MONASH University

Social work - client relationship practice: exploring social worker perspectives

Wendy Elizabeth Rollins

Bachelor of Arts (Monash University)

Bachelor of Social Work (La Trobe University)

Graduate Diploma Social Policy and Research (Swinburne Institute of

Technology)

Graduate Certificate Human Services (Leadership) (Australian Catholic

University)

Graduate Certificate of Higher Education (Australian Catholic University)

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at

Monash University in 2017

Department of Social Work

Copyright notice

Abstract

Consensus exists in the social work literature that social worker - client relationships are central to social work identity and purpose. However, practice knowledge about what social workers actually do in contemporary practice in their work with clients is under researched. This thesis reports on a qualitative study about social worker - client relationship practice as it occurs in the child and family welfare system. The aim of the study was to explore social worker perspectives about social worker - client relationship practice including its significance for achieving client outcomes. The clients with whom social workers engaged in this study were almost exclusively clients of the statutory child protection system.

Using qualitative exploratory methodology, the study sought social worker views using semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 16 social workers employed in child protection, foster care, family support and services for young people. Qualified social workers were invited to participate on a voluntary basis. While gender of the participants was not a recruitment criterion, all 16 participants were women, reflecting the gender profile of the child and family welfare sector and Australian social work.

The study found that social worker - client relationship practice is seen as crucial for achieving client outcomes and is a distinct practice approach, called Social Work Relationship Praxis (SWRP). Insights from social workers identified that the main focus of SWRP is on developing, retaining and retrieving client engagement with the social worker acting as a Relationship Building Agent. SWRP was found to be informed by relational assumptions about the concept of 'the self',

human development and healing. Implications of the findings for practice, education and research are outlined and include examining SWRP with other groups of social workers and in other practice contexts, elevating the relational paradigm in social work education and revisiting the concept of the social worker - client relationship for contemporary social work practice. The outcomes of these suggestions would inform further development of Social Work Relationship Praxis, particularly in the Australian context. Overall, the thesis argues for elevation of the concept of the 'relational self' in social work that extends the current focus on self-awareness to 'self-other' awareness and integrates this into a relational view of social work practice.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Eris Jane Harrison provided professional formatting and copy editing services, in accordance with the policy for the ethical editing of theses developed by the Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies collaboratively with the Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd) Australia. The editor does not specialise in this field.

Signature: …█████████…………….

Wendy Rollins

Date: …14th November 2017

Acknowledgements

Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 The scope of the research

This qualitative study examined social worker - client relationship practice in child and family welfare. This relationship practice is central to social work identity and purpose (Alexander and Charles 2009; Connolly and Harms 2013; Dominelli 2009; Dybicz 2012; Ferguson 2016d; Folgheraiter and Raineri 2012; Healy 2012; Holmes and McDermid 2013; Howe 1998; Mandell 2007; McDonald and Jones 2000; Mishna et al. 2013; Parton 2003; Payne 2006; Trevithick 2003, 2012; Tsang 2000). Yet, social worker - client relationship practice has received negligible research attention (Ferguson 2016d; Fernandez 2014; Healy 2014; Tilbury et al. 2015; Trevithick 2012).

The credibility and legitimacy of the social work knowledge base demands ongoing scrutiny and research. As an academic discipline, and as a professional practice, the body of knowledge called social work has to be useful to the real world that practitioners inhabit. Social workers have to demonstrate that they have the required knowledge, skills and practice methods for protecting children, for promoting child development and for facilitating and enhancing families to fulfil their societal role of 'growing' the next generation.

Social work practice is contextualised practice. The social worker - client relationship as it unfolds in practice varies enormously in scope, depth, and purpose from one 'case' situation to the next. The scope, depth and purpose of each relationship is informed and shaped by the inherent variations of: a) agency mandate, purpose and practices; b) social worker style, practice experience, life experience, skill, theory, knowledge and personal attributes; and c) client capacities,

skills and knowledge, as well as their current experience of their life situation. The variability in expression of the social work relationship across contexts has limited the development of a 'one size fits all' practice framework (Sheppard, 1998; Sheppard and Charles 2015). Yet this diversity of expression of the social worker – client relationship practice has to be considered when building practice knowledge.

That the professional 'helping relationship' can and does enable change and alleviate distress is widely established (Ainsworth and Hansen 2011; Duncan et al. 2010; Ferguson 2016c; Parton and O'Byrne 2000b; Ruch 2014; Tilbury et al. 2015; Waterhouse and McGhee 2013; Winter 2009), although how social workers conceptualise relationship practice based on their practice experience, and how they go about their practice, is less clear.

A focus on the nature of social worker - client relationship practice is to an extent a focus on social work practice generally. Social worker - client relationship practice provides a window through which the activity of practice can be explored, including how social workers integrate knowledge with practice and how they adapt and modify knowledge to meet the demands of the unique characteristics of each practice situation. This 'relationship space' is the site for practitioner and client interaction; it is also the space where social *work* is practised and the role of the social worker is performed (Sheppard 2007, p.56).

Knowledge about social worker - client relationship practice can be found in the theoretical literature, practice theory literature and empirical research literature, but has not developed independently of knowledge generated from other disciplines, such as psychology. What counts as social work knowledge is contentious, and thus has ramifications for the discipline (Healy 2014; McDonald 2006).

References to 'relationship practice' can be found in social work research examining practice approaches (Ruch et al. 2010); social worker efficacy (Duncan et al. 2010; Marsh et al. 2012); client experience of service (Beresford et al. 2008); practice with particular groups of people (Bennett et al. 2011, 2013; Nelson et al. 2016); and, practice with particular social problems, such as the effects of poverty, homelessness and domestic violence. This body of literature is examined in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis.

Social worker - client relationships are not spontaneous events. These professional relationships are informed by institutional factors and occur within a formal organisational structure. The organisational structure defines and prescribes a set of parameters for the relationship process. This set of parameters provides the 'container' for the relationship process that occurs at the frontline practice with clients and is commonly referred to as casework. This study explored relationship processes, mindful of this premise, and is diagrammatically represented in Figure 1.1.
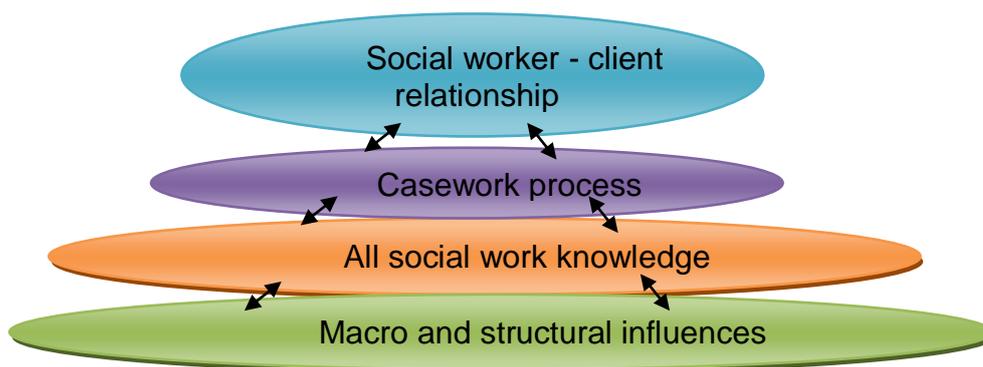
Figure 1.1: Social worker - client relationship in context

The macro and structural influences on social worker - client relationship practice are identified and discussed in Chapter 2.

Exploring existing conceptualisations and practices of 'social worker - client relationship practice' with practising social workers affords opportunity to consider the (re)formation of a contemporary social work - client relationship practice. This chapter introduces the thesis by explaining the rationale for the topic and its significance for building social work knowledge. The context for the study is then outlined. The chapter concludes with an outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.1.1 Social worker - client relationships in practice

At its most fundamental, the social worker - client relationship is the sum of interactions and the meaning of interactions between people. The social worker - client relationship shares ontological characteristics with all human relationships; that being in a relationship is a quintessential and often taken-for-granted human experience. Each person in a relationship is witness to 'the other', and each person has 'experience' of 'the other', however minimal this may be in some instances. It is through the relationship dialogue and interaction that the meaning of experience can be explored, clarified and (re)formed. This basic observation requires that analysis of the social worker - client relationship has to acknowledge that human existence is essentially intersubjective. It is a medium for exploring the full range of experiences that life can generate; for clarifying meaning of experience, emotions, hopes, disappointments; for making and implementing plans; and, ultimately, for the purpose of attaining some relief from distress, or achieving desired change. In this way, the social worker is creating a working relationship that has a purpose beyond achieving stated intervention goals. Building a relationship with a client is also creating a space for interaction where the formal terms and parameters of the relationship are negotiated and where emergent intersubjective processes have to be acknowledged. As with any relationship, the social worker - client relationship is

dynamic, and this is particularly the case in the child and family welfare sector, where family situations can regularly change in unpredictable ways.

In this thesis, the social worker - client relationship is viewed as a social construction, because how the relationship develops and what it means to the people involved is, in the end, an individual's interpretation of that experience, and is not independent of the context in which that interpretation occurs. Every human relationship is a medium through which individual needs for closeness and separateness are played out. Addressing these needs is in continual motion over time and can often be a source of relationship tension. Social worker - client relationships are no exception. At the same time, the social worker - client relationship operates at a formal level, as a publicly sanctioned and purposeful entity. In this thesis, the social worker - client relationship is viewed as a space that is nested within a multilayered context and is informed by the individual and combined impact of these layers.

The social worker - client relationship is also a space where private lives of individuals intersect with the State; it is a negotiated space that reflects social, cultural, political, legal and economic institutions and structures, and public life where cultural and social values and norms are derived, reflected, reproduced and contested. State power and authority is exercised through State instrumentalities and processes. The individual's experience of interacting with these instrumentalities can be positive or negative for that individual, depending on the nature and purpose of the interaction. Either way, the individual's experience of the relationship can reflect expression of State power. An espoused central concern for social workers when negotiating this landscape with, or on behalf of, clients is assessing and mediating the exercise of State power at critical moments to promote

the power of the client in these processes. Informed by prevailing ideologies and discourses, public beliefs, attitudes and discourses, institutions and social and cultural systems also change over time, influencing community views, including the organisational context of professional practice in the human services, including social work (Sheppard 2007; Trevithick 2014).

This interface is the space where relatively powerless individuals, for example, the individual client, come face to face with the power of the State through the people who have delegated authority under legislation to make decisions about their lives. Coming face to face with State authority is often an intimidating experience for clients, especially where the focus is on what are perceived as private matters: one's own children and parenting. Guided by professional ethics, social workers negotiate this landscape with, or on behalf of, clients to determine timely intervention that promotes the client's sense of power by observing how power is exercised, for what purpose and by whom. Negotiating power structures effectively in the interests of clients requires critical evaluation of the impact of prevailing medical, 'psy', legal and economic discourses (Healy 2014). Again, social workers are uniquely placed to assess these broader contextual factors, to understand how they are influencing the individual client and to act in accordance with professional and organisational norms. This study provides insights into ways social workers reflect on these factors to inform their relationship practice with clients. These issues are further discussed and highlighted in relation to the contemporary practice context in Chapters 2 and 3 and are examined in the Findings in Chapter 7.

The client and family services arena, often referred to as 'child and family welfare', is the complex constellation of primary, secondary and tertiary services that exist in government and non-government sectors and which intervene, support and

work with children, young people and their families. Facilitating efficacy and agency in building, maintaining and repairing relationships is critical to much child and family practice with clients that occurs within these contexts. This study explores this phenomenon with social workers, whose practice experience resides in building, maintaining and repairing the relationships that exist within families, within organisations and in the interstices that connect the intimate and private lives of families with the instrumentalities of State authority and the public sphere. Social workers employed in child and family welfare are in a unique position to enhance understanding about social worker - client practice. These perspectives about social worker - client relationship practice are explored in Chapters 2 and 3 with reference to the literature.

The clients with whom social workers engage are very often the disadvantaged and vulnerable people in our community, having suffered the consequences of physical, emotional, sexual abuse, neglect, long-term trauma, poverty and illness (Fernandez 2014; Payne 2006; 2014). Social workers are equipped with knowledge about the impacts of trauma, poverty and suffering on human development and agency and can scrutinise and mediate the worst effects of State power to which clients, who are highly dependent on the beneficence of the State, are particularly susceptible. Social workers are often exposed to, and find themselves working with, sensitive and deeply intimate issues entailed in the inner lives of the client. This work inevitably requires the social worker, as an ethical practitioner, to bring a high level of self-awareness and interpersonal skill to their practice. It involves remaining alert for challenges to their own professional boundaries and their own inner and outer worlds. How ethical practice is challenged in contemporary practice is discussed in Chapter 3.

It is these considerations that form the scope and purpose of this thesis. The importance of 'relationship' as the vehicle for change, growth and healing, indeed for quality of life, is understood in social work. Social workers also understand that their relationships with clients inherently reflect and reproduce power relations and dynamics, and that they, as social workers, are professionally obliged to navigate these relations in accordance with practice ethics. Thus, there is recognition that social worker - client relationship practice is context dependent and that relationships do not exist in a political vacuum. In engaging with clients, social workers straddle and negotiate formal understandings of public-private boundaries, as well as navigating contested norms about what constitutes private and public life. Thus, social worker - client relationship practice is a complex enterprise worthy of investigation from the perspective of those who undertake this practice.

1.1.2 Aim of thesis

Contemporary constructions of social worker - client relationships reflect diverse theoretical positions and ideas about the nature of the human being, the nature of human relationships, social work practice including practice ethics, values and knowledge, and the nature of the organisational and institutional contexts of practice.

As stated earlier, the purpose of this research is to explore how social workers understand and explain their relationship practice with clients. An underlying premise of the study is that actions taken by social workers are the outward expression of internal processes they engage with, when in-practice as well as when reflecting on their practice. Processes of listening, observing, intuiting, thinking, reflecting and empathising, are often actively employed by social workers to transform *what they know* (from practical and theoretical bases of knowledge) into

how to know and *how to act* (Ryle 1949*)*. Explicating what social workers do in their engagement with clients is problematic for research because much of what social workers do when engaging with a client is not particularly visible (Beddoe 2015; Ferguson 2016d; Healy 2014; Tsang 2014). The nature of social worker - client relationship practice becomes more visible through this study. Understanding of the processes used when social workers transform what they know for use in the practice situation is examined, shining a light on the 'knowing-doing nexus' that is often hidden from view in social work practice.

How social workers actually undertake their relationship practice has received relatively little research attention within social work practice research (Cosis Brown et al. 2014; Ferguson 2016c; Jones 2001; Lonne et al. 2009; Trevithick 2012; Whincup 2016; Winter 2009). This is puzzling given the existing literature about child protection generally and the oft-repeated calls for 'improvement' of practice, for clearer articulation of social work's professional knowledge base and for knowledge about what social workers do. This study sheds light on what social workers do within the child and family practice context, revealing much about the thinking and reflection that informs daily actions undertaken by social workers in social worker - client relationship practice. The remainder of this chapter clarifies the research question and explains the impetus for the study as well as the study's significance for social work practice. The thesis structure is explained in the final pages of this chapter.

1.2 The research question

The aim of this study is to explore how frontline social workers practising in the family and children's services field conceptualise their relationship practice with clients. The research question directly addresses this:

> How do frontline social workers conceptualise the social worker - client relationship in their practice?

This research question investigates the intricacies of such practice as perceived by the study respondents. It is an open research question, so as not to pre-empt respondent answers. On the surface, 'the relationship' between the social worker and the client is one of the mechanisms by which the State carries out its functions and responsibilities. It is through the relationship that clients come to understand the nature of their legal relationship with the State and to access available support. However, it is at the human level, through the 'relationships' between the client and the frontline social worker, that fears and anxieties often surface which need to be heard and addressed if the client is to fulfil the legal requirements placed on them. The social worker has to convince the client that it is worth their while to have faith in the process and in the social worker they are allocated. Through skilful relationship building and nuanced understanding of trauma, betrayal and abuse and its impacts on children and parents, entrenched feelings of disempowerment, hopelessness and unworthiness can be assuaged. In brief, the relationship practice between social workers and clients can be all of these things and more.

This research question provides a basis for seeking participant views and practice knowledge about their social worker - client relationship practice, including

their perceptions of the significance of social worker - client relationships for achieving client outcomes and for social work identity.

1.3 Impetus for the research

The impetus for exploring this topic comes from my own practice experience, working directly with clients as well as supervising other social workers in family support and foster care programs. In the 1980s and 1990s, it was my observation that the role of the frontline worker in casework with families was being reconfigured, as managerialist approaches to service delivery were being introduced in the child and welfare sector. My personal impression at the time was that the complexity of the work involved in developing working relationships with clients was diminished through reductive reporting measures that required counting discrete events or episodes of worker activity. The strong winds of economic rationalist- inspired human services management swept through the landscape of government child protection services and non-government family and children's services, including out- of- home care services. My experience of this change was that the messy, challenging and often chaotic work of engaging families and individuals was not fully appreciated or accurately understood by policy makers. The complexity associated with stimulating or facilitating change in relationships within families seemed incompatible with outcomes-based measurement used in managerialist approaches to service delivery. The multidimensional and unpredictable human nature of the work with clients was reduced to numbers and types of visits/interviews and 'cut and dried' outcomes. Managerialist approaches are inherently reductive: they are not designed to promote insights into interpersonal relationships or reflect the inherent complexity of family life. This experience prompted my thinking about how the multidimensionality of frontline practice in child and family welfare can be better

communicated, so that it is not omitted, and the needs of children and families are also not ignored.

A concern at the time was that reductive reporting approaches devalue the work of the social worker and also result in explaining away the needs of clients and ignoring the uniqueness of each client situation. These observations and experiences led to the current interest in exploring with practising social workers their views about what social work practice entails. This study is, therefore, a practice-generated study, one that utilises 'practice knowing' as a source of data and one that adds to knowledge and understanding of the client-social worker relationship and its role in social work practice. The purpose and rationale of this study stem from these early observations and deliberations.

In interviews with a client, whether they are conducted in an office or during a home visit, moments do occur when it becomes apparent that the client's awareness of their situation is changing or growing; where they are experiencing a change in the way they see their world. These moments of insight and shared meaning are significant in the relationship and in the change process and can often be felt by both social worker and client. For the client, such moments can portend a sense of hope that something can get better, or is possible. The content of these exchanges is likely to have different meanings for the client and for the social worker; however, such moments generate a visceral, emotional and cognitive response that indicates that the encounter has shifted in meaning and increased in significance for the client. Somehow 'the interview' or the 'relationship' has become useful to the client in a deeper way, leaving the practitioner with a sense of 'reward' and new learning. It seems that these moments of change or clarity are the result of the client's

capacity to feel safe within the relationship built together, although how and why these shifts occur in the way they do is not always obvious.

My curiosity then turned to the broader issue of how we, as social workers, articulate this work that we do. It has been reported many times that social workers are not good at describing what they do (Ferguson 2016d; Trevithick 2012). Relationship practice is complex work that can also be dangerous when professionals are not able to remain attuned to the relationship process and alert to blurring of roles and boundaries and ethical issues (Cooper 2005; Munro 2011b; Trevithick 2003; Warner 2014). As social work is usually undertaken within the context of 'the working relationship', it is neither easily visible nor tangible. Nor is a description of the work easily reduced to tag lines and one-liners. These complexities have contributed to the long-term struggle that the social work discipline has had, of claiming the clear professional identity and status accorded to other helping professions (Healy 2001; McDonald 2006). Hence, this project has developed out of a desire to ask frontline social workers how they describe and attribute meaning to their 'relationship' practice with clients that is the 'bread and butter' of their daily work.

Rewarding moments experienced in practice, as described above, make the work intriguing and satisfying; however, these brief descriptions belie the intricacies of the emotional, intellectual and practical work that is involved in building relationships with clients in family and children's services. Relationships that can produce change usually do not develop easily, because they require the convergence of many factors at a point in time. These include, for example, perceiving or intuiting when a client is 'ripe for change' or when the client is ready to trust in the worker's intentions and capacities. Relationship work in social work

practice with clients in child and family welfare services is multifaceted and can be elusive. It requires time, patience, perseverance and reliability. Developing relationships with clients in this field of practice often includes the challenge of developing relationships with people who are not confident with relationships or who have trauma histories which impact on their capacity to trust. It is these aspects of the relationship process, the factors that can impact on the relationship process and the social worker's role within the relationship that are examined in detail in this thesis.

1.4 Significance of the study

A key reason for undertaking research is to add to existing social work knowledge used in and for practice (Alston and Bowles 2013). The significance of this study lies in its contribution to knowledge in two areas of social work relationship practice: the practice of social worker - client relationships and, secondly, how social workers utilise and translate knowledge in, and for, practice. This second area of significance is concerned with adding to existing knowledge about the 'praxis' of social worker - client relationship practice. In so doing, the study contributes to developments in practice epistemology and practice theory and has implications for social work practice at the frontline of human services and social work education. Each of these areas of significance is now explained.

1.4.1 Social worker - client relationship practice

The thesis reports on this exploratory study to convey the social work experience of being in 'relationship practice' and is based on the assumption that frontline social workers are an important source of knowledge for learning about social worker - client relationship practice. As social work practice with families and

children involves working with the idiosyncrasies of human relationships, often in situations where there is a high level of distress, family stress, and even chaos, it is perhaps surprising that the perspectives of practising social workers have not been sought more often to build our knowledge about this area of practice.

One-on-one work, often referred to as 'direct practice' in social work parlance, involves face-to-face and/or telephone contact with a client on a regular basis over a period of time with the express purpose of assisting the person to achieve change according to agreed and set goals. This work has traditionally been referred to as 'casework', and is explained in the next chapter.

Generally speaking, families become clients of this group of services because they are experiencing difficulty with some aspect of their family life. Families are complex and family systems are ever changing. Families can come to the notice of family and children's services either through self-referral or referral by others for various reasons, including inadequate housing, financial problems and/or family relationship issues that might include child-related and/or parenting issues, or where harm of some kind to a child or family member is suspected or substantiated.

Working with a family often means working with one or more family members. The social worker has to develop sufficient rapport with the client to reach a degree of trust or at least an agreement to work together (Gambrill 2013; Trevithick 2012) and also establish their credibility with other family members. Attaining a degree of trust is critical, because it forms the basis for solid and effective work. While social work practice with clients in family and children's services has instrumental elements, it is an activity that is way beyond being instrumental in character. Chapters 2 and 3 highlight the non-instrumental nature of social worker - client

relationship practice (Ruch 2000; Sudbery 2002; Trevithick 2012). Families are exposing intimate and sensitive aspects of themselves and their family relationships. It is the social worker's task to use their skills, knowledge and values to carefully build a trusting working relationship in the hope that family member/s feel safe to expose aspects of their family life in the interests of achieving change in the required areas.

The constant public scrutiny of frontline social workers in child protection settings underlies the importance of, firstly, continuing to build knowledge about this work, and secondly, the importance of effectively conveying the nature of the work to key stakeholders such as policy makers (Cooper 2005; Munro 2011b; Ruch et al. 2010). This study enables practitioner perspectives about social worker - client relationships to be recorded, to increase understanding about the intricacies of social work practice that contributes to a narrative about the practice of social worker - client relationships, demonstrating that it is a distinctive and discrete body of knowledge and professional practice (Osmond and O'Connor 2004).

Finally, the thesis has relevance for the role of the State in the lives of its citizens and how government instrumentalities are utilised in the name of protecting children and supporting families. The 'frontline' of service delivery, where social worker - client relationships take place, is where the public sphere of social, cultural, economic and political values, institutions and processes intersect with the private lives of individual citizens. The relationship is the working space for managing a complex and contentious array of public - private demands and competing interests, competing ethical positions, and competing practice possibilities and constraints. Operating at this public - private interface requires skilful response to, and engagement with, a raft of 'grey' moral and practical issues and dilemmas. It is a

contentious practice that involves continual navigation of ethical issues and requires social workers to be ever mindful of their accountability to the complexities associated with increasing bureaucracy and attendant technologies of practice. Examining social worker - client relationship practice and what goes on in that space provides insight about the demands of the State, and how they encroach upon the work that unfolds between social workers and their clients.

Specific focus on social worker conceptualisation of relationship practice with clients is underdeveloped in the literature (Gursansky et al. 2012; Trevithick 2003, 2012), although social work practice research does exist that pertains to related topics. These include, for example, social workers' perceptions about their roles in child protection (Boehm 2012; Guerin et al. 2010; Holmes and McDermid 2013; Myers 2008; Reilly et al. 2011; van Nijnatten 2010), social worker experience of aggression, violence and conflict (Bosly 2007; Kemshall et al. 2013; Koritsas et al. 2010; Littlechild 2005; Saini et al. 2012; Smith, M 2001; Smith et al. 2003), and research that has explored retention and burnout of social workers in child protection (Regehr et al. 2004; Savaya et al. 2011, 2012; Stanley and Goddard 2002; Stanley et al. 2007; Tham 2007; Weaver et al. 2007, 2012). Some studies have explored social worker perceptions of specific aspects of social work roles in child protection including communicating with children (Ruch 2014), decision-making (Gillingham and Humphreys 2010; O'Connor and Leonard 2014), sense-making (Helm 2014) and perceptions of access visits (Morrison et al. 2011). Studies that have investigated the effectiveness of social worker - client relationship practice also exist (Marsh et al. 2012; Rubin and Parrish 2012).

Research exists that elicits client perspectives about the helping relationship and the social worker - client relationship (De Boer and Coady 2007; Duncan et al.

2010; McLeod 2010; Ribner and Knei-Paz 2002). Because social work claims to respect the inherent worth of individuals and seeks to redress structural disadvantage, it is incumbent on social workers in their practice and research to invite client feedback about their contact and engagement with social workers as this is an integral source of knowledge for further development of the knowledge base. At the same time, it is critical that social workers examine how they view, explain and articulate their own understanding and practice. It is this concern that is the focus of this study. Findings of the study were examined for any implications for enhancing client experience of engagement with social workers.

The place that a social worker's own identity occupies, their humanity and their experience of 'being in a relationship' is not well researched, yet these dimensions of 'relationship practice' arguably play a central role in making purposeful connections for change. The 'social worker - client relationship' is a theoretical construct and is a practice that can have real and very important ramifications for the individuals involved. How social workers themselves understand the way they go about this work with clients is not well understood even though the literature abounds with theories and concepts that are used to inform this practice. Starting from the premise that social worker - client relationship practice is concerned with 'doing' and action, an important component of exploring social worker - client relationship is seeking understanding about how social workers transform their knowledge into action. Therefore, part of the significance of this thesis lies in deepening understanding about how knowledge is translated to action.

1.4.2 The knowing-doing nexus

Building knowledge about how the knowledge-practice nexus works in social work practice is an ongoing concern in social work (Healy 2014; Sheppard 1995;

Trevithick 2003). Social work practice research has had difficulty in using rigorous research methodologies that help to get to the heart of the social work enterprise that is concerned with alleviating human suffering, facilitating change and supporting emancipation from oppression (Gray and Schubert 2013). Drawing on the work of Marsh and Fisher (2008, p.994), Trevithick (2012) discusses the 'uneasy marriage between theory and practice, reiterating the need for reform in how knowledge is produced, particularly in the three areas of: 1) relating research to practice concerns; 2) involving practitioners in generating knowledge that advances social work practice and knowledge production; and, 3) ensuring that research is focused on developing solutions for practice' (p.51). Knowledge gained from studies that have gleaned client perspectives is also an important source of data for this thesis.

A key development that has helped to strengthen the knowing-doing nexus, is the theoretical development of critical reflection in recent decades (Fook and Gardner 2007; Healy 2014; Morley et al. 2014; Pease et al. 2016). The practice and theory of critical reflection is integrated into the social work curriculum in Australia through the ASWEAS in teaching and learning as well as in social work supervision (Davys and Beddoe 2009, 2010). The degree to which critical reflection is used in practice is hard to gauge though it is at least variable across sectors and individual agencies.

Research about social work practice with clients is further complicated by a number of factors. These include: the diverse and contextualised nature of practice; the profession's lack of an institutional base (Healy 2014); the relative invisibility of social worker - client interactions and being subject to fierce media scrutiny (Shoesmith 2016; Warner 2014). Finally, ethical issues associated with invasive

research methods can also militate against research that seeks to gain a close view of the relationship in action.

Social work is a profession noted for its diverse methods and practice contexts. This practice diversity both reflects and requires the utilisation of a diverse range of knowledge types that in themselves reflect a range of epistemological paradigms.

Much social work - client relationship practice lacks visibility, because many social worker - client interviews are held in non-office settings such as the client's home or, when in an office, occur in private interview rooms. In addition, social work practice is often focused on the internal worlds of human beings as much as on their external worlds. The lack of visibility can also be attributed to the reality that social workers *are* their practice, as Payne (2006, p.55) notes. This is arguably most evident within the context of social worker - client relationships, where practitioners are active agents within the 'helping'/intervention process. As an individual human being, s/he is not separate from the relationship with the client in which they are involved, yet they maintain a level of separateness by virtue of the professional role they occupy and their own working understanding of role boundaries. Social work practice entails 'use of self': a concept that is also contentious, further challenging complete understanding of the social worker - client relationship practice. An exploration of practice is inherently entwined with an exploration of how social workers draw upon themselves to determine their actions in any given situation.

Unlike nursing and teaching, social work has not enjoyed the benefits of having an institutional 'home' that potentially provides impetus for a practice emphasis in research over the long term. The relative invisibility of social work direct practice with clients, along with the practice and contextual diversity of social work,

entrenches the vulnerability of the profession in the current neoliberal environment (Stark 2010). The impact of reductionist practices in child protection is exemplified in the UK, where management practice seeks to shift social work practice in child and family welfare away from the integral importance of human relationships for development and quality of life. In her review of child protection services and social work in the UK, Munro (2011a) observed the increasing prevalence of:

> A 'rational-technical approach', [where] the emphasis has been on the conscious, cognitive elements of the tasks of working with children and families, on collecting information and making plans. The focus of reforms has been on providing detailed assessment forms, telling the social worker what data about families to collect and, how quickly to collect it (Munro 2011a, p. 36).

The increased emphasis on a rational-technical approach has sidelined the critical importance of complex decision-making, professional judgement and needs assessment when working with people living with the effects of profound trauma, and the loss of - or fracturing of - early trusting relationships. Being in trusting relationships with others is critical for wellbeing. The relationships that develop between clients and social workers (and other frontline practitioners) are part of the practice exercise; they do not only exist as a mechanism for instrumental service delivery.

Focusing on social worker - client relationships, as in this study, enables exploration of these perceptions as outlined by Munro (2011a) and discussed by others (Gillingham 2016; Trevithick 2014). The study sought to find out from frontline social workers their views on the significance of relationship building with clients; whether their capacity for building relationship with clients is hindered or not in the current public policy environment, and whether the conventional espoused role of

social workers in repairing, restoring or facilitating connection for clients of child and family services with the broader community remains part of this practice. The sense of increased uncertainty, fear and rapid change in contemporary life that threatens loss of community, disconnection from community, social isolation and loneliness, suggests that social work still has significance for mitigating the impacts of such rapid and persistent change on individual lives.

Learning more about how social workers translate knowledge into action requires thinking about the epistemology of practice. Therefore, the next point of significance of the current study is its contribution to knowledge about social work practice epistemology as it relates to social worker - client relationship practice.

1.4.3 Consideration of an epistemology of relationship practice in social work

When engaging with clients, social workers begin by seeking the client's perspective about their situation, as they are concerned with how people experience their context and their daily lives. This is subjective material that is not easily amenable to the demands of scientific research methods. Developments in qualitative research methodology are helpful for social work research that is concerned with practice experience and building practice knowledge (Alston and Bowles 2013). This study draws upon qualitative research epistemology and methodology to gain insight into how social workers determine their actions in practice.

Quantitative research has also made its mark on building knowledge for social work practice. Empirical studies have focused on social worker effectiveness and on whether clients find social workers useful or helpful to them. These are reviewed in

Chapter 2. This study has a more open intent. It is asking social workers to discuss with each other and with the researcher, how they determine their actions in practice with clients. In so doing, the study aims to reveal the processes social workers use to determine how best to act in any given situation, in addition to the knowledge social workers draw on when engaged in relationship practice with clients. A qualitative exploratory methodology encouraged social workers to speak openly with the researcher and with each other about their practice.

The history of the discipline of social work can be characterised by its perennial struggle to establish and articulate its own identity and gain legitimacy amongst the professions (McDonald et al. 2011; Parton 2000). Maintaining its professional status is arguably more difficult in the current global neoliberal climate (Stark 2010). Establishing a distinct practice knowledge base continues to be a major priority for social work. While social work's commitment to practice is a defining characteristic of the discipline, until recently, it is this that has proven an obstacle to claiming its distinctiveness and research strength (Parton and O'Byrne 2000b). Parton (2000) argues that research about the theory/practice relationship is needed to highlight social work's distinctiveness. Building practice knowledge has suffered from a lack of research attention (Trevithick 2003), and this includes establishing knowledge and theory used in practice (Healy 2000; Plath 2003). Practising social workers have had limited capacity to contribute to the formal social work knowledge base (Healy 2014).

Recent development of practice epistemology in health and allied health disciplines is heartening for social work research about practice (Higgs et al. 2004). Trevithick (2012) notes that research about social work skills and interventions have also been neglected, although there seems now to be growing interest (Fraser 2011;

Trevithick 2012). Trevithick (2012) highlights two problems that beset this area of knowledge development (p.43). One is the absence of a conceptual map for direct practice as a means for organising theory used in direct practice; the second relates to the absence of consistently defined nomenclature for direct practice. The terms 'methods', 'approaches', 'perspectives', 'practices' and 'modes' are used interchangeably throughout the literature, although they are distinct concepts with different meanings (Trevithick 2012, p.43). These observations are further discussed in Chapter 3.

A third problem and a perennial criticism besetting theory-practice integration in social work is the relative lack of practice-generated knowledge (Osmond and O'Connor 2004). Theorising from practice is one way of tackling the theory-practice divide (Fook and Napier 2000). Taking a postmodernist lens to the issue, Fook and Gardner (2007) suggest that, while the theory-practice divide is widening, it is now more acceptable to question the 'taken-for-granted' authority of academic, non-practitioner researchers in a way that was not the case when the modernist paradigm dominated knowledge-building thinking (p. 82). The significance attached to practice-generated knowledge in this study can enhance the legitimacy of practice-generated knowledge as valid epistemology in professional practice disciplines.

Practice, or knowing how to use one's body and mind to enact social work knowledge, skills and values, involves having access to practice knowledge that has been built using practice epistemology. Practice epistemology is a way of building knowledge that privileges the nature of practice (Higgs et al. 2004). It is quite different from applying theory to practice. Over time, many practitioners learn how to do this integrative work through experience (Fook et al. 2000). Reflective practice is

one means that encourages practitioners to do integrative work to inform their practice. Social workers also learn about 'use of self' through practice experience, although it is a concept introduced in undergraduate social work education. Gaining knowledge about how social workers undertake this work has to be achieved by listening to social workers talk about how they go about undertaking their relationship practice, how they engage with clients, how they manage the complexities of their work and how they determine the best courses of action.

This thesis contends that the absence of an epistemology of practice for social worker - client relationships is a problem for social work. Practice knowledge has to be informed by a coherent practice epistemology. Establishing a practice epistemology has been problematic for social work, certainly, as it has for other practice disciplines (Higgs et al. 2012; Higgs et al. 2004; Schon 1992). Consensus about what 'practice' is, and being able to demonstrate practice validity, is critical. With its explicit focus on 'practice', this study contributes insights and knowledge about social work practice knowledge. Focusing on '*knowing how'* as well as '*knowing what*' in practice is critical for effective practice in an uncertain world. Thus, an underlying aim of this study was to understand the way in which social workers determine how to act in their daily practice, and to use this as 'data' for proposing an epistemology for relationship practice.

This thesis provides a window for gaining insight into the theory/practice relationship as it is practised 'on the ground'. The social worker - client relationship is where social work practice is enacted; it is where we would hope that the essence of social work identity is to be found, and where the application of social work knowledge, values and skills can be seen to be used.

The research methods used in this study include individual interviews and focus groups with practising social workers to find out and record how they go about their relationship practice with clients. The methodology provides an opportunity to hear about their 'lived experience' of this practice and includes participant accounts and reflections of case examples. The methodology also enables the sharing of experiences and views about practice eliciting common themes as well as areas of difference in the way they practice.

Finally, the knowledge gained from this study can inform social work practice teaching and learning to better prepare social work graduates for contemporary practice challenges.

1.4.4 Social work education

Social work education has to prepare students for contemporary social work practice by encouraging students to develop their own strong theoretical and practice knowledge base. Much has been written for undergraduate social work education about interpersonal communication and the social work process with clients across a diverse range of practice fields and practice contexts. While a theoretical base for direct practice exists, as do texts about social work practice skills, relatively little is available that brings all of this knowledge into one practice framework as a 'how to' for learning about practice. Social work degree programs include 'practice skills' units, and skills development is integrated into other units. However, skills development has to be vertically and horizontally integrated and embedded in all parts of the curriculum. Practice-theory integration involves more than the direct application of skills to solve a problem or to perform a task. As this thesis demonstrates, the individual social worker determines how or what skills, capacities and knowledge are used and when, through the disciplined and internal

use of a complex range of mechanisms discussed in Chapter 2 and explored with participants in the study.

This study therefore builds on existing social work pedagogy and practices by developing a conceptualisation of social worker - client relationship practice generated from learning about the practice experience of frontline social workers. The contribution of this study to practice knowledge has relevance for social work education, in that it will serve to improve the strength of practice epistemology that in turn can influence practice pedagogy in social work.

1.5 The context of the study

The study was undertaken with practising social workers employed in the child and family welfare arena. The social workers were employed in statutory, government non-statutory and non-government services. All social workers in this study work with children, young people, biological parents of these children and young people and carer families.

The reason for choosing the family and child welfare context was twofold. Firstly, it is an area of practice with which the researcher is familiar having practised in both statutory and non-government services with children, young people, parents and families as a social worker. This familiarity means that participants can have some confidence that the researcher understands their practice language and reflections. The potential risks in having familiarity are discussed in Chapter 4.

The second reason for choosing the child and welfare field for this study is that the work is focused on developing constructive relationships around the child, with the child and with family members and other people engaged with the child. Children become clients of the child welfare system because of significant and deleterious

relationships they experience or are likely to experience in the care of their parents or other adults. A key aspect of the practice endeavour is to facilitate and provide growth-inducing relationships for the child through approved foster carers/care services, if the child/young person is in care, and/or through facilitating stronger and improved parental capacity so that the child's needs for safety and their development can be improved and assured. While this aim has been noted in research with social workers, the degree to which social workers can do this work appears to be under pressure and even somewhat compromised in the current child protection context as emphasis on forensic and risk assessment has increased (Healy and Meagher 2007; Munro 2011b). This theme is explored in this study, as is the theoretical knowledge base that informs social worker - client relationship practice in child and family welfare.

1.6 Summary of purpose and structure of the thesis

Social worker - client relationship practice remains central to contemporary social work purpose and identity. Identifying the parameters of, and building the knowledge base, for social worker - client relationship practice is bound up with broader social work professional aspirations. A need for practitioner-generated research has been identified in social work literature. This thesis examines how social workers think about their relationship practice with clients, revealing insights about the knowledge-practice nexus, including underlying objective-subjective, technical/rational- practical/moral tensions inherent in social worker - client relationship practice. The qualitative study adds to knowledge by gaining frontline social workers' perceptions about their practice experience of social worker - client relationship practice.

Exploring this topic affords examination of various dimensions of social work practice. The first of these dimensions relates to the concept of 'relationships' within a social work context and what relationship practice with a client entails from a social work perspective. Social work has developed extensive theoretical armoury for practice. How social workers use this knowledge in their relationship work with clients, and what knowledge they draw upon, is less clear. Given that 'practice' or action is the object of social work and social work's raison d'être (Parton and O'Byrne 2000b), and the acute attention that is focused on child protection and out-of-home care, this gap is perhaps surprising.

This chapter has introduced the research problem with reference to the impetus for the study and the significance of the study for social worker - client relationship practice, for social work practice epistemology and for social work education.

The literature review for this study is presented in two chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the social work literature about conceptualisations of social worker - client relationship practice, theories that inform social workers in their practice with clients and empirical literature. Chapter 3 maps the practice context for the study.

Chapter 4 outlines the qualitative research methodology used for the study, and Chapters 5 and 6 report on the findings generated from the study. Chapter 7 analyses the findings to draw conclusions about what the study means for understanding social worker - client relationship practice. These conclusions are summarised and then explored in Chapter 8 for their implications for social work research, practice and education.

The next chapter outlines and reviews knowledge about social worker - client relationship practice.

Chapter 2. Exploring social worker – client practice

2.1 Introduction

Essentially, human relationships are dynamic self-other processes shaped by social, cultural and economic factors. The social worker - client relationship is a particular form of human relationship that remains central to social work purpose. To establish the background for the study undertaken for this thesis, this chapter and the next delineate and review the literature to identify current thinking about social worker - client relationship practice.

What social workers do, and how they draw upon the range of knowledge available, is inconclusive (Trevithick 2012; Healy 2014), reflecting a general view that the practice of social worker - client relationships is under researched (Fernandez, 2014; Ferguson 2016d; Healy, 2014; Smith and Donovan, 2013; Sudbery, 2009; Tilbury et al. 2015; Trevithick, 2012; Waterhouse and McGhee, 2013).

As noted in Chapter 1, identifying the content and parameters of knowledge about social worker - client relationship practice is not straightforward; it is a diffusely represented phenomenon in the literature. To address this issue, examination of the literature about social worker - client relationship practice centres on three main topics: the concept of the social worker - client relationship; social worker - client relationship practice itself; and the role of the social worker in this practice approach.

As social work practice cannot be examined without reference to context, this study is located within child and family welfare. Contemporary child and family

welfare in Australia is the product of historical, as well as contemporary, global and national factors that influence the potential of social worker -client relationship practice. Law and policy, relating to out-of-home care, can be unkind and blunt in response to the multidimensionality and subtleties of social worker - client relationships with children and families. This context and how it influences social worker - client relationship practice is the subject of Chapter 3.

As originally conceived, the social worker's aim with the client is to facilitate client individuation and autonomy by developing a working relationship with the client, guided by practitioner use of empathy and non-judgemental attitude (Biestek 1957). While elements of this approach have endured, much has also changed. Contemporary thinking about the values that underpin social worker - client relationships begins this chapter.

Conclusions are drawn at the end of the chapter about contemporary knowledge of the social worker - client relationship, the practice of the social worker - client relationship, the social worker-in-practice and how these apply to the study's research question.

2.2 Humanistic principles, ethics and social worker - client relationship practice

The theory of social worker - client relationship practice has its roots in humanistic principles and moral philosophy and is closely associated with the notion of having care for others (Banks 2012a, 2012b; Bauman 2000a; Payne 2011; William and Ming-sum 2008). Humanistic social work affirms '*all* kinds of knowledge, *all* skills and *all* the creativity that human beings have achieved' (Payne 2011, p. ix), embraces broad definitions of evidence (Payne 2011) and draws on humanistic

psychology, microsociology, human rights theory, phenomenology and existential theory (Payne 2011). Social work is essentially concerned with human-to-human interaction and views the human being as a holistic entity, interdependently nested within society. Social workers engage with people's lives as they actually are, not how they should be (Payne 2011). In the process, the humanistic approach is cognisant of power in relationships in its aim to promote and protect human rights and to achieve individual and structural change.

Social work practice 'is a practice that seeks human and social well-being by developing human capacities; personal growth; and social relationships of equality, freedom, and mutual responsibility through shared social experience' (Payne 2011, p. 31). Humanistic informed social work relationship practice is future oriented and committed to engendering realistic hope (Bland et al. 2015; Collins 2015; Miller and Rollnick 2014). The self-other dynamic in social work is significant for sharing and making meaning about experience, for giving and receiving help and for being open to experiencing the other person in their totality (Payne 2011, p. 12). Overall, Payne's theorising about humanistic social work provides a contemporary and comprehensive theoretical platform for this research study. Intrinsically linked to social work humanistic perspectives are 'helping' and 'caring' and the 'ethics of care'. These are briefly examined to help delineate the social worker - client relationship concept for this thesis.

2.2.1 Caring, helping and the ethics of care in social worker - client relationship practice

Helping and caring are part of social work practice (Banks 2012a; Bauman 2000b; Howe 2013) although the social worker - client relationship is rarely described as a helping relationship in contemporary literature. More often it is

labelled as case management or therapy or clinical practice. From a relational perspective, these terms are euphemistic because they do not denote the engagement and relational work that occurs in the daily encounters between social workers and clients. Arguably the terms caring and helping better reflect relational practice. To foreground them in this discussion about relationship practice the following description of helping is offered:

> Processes [that] enable people to work on issues in their lives by uncovering the internal debate and helping to resolve or manage such internal conflicts. Relationships, attachments, and connectedness are an essential element of caring, but personal growth views of development minimise them because of their focus on how people change in a linear way; they do not examine the trails of relationships that provide continuity and community for people. Shared humanity and vulnerability enables practitioners and clients to develop relationships that go beyond the tasks and events that they are involved with (Montgomery 1993 cited in Payne 2011, p. 139).

According to this description, helping and humanistic social work are relational processes that share a common purpose and ethics. Similar to helping, is the act of caring, being mindful of, and taking action to address another's needs. Caring is, therefore, intertwined with the purpose and nature of the relationships that social workers develop with clients and has long been associated with the motivation behind the choice to pursue social work as a career (Hackett et al. 2003).

Caring for others has been regarded since Aristotelian times as integral to notions of ethical conduct and to civilised societies (Bauman 2000a). Nevertheless, the normative virtue of caring within broader society is seen by some as under threat (Tronto 2010). Caring is also a traditional and contemporary key life experience for women and is a theme in social work and feminist social work literature (Dominelli

2002a; Featherstone and White 2014; Noddings, 2003). Caring-for continues to be a primary role for women in society. Dominelli (2002a) observes that, while social work practice aims to be emancipatory, social workers, who are mainly women, tend to underplay the importance and difficulty of caring work:

> Caring is hard work. It is socially necessary work. Yet, it has been consistently devalued and taken for granted. 'Something women do naturally'. Nonetheless, women are constantly engaged in servicing its circuitous motions, often at the expense of looking after their own needs as they put their efforts into ensuring that the lives of their loved ones are a little easier. Social workers collude with the seemingly effortlessness of women's endeavours and thereby negate the recognition of how much effort they put into basic survival (Dominelli 2002a, p. 2).

Dominelli's (2002a) analysis of this alleged collusion suggests a social work lack of consciousness about their socialisation and identities as carers, which inhibits their capacity for exploring issues of oppression and subordination in relationships with clients.

From a feminist perspective, caring is a complex and political relational activity which involves ethical and moral decisions (Banks 2012b; Watson et al., 2004; Pettersen 2012). This stands in contrast to altruistic views that caring is a selfless activity. Caring can reflect various motives of the carer as well as the person being cared-for. As a political act, caring-for and being-cared-for reflect, reproduce and challenge institutionalised views about who is responsible for 'the caring' and how care is to be discharged. Each self-other dynamic of the carer and person being cared-for also represents and reinforces power relations. Caring-for and being-cared-for also involve the communication of emotions. Feminist views regard care and the ethics of care as 'firmly based in' relational ontology (Bozalek 2016) and as

having five elements: attentiveness, responsibility, responsiveness, trust and integrity (p. 88). How these perspectives translate to the social worker - client relationship is also explored later in this thesis.

How these perspectives about caring link to social worker relationship practice in the case of child and family welfare is explored throughout the thesis. Consideration of the construction of care leads to clarification of the ethics of care in social worker - client relationship practice.

2.2.2 Ethics of care

As social work practice is highly contextualised, so too is the ethics of practice. Conventional social work ethical practice is concerned with issues of individual autonomy and self-determination, client rights to privacy and confidentiality and preservation of the dignity and uniqueness of the individual. Ethics for social worker - client relationship practice draws upon virtue ethics, ethics of care and more recently, ethics of proximity (Banks 2012a). Virtue ethics is also enjoying renewed interest for its applicability to professional practice and is essentially the idea that an action is right if it is undertaken by a person of virtuous character (Banks 2012a). Banks' analysis of the concept of 'a virtuous character' suggests the ethical social worker as: open minded, empathic, morally courageous, hopeful, reflective, and one who approaches situations with wisdom and integrity (Banks 2012a, p. 73).

An 'ethics of care' approach for social work is gaining momentum in the literature, including for social work education (Hermsen and Embregts 2015). The ethics of care is relational and integrates the moral basis of social work with the technologies of practice (Banks 2012a; Bozalek 2016) as explained here:

How one person relates to others [is] related to the goal of enhancing the existence of others. In a social work context, a caring person is one who has a motive of attentiveness towards particular others for whom the professional takes responsibility, and competence in giving care, tailored to the responses of the person cared for (Banks 2012a, p. 75).

The emphasis on 'care' opens a window for thinking about relationship practice that is sensitive to the range of cultural norms about family and care that social workers encounter with clients from differing cultural groups. An ethics of care approach for social worker - client relationship practice is needed to guide practitioner responsiveness. Applying an 'ethics of care' approach to practice requires expertise and can be challenging for individual practitioners (Stark 2010). Social worker - client relationship practice requires both good understanding and capacity to confidently engage with and address ethical issues and dilemmas.

Mindfulness about the ethics of care is challenged where managerialist neoliberal organisational practices prioritise risk-averse practices over client needs and emancipatory practice, and where the consequences of mandatory reporting overwhelm service provision (Bland et al. 2015; Broadhurst et al. 2010; Morley et al. 2014; Parton 2014; Parton and O'Byrne 2000b; Trevithick 2014). The influence of managerialist organisational culture on social worker - client relationship practice is explored in Chapter 3. However, it is noted here that a humanistic ethics of care approach to practice offers an important counterpoint to discourses that minimise and regularise the complexity of human experience, and which 'lack[s] a metric for existential qualities such as inner hurt, despair, hope, grief and moral pain that frequently accompany, and indeed often constitute, the illnesses from which people suffer' (Greenhalgh and Hurwitz 1999, p.48).

Practitioners can easily get caught when having to negotiate these two paradigms in their day to day practice that involves:

> dealing with many kinds of people, situations and personal problems … and is about local negotiations, which use different narratives to organise and articulate 'messy' issues together with clients and other professionals (Juhila et al. 2003, p. 18).

Alston and Bowles (2003) identify four areas of difficulty for ethical social work practice and where practitioners can get caught. These are: that social work loyalties often sit between other parties with conflicting interests; social workers function as both helpers and controllers; the duty to protect the interest of a social worker's work is often in conflict with the demand for efficiency and utility; and, finally, there is a challenge associated with working ethically in situations with limited resources (p. 86).

Research exists about social worker use of ethics in relationship practice with clients. This research includes studies about social worker decision-making and engagement in 'critical technologies of the self' (Hugman 2003, p. 1027), discussed later in the chapter, and studies that investigate organisational pressures and how these pressures lead to a failure to act on observations of children in situations of suspected risk of harm, discussed in Chapter 3. Researching the application of an ethics of care approach is not easily amenable to narrow and pervasive definitions of evidence-based practice (Healy 2014; Petersen and Olsson 2015; Stark 2010). Linked to ethics of care is the ethics of proximity and the ethics of responsibility that 'erupts as a primary response to the other because that other's response demands my recognition, reaction and action' (Tascon 2010, p. 90). Ethics of proximity is a sense of responsibility unbounded by rule or laws. Ethics of care, of proximity and of

responsibility are not well understood in social work; however, they appear to have direct relevance for the practice of relationship, given the intimate and sensitive content of social worker - client relationship practice, the focus on adult-child relationships, the non-visible settings of social worker - client encounters, and practice issues associated with navigating the public-private character of social work practice.

An ethically informed, humanistic approach to relationship practice for social work also considers constructions of 'clienthood' and 'the client'. Recent influence of consumer movements has transformed former notions of 'the client' as 'unknowing' and as a grateful and passive recipient of professional expert help, to an empowered subject able to make decisions about their own lives (Beresford 2005; Trevithick 2014).

Alternative terms such as 'service user' and 'consumer' are used widely now instead of 'client'. Despite this trend, the terms remain contested and the degree to which 'consumers' can make their own decisions is also contested (Beresford 2005; Juhila et al. 2003; Smith 2012). In the child and family welfare literature, clients are referred to as 'client' or as 'children', 'parents' and/or 'families'. For clarity, the term 'client' is used throughout this thesis.

Humanistic social worker - client relationship practice also respects the client and their views and experience as having implications for how intersubjective processes and communication between social workers and clients are conducted, facilitated, interpreted and acted upon. The current study provides insights about whether social workers utilise and engage with these ideas in their interactions with clients.

The continuing significance of empathy, open-mindedness and working together is entirely consistent with a growing interest in the ethics of care and the humanistic basis of social work practice. Ethics of responsibility and proximity are attracting attention in the literature and are worthy of exploration for relationship practice. Early and contemporary conceptualisations of 'social worker - client relationship practice' are now examined in view of this philosophical base and with particular reference to child and family welfare practice.

2.3 Early construction of 'relationship' in social work practice

What constitutes the social worker - client relationship remains grounded in Western historical and social experience. The work that social workers do with clients has been regarded as a 'relationship' since social work began (Biestek 1957; Perlman 1962; Richmond 2017). The social worker - client relationship was regarded as central to social work purpose. Emphasis was placed on initial rapport building by the social worker with the client to develop the client's trust in the worker, and the relationship was the foundation for identifying goals for action. Biestek's casework relationship was person-centred and process oriented; the relationship was 'the soul of social casework' (Biestek 1957, Foreward). Establishing the casework relationship was guided by the social worker's use of particular qualities which included: regarding the client as a unique person of worth; allowing the client purposeful expression of feeling, and listening without judgement; the social worker controlling his/her own emotional involvement while conveying empathy for the client's feelings and enabling clarification of the meaning of these feelings; honouring client self-determination; and, finally, affirming confidentiality that 'permits the client to keep some things to self' (Biestek 1957, p. 17). The emphasis on

purposeful social worker - client relationships that are based on humanistic values and is contained within a phased linear structure continues to the present day in social work (Compton et al. 2005).

2.3.1 The technologies of the social work process: the structure that contains the relationship

The social work process typically consists of these stages: engagement, assessment, planning, intervention, evaluation and termination (Compton et al. 2005; Perlman 1962; Richmond 1917) and remains a fixture in undergraduate social work education (Maidment and Egan 2016; Trevithick 2012). Theoretically, the social work process is represented as a linear process; however, in practice, the process of change in people's lives and behaviour rarely occurs in such a neat linear fashion because change is inherently often messy and chaotic. Secondly, rapport building is not confined to the first phase of the process. Usually referred to as 'engagement' (Maidment and Egan 2016), rapport and relationship building continue throughout the process and can wax and wane throughout and even completely cease. In addition, the 'assessment' phase is not confined to one period of time in the process; it is an ongoing responsibility of the social worker throughout the entire intervention (Holland 2000). Despite these alternative views, the task of engagement continues to be seen as a first phase of intervention.

This phased social work process is still used today, usually referred to as case management. Studies about the contemporary managerial context of child and family welfare practice today indicate that this phased structure tends to be used as a technology of organisational efficiency (White et al. 2009) rather than as structure that contains the social worker - client relationship. The relative simplicity of this phased process is amenable to technical-instrumental imperatives endemic in

contemporary human services. The encroaching instrumentalism of managerialist organisational culture has also been analysed as demonising human 'vulnerability' and that 'being vulnerable', is a euphemism for being unworthy of receiving care, of being of a weak or inferior character or of being beyond help, a view that over time has becomes institutionalised (Allan et al. 2003; Bauman 1995; Garrett 2003; Healy 2014; Parton 2011; Trevithick 2014; White et al. 2009). The 'holding' and change functions of the social worker - client relationship are potentially jeopardised and professional control is diminished under such conditions (Garrett 2003; Trevithick 2014). While the casework process is interdependent with the social worker - client relationship, it is the latter that is the focus of this thesis and is reviewed in the next section.

2.4 The enduring significance of particular relationship qualities in social work

The particular qualities identified by Biestek (1957) as intrinsic to the 'helping process' have largely endured to the present day (Alexander and Charles 2009; Beddoe and Maidment 2009; Buckley et al. 2011; Compton et al. 2005; De Boer and Coady 2007; Duncan et al. 2010; Green et al. 2006; Maiter et al. 2006; Mason 2012; Palmer et al. 2006; Payne 2011; Ribner and Knei-Paz 2002; Ryan et al. 2004; Trevithick 2012; Trotter 2015) and are ubiquitously referenced and discussed in social work theory, research and undergraduate texts (Alexander and Charles 2009; Beresford et al. 2008; Connolly and Harms 2015; Healy 2014; Maidment and Egan 2016; Parton and O'Byrne 2000a; Sheldon and MacDonald 2009; Winter 2009).

The beneficial outcomes of the 'quality and value of the experience' of the professional helping relationship, characterised by empathy, respect, trust, openness, transparency and reliability can hardly be overstated (Brandon and

Thoburn 2008; Duncan et al. 2010; Fook et al. 2000; Hamer 2006; Parton and

O'Byrne 2000a ; Pilgrim et al. 2009; Trevithick 2003). As Howe summarises:

> One of the hallmarks of a good relationship is that our feelings, however dark and distressing, are recognised, understood and accepted by the other. If the relationship is a place where we can feel safe, then we can explore the thoughts and feelings that are distorting and disfiguring our lives (Howe 2008a, p. 6).

This analysis of the benefits of experiencing a safe relationship is further

reinforced by Thomas (2007), who concluded that '50 years of meta-analytic studies

about the value of a helping relationship concluded that relational factors account for

as much as 75% of success in treatment while models and techniques account for

only 25% of success' (Thomas 2007 cited in Tosone 2013, p. 252).

Contemporary studies about these relationship qualities and their benefits

further reiterate that listening to clients, privileging the client's experience,

requesting feedback from the client in the relationship, avoiding critical or pejorative

comments, and asking what has been most helpful in therapy are what clients want

in therapeutic relationships (Duncan et al. 2010, p. 116). The findings of Duncan et

al. (2010) reiterate the importance of 'conveying empathy as a humanising, and

therefore, helpful emotional experience' (Duncan et al. 2010, p. 119) that invites

client exploration and meaning–making that supports their endeavours. Further, a

sense of alliance, goal consensus (Duncan et al. 2010 p. 121-22), communicating

positive regard, genuineness, feedback, self-disclosure, and persevering with

relationship repair when it 'breaks down' are also identified as salient to a

therapeutic relationship (p. 124).

Recent social work studies have appraised the value of the social worker -

client relationship from other perspectives. Marsh et al. (2012) undertook a meta-

analysis of empirical studies to appraise the mediation role of the social worker - client relationship for achieving client outcomes and to identify the factors that might moderate the influence of the relationship in these settings. Using a multiple search strategy and examining databases, experimental, quasi-experimental studies and studies using quantitative measures of the social worker - client relationship and moderator and outcome measures were included, resulting in a total sample of 60 studies. The studies consistently indicate that the social worker - client relationship is 'widely accepted as having robust, moderate treatment outcomes' (Marsh et al. 2012, p. 234) and that the three ingredients necessary for inducing change are: social worker - client agreement about goals, clear and agreed tasks required to achieve the goals and the social worker - client bond. Only seven studies that met the inclusion criteria for the meta-analysis were located in the child welfare field, compared with 25 in the substance abuse field and 28 in the mental health field.

A cross-national study in North America and Australia that explored 'expert' social work relationships with clients found that belief, optimism, and caring were generated through these relationships (Ryan et al. 2004). Thirty-five social workers identified as 'experts' by their peers formed the sample. Using a grounded theory analysis, Ryan et al. (2004) concluded that social work expertise is more than instrumental application of practice knowledge and skills: this is also affirmed by others (Connolly 2007; De Boer and Coady 2007; Jacobs 2009; Parton and O'Byrne 2000a). Belief, caring and optimism were described as follows. 'Belief' included social workers' belief in their own knowledge, skills and capacity as a social worker, a belief in their own assessment of and intervention in, the client's situation, and a belief in the client's capacity to survive, change and recover. 'Optimism' referred to hope that clients can recover and that they possess the strengths that will facilitate

recovery and change; and 'caring' referred to the importance attached to 'authentically caring about the client' (p.422).

Notions of mutuality and bi-directionality in social worker - client relationships have also been explored to determine the degree to which the relationship facilitated reciprocity (Alexander and Charles 2009). In a qualitative study undertaken by Alexander and Charles (2009) social workers were asked whether they had received care from their clients (Alexander and Charles 2009). Experienced social workers with five and 35 years' practice and who had experienced being cared for by a client were recruited to a sample of 10 social workers. The findings were categorised into the following themes: 'awareness of care through overt and subtle gestures, demonstrations of care independent of workers openness, and assumed reciprocity in the relationship' (pp.12-14). When asked how they accounted for these developments in their relationships with clients, participants described it as a complex process that did not follow any 'clear or static rules' as to when a shared mutuality of intimacy would develop. Closeness and separateness would shift over time, sometimes explicitly and sometimes without being discussed. The meaning of the relationship was reviewed and negotiated throughout between the social worker and the client. Participants also reported feeling comfortable with varying levels of intimacy and did not expect any reciprocity from the client. Interestingly and importantly, all participants spoke about the conflict they felt between the realities of practice in relation to distance and closeness and the expectations of boundaries within their professional role which they had learned from their training and professional experience.

A more recent study in Canada sought a multi-perspective view about social worker - client relationship practice in child protection (De Boer and Coady 2007).

Data were collected from 30 semi-structured interviews that included interviews with six social workers and six clients individually and in social worker - client dyads. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling (De Boer and Coady 2007), and care was taken to clarify inclusion criteria so that where social worker - client relationships had experienced difficulties, including hostility, distrust and avoidance, these were not excluded (De Boer and Coady 2007).

Data analysis consisted of two processes: seeking the story of their relationship from each social worker - client dyad and secondly, a variable-oriented strategy where the six stories and all individual transcripts were subject to a cross-case qualitative analysis using inductive coding methods. The data revealed that a 'humanistic attitude and style that stretched traditional professional ways of being' and a 'soft, judicious use of power' contribute to a 'good helping relationship' (De Boer and Coady 2007). Included in such relationships were the traditionally identified qualities of empathy, being non-judgemental, respectful and reliable, and others including 'addressing fears of child apprehension and allaying unrealistic fears', 'constantly clarifying information to ensure mutual understanding', 'using a down to earth manner', and 'being realistic about goals and patient about progress' (De Boer and Coady 2007). While self-selection of the sample may have compromised the findings, it is an important study for its identification of preferred relationship attributes by clients and social workers within a child protection context. These also illustrate that relationship practice is possible within a statutory environment and, secondly, and importantly, that clients appreciate warmth balanced with thoughtful use of power.

Applying a humanistic approach to client engagement in social work implies that trust in the relationship process and in the social worker is significant. Smith

(2001) undertook a small-scale study that explored trust in the regulated and audited

child protection context in the United Kingdom. Data were collected through

individual interviews and focus groups with social workers. Smith (2001) found that

the study participants believed that trust in the social worker is important in

situations where they (the social worker) may be the only person who sees the

parent with their child, or where the child is in out-of-home care and only sees the

parent at contact visits. In these cases, the parent relies on the worker to share the

memory/narrative they are building up about their relationship to their child. This was

exemplified in one instance when the parent said to the worker, 'Do you remember

that time when (child) did such and such?'

A second finding of Smith's study (2001) was the distinction made between

confidence and trust. While confidence in service delivery was identified as

important, confidence was seen as more instrumental than trust. Unlike confidence,

trust entails a sense of moral agency. Three forms of trust were identified as

important by the social workers. The first is the trust that is communicated by

frontline workers, including receptionists, social workers and foster carers, who

facilitate access to the system. For Smith (2001), if trust is not built at this point or at

least if the client does not feel that they can take the risk in being trusting, then client

confidence in the system is diminished or lost. Secondly, the relationship with

frontline workers can provide clients with the experience of what it is like to be in a

trusting relationship. Because many clients, children and adults, of the child welfare

system, have endured abusive, unpredictable and chaotic relationships, this can be

a valuable, albeit precarious, experience. Having the experience of taking the risk to

trust and to be able to sit with the risk as well as the rewards that trusting another

can bring is an important goal of social worker - client practice in this context.

Finally, children who enter out-of-home-care have experienced the ramifications and trauma of being in non-trusting situations with family members and others.

Overall, Smith's study (2001) found that 'trust' is felt in human relationships and can also be an experience of engagement with the wider system. While developing a trusting relationship is seen as a desirable aim of social worker - client relationships, building trusting relationships with another person is precisely the challenge for clients with traumatised relationship histories. Rather than seeing trust as something that can be developed at the beginning of a social worker - client relationship, it is more likely beneficial to practice that trust-building capacity is seen as a process that emerges over time.

The qualities that characterise the helping relationship in social work are firmly established. How the social worker embues their engagement with a client is less clear. Also less clear is the difference, if any, between the terms engagement and relationship as they apply to social worker- client interaction and practice. Both terms are widely used in the literature. Engagement is the accepted term to describe the first phase of the casework process. Relationship seems to be a broader term that describes the transaction between social work and client, and which reflects social work's humanistic values compared with the more instrumental management tone of the term 'casework'. Clearer distinction between the terms: engagement and relationship may be achieved throughout this thesis. Central to both terms is the importance of empathy in building relationships and how empathy is used by the social worker to relate to the client. This is now explored.

2.4.1 Empathy

Empathic relating is enduring and integral to the professional helping relationship (Cooper, A 2008; Gerdes and Segal 2011; Howe 2013; Ruch et al. 2010; Trevithick 2012). Drawing on a range of disciplinary perspectives, the fundamental importance of empathy in human relationships is affirmed in the literature. Being empathic, and the human ability to convey empathy with others, reflect our fascination as human beings with understanding the meaning of our own or others' experience (Howe, 2013). Having experience of empathic relationships is essential for 'formation and reformation of the social self', as Rogers (1986, p.129 cited in Howe 2013, p.137) observed, and 'empathy is in itself a healing agent'.

This construction of empathy is closely related to phenomenological views of the self, as exemplified by van Manen who contends that we 'find-ourselves-being-in-relation-to-others' (van Manen 2007, p. 395). These reflections point to the role of intersubjective processes within relationships for self-formation and are not unrelated to conceptualisations of 'use of self' discussed towards the end of this chapter.

Being the recipient of empathic attention is a quality client seek in a professional helping relationship (Bland et al. 2015; Buckley et al. 2011; De Boer and Coady 2007; Reimer 2010; Ruch 2014; Winter 2009). Feeling listened to and understood also facilitates the expression of sensitive feelings and emotional pain (Bland et al. 2015; Howe 2013; Ruch et al. 2010). In a psychologically safe relationship, this expression enables understanding about experience that, in turn, can present an opportunity for re-authoring experience and, in the process, gain leverage about possibilities for change.

Empathic relating can also foster self-regulation and improve relationships which are also healing experiences (Howe 2013; Stern 1985, 2002; Trevithick 2014). 'High empathisers' tend to be good regulators of their own and other people's feelings. Empathic relating can help to dismantle defensive responses that ultimately militate against healthy, caring enduring relationships (Howe 2013;Trevithick 2014). Empathy is also learned through early experience of close empathic relationships and it is close relationships we return to in times of distress or despair (Howe 2013). Howe reiterates the importance of the experience and healing potential of the safe empathic relationship in the professional practice space.

For social work practice in mental health, Bland et al. (2009, 2015) highlight the importance of the notion that 'personhood is constructed through relationship' (p. 29). In life, as in social work practice, it is through relationship experience that we become fully human, and language is the tool used for meaning– making that facilitates 'personhood' as explained here:

> Relationships and language (verbal and nonverbal) are reciprocally bound together. Once you (the healer) form a relationship with us (those with mental illnesses), you become part of our lived experience. How language is used can enhance or restrict relationships. The language we use demonstrates how we think and act; it also limits or enhances how others hear us (Bland et al. 2009, p. 29).

Howe (2013) also captures this essence of relationship in practice, although with a slightly different emphasis:

> Relationships in which we feel safe to talk – to describe and narrate – hold the possibility of rethinking, re-feeling, redefining and reforming the self (Howe 2013, p. 141).

Empathy can only be conveyed through verbal, written and nonverbal communication, so having mastery of different communication and language styles and skills is critically important to development of empathic, purposeful relationships in practice (Bennett, B et al. 2013; Harms 2007; Maidment and Egan 2016; Ruch et al. 2010; Trevithick 2012). How language is used is pivotal to clarifying meaning and constructing self-identity and so is a key element of practice (Baxter 2010; Bland et al. 2009; Bland et al. 2015; Houston 2009; Howe 2013; Parton and O'Byrne 2000b; Trevithick 2012). How, and how well, social workers convey empathy in their communication with clients is less clear, although one Australian study that explored the role of helping relationship values amongst child protection workers noted a lack of empathy (McArthur et al. 2011). In this study, approximately 41% of the sample of 859 were social work qualified (McArthur et al. 2011, p. 2). These findings regarding a lack of empathy findings were affirmed in a UK study by Forrester et al. (2008) that examined use of communication skills by child protection social workers by analysing data from 24 taped interviews between a social worker and an 'actor' client. The researchers found that few interviewers conveyed empathy yet, where empathy was conveyed, the client was less resistant, more at ease, disclosed more information. The apparent lack of empathy is concerning.

2.4.2 Empathic relating, communication and engagement

Undergraduate social work texts about communication skills abound in social work (Bennett, Bindi et al. 2013; Connolly and Harms 2013; Harms et al. 2011; Hennessey 2011; Maidment and Egan 2016; O'Hara and Pockett 2011;Trevithick 2012; Trotter 2015). The focus of introductory communication skills units in social work is on learning about individual communication skills and how they are contextualised by social work ethics and values and providing opportunities for

students to practice these skills. Foundation skills typically include active listening, reflective listening, paraphrasing, summarising and using open and closed ended questions.

In her exploration of social worker communication with children in the United Kingdom, Ruch (2014) used a methodology described as a three phased reflective case discussion model that enables a 'practice near' approach (p.2150-51) to understanding detail about relationship practice. Ruch used this methodology to interview social workers and found that they spoke about feeling 'uncomfortable' in communicating with children. Ruch (2014) interpreted these findings as a reflection of the social workers' lack of confidence in communicating in organic and nonlinear ways with children, as it presents a way of communication that differs markedly from the procedural forms of communication expected by their organisations and runs the risk of contravening organisational expectations of practice. This finding echoes an earlier study (Winter 2009) which indicated that deeper factors of social worker attitudes, values and emotional competence need to be enhanced for relationship practice with children.

A study that has specifically focused on deconstructing the concept of engagement is Yatchmenoff's study (2005) that interviewed social workers and clients about their experience and views of social worker- client engagement. The study tested a multidimensional measure of engagement using qualitative research methodology. A sample of 278 child protection clients were interviewed who were mainly mothers of child clients. All clients were 'open cases' at the time of interview. Yatchmenoff's (2005) measure of engagement comprises of seven indicators. These are: client receptivity, described as openness to receiving help; client expectancy, described as the perception of benefit; a sense of being helped or the

expectation of receiving help through the agency's involvement; a feeling that things are changing (or will change) for the better; client investment, described as commitment to the helping process, characterised by active participation in planning or services, goal ownership, and initiative in seeking and using help; the working relationship, described as the interpersonal relationship with the worker, characterised by a sense of reciprocity or mutuality and good communication; and, finally, mistrust, described as the belief that the agency worker is manipulative, malicious, or capricious, with intent to harm the client (Yatchmenoff 2005, p. 87). For the purposes of the current study that is exploring the significance of the social worker - client relationship, this identification of the dimensions of engagement is potentially useful reference. An overall finding of Yatchmenoff's (2005) study was that:

> Many parents who expressed a need for help were not at all positively involved in a helping process with the child welfare system. Indeed, lower variability on this (the receptivity) dimension suggested that most families interviewed acknowledged problems and a need for assistance (p. 93).

Yatchmenoff (2005) observed that this finding concurred with earlier findings (Janko 1994) that the link between client receptivity and perceived client lack of motivation and denial is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon (Juhila et al. 2003). More recent studies have also sought to better understand client experience of engagement with child protection services (Gladstone et al. 2012; Harries 2008). Gladstone et al. (2012) also sought to identify what facilitates client-worker engagement and how the relationship influences intervention outcomes (Gladstone et al. 2012). This qualitative Canadian study involved personal interviews with 131 worker–parent dyads (child protection workers and their corresponding parent clients). The researchers found that, where the client felt that they could trust the

worker, and where the client felt that the worker was knowledgeable about parenting, better outcomes were achieved. They also found that worker stress militated against positive outcomes (Gladstone et al. 2012).

Although these are small studies, they do suggest that aspects of relationship practice, such as empathic relating and understanding the role of relationship for exploration, meaning–making and growth, and responsive communication are perhaps not so well understood or practised by social workers. The studies also suggest that the pressured environments of child protection do not actively enculturate relationship work. Combined with a relative lack of collective practice experience in child protection induced by high rates of staff turnover, that is further explored in Chapter 3, these findings may also indicate that social work education fails to sufficiently prepare students in relational communication. The contrasting finding that hope and optimism felt by clients suggests that relationship practice was beneficial to the client, although how this was enacted is not known.

Having reviewed literature about the humanistic underpinnings of social worker - client relationship practice, including the ethics of care, empathy and empathic relating, I now examine social work knowledge about relationship practice.

2.5 Contemporary conceptualisations of 'relationship practice'

Generic social work theory that informs direct practice with individuals typically includes crisis intervention theory, problem-solving and task-centred models, strengths-based principles, systems and ecological theory, psychodynamic theory, narrative theory, solution focused brief therapy, trauma informed practice and practices informed by critical perspectives, such as professional narratives (Coady

and Lehmann 2008; Harms and Connolly 2012; Maidment and Egan 2015; Pease et al. 2016; Trevithick 2012; Walsh 2006; O'Hara and Pockett 2011). This constellation reflects a range of epistemological orientations and purposes, and is a mix of theories, models and frameworks. Texts about the skills for social work direct practice also exist (Hennessey 2011; Maidment and Egan 2016; O'Hara and Pockett 2011; Trevithick 2012).

This section of the literature review focuses on the practice of social worker - client relationships and is examined in three parts. The first is psychodynamic influences on social worker - client relationship practice, including child attachment theory in social work practice, and relationship-based practice. The second explores critical feminist analysis and philosophical concepts about relationship, including relational theory; and the third part discusses social worker integration of knowledge with the realities of the practice context. Empirical research about the application of these theories and concepts and social worker - client relationship practice is also identified and discussed.

2.5.1 Relationship-based practice and child–parent attachment theory

Reviewing the literature about social work practice in child and family welfare reveals the considerable and long-lasting influence that psychodynamic thinking has had on social work practice in child and family welfare. Psychodynamic and psychoanalytic theory, including child attachment theory (Bowlby 1988), object relations theory (Ainsworth 1969; Valentine 1994), theory of ego defence (Trevithick 2011) and concepts such as transference and countertransference have all been part of this history (Goldstein et al. 2009; Trevithick 2012). The relevance of child attachment theory and object relations theory has been reinforced in recent years

(Cooper 2006, 2008; Perry and Sullivan 2014; Ruch 2005, 2007a, 2010; Schore 2009) with discoveries in neuroscience research about the impact of trauma on brain development in children (Baradon 2009; Development Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood 2000; Perry and Sullivan 2014; Powell et al. 2014; Schore 2009; Segal 2013; Slade 2005; Steele and Baradon 2004).

The central tenet of attachment theory is that human development occurs in the context of the parent-child relationship because babies are born with a blueprint for seeking attachment to an adult caregiver for their own survival and ongoing development. Where babies do not experience safe, secure, predictable, stimulating and loving attachment in their infancy, their potential for healthy physical, social, intellectual and emotional development is compromised and, depending on the seriousness of the attachment issues, development can be seriously undermined (Schore 2009). The theory of ego defence posits that human beings over time develop psychological mechanisms that protect the ego against intolerable emotional and psychic pain (Trevithick 2011). While these mechanisms are essential for survival of 'the self', they can become problematic when mechanisms are habitually and unconsciously invoked to the detriment of personal growth.

Neuroscientific research has confirmed that all forms of abuse and neglect can have traumatising effects on neurobiological development in children (Perry and Sullivan 2014) and that abusive relationships can disrupt, distort and undermine the natural impulse to trust others. Trauma 'can rob the victim of a stable sense of self' (Knight 2015, p. 26) and can lead to long-term feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness. In the process, other capacities are also jeopardised including emotional self-regulation and developing the capacity for attunement to verbal and nonverbal cues emitted by other people (Cozolino 2014). The capacity to attune to

the emotional states of another person is possible through a mental map known as the 'visceral -emotional template' (Cozolino 2014, p. 228). This template 'enables attunement to another person's emotional state through communication conveyed in physical movement, mirror systems, imitation and resonance behaviours' (Cozolino 2014, p. 228). This capacity is evident in the attuned parent who can modulate their tone of voice to convey to the baby that the parent understands their experience and in so doing, can reduce the baby's anxiety (Jonsson et al. 2001). Babies living in abusive situations commonly develop over time, adaptive survival behaviours including hypervigilance and nuanced sensitivity to even subtle changes in the behaviour of perpetrators (Cozolino 2014; Knight 2015). Developing the important capacity to self-soothe when distressed, is often compromised as is the capacity to be comfortable with oneself. This is key knowledge for social workers who engage with children and parents who become clients of child and family welfare services. Both these theories emphasise the importance of early relationship experience for infant development and for developing healthy relationship capacity later in life.

In contemporary practice, this knowledge is termed trauma informed practice and is seen to 'provide a corrective emotional experience' (Knight 2015, p. 26). It requires the practitioner to be:

> sensitive to this possibility (that the client may have a trauma history) and to the ways in which the client's current problems can be understood in the context of past victimization (Knight 2015, p. 26).

Knight identifies the four main principles of trauma informed practice as: 'normalising and validating clients' feelings and experiences; assisting clients to understand the past and its emotional impact; empowering survivors to better

manage their current lives; and helping them to understand current challenges in light of past victimization' (Knight 2015, p. 28).

These principles are consistent with social work practice of engagement and relationship work, although how it is done is not well documented. This work requires more than technical application of identified skills, because how one works with the individual is contingent upon the characteristics of each individual situation and involves working with subjective material in a relational way (Knight 2015, p. 28). How best to prepare social workers for this work is also not well-developed though Knight affirms the need for strong self-care strategies for self-nurturing and managing stress and using strategies to minimise transference.

Knowledge about the relational nature of brain development in infancy and childhood has highlighted the importance of relationship in early childhood for development, emotional self-regulation, for learning and for trauma recovery. Child and family welfare practice has absorbed this knowledge to develop intervention programs with children, and families with troubled relationship histories: an example is the Circle of Security program, a treatment program developed in the USA. Circle of Security is essentially informed by developmental psychology child-parent attachment theory. In general terms, the Circle of Security program aims to repair or facilitate the development of healthy secure attachment between an infant and their parent. This is achieved through a 20-week group program consisting of infant/toddler - caregiver dyads that uses videorecording, group process and education to encourage parents to explore, and develop an understanding of, their own attachment experience as children and to learn how it now affects them as parents. Through developing their observation, reflective capacity and emotional self-regulation, they learn to understand their children's needs, how to better

70

respond to them, and to help their child's own development of self-regulation. It is a program that has been evaluated and shown to significantly reduce the risk of insecure child-parent attachment and to enhance attachment style and parenting practice (Cassidy et al. 2010; Hoffman et al. 2006; Powell et al. 2014) (See: https://circleofsecurityinternational.com/).

Therapists work to establish a 'secure base' within the program so that throughout the 20 weeks, the caregivers can gradually learn about how their child activates their own stress response (called 'shark music'), prompting particular behaviours that obstruct their child's attempts to build an attachment with them. Through this, the parent becomes aware of how their own behaviour reflects their own childhood attachment experience. With the use of video recording technique and group process, the caregiver builds reflective capacity and learns how to change their parenting behaviour to one that is 'attachment- inducing' and which leads to improved parenting for their child. Circle of Security is an intensive program. Creation of a 'secure base' allows and enables caregiver exploration and comfort seeking as they require. In this way, it 'replicates' and parallels a healthy parent-child relationship. Accessing experience of being in a secure base provides pivotal experience leading to transformational leaning. The outcomes for the caregiver and the child stem from the experience of the relationship process itself and from the changed relationship achieved by the end of the intervention.

This emphasis on relationship has relevance to the current study is. While the premise of creating a safe space, is similar to the professional helping relationships with adult clients, the Circle of Security program takes this one step further with its explicit premise that this has to happen through the context of the parent-child relationship. This thesis contends there are lessons in this approach for social

worker - client relationship practice with children and families, an idea that has been explored in social work by (Ruch (2005 2007a) and Ruch et al's. (2010) relationship-based practice and which is also conceptually linked to trauma informed practice, also explored for social work practice (Knight 2015).

Knight's (2015) analysis reiterates that social worker practice with clients does provide a space for trauma informed practice, as it occurs in the real world day to day interactions with clients and is often about pressing day to day issues such as meeting material needs and dealing with child access issues and other family relationship tensions. Knight (2015) contends, therefore, that corrective relationship work can be done by social workers precisely because they tend to work with clients as events unfold in the client's life, such as in home visits, parks, child care centres or caregiver homes through the course of the intervention.

Assessing, monitoring and facilitating healthy parent-child attachment is often at the core of practice in child and family welfare. It is contentious and at times precarious work, because the safety of the infant and/or child has to be prioritised while identified opportunities are provided for healing and developing the attachment relationship between the child and their parent. For example, a one-year-old child may have been removed from her mother's care because she was found unattended on more than one occasion. The child is likely to be placed with a foster family or with the child's extended family in accordance with a Court Order. A condition is likely to be included in the Order which prescribes the amount and type of contact permitted between the mother and the child during the life of the Order. This scenario can be complicated by many other factors such as the mental health of the mother, the degree of trauma experienced by the mother either in a current relationship and/or her history, or unstable accommodation. The typical expectation

of the social worker is that they work to develop a safe relationship with the mother following the principles identified above, so that her contact with the child is helpful to the child's own development of self.

Trauma informed practice is skilled work that also carries a risk of vicarious trauma and emotional exhaustion for practitioners (Knight 2015). Thus, this work requires a high degree of practitioner self-understanding about their own relationship histories, well-developed reflective functioning, emotional self-regulation and self-efficacy and high level of skill in knowledge – practice integration as well as communication skills and capacities. A second precondition for relationship practice is that individual practitioners are sufficiently informed, equipped and supported (Knight 2015; Trevithick 2014).

Attachment theory, object relations theory and the ego defence mechanism are all components of psychodynamic theory, which is regarded as key knowledge for practice with children and families with traumatised relationship histories. Contemporary developments in neuroscience research have confirmed the importance of early healthy child-caregiver attachment for healthy child development. How this knowledge can be used in child and family welfare practice settings is being explored and developed (Goldstein et al. 2009; Knight 2015; Ruch 2014; Ruch et al. 2010; Trevithick 2012, 2014).

Translating this knowledge to cross-cultural relationships between social workers and children is also a developing area. While some inroads have been made with regard to 'white' social work practice with Australian Aboriginal clients within the context of child and family welfare (Bennett et al. 2011; Fejo-King 2013; Harms et al. 2011), practice effectiveness remains elusive(Bowlby 1969; Stern

1985). The Western practice of individualised professional engagement is inconsistent with Aboriginal cultural norms about community and collective ways of knowing. This knowledge is being integrated in various ways into the development of trauma informed approaches for child welfare practice by Australian state and territory governments in the Australian context (Australian Capital Territory Government 2014; New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services 2017; unknown 2015; Western Australia Department of Child Protection 2011). These State-based programs, include the Signs of Safety program in Western Australia (Western Australia Department of Child Protection 2011), and trauma informed programs in NSW and the ACT (Australian Capital Territory Government 2014; New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services 2017). While evaluation of these programs is clearly important, evaluation of intervention programs is multilayered (Lamont 2009). Program evaluation does not necessarily provide insight into how practitioners actually interact with clients and programs delivered are not always staffed by social workers (Aylward et al. 2010).

Social worker - client relationship practice is skilled work that requires a sophisticated level of relational knowledge and nuanced 'use of self'. The humanistic, ethics-informed person-in-environment lens of social work provides a conceptual basis for trauma informed practice that recognises the role of relational experience and processes for awareness, healing and development.

2.5.2 Relationship-based social work

There is debate in the literature about the importance of relationship-based approaches for social work practice, and there are calls for clarification of the term 'relationship-based practice (Turney 2012). Murphy et al.'s (2013) central argument

is that the qualities of relationship-based practice are epistemologically aligned with principles of person-centred theory rather than the psychoanalytic foundations of relationship-based practice as proposed by Ruch et al. (2010). British social work practitioners and researchers Trevithick (2014), Howe (2009) and Ruch et al. (2010), have developed a relationship-based practice framework for social work practice in child and family social work.

Relationship-based social work contains the following key ideas:

> That human behaviour and professional relationships are integral components of any professional intervention; human behaviour is complex and multifaceted, people have rational and affective dimensions; that internal and external worlds of individual life are inseparable so integrated (psychosocial) responses are crucial for social work practice; each social work encounter is unique and so responses must be tailored to that uniqueness; 'use of self' is critical for helpful collaboration and intervention; and, ensuring respect for individuals is embedded in practising in inclusive and empowering ways (Ruch et al. 2010, p. 21).

Ruch et al.'s framework is based on the premise that past experience informs current thinking and behaviour, that individuals do not always have a conscious understanding of their behaviour, and that within the course of a professional relationship where expression of feelings and perception of experience can emerge and be brought to consciousness, using transference and countertransference mechanisms.

Early experience of severe anxiety, uncertainty and feelings of powerlessness can result in poor development of inner working models (Bowlby 1998) that, in turn, can manifest later in life in the expression of intense feelings and erratic behaviour. The relationship-based practice framework also draws on understandings about the

nature and role of defence mechanisms that individuals develop to avoid painful experiences, and recognises that these can be explored within a professional relationship to facilitate improved relational functioning. The relationship-based framework also emphasises the importance of reflective capacity for relationships and applies systemic thinking to acknowledge that dynamics exist and recur between the intrapsychic, interpersonal and broader social contexts for any individual and these influences also impact on individual experience (Ruch et al. 2010). The social worker's effectiveness in relationship practice has to be understood within the organisational context of their practice (Ruch et al. 2010). Relationship-based practice also has to be supported and reflected in organisational culture, policy and practices.

As Ruch (2011) sees it, frontline child protection practice is 'complex, contingent and situated', asserting that management in the child welfare arena needs to be 'fit for purpose' (p. 5). Much of the work is about pain and anxiety as much as it is about learning and implementing effective public management techniques and systems. That is to say, management practices need to incorporate open reflective management practices within the managerialist framework and not split them off. Ruch contends that psychodynamic concepts of anxiety containment, 'splitting' of difficult emotions and projection have potential usefulness for examining organisational culture that supports practice with families about relationship issues (Ruch 2011).

The emphasis on encouraging clients to understand their own experience of relationship, and how they can use this knowledge to facilitate development of relationship capacity complements ideas and principles in trauma informed practice. The extent to which this work can be effective in contemporary practice contexts

where emphasis is given to a more task focused approach to client interaction is problematic (Cooper 2005, 2008; Ferguson 2005; Howe 2009; Munro 2011b; Ruch et al. 2010). These contextual factors are further examined in the next chapter, Chapter 3, which examines the practice context.

Many studies have investigated and confirmed the value of relationship and the social worker - client relationship process in social work for facilitating client outcomes for social work practice (Duncan et al. 2010; Horwitz and Marshall 2015; Ornstein and Ganzer 2005; Pozzuto and Arnd-Caddigan 2006, 2009; Prynn 2008; Thomas 2007; Tosone 2013, Ruch, 2010; Trevithick 2012).

Very few have observed the social worker - client relational practices as they specifically unfold in 'natural settings' (Horwitz and Marshall 2015). An important exception to this is a study, using ethnographic methodology, made observations of face-to-face encounters between social workers and families, including home visits, to ascertain what social workers actually do in this work (Ferguson 2016d).

A total of 87 social workers – client encounters were observed and 71 of these occurred in the family home. The researchers followed the social worker in a different car to the homes. Written consent was provided by all sample participants and participation by clients and the social workers was entirely voluntary.

Ferguson (2016d) observed that the practice was 'deeply investigative' (p. 283), although relational skills were used. The key findings were that many of the social workers used relational skills in their encounters with family members, including children, in a constructive way, although they were lacking in some instances. Ferguson also found that social workers had to often communicate with children and parents at the same time; that many of the social workers

demonstrated being comfortable engaging with children through play and at the children's developmental level; that longer term relationships were yielding positive change and that the relationship with the social worker was valued by these families. In some instances, the visits were cut short, due to factors such as family resistance; or intense emotions being expressed; the child's readiness and willingness to communicate, and organisational pressures such as hot-desking, open plan offices and availability of worker time.

Ferguson's (2016d) research enabled close observation of encounters between social workers and clients that is very helpful for understanding how social worker - client relationship practice is conducted, for identifying what social work capacities, skills and knowledge are required, and for ascertaining how social workers learn how to do this work. As Ferguson (2016d) concluded, this is complex work where many of the variables are not controlled and where the stakes can be high.

In his reflection about the methodology used in his study, Ferguson (2016d) reiterates that child protection is an 'intimate' practice. To understand it better, 'near practice' methodologies are required (Ruch 2014) or 'practice ethnography' (Longhofer et al. 2012). As Ferguson notes, it is remarkable that what social workers actually do is so little studied, despite the acute attention given to child death reviews in the UK and Australia, and the findings of those reviews, which have included more detailed understanding of how relationship practice works (Ferguson 2016c). In conclusion, Ferguson states that his findings suggest:

> that what is needed to produce unique data about the nature and lived
> experience of practice is an approach that observes face-to-face encounters,
> while staying close to the emotional experiences of workers and service users

and using psychodynamic and social theories to make sense of those dynamics (Ferguson 2016c, p. 157).

A larger recent UK study (Winter et al. 2016) focused specifically on how social workers communicate with children and young people across Scotland and England. The observations occurred in a range of practice settings where social worker – client interactions had a range of purposes relating to the protecting children from imminent harm, assessment of the needs and wellbeing of the children and young people. In total, Winter et al. (2016) observed 82 social worker interactions with 126 children and young people ranging in age from babies to seventeen-year-old young people.

The key research aims were to learn how practitioners experience and understand their communication; to learn how the children and young people experience and understand their relationships with social workers; and to identify the factors that best facilitate communication between social worker practitioners, children and young people (Winter et al. 2016, p. 3).

Using inductive analysis, the findings included that the social workers physically moved around with the child: for example, during a home visit, the social worker would follow the child as they moved around; and helped children to make meaning using different kinds of communication. They found that social worker understanding and experience of what they did, revealed that, while social workers had an understanding of the kind of communication required when communicating with children in this context, there were structural, practice-related and personal factors identified that influenced their experience of doing this communicative work. Structural factors included workload pressures and office space issues, including 'hot-desking', which is well documented and is discussed in the next chapter.

Practice-related factors include the impact of office processes that limit social worker - client contact to one or two contacts, which impedes capacity for forming long lasting and deeper relationships. Requiring clients to repeatedly tell their life story when cases are passed from one team to another raised an ethical issue for the social workers. They reported that asking a client to tell their life story, often emotionally painful for them, can appear disingenuous and fickle. Repeatedly speaking about trauma experience is also known to risk re-traumatising the narrator of the story.

Personal factors included personal capacities and 'natural' affinity identified by the social workers, for communicating with children of particular ages.

Ferguson (2016a) and (Winter 2009, 2016) provide important lessons for undertaking similar research in Australia. The research questions posed in each of these studies, and in particular, the researchers' hopes to 'gain a full appreciation of the nuanced, contingent and complex nature of communicative encounters' (p. 4) also equate with the research undertaken for this thesis. The findings generated from researcher observations about the children's engagement experience with social workers were that for some children, the social worker was not welcome, or they were shy or indifferent towards the social worker. In other instances, the social worker was welcomed and verbal and non-verbal communication observed indicated that they were regarded favourably by the child. Overall, Winter et al. (2016) concluded that relationship practice requires workers who are reflective and who can demonstrate the 'use of self' requires 'being aware of one's own personal qualities, professional values and alignment with professional responsibilities' (Winter et al. 2016, p. 15). It is a practice that demands a way of being that enables adaptive and responsive actions according to each context. Winter et al.'s (2016)

conclusion was that it was not possible to identify a list of relevant factors for this work, because it is so contingent, context dependent and complex. In the shadow of the comprehensive Munro review of the UK child protection system (Munro 2010a, 2011a, 2011b), and the associated public, media and political turbulence in the UK that arose from the deaths of children under the care of government:

> Changes are afoot in the UK, especially in light of the Munro review (Munro 2010b; Munro 2011a; Munro 2011b). These changes seek to reclaim the importance of the relationship between social workers and children and significance of 'face-to-face practice' (Winter et al. 2016, p. 3).

This is a sentiment supported by others (Broadhurst and Mason 2014; Devaney and Smith 2010; Featherstone and White 2014; Ruch et al. 2010; 2014) and timely for Australian practice in view of the roll out of the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children* (2009–2020). Australian theorising about the social worker - client relationship as partnership is a step in this direction (Scott and Arney 2010). Notably, Scott and Arney (2010) concluded that the success of the partnership approach was driven by the professionals involved.

In addition, these studies are demonstrating innovative methodologies that enable practice-in-action as it occurs in the settings where much of this work is undertaken, and that also increases its visibility. This kind of research is not without ethical dilemmas; however, studies such as these demonstrate that highly relevant and important knowledge can be developed about relationship practice.

Relationship-based practice recognises the role of power in relationships, the role of power in abusive relationships, the role of power between a social worker and a client in relationship-based practice, and the importance of power sharing in the client–practitioner relationship for ethical and therapeutic reasons. Recognition

of how power influences relationships is fundamentally important in social work (Alston and Bowles 2013; Banks 2012a; Bozalek 2016). As a social work practice method, relationship has to be ethically informed and demands from the individual social worker, a well-developed understanding of self-other awareness.

The 'self-other' concept has been theorised by philosophers including Buber (Gordon 2011), who identified two types of relationships: the 'I-thou' and the 'I-it'. 'I-thou' relationships are based on respect, where each individual treats the other as like-self: another human being. By contrast, the 'I-It' refers to instrumental relationships where the humanity of one is not respected by the other. In Buber's view, these are not mutually exclusive types. Rather, they are two 'ontological modes of existence' (Muth 2009; Gil 2010; Gordon 2011). The 'I-thou' emphasises 'relations' and dialogue and 'being with' another.

> Buber's point is that a genuine encounter often involves confronting the other, not in order to impose oneself or to change the other but in order to confirm and accept the other as a partner in dialogue. Confirming the other does not imply approval; it means accepting the other with his or her difference and uniqueness (Gordon 2011, p.209).

The ontological flavour of Buber's concepts of I-Thou and I-It, captured in his sentence 'All real living is meeting' (Buber 1958, p. 11) is resonant with two other concepts from phenomenology that have relevance for the current discussion.

Phenomenology seeks to understand phenomena as 'things in themselves'. It is concerned with the meaning of 'being' and so is concerned with understanding phenomena through experience. These concepts devised by Heidegger (1978) build on Husserl's (1900) theorising before him, and resonate with the person-in-environment lens of social work and so have relevance for thinking about social

worker - client relationship practice. These are Heidegger's concepts of 'being-with' and 'being-in-the-world' (Cerbone 2008) and 'relations of recognition' (Honneth 1995).

Heidegger argues that 'being' cannot be separated from the external world because our sense of who we are is informed by our place in the world and how we interpret our sense of 'being-in-the-world'. It is based on the premise that awareness of 'being' is interpretation and experience. This perspective of human experience is compatible with social constructionism, which says that meaning is constructed, not made 'out there', independent of 'the world' (Cerbone 2008, p. 57). It is related to Heidegger's 'being-with', which also built on Hegel's work about intersubjectivity, described as 'the existence of a between-world, connecting individual human subjectivities' (Crossley 2005, p. 2). Another philosopher, Honneth (1995), contends that development of individuality and self-identity occurs through our experience of intersubjective processes that reflect three forms of recognition: love, rights and esteem. Honneth (1995) draws on object-relations theory for his theorising and contends that the experience of the love of the early parent–child relationship enables the infant to believe that they have a 'place' and that they matter. For Honneth (1995), this is critical to an individual's development of 'relation-to-self', that is, of 'recognition'. To be recognised is essentially relational, and relational experience shapes and forms identity. Recognition can also emerge through the intersubjective processes that exist in the civic space where recognition is bestowed through the mechanism of rights, and through obligations and rights organised through the law. Recognition also emerges through esteem that is gained through ethical life (p. 121).

Honneth's ideas have not received much attention in social work, and have been refuted for their psychoanalytic origins and lack of analysis about the implications of social structures on the process and experience of 'recognition' (Garrett 2010). Refuting Honneth's work however ignores the relevance of 'recognition' in relationship process in social work practice that enables a person to believe that they do matter; that they are worthy and that they have a right to 'recognition' that, overall, reflects the sanctity of identity in the world (Houston 2009). These do seem to be relevant constructs for social worker - client relationship practice that has emancipatory aims.

The theory and empirical studies about relationship, the social worker - client relationship practice and intersubjective processes informed by psychodynamic, feminist and phenomenological concepts confirm the importance of empathic attention and of safe relational experience for healing, development and personal growth. Recent small-scale studies have examined the positive outcomes of social worker - client relationships characterised by belief and caring and optimism, while others, located in child protection contexts, suggest low levels of empathic relating to clients.

2.5.3 Online, e-technologies, social media and social worker – client relationship practice

Social worker - client relationships are also conducted using electronic forums and mediums, through online platforms such as Skype and chatrooms, as well as social media.

While this is not specifically examined in this study, some social work research explores the benefits and challenges associated with conducting practice using this

medium. One interesting approach considers the part that online technologies can play in facilitating social presence and social interaction (LaMendola 2010). Social presence occurs when awareness of the other is conveyed through communication, and La Mendola notes that the concept of social presence shines a light on the importance that 'the experience of the encounter' can have for an individual, citing this as a central idea in social work that was evident even in the early days of home visitation of the poor. The idea of enabling social presence is akin to the importance attached to feminist ideas about making the invisible visible and to Honneth's ideas about the power of recognition, all of which have relevance to the current study that explores the value of the social worker - client relationship.

2.5.4 Relational, critical feminist and phenomenological conceptualisations

Emanating from American feminist therapy, relational theory offers a set of principles for engaging with clients (Jordan et al. 2004) (See: http://www.jbmti.org/) and is compatible with the ecological premise of social work.

Relational theory is based on the premise that personal growth can be achieved through having experience of growth-enhancing relationships (Freedberg 2009; Jordan et al. 2004) and is the basis of the philosophy of the Jean Baker Miller Training Institute (JBMTI) that is the intellectual home of relational theory. While the conceptual basis of this work is traceable to Rogerian principles and theory, Jean Baker Miller advanced liberal feminist understandings of 'relationship' and 'being relational' to develop Relational-Cultural theory (Jordan et al. 2004).

Jordan et al. (2004) emphasise that the relational therapeutic relationship requires therapist authenticity in the relationship. It is this authenticity of the therapist

that ensures mutuality and emotional availability. Good relational outcomes are achieved when each person feels:

> a greater sense of zest (vitality, energy); more able to act and does act in the world; has a more accurate picture of her/himself and the other person(s); a greater sense of worth; more connected to other persons and exhibits a greater motivation to connect with other people beyond those in one's primary relationships (Miller and Stiver, 1997 cited in Freedberg 2009, p. 71).

Emotional maturity is not defined by separation, individuation and autonomy, as in traditional counselling theory, but rather by well-developed relational capacity (Comstock et al. 2008). Relational-Cultural theory has seven main tenets. These are: that people grow through and towards relationships throughout the life span; that movement toward mutuality rather than separation characterises mature functioning; that the ability to participate in increasingly complex and diversified relational networks characterises psychological growth; that mutual empathy and mutual empowerment are at the core of growth-fostering relationships; that authenticity is necessary for real engagement in growth-fostering relationships; that participation in the development of growth-fostering relationships induces growth; and finally, that the goal of development is the realisation of increased relational competence over the life span (Comstock et al. 2008, p. 280).

Relational theory has also been explored in social work (Ornstein and Ganzer 2005; Freedberg, 2009; Segal, 2012) that incorporates feminist understandings about the impact of class, sexuality, and ethnicity, that 'contextualises that experience and locating them in the historical, cultural, and social matrices in which both the therapist and the client are embedded' (Ornstein and Ganzer 2005, p. 567),

and it 'is fully compatible with the core principles and values of direct social work practice' (Freedberg 2009, p. 21).

Drawing on their practice with adults in residential settings in chronic mental health and homelessness settings, Ornstein and Ganzer (2005) contend that transference,countertransference and self-disclosure are used in such a way that the therapist is more involved in the therapy process, unlike a traditional psychoanalytic approach; where the client and therapist 'co-construct meaning', a stance echoing Howe's and Bland et al.'s (2015) more recent emphases on the importance of relationship. Relational theory projects a more egalitarian view of the client-therapist relationship and emphasises the importance of practitioner self-awareness and 'use of self'.

Social worker - client relationship practice in child and family welfare is influenced by legal intervention and often occurs in non-office environments, such as home visits, where the social worker is often engaged with more than one person at a time. It is, therefore, more pragmatic than the therapeutic encounter. In the U.S. Segal (2013) applied relational theory to social work practice in the child protection setting in a study of a home visiting service in a Latino community that prioritised parents of two-year-olds to facilitate parent–child attachment. Taking the view that relational process is focused on enhancing parental capacity to understand and respond to a child's cues, 'rather than practising techniques on parents' (p. 381) or 'delivering services to families' (Featherstone et al. 2014, p. 1740), Segal records a relational encounter and the intersubjective processes that played out between a social worker and a Spanish-speaking mother concluding that:

> Reflective supervision, knowledge-building around intersubjectivity, and efforts to create organisational climates that minimise social distance between

individuals are all possible means of institutionalizing the relational approach (p. 382).

While this study only provided one illustration of one encounter with one family, the study does highlight the principles of reciprocity and the 'we-identity', power sharing and the recursive nature of relational practice. For relational theory to gain impetus as a solid way of practice it has to overcome organisational resistance to the fact that relational work takes time. Segal (2013) further argues that the outcome of relational practice is consistent with the outcomes of evidence-based research.

Social worker - client practice in child and family welfare is in many ways a 'women's domain'. The social work workforce is largely made up of women (Healy and Lonne 2010). Most of the clients with whom social workers engage in child and family welfare are women who are the biological parents or caregivers of the children clients (Davies et al. 2007; Featherstone and Fawcett 2012; Ramvi and Davies 2010; Shoesmith 2016). Most clients of child protection authorities carry significant personal pain as a result of their long experience of being subject to abusive and oppressive relationships.

Many of the women and children who become clients of child and family welfare services are subject to acts of domestic violence. Notwithstanding definitional contention about the term 'domestic violence', it is an endemic phenomenon in Australia with one woman killed each week by her partner or ex-partner and with one in four women experiencing intimate partner violence (Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria 2016). Children are present in one out of every three family violence cases reported to police, and Aboriginal women are 35 times more likely to be hospitalised by family violence than are other women (Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria 2016). Therapeutic approaches to this

type of trauma require nuanced and judicious use of respectful relationship skills and are identified as critical to strengthening and healing child–parent attachments, as noted here:

> Therapeutic responses to children exposed to domestic and family violence should include working with mothers (or the non-offending parent) and children to strengthen attachment and should be trauma-informed (Campo 2015, p. 16).

Child and family welfare is essentially aimed at protecting children from harm, intervening to facilitate children's development and quality of life, and enhancing family functioning. The focus of the work women social workers and their predominantly women clients do is on family roles and functions, parenting and caring responsibilities and relationships, an area of social life that is still primarily the domain of women (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007b). The division of labour in the contemporary family home remains largely the responsibility of women. Girls are still socialised to internalise the 'family responsibility' script that includes being prepared for the emotional and practical labour of caregiving associated with growing and maintaining families (Bielby cited in Chafetz 2006). The family is the place in which the 'thick and close forms of relatedness imaged by biological ties of kinship' are located (Thornes 1992, p. 10 cited in Bielby 2006).

The delivery of services to families and children through child protection, family support and foster care are subject to the same social, economic and political structures that reproduce dominant views about gender roles and relationships between men and women. These patterns of family role socialisation, gender relations, division of labour within families, and role expectations are reflected in, and have implications for, how practice is conducted with children and families,

including in the relationships that develop between clients of these services and social workers. Women social workers are subject to these same socialisation processes as much as are women clients. Little is known about how these socialisation processes influence women social workers in their relationship practice with women clients.

Helping women to understand their relationships in, and their experiences of, family includes facilitating their knowledge and understanding of their socio-political location within broader institutional, community and interpersonal contexts. It is awareness of 'the personal and political dimensions of life, respecting diversity encompassed by women, seeking more egalitarian forms of social relationships, and transforming the existing social order' (Dominelli 2002b, p. 3) that provides the starting point for feminist social work in the child and family arena.

Building safe healthy relationships, 'caring' relationships and strong parenting are key foci in post-court intervention and are central topics of social worker - client relationships and interactions (Munro 2008). Child and family welfare provides a context for social worker - client relationship practice that can explore with women clients their own multiple identities as individuals, women, daughters, mothers and spouses, to gain insights about how their life experience has led to how they see themselves, uncovering disempowering narratives, and then fostering the construction of more powerful narratives that speaks clearly to the person about themselves. This kind of careful and skilled exploration can lead to increased hope for their children's lives and for their own.

A feminist conceptualisation of social worker - client relationship practice is concerned with helping women clients to understand their own experiences of

90

'being-cared for 'and how that has been internalised and informs their own views and potential as caring parents and spouses (Lieberman et al. 2005; Slade, 2007). This work occurs within the context of conducting family life and is subject to the intervention of broader institutions and their instrumentalities, such as legal courts, state income security and child protection authorities, that continue to perpetuate oppressive themes, even though empowering practices like restorative practice and trauma informed practice are also utilised. It is complex terrain for social worker - client relationship practice (Ramvi and Davies 2010).

At the same time, male members of these families – partners, brothers, boyfriends and grandfathers – exert a strong influence on the relationship process and intervention outcomes, regardless of their relative presence or absence, physically or emotionally during home visits and other points of contact (Featherstone and White 2014).

The women with whom social workers work are usually the mothers of the child clients. The relationship developed has been identified in some situations as leading to 'collusion' between the mother and the social worker where both minimise and even deny the apparent risk to the child's safety. The goals of family reunification, permanency planning or mandatory parental supervision all influence the mother's self-identity as a mother, a spouse and an individual, as well as her perceptions of her relationship with the child, and her wishes for the development of her relationship with the child. Added complications of being a victim of trauma herself, alcohol and drug dependence and/or mental illness all impact on the mother's role in post-court involvement with the child and in turn her impact on her views about her own worthiness. Social worker - client relationship practice often involves engagement with the child's mother, either because the child is living with

the mother, or because the child has been removed and so the mother-child relationship is having to reform and be re-visioned in some way that meets the child's needs, the court Orders and the case plan goals, as well as her own feelings about her role as mother to her child. Regarded in this way, the client mother and the social worker have important and complex work to accomplish about examining the meaning of motherhood.

What it means to be a mother and how it is tied to women's self-identity has been the subject of feminist analysis with regard to client mothers in child and family welfare. Researchers have also explored constructions of motherhood, finding that motherhood is both demonised and idealised within the child protection context (Davies et al. 2007; Krane and Davies 2000; Krane et al. 2010). How these constructions of motherhood are perpetuated or mediated in child and family welfare practice contexts is unclear. Intrinsic to the perceptions mothers have of themselves *as mothers* is the impact of other life experience, such as intimate partner and family violence as children, mental illness and/or alcohol and drug dependence (Doidge et al. 2016; Krane et al. 2010). It is also where interfamilial attachment patterns can be explored, challenged and changed. These insights have implications for how social workers might go about developing a relationship with a client mother and how they might go about preparing that mother for contact with her child.

In their relationship practice with women clients, social workers become part of, and are witness to, the day to day trials and tribulations experienced by these mothers as they go about managing their lives, caring for their children and reflecting on themselves as individuals. This is important to consider for its influence on how social worker - client relationships unfold, and for its impact on the social

worker, who is usually a woman and often a mother herself, and ultimately for the social worker's use of self in practice.

Menashe et al. (2012) explored the maternal identity and the professional identity of welfare workers and how these identities potentially influence their relationship work with client mothers. This qualitative study used the snowball sampling technique to recruit a sample of 10 women welfare officers who had at least one year's practice experience and who also had a child at least 12 months old of their own. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Data was analysed using phenomenological analysis methods. Menashe et al. (2012) found that the professional and maternal identities of the child welfare officers fluctuated between two positions: anxious motherhood and reflective motherhood. Anxious motherhood was described as 'the prism through which the welfare officer views the world as dangerous for her children, stimulating protective, control-enhancing actions' (Menashe et al. 2012, p. 3). 'Reflective motherhood' was used to denote the way in which the welfare worker struggles with her own stresses and conflicts as a mother and searches for an experience of meaningful, positive motherhood (p. 5). Menashe et al. (2012) concluded that by balancing these two identity positions, social workers prevented their own secondary traumatisation and enhanced their own professional and maternal growth. These findings are significant for this thesis as they highlight how identity positions can influence how social welfare officers interact with client mothers and further suggest the immersion of the reflexivity of the worker 'self' within the relationship space. This analysis of the relational experience also suggests that social worker absorption and interpretation of their insights about the client's presentation influences their own sense of identity, not only their assessment of the client.

Menashe et al.'s (2012) findings highlight that experience of relationships with clients, has influence beyond their professional role and foregrounds the responsive and recursive nature of relational encounters. Thus the potential for exploring the role of mutuality and responsiveness for social worker - client relationship practice is opened.

In Michigan, USA, Sykes (2011) investigated mother's perceptions of being labelled neglectful in their parenting for their children, and how this affects their self-identity and their compliance with child protection service plans. Using purposive sampling, Sykes interviewed sixteen Caucasian mothers who were child protection services clients who had had at least one child removed and were working towards family reunification or family preservation. The data analysis revealed four different types of 'identity talk' (p.455) offered by the mothers in their interviews. These were: adopting 'the good mother' stance (asserting strong parenting capacity); associational distancing (not associating with other mothers who are clients of child protection services); institutional distancing (distancing from child protection services); and active resistance to child protection service approaches (Sykes 2011, pp. 451–453). These identity narratives as revealed in the Sykes study provide valuable insight for relationally oriented practice.

An earlier study by Rose and Meezan (1996) explored components of neglect as perceived by 131 mothers from three cultural groups in Chicago. It was a study that illustrates how learning about the perceptions of mothers is helpful not only for research but for developing a relational approach for child and family welfare. The study participants were asked to rate the seriousness of each of nine statements about neglect on a five-point Likert scale with reference to a range of vignettes portraying scenarios where child neglect featured. Rose and Meezan (1996) found

that, although workers and mothers agreed that the most serious forms of child neglect were exploitation and inadequate supervision, and the least serious were inadequate clothing and shelter, mothers consistently judged all allegations of neglect as more serious than did the workers. The mothers judged a lack of emotional care as more serious than did the workers, and workers judged a lack of physical care as more serious than did the mothers. This study was replicated in the UK, revealing the same findings as those of Rose and Selwyn (2000). That the mothers found the lack of emotional care more serious than physical care is significant and has to be understood within the context of their relationship histories, providing impetus for further thinking about development of relationship practice.

Horwath (2007) explores the social worker – client relationship space from the perspective of how unmet practitioner needs can negatively influence their effectiveness with parents who are not meeting the needs of their child. Horwath proposes a typology consisting of four quadrants to facilitate examination of practitioner – parental engagement that depicts full and active practitioner engagement at the highest quadrant to practitioner disengagement at the lowest quadrant where there is no 'walking the walk' or 'talking the talk' with the client (p.1611).

How the multiple identities of the women social workers intersect with the multiple identities of the women clients (Menashe et al. 2012); how these identities are perceived by the clients of themselves (Featherstone and Fawcett 2012) and by the social workers of themselves, as well as their constructions of 'the other'; how these social worker positions influence effective engagement with parents (Horwath 2007) and, finally, how gendered socialisation of caring and mothering are manifest

in social worker - client relationship practice (Featherstone and White 2014) are all important topics for further investigation.

The studies discussed herein indicate that relationship practice can enable safe exploration of self-identity, and facilitate meaning–making about experience as formed by a traumatic past. Relationship work itself requires appropriately skilled and qualified practitioners and a supportive organisational context that respects the complexity of this work (Ferguson 2016c;Horwath 2007; Knight 2015; Krane et al. 2010; Ruch et al. 2010; 2011).

Current literature suggests that, in child and family welfare, workplace conditions provide anything but a safe, supportive work environment (Broadhurst et al. 2010; Gillingham and Humphries 2010; Haworth 2007; Helm 2014 ; Ruch 2011; Smith et al. 2003; Trevithick 2014). Work environments preoccupied with risk assessment and onerous auditing practices, where workloads are excessive and where workers are suffering from burnout and fatigue are well documented. Such practices and concomitant organisational discourses also encouraged a 'disembodied view of the child, separate from the mother and family' (Featherstone et al. 2014; p. 1742), and can increase the perceived distance between clients and social workers (Featherstone and White 2014).

Feminist and philosophical variations of constructions of 'relationship' that privilege the healing potential of the experience of being in a relationship challenge older notions of the relationship, where the social worker is the expert, and the relationship is aimed towards autonomy and individuation. While these aspirations are clearly important for adult functioning, older notions minimise or negate the role of relational maturity that is equally important for adult functioning. Relational

approaches enable development of both independent functioning and relational functioning. They reflect feminist notions of relationship as opposed to traditional white masculine notions of heroic autonomy.

How social workers view the women they engage with, how they help them to explore their own life experiences, often of trauma and oppression, is a key element of relationship practice in child and family welfare where the focus is often on parenting and parent–child relationships. Analysis of this life experience means for the women involved, and how it unfolds in their interaction with each other as constructed through the social worker - client lens, is enhanced is important. Feminist analysis that seeks to understand the links between cultural, gender and family role socialisation, and caring and parenting responsibilities, offers important insights for this study.

An in-depth study in the UK explored understanding about women's perspectives with social workers in the statutory practice context and informed by feminist literature (White, 2006). The sample consisted of 20 women social workers who expressed an interest in women's issues in social work and wanted to participate in the research project. Semi-structured interviews were used in a flexible way to encourage women 'to tell it how it is' rather than be pre-empted by questions informed by the literature (White, 2006, p.146). However, a literature review was used to identify themes for the interviews, and these were feminist identity and identifications, egalitarian relationships and power, managerialism and state-based social work. White's study (2006) revealed findings relevant to this thesis. A key finding was that the participants expressed and held a range of views and stances and identifications with regard to feminist views and positions and none of them

'primarily aligned' themselves with a feminist identity as the stance from which they approached their work (p. 139). Egalitarian relationships were not seen as possible within this work environment; partnership with service users and service user participation were identified as day to day expression of client empowerment.

Managerialism in state social work has encroached on social worker manoeuvrability and eroded room for discretion. Overall, the findings reveal a lack of integration of feminist views and/or principles in the social worker engagement with women clients suggesting that more work needs to be done for practice and in social work education to befriend social workers with feminist knowledge and analysis. They also highlight the dominant white masculine paradigm that underpins the managerialist context. Viewed in this way, social worker - client relationship practice becomes a battleground for connection over isolation and relationship over autonomy.

How this picture compares with the Australian context is unclear, although this study explores social work identity and how this impacts on relationship practice and social work education.

2.6 Clarifying knowing-doing integration in social worker - client relationship practice

Practice is experiential and action oriented. Professional practice is action informed by integrated use of values, ethics and knowledge. The review to this point has focused on delineating and reporting on what social worker - client relationship practice is, and how it is theorised in the literature. However, this is only part of the practice story. The other part is the operationalisation of this theory for, and in, practice. This is the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

The term 'practice' is contested in social work (Connolly and Harms 2013; Gray and Schubert 2013; Healy 2014; Trevithick 2012). This may be 'in part because of the differences between the relatively informal ways knowledge is built and transmitted in practice and the formal requirements for knowledge production demanded by academic and professional institutions,' (Healy 2014, p. 19).

Much social work practice with clients is not visible. This is apparently consistent with all professional practice, where about one-tenth is visible, while the theory, values, beliefs, assumptions, and emotions lying underneath are invisible (Fish and Coles, 1998 cited in Higgs et al. 2004; Tsang 2000). The invisibility of practice in social work is not aided by the relative visibility of like professions such as teaching or nursing.

Schon (1983) coined the terms 'reflection in action' and 'reflection on action', widely used in social work, to denote the intentional effort that helps the practitioner to systematically transform knowledge into practice. Other terms, including practice knowledge, practice wisdom, and tacit knowledge, are also used. That they are used interchangeably increases confusion and obfuscates clear definition, understanding and application. This confusion is a problem for clearly articulating practice.

Each practice situation is unique and requires a response that is tailored to the particular characteristics and needs of each particular situation (Eraut 2000; Lishman 2012; Payne 2006), and so requires the use of generalised knowledge and knowledge that is used or created for, and in, each individual situation (Payne 2006; Trevithick 2012). Practice also has a performative element (Humphrey 2011; Trevithick 2012). Thus practice in social work and other helping professions can be uncertain and ambiguous and is 'a blend of art, science, craft and humanity' (Higgs

et al. 2004, p. 53-4), a perspective echoed in social work literature (Connolly and Harms 2013; Gray and Schubert 2010; Osmond and O'Connor 2004).

From a phenomenological perspective, practice know-how can also involve 'pathic knowing' (van Manen 2007, 2014). Pathic knowing is not only something that happens as part of practice, but *is* practice. The 'phenomenology of practice involves a different way of knowing the world. Whereas theory "thinks" the world, practice "grasps" the world — it grasps the world pathically' (van Manen 2007). According to van Manen, knowledge is pathic to the extent that the act of practice depends on the sense and sensuality of the body; personal presence; actions, relational perceptiveness, tact for knowing what to say or do, in contingent situations, thoughtful routines and practices' (van Manen 2007, p. 267).

A more general description of practice is used for this discussion because it attempts to capture the complex range of individual attributes and experience involved in the act of knowledge and information integration and reflects the notion that practice grasps the world; practice works with what is. It is inherently contextualised, unpredictable and contingent practice, like child and welfare practice with children and families:

> Practice means more than the work we do with service users, more than 'doing'. … theories and values are embedded in all that we do and practice also entails reflection, reflexivity and being critical in and through action. These elements put what we do in wider contexts during our education but also continuously as we practice later in our careers. All this involves a complex combination of practical skills, knowledge, values, thoughts, feelings and actions (Adams et al. 2009, p. 7).

A range of content knowledge that includes procedural, factual, empirical and theoretical (Drury Hudson 1997; Trevithick 2012) is critical for practice. The

individual social worker has to integrate and tailor these knowledges to the uniqueness that is each practice situation; 'to be attuned to person and context' (Eraut 1994, p. 122); it has to be used 'applicatively'(p. 124).

To act effectively requires capacities to absorb and critique information and knowledge; to assess, interpret, process and analyse all kinds of knowledge and information; to attune to and process expression of emotions, language and behaviour; to understand and utilise oneself for the purposes of the relationship work, and to be a sophisticated learner. Overall, therefore, relationship practice requires a mastery of these skills and attributes that becomes a well-developed capacity for use of self (Bolton 2010; Ruch 2002, 2005; Ruch et al. 2010).

Literature exists that suggests social workers do not use theory much or very well in their practice. Osmond and O'Connor (2006) undertook a small-scale qualitative study with a convenience sample of ten social workers who worked in child protection in an Australian state. This study used multiple methods, including in-depth interviewing, observation, unstructured interviewing and knowledge mapping to explore the extent to which these social workers used research findings and theory in their practice. The study found that the social workers 'did not demonstrate a coherent, comprehensive and elaborated theory and research base to their practice' (Osmond and O'Connor 2006, p. 5). Although it is only one study, the findings flag a further impediment to achieving knowledge-informed social work practice.

The literature that speaks to each of these attributes is generally fragmented. Therefore, each of these attributes, seen as the building blocks of the practitioner 'self' are individually examined in this part of the review. However, from a practice

101

perspective, it is noted that, these attributes tend to be used in combination and together constitute practitioner 'use of self', reflect professional identity and inform practice efficacy. In the light of the problem with social work nomenclature, this review refers to these attributes, including critical reflection, decision-making and emotional regulation, collectively as the 'phronesis' of practice. Phronesis is an Aristotelian term that is explained with reference to the current resurgence of professional practice literature (Higgs et al. 2012; Kinsella and Pitman, 2012).

2.6.1 Phronesis and social work – client relationship practice

Conventionally called theory-practice integration or knowledge-practice integration, the practice-theory dichotomy has been rejected because the two are interconnected and interdependent in the act of practice (Higgs et al. 2004; Trevithick 2012). As stated, social workers also draw upon a range of knowledge types that require transformation for action.

The integration of knowledge into action is both conscious and unconscious. 'Practice wisdom' is widely used in social work to describe practice know-how, although it is often used interchangeably with tacit knowledge, that which is not entirely conscious. Practice wisdom is described here as:

> the accumulated knowledge practitioners are able to bring to the consideration of individual cases and their practice in general. This would appear to have three main and distinct potential sources: knowledge gained from 'everyday life', derived from the process of living in society and interaction with others; knowledge gained from social science, specifically research and ideas; and knowledge gained from the conduct of social work practice (Sheppard 1995, p. 281).

This description of practice wisdom offers ideas about the content knowledge used for practice although how social workers actually use this knowledge, what it

consists of and the quality of the knowledge used has been questioned (Munro 1999; Scourfield 2006; William and Ming-sum 2008). Clarifying how knowledge is used or should be used by practitioners is less clear, because integrative work occurs internally and so is relatively invisible.

Aristotelian concepts of knowledge, including 'episteme' 'techne', 'theoria' and 'phronesis' are being re-examined in contemporary health care professional practice literature (Boud and Brew 2013; Gustavsson 2004; Higgs et al. 2012; Higgs et al. 2004; Kelly 2016; Petersen and Olsson 2015), reflecting intellectual interest in the development of a distinct practice epistemology. This interest builds on earlier work (Eraut 1985; 1994; 2000; 2002; Jacobs 2009; Polanyi 1962; Ryle 2009).

A broad definition of 'phronesis' is that it:

> represents practical knowledge or wisdom (that) is the knowledge used in processes of social interaction. It is used in connection to ethically rooted kind of knowledge or understanding of the norms and values through which people work towards their idea of a good life' (Gustavsson 2004, p. 36).

As a context-dependent way of knowing and doing, phronesis also involves:

> a preparedness, on the part of the practitioner, to understand a given situation in *different ways,* and not to accept immediately that the situation is what it appears to be. It is a preparedness to explore different *already-available ways of understanding a situation when we are in a situation in which we must act…* (Kemmis 2012, p. 155).

The emphasis given to ethics in the first description and 'preparedness' in the second goes some way to capturing the incidental and unpredictable nature of practitioner thinking and action of practice, synonymous with Eraut's (2002) notion of creative and generalised knowledge.

Flyvbjerg et al. (2012) maintains that phronesis 'has no analogous contemporary term', although it is essentially about experience, the interaction between the general and the concrete and requires 'consideration, judgement and choice', (Flyvbjerg et al. 2012, p. 57). Consideration, judgement and choice, applying general knowledge to unique situations, responding to unpredictable, ambiguous and uncertain predicaments is what social workers do, although little is known about how they go about doing it. It is a process, nonetheless, of reading and making meaning from a range of stimuli.

Phronesis has been explored for its epistemological potential, because much practice is not amenable to narrow definitions of evidence-based practice (Petersen and Olsson 2015; Sellman 2012). Narrow definitions of evidence-based practice EBP and organisational practices that subject tasks to simple measures risk losing the critical importance of ongoing evaluation that firstly invites the client to be an active player in their change process, and secondly, encourages the practitioner to maintain attentiveness to what is happening for the client at any given time. While sophisticated forms of evaluation are challenging to implement, they are more likely to accurately reflect the complexity of the work and help to promote sound judgement and appropriately flexible decision-making in the interests of good practice (White et al. 2009). The impact of narrowly defined, uncritical and reductionist application of knowledge by practitioners has been a regular finding in child death reviews (Cooper 2005; Munro 2011a) and in studies that have researched the working environments in child protection over the last decade or more, discussed in Chapter 3.

The various skills and capacities that constitute phronesis are used for the full range of daily practice activities associated with social worker - client relationship

practice and include assessment, synthesising information and knowledge, identifying appropriate intervention strategies and plans, reviewing working on an ongoing basis and adapting intervention as situations change. The context-dependent and contingent nature of practice stems in part from the relationship work, because it is often highly emotional and crisis driven. Such work compels social workers to draw upon skills in self-directed learning and transferring knowledge; critical thinking, analysis, synthesis and judicious decision-making; reflection, critical reflection and reflexivity; emotional intelligence, emotional regulation and attunement; intuition and self - awareness and 'use of self'. These elements of phronesis are now individually discussed in relation to social worker - client relationship practice.

2.6.2 Self-directed learning skills, transferability

Committing to lifelong learning is an Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) expectation of all social workers. Undergraduate education places emphasis on students developing awareness of their own learning styles (Boud 2007) and through experiential learning (Kolb 1984), to become self-directed and self-regulated learners. Social workers need to become expert learners (Howe 1998). Well-developed learning skills are important for strong reflective practice and effective 'use of self'. Social work practice is demanding and complex (Adams et al. 2009; Payne 2011) and requires practitioner creativity, flexibility and responsiveness. Education theories developed by Friere (1972), Schon (1983), Brookfield (2000) and Mezirow and Associates (2000) have all embraced learning for transformation and liberation that have also informed social work pedagogy.

Within social work literature, attention has been given to conceptualising learning for social work practice, including facilitating transferability of knowledge

(Cree 2011; Macaulay and Cree 1999), the importance of encouraging 'deep learning' for social work practice (Clare 2011), and awareness about personal learning styles and the role of practice learning in social work field education. Awareness of individual learning styles, skills and developing confidence and competence in understanding and using learning is critical for practice and central themes in social work pedagogy.

2.6.3 Critical thinking, judgement and decision-making skills

One of the persistent reported shortfalls of social work practice from child death inquiries and reviews within child protection is social worker capacity to make sound judgements (Connolly and Harms 2012; Cooper 2005; Munro 2011b; Sheehan 2015;Taylor and White 2001;Trevithick 2012). Highly developed critical thinking and analytical skills are important for scrutinising, interpreting and identifying gaps in evidence and for making decisions. The stakes are often high and usually involve considerable non-rational content. Critical thinking includes being curious, staying well informed, being willing to reconsider views, clear thinking, being diligent in seeking information, making prudent decisions and judgement and 'being comfortable with emotion as well as the rational aspects of critical thinking' (Rolfe et al. 2011, p. 69).

England's Victoria Climbié Inquiry, into the tragic death of a very young girl, at the hands of her family (Laming 2003), identified that social workers, and other professionals, make judgements too quickly about what they think is happening or what they are observing, a conclusion reflected in the child protection literature more generally (Munro 2011b; Taylor and White 2001). In a detailed examination about social worker use of judgement in child protection cases, Taylor and White (2006) observed that knowledge cannot always be applied to practice in a straightforward

106

fashion. Having the capacity to 'sit with' incomplete or ambiguous information and being able to deliberate through an ethics lens is critical to relationship practice. It requires having the capacity to tolerate a level of anxiety that is associated with not making a decision quickly. This can be challenging in a high pressure, crisis-ridden practice environment (Buckley et al. 2011; Gallagher et al. 2011; Smith, M 2001; Smith et al. 2003). Making the 'best' decision also requires an ability to appreciate the various factors that impact on a situation, seeking '360 degree' assessment and not succumbing to external pressures to have a decision made hastily (Gillingham and Humphreys 2010).

Decision-making models for guiding social worker decision-making in child and family welfare contexts tend to be actuarial and atheoretical, so do not allow for the complexity of decision-making that has significant consequences for children and their families, or tend to be consensus based, lacking evidentiary support (Graham et al. 2015). However, ecological decision-making models and ethical decision-making models that represent the multifactorial and subjective nature of decision-making do exist (Chenoweth and McAuliffe 2015).

Research about practitioner decision-making in child protection has tended to focus on case factors rather than the decision maker (Graham et al. 2015). In Texas, USA, Graham et al. (2015) completed a large study that identified the range of factors that influence practitioner decision-making including how these factors influenced the final decision made. The decision to place a child in care was the 'case' used for data collection and the researcher's own ecological decision-making model was the basis for categorising the influencing variables (Graham et al. 2015).

The sample consisted of 1,103 CPS investigative caseworkers. The sample was predominantly female and 49% were white, with a mean age of 37 years. Of the sample 58% had no more than one year's experience in this work. Data were collected through electronic survey and 60% of the surveys sent were returned. The final survey questions resulted from a complex analysis of previous research about influencing factors, including administrative case records. The survey consisted of Likert scale questions reflecting five categories of influencing factors, related to the case, the caseworker, the child protection organisation and external factors.

Researchers used a range of empirical measures to identify correlations among the factors influencing decision-making. While these key factors are proxies for other factors, the picture that emerges is that caseworker decision-making is influenced by the workers' perceptions that they will be held personally responsible if a decision made turns out post hoc to be a mistaken decision or lead to 'wrong' outcomes, and that support for the worker, workload and resources issues significantly influenced the final decision, along with case factors (Hoskins and White 2010). The study found that risk assessment, family income and proportion of Hispanic families on the case load were the case-related factors and which included removal of children from their homes.

These factors were found to be far less significant than the context factors. Findings also confirmed that case workers rarely made decisions alone. A key implication of the findings in Graham et al.'s study for the current study is the influence of social workers' emotional perceptions, in addition to the influence of identified organisational influences on decision-making. Decision-making by social workers has also been found to be more reliant on practice wisdom than decision-making tools (Gillingham and Humphreys 2010; Pollio 2006). Related to this finding

is the use of discernment, identified by researchers in the Canadian study by Hoskins and White (2010) which aimed to better understand how social workers navigate through the ambiguities, contradictions and incomplete information that characterises situations of suspected neglect. They found that the seven experienced social workers in the sample tended to place importance on discernment. Discernment in this study was understood to mean a carefully applied relational process where social workers seek multiple sources of information, are deeply engaged in the situation and where discernment is values informed (Hoskins and White 2010).

Making decisions in child protection often has highly significant implications for the client involved as well as for other stakeholders, such as carers. Decisions involve consideration of non-rational content, multiple perspectives and organisational imperatives, all of which has to be deliberated, interpreted and synthesized for a decision to be reached. For these reasons, decision-making in child and family welfare is more than a cognitive process and is best executed with emotional maturity and clear professional identity. Sound judgement is more than good decision-making skill; it also involves reflection capacity, which is next reviewed.

2.6.4 Reflection, critical reflection and reflexivity

The concepts of 'reflection', 'critical reflection' and 'reflexivity' have gained considerable presence in the social work literature over the past 20 years. Despite this, the concepts can be difficult to understand because they are often used interchangeably and for different purposes (Daley 2010; Fook and Gardner 2007; White 2006). 'What it (reflection) achieves and how it is realised ... remains problematic and contentious', (Parsloe 2001 cited in Ruch 2002, p. 199).

Nevertheless, reflection and critical reflection are widely regarded as useful tools for theory-practice integration, for professional assessment and for ethical and informed decision-making in contingency-based and contextualised professional practice (White, 2006; Fook and Gardner, 2007; Higgs et al. 2012).

Reflective learning and reflective practice for the professions can be traced in modern times to Dewey (1938), Friere (1972), Schon (1983), Brookfield (2000) and multiple references to these writers are found in social work literature. This includes undergraduate social work texts, such as Trevithick (2012), Connolly and Harms (2013) and Maidment and Egan (2016); texts relating to reflective practice such as Fook and Napier (2000), Knott and Scragg (2007) and Morley and Dunstan (2013); theoretical social work texts (Bennett, B et al. (2013), Healy (2014) and Payne (2014), and practice skills focused texts, such as O'Hara and Pockett (2011) and Trevithick (2012). Dewey (1938) and Schon (1983) also discuss critical reflection as a practice approach, a notion that has also been adopted in social work research (Fook and Askeland 2007; Fook and Napier 2000; Pockett and Giles 2008), for use in practice (Green et al. 2006; Napier 2005; Stepney 2009; Young 2004) and in social work education (Giles et al. 2010; Healy 2014; Pockett and Giles 2008).

Reflective practice is a useful tool for practitioners to clarify complex and confusing situations for themselves, the client, and the contexts of both for the purpose of discerning a course of action or way forward. Articulate appraisal of reflective practice relevant to this study is:

> Reflective learning is a multi-faceted phenomenon which emphasises the individualised nature of the learning process and the importance of holistic understandings of knowledge acquisition and application. It challenges the established orthodoxy based on positivistic understandings of knowledge

which distance the knower from the known and dismiss the place of the self and subjectivity in the knowledge creation process (Guba and Lincoln 1998 cited in Ruch 2000, p. 99).

Ruch (2002, 2007) also points to the value of reflective practice for containment of anxiety present in the social worker - client relationship, and this is consistent with psychodynamic conceptions of relationship, discussed earlier. Examining 'the self' - the worker 'self' and the client 'self' - are inescapable non-rational aspects of relationship practice and require reflection in relational processes. Applying a reflective stance and technique enables social worker understanding, analysis and synthesis of non-rational knowledge, being aware that:

Perceptions are filtered through their (social worker) own thinking and knowing processes, through their own emotions and feeling processes, through the way they themselves integrate and regulate their own doing and behaving. Knowing the self is more than knowing how one feels. It is knowing how one thinks and acts, (Papell, 1996, p.19 cited in Ruch 2002, p. 203).

This view of reflective practice has direct relevance for frontline practice in statutory contexts as it is a practice that can help to explicate the multi-subjectivities, complexities and uncertainties that confront the individual social worker at any point in time, with service users, service providers or other stakeholders. Thus reflective practice in child and family welfare is also intertwined with the 'the ethics of care', with learning and decision-making processes.

Organisations informed by managerialist and instrumentalist principles, that seek to 'tidy up' messy problems, also tend to reduce or ignore the emotional and chaotic reality that represents so much of child welfare work. The lack of 'thinking spaces' in these contexts has been highlighted advocating for the use of case discussion to encourage reflection by individual practitioners and also as a tool for

organisational support for practice (Ruch 2007b). Reflection and critical reflection militate against hasty uninformed unethical decision-making and action.

2.6.4.1 Critical reflection

Critical reflection is described as the 'unsettling individual assumptions to bring about social change,' (Fook 2007, p. 16), and encourages explication of the relationship between the individual and their broader social context, 'linking changed awareness with changed action,' (Fook and Gardner 2007, p.16). Critical reflection helps to illuminate assumptions and the status quo, Fook (2006, 2007), Dominelli (2002), and Young (2004); to uncover or make explicit the prevailing hegemony, power dynamics which underpin prevailing social and political institutions, structures, language and processes implicit in any situation (Brookfield, 2006); to contextualise the individual from a critical perspective; to 'bridge' theory with practice Fook (2007), Healy (2005), Adams, Dominelli and Payne (1998), and Pease (2003) and as a practice tool for learning about 'self' in practice.

It is a theory and a practice derived from reflection theory and practice and critical social theory (Fook and Gardner, 2007, p. 23). It enables greater transparency and accountability of assessment, interpretation and decision-making. How critical reflection is used in child and family practice is not known.

2.6.4.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a more recent addition to reflection literature and has been described as having three variations (D'Cruz et al. 2007). The first is the individual's ability to process information and create knowledge to guide life choices, a variation that has clear implications for social workers and social worker - client relationship practice. The second variation, epistemological in nature, concerns an individual's self-critical approach that questions how knowledge is generated. The third

variation, of particular relevance to the current review, is that the 'acknowledgement of emotional responses by the practitioner can be used to promote deeper understanding between the practitioner and client and ultimately enhance practice' (D'Cruz et al. 2007, p81.).

Reflection, critical reflection and reflexivity are used widely in undergraduate texts (Chenoweth and McAuliffe 2015; Connolly and Harms 2012; Connolly and Harms 2013; Harms 2007; Maidment and Egan 2016) and in undergraduate social work teaching. They are also widely used as concepts and as technique in social work supervision and practice (Davys and Beddoe 2010).

2.6.5 Emotions, emotional intelligence, regulation, attunement and intuition

Research about emotions in child protection and practice has begun to attract renewed research attention (Ferguson 2005). Emotion is a central feature of parenting and so is elemental to social work practice with children and families (Cooper 2005; Gausel 2011; Ferguson 2005; Howe 2008a, 2014; Ruch et al., 2010; Trevithick 2012). While emotional work pervades all family life, it is not always visible and so the effort, time and energy that goes into this work within families often goes unnoticed (Bielby 2006) and is often devalued as women's work (Gray 2002). Bielby further notes:

> Gender defines the normative expectations for and of those who comprise the domestic unit and the activities within it, and emotional labour, including its type, degree, and management, are central to the gendered social construction and enactment of the family (Bielby 2006, p. 394).

As much as relationship practice with clients is conducted by women social workers it is arguable that the importance of emotional labour is diminished.

The term 'emotions' encompasses the full range of emotions, some of which are distressing to witness and respond to while other emotions can bring pleasure. Emotional labour is a significant element of relationship practice with clients in child and family welfare settings, and 'focus[es] on tacit and uncodified skills associated with emotional work, care-giving and family support' (Gray 2002, p. 991). Emotional labour:

> Involves the management of feelings in accordance with the 'feelings rules' of the organisation worked for by either suppressing the emotions deemed undesirable or by inducing those that are expected or demanded. This emotional regulation is achieved either through surface acting; pretending to feel what is expected or deep acting; and drawing on deeper, personal reserves to bring forth the required facial or bodily display of emotion (Leeson 2010, p. 484).

Referred to at times as 'soft skills', the sophisticated nature of emotional labour is highlighted in this description (Gray 2009). 'Being emotionally intelligent, intuitive and capable of emotional reasoning and emotional attunement enables a practitioner to work skilfully with people in distress and pain (Ferguson 2005; Ingram 2013; Munro 2011a). Learning how to respond to a client's expressed or veiled emotion in a supportive and instructive way in the moments that emotions become the 'topic' of the encounter can make for powerful opportunities for learning and change. Social worker awareness of, and capacity to work with, emotion is not well researched.

Practice in child welfare needs to encompass the realities of its 'subject matter', which is often about pain and anxiety (Ruch, 2014; Trevithick 2014). Anxiety is so much a part of the work for child protection and family and child welfare that management practices need to incorporate open reflective management practices

114

within the managerialist framework and not split them off. Ruch (2014) applies psychodynamic concepts of anxiety containment, 'splitting' of difficult emotions and projection to analysing organisational discourses and practices illustrating how organisations diminish or ignore the inherent prevalence of anxiety in child and family welfare contexts. The emotional and behavioural content tends to be seen as something that has to be contained and regulated rather than as an opportunity for exploration, learning and growth with the client (Hennessey 2011; Ingram 2015). In the process, emotions and suffering are at risk of being made invisible. Such practices can seem a far cry from focusing on 'the relationship as medium for change' (Ruch 2005).

Critical to safe, trusting relationships is the requirement for social workers to be able to process their own and others' emotions. Ingram (2015) in Scotland explored social work emotions in practice using quantitative and qualitative methods that surveyed 112 respondents and undertook 14 interviews with social workers employed across a range of sectors. The largest participant group was employed in child protection. The study found that participants were self-reporting about the subjective material of emotions in their practice. While many participants used supervision to process emotions, and some found this useful, others did not feel safe to explore emotions in supervision for fear of being seen as not coping or as inadequate in some way. This is an important finding and suggests the need for further investigation into how social workers process emotions and how they link this to building relationship and parental capacity with clients (Ingram 2015).

Relationship practice requires practitioner openness to 'sitting with' the emotional pain and the 'messiness' of the client experience. It requires practitioner maturity in emotional self-regulation, emotional intelligence (Cooper, MG 2008;

115

Howe 2008a; Morrison 2007; Ruch et al. 2010), reasoning (Trevithick 2014) and intuition (Trevithick 2003, 2012) that together enable practitioners to exercise emotional attunement with the client. The neurobiology of attunement was described earlier in this chapter. Within social work, emotional attunement is described as the capacity to 'feel another person's emotion – their inner worlds of sensations ... it indicates an emotional resonance … with the quality of feeling that is being shared' (Trevithick 2014, p. 294). Related to emotional attunement and awareness is intuition.

Intuition is 'an unconscious process that occurs automatically in response to perceptions, integrating a wide range of data to produce a judgement in a relatively effortless way' (Munro 2011a, p. 37). Intuition has also been described as the composite of cognition and the unconscious that comes through 'deep familiarity with a particular environment' (Hogarth 2010). Intuitive responses are efficient although, like all knowledge, is prone to error if used injudiciously (Daniel 2003; Munro 1999).

Emotional regulation refers both to intrinsic efforts to manage one's own emotions and to extrinsic efforts to help other people manage their emotional responses (Gross and Thompson 2007b cited in Curtis Mcmillen et al. 2014). Like the development of empathy and reflection, emotional regulation is important for healthy human development and is difficult to learn when early relationships are characterised by abuse and betrayal. At the same time, emotional regulation is an important aspect of relationship practice with children, families and young people (Curtis Mcmillen et al. 2014). Curtis McMillen et al. (2014) analysed existing emotional regulation frameworks used in child and family welfare including affect regulation training, acceptance and commitment therapy, attachment, self-regulation

and collaborative problem-solving, dialectic behaviour therapy, emotion-based therapy, emotion regulation therapy and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy. They conclude that while all of these frameworks have benefits, many of them are psychological in orientation and do not account for external factors impacting on the child or the family's life. In this way, they argue that this becomes 'yet another way to blame mothers for their children's problems, and that the cause is to be found in early parenting' (p. 460). The key finding of this study for the current review is the affirmation that facilitating emotional self-regulation is broadly regarded as a key aspect of child and family social work practice and further investigation to test the validity of these frameworks is required.

Understanding the role of specific emotions has been explored to a limited extent. Gibson (2014) explored shame in the context of child and family practice. Shame-reducing practice is a term used by Gibson (2014) to reflect his view that shame and guilt are used, discussed in, and pervade child protection practice. While shame and guilt can have profound effects on human behaviour, there have been few studies in relation to social work practice and child and family practice. Gibson notes that shame, a self-deprecating view of the self, is not an unexpected consequence of poverty and stigma. It can also be bound up with being subject to cruel and oppressive parenting. Finally, feelings of shame can be reinforced by being subject to the professional gaze and can be a barrier to engagement. Gibson's (2014) exploration of shame and guilt in relation to social work practice in child and family welfare suggests the need for further development of shame-reducing strategies that can be used in relationship practice, including how worker shame impacts on relationships with clients.

In relationship practice with clients, exploring and processing emotions is an inevitable component of intersubjective process. Where a client is provided opportunity to understand their emotions and the role they play in their life and interactions with others, and to identify how this can change and how they can achieve this, it is often painful, slow work. However, it is critical to increasing self-regulation and parenting (Davies et al. 2007; Ramvi and Davies 2010).

That social worker engagement with clients in child and family welfare has a high emotional load and involves emotional labour on the part of the social worker is recognised in the literature. Organisational pressures that reflect a lack of understanding of relationship practice add to the emotional load for social workers through stress, anxiety and fear of performance failure. Little research exists that illustrates how social workers evaluate and understand the emotional component of their practice and how they utilise it for relationship practice. One study (Ingram 2015) explored with social workers how they processed the emotional content of their child protection practice, using formal and informal forums, and found that current practice environments, with factors such as time pressures and supervisor reluctance, militate against social workers feeling psychologically safe to explore their emotional responses and experiences generated by their day to day work. This is a serious concern where practice with children and families in child and family welfare is intensely emotional (Ferguson 2005; Gausel 2011; Hoskins and White 2010; Ingram 2015). Social workers are expected to engage with clients, children and adults, often the mothers, about their feelings; indeed, clients are encouraged to express their feelings about what is going on for them, so they can learn about themselves, a forerunner to achieving behavioural change. From a client's perspective, being a mother or father or wanting to become a 'better parent' involves

considerable self-reflection about emotions and identity. Given the relational nature of the work, it is, therefore, vital that practitioners are equipped and supported to work with emotion.

2.6.6 Self-awareness and use of self

The terms 'use of self', intuitive use of self, positive use of self, awareness of self, personal knowledge and self-knowledge are all terms in the social work literature that point to the idea that 'the person of the practitioner' is a significant element of practice (Connolly and Harms 2013; Hoskins and White 2010; Ruch et al. 2010; Sheppard 2007; Trevithick 2012).

Notwithstanding the view that any knowledge becomes 'personalised' when it is used (Sheppard, 1995, p. 283), personal knowledge has been described as:

> An inherent or spontaneous process where the worker is necessarily committing him or herself to action outside of immediate consciousness, or is action based on a personalised notion of 'common sense' and includes intuition, cultural knowledge and common sense (Drury Hudson 1997, p. 38).

Recognition that, as individuals, we each have or use personal knowledge is self-evident and qualitatively different from notions of 'self-awareness' and 'use of self' regularly discussed in social work practice literature (Coulshed and Orme 2006; D'Cruz et al. 2009; Fook and Gardner 2007; Howe 2009; Howe 2013; Kondrat 1999; Leung 2008; Mandell 2007; Rossiter 2011; Ruch 2000; Taylor and White 2001; Trevithick 2012) including undergraduate texts (Chenoweth and McAuliffe 2015; Connolly and Harms 2013; Harms 2007).

There is consensus that self-awareness is a necessary condition for competent social work practice (Howe 2008b; Kondrat 1999; Ruch 2005; Trevithick 2012) for

reasons of ethics, including maintaining professional boundaries, and for self-care, although the term has fluctuated in popularity over time (Gordon and Dunworth 2016).

Self-awareness is our conscious understanding of ourselves, of who think we are. Who we are, of course, also includes what we do not know about ourselves (Butler et al. 2007; Kondrat 1999), including cultural characteristics that reflect 'our personal connectedness with own culture [that] exists below the level of consciousness and is so deeply embedded that it escapes everyday thought' (Connolly and Harms 2013, p. 166).

Kondrat (1999) identifies and describes three types of self-awareness in the social work literature. They are 'simple conscious awareness', 'reflective self-awareness and 'reflexive self-awareness' (p. 452). Simple conscious awareness refers to 'awareness of whatever is being experienced, for example expressed as, 'This is great'; reflective self-awareness is awareness of a self who is experiencing something, for example, expressed as 'I feel happy'; and the third, 'reflexive self-awareness', is the self's awareness of how his/her awareness is constituted in direct experience. Feeling happy could become awareness of being able to contribute energy to practice. From her analysis of these three types, Kondrat (1999, p. 464) proposes a fourth, called 'critical reflectivity' as the highest form of practitioner self-awareness, that understands self-awareness as transcending the individual 'self' and having awareness of self as a social agent and product. This is awareness of self as an agent that can be used for practice purposes.

In the main in social work literature, 'use of self' has been informed by psychodynamic theory. While this conceptualisation of 'use of self' has endured, it

has been challenged by others. For example, Kondrat (1999) reminds us to think about the epistemology of the concept of 'self'. Is 'self' reflecting an individualised understanding of self that aims towards self-actualisation and autonomy (Erikson 1950), or is the development of self inextricably tied to the development of the other (Bland et al. 2015; Freedberg 2009; Jordan et al. 2004), including where 'the other' could be a group or community with distinctive cultural identity (Bennett, B et al. 2013). These reflections suggest the importance of the process of relationality for self-formation, a process inherent to social worker - client relationship practice. This relational view of self is compatible with the idea discussed earlier, that we 'find-ourselves-being-in-relation-to-others' (van Manen 2007, p. 395). Even though it is an idea that has a long history in Western philosophy and anthropology, it arguably has not penetrated social work practice with children and families until fairly recently. This idea about the relational self is explored in this thesis.

Renewed interest is emerging particularly in the UK about the meaning of 'use of self' and how it unfolds in practice. 'Use of self' can be expressed in different ways in practice: for role modelling, for example, a social worker offering to help a mother to learn play with her child; and for anxiety containment, such as proving to be a holding space for the mother so that she can safely express the painful emotions that are impeding her from playing with her child. 'Use of self' might also be considered from a philosophical perspective, enabling exploration of existential issues, for example, what kind of mother do I want to be, what is it to be a mother, or even do I want to be a mother?

Based on the premise that relationship practice *is* the work, 'use of self' considered as 'self as process in interaction' (Arnd-Caddigan and Pozzuto 2008) invites the idea that the experience of relationship practice becomes part of practice

repertoire, that it is the phronesis of practice. This process and relational oriented notion of 'use of self' also lends itself to application in contingency-based and non-office settings. It needs to be better understood and researched, including whether it is this use of self that could be the basis of relationship practice epistemology.

2.7 Summary and conclusions

This chapter has reviewed the theoretical and empirical literature about social worker - client relationship practice and identified three main findings. The first confirms the enduring significance of the humanistic orientation of social work practice characterised by a respect for each individual and an empathic approach. Humanistic relationship approaches for social work have to be informed by ethics. Growing interest in the ethics of care and ethics of proximity for social work is identified.

Theorising about social worker - client relationship practice, relationship-based practice and relational theory and of child and family welfare practice have their genesis in psychodynamic theory and share the primacy of the social worker - client relationship as a practice method, although relational theory places more emphasis on the reciprocity of relationships as the key principle required for enhancing growth.

Feminist analysis exists that argues that well-developed relational capacity is a sign of emotional maturity. Relational-cultural theory acknowledges that meaning of experience and identity is influenced by gender, age, class and cultural factors. Feminist research that has examined how motherhood is constructed and how this influences social work practice and studies that have focused on the social worker engagement experience with client mothers reflects an interest in understanding how the predominantly female nature of child and family practice impacts on the

work with clients. Feminist research also complements social work ideas about the power of relationship and the role of power sharing. Collective notions of relationship have also been canvassed, encouraging the incorporation of non-Western constructions of relationship, family, wellbeing and care in social worker - client relationship practice.

The self-other process is the central component of this practice approach. Re-examining relationship practice for contemporary social work practice, in the light of social work's espoused values and ethics, identity and purpose is also important for the social work professional project.

Finally, social workers rely on a range of knowledge, skills and capacities to practice relationally. Few studies have specifically explored how social workers undertake this work or what it actually entails 'on the ground'. Relationship practice is ontological and requires practitioner 'use of self'. Use of self is an unclear though persistent concept in the social work literature. How much the notion of 'use of self' captures the phronesis of practice or not, and how it can be incorporated in the development of flexible, responsive and creative relational practice, requires further research and understanding (Kinsella and Pitman 2012).

As has been noted, social work practice is under pressure in child and family welfare organisational contexts and this has bearing on the future potential for social worker - client relationship practice. This context is further examined in the light of the literature in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Context for the study

3.1 Introduction

The practice context of this study is the constellation of services called child and family welfare. Social work practice is highly contextualised as are the relationships that occur between social workers and clients in child and family welfare services (Healy, 2014). This means that the way social work practice is undertaken is shaped by and responds to the particular characteristics of the context in which it is practised. For this study, contextual factors and trends include macro structural factors and influences, the organisational contexts of child protection, foster care and family support practice and the types of practice social workers are employed to do. A brief overview of the gendered nature of frontline practice from a feminist perspective is also outlined, as it has potential significance for the way in which engagement is undertaken by social workers with clients. The review is largely confined to literature about the social worker practice experience in Australia and the UK because they share some similarities. Particular reference is made to New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, because this is where the study is located.

3.2 Macro structural influences and factors shaping child and family welfare practice

Overall, the trends of the last 20 years have significantly affected social work is practised with children and families. The current system for supporting children and families is regularly described as failing those for whom the system exists (Fernandez 2014; Lonne et al. 2013; Parton 2014a; Saini et al. 2012; Trevithick 2014).

The highly emotive nature of child protection in the public mind also influences public perceptions of child protection and, ultimately, the practice of social worker relationships with clients. The impact of media reporting, the public response to media reports of children being mistreated, and the political furore that follows high profile cases and leads to government reviews and intervention are discussed in this chapter as relevant context for social work practice and the experience of social workers and other frontline practitioners.

3.2.1 Australian legislative framework

Legislation and policy reflect the aspirations of government and set the direction for the way services and interventions are to be provided (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2014). Australian laws for the protection of children are state and territory based and enshrine 'the best interests of the child' principle, reflecting Australia's signatory status to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (Bromfield and Holzer 2008). All legislation and policy has to provide guidance for decision-making that reflects this principle (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2014), that all decision-making about a child has to prioritise the best interests of the child (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2014). Defining what is in the best interest of a particular child is contentious, adding to the complexity of social worker - client relationship practice.

Other principles consistently evident in much of Australian family and children's services legislation include: the importance of early intervention to prevent entry or re-entry into the statutory system; the rights of children and young people to participate in decision-making about their own lives; delegation of authority for decision-making about children's lives; provision for out-of-home-care options for children unable to live at home for reasons of protecting their safety and wellbeing;

and provision for maintaining a child's sense of cultural identity and community connectedness with specific reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

This study is located in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory and the relevant legislation specific to these jurisdictions is as follows. In NSW, the legislative framework for the protection of children includes *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection)* Act 1998 and the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Amendment (Parental Responsibility Contracts) Act 2006*, the *Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act 2000*, the *Crimes Act 1900*, the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the *Ombudsman Act 1974*, the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) and the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Amendment Bill 2009* (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2014).

The ACT legislative framework consists of the *Children and Young People Act 2008* as well as the *Adoption Act 1993* , the *Human Rights Act 2004*, *Human Rights Commission Act 2005*, the *Public Advocate Act 2005*, and the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2014).

3.2.1.1 Media influences, the politicisation of practice and ramifications for relationship practice

The abuse and neglect of children is a highly emotive subject in the public mind (Cooper 2005; Lonne et al. 2009; Parton 2014a; Warner 2013; Warner 2014; Shoesmith, 2016). Highly publicised child deaths, and the subsequent inquiries in the UK, New Zealand and Australia, have significantly affected the direction of child protection and family services policy (Lonne et al. 2009; Munro 2011b; Warner 2013). The recommendations from these various inquiries share many common themes, including: failures of professional decision-making and bureaucratic

administration; inadequacy of staff training and supervision; inadequate risk and family assessments and reporting practices; poor record keeping; lack of inter-agency co-operation, communication and coordination; failure to follow the law or, alternatively, slavish adherence to procedures; high staff turnover; and major recruitment problems, leading to difficulties in running a high-quality professional service (Ainsworth and Hansen 2011; Lonne et al. 2013, pp. 1633-34; Munro 2011b).

Print media representation of child abuse and neglect incidents in Australia has helped to promote the protection of children as an important community issue (Lonne and Gillespie 2014). Yet Lonne and Gillespie found that tabloid coverage is deficient in a number of areas. These are: the frequent lack of detail about events being reported; the greater focus on incidents of sexual and physical abuse and the underplaying of emotional abuse and child neglect; failing to represent the voices of victims; and presenting in a punitive tone the abuse and neglect of Aboriginal children.

Heightened public response to child deaths has also been examined for other reasons, such as what it tells us about how child abuse is problematised as a moral issue. News of a child's death through cruel treatment by adults is attractive to media for its newsworthiness. The impact of pervasive, emotive and unscrupulous media attention on individual practitioners in the UK is documented (Lonne and Gillespie 2014; Parton 2014b; Shoesmith 2016). While social workers are expected to critically reflect on the ethical and moral dimension of any case in which they are involved, such media furore can place practitioners in formidable ethical, existential and moral quandaries, sometimes leading to professional isolation as well as ill-health (Ellett et al. 2007; Parton 2014a; Shoesmith 2016; Smith et al. 2003).

Media reporting in November and December 2008, of the highly publicised death of Peter Connelly ('Baby P'), at the hand of his family prompted one qualitative analysis of some 420 press articles written about the case to identify the political, ideological and symbolic dimensions of public reaction to the 'Baby P' case (Warner 2014). In particular, Warner examined how the moral discourse was developed by the interplay between media reports and politician reaction, and how this had an impact on social work. Warner applied Critcher's thesis of moral regulation (Critcher 2008 cited in Warner 2014) that argues moral panic is a diffuse and pervasive process of moral regulation (p. 31). Using this as a frame of analysis to distinguish the forms of moral talk evident in the articles selected, Warner concluded that two conflicting moral messages emerged out of the public reaction to the death of 'Baby P': one that represented social workers as bureaucratic, robotic agents and the second that represented them as 'soft-hearted do-gooders'. Ironically, Warner concluded that, ultimately, social work was constructed as 'cold-hearted, inhumane and detached' (Warner 2014, p.1651). This analysis exemplifies how the form that media representation takes can influence public perception of the subject, in this case, of social workers. Peter Connelly's particularly tragic death occurred despite the number of professionals and services involved and the 60 visits made to the child's home and 50 injuries reported (Local Safeguarding Childrens Board 2009), facts that understandably created a hostile public climate towards social workers and other associated professionals. Negative public discourses about social workers as illustrated in this example, show how social work practice can be inextricably tied up with community response to moral problems, and that potentially, if not actually, at the micro level, can negatively influence client and social worker impressions of each other, creating a climate of fear, distrust and blame rather than

one of trust, collaboration and safety (Munro 2010a; Shoesmith 2016). As these discourses take hold, the public perception of people who become clients of child and family welfare services can also diminish them as citizens and as individuals, a largely unacknowledged issue, further adding to the challenges for social work relationship practice (Moore 2012).

A pervasive government response to perceived inadequacies in identifying children at risk has been to introduce risk assessment. While assessment of risk has potential benefit, how the technologies of risk assessment have been understood and used has been questioned (Fernandez 2014; Lonne et al. 2009; Munro 1999, 2010a). The 'blame' culture that has developed in the community does affect social worker confidence to make decisions about children perceived to be at risk, knowing that the social worker can be exposed to negative and emotive media and community retribution and reprisal (Shoesmith 2016). This study may shed light on social worker confidence and thinking about their decision-making about children's situations.

Warner's (2014) study and social work analyses about the politics and politicisation of child protection and child protection practice that precipitate government and organisational responses indicate how priority on family relationship practice and engagement with families is decentred in practice organisations. The potential consequence for frontline social workers is that their professional practice purposes are subjugated to organisational imperatives that in turn devalue family practice.

3.2.1.2 The 'risk' society and child and family welfare

Much has been written in recent years about the impact of the language of risk in Western democratic countries, the emergence of the risk society (Beck 2014; Mythen 2014) and how this has permeated all aspects of contemporary life, including the development of a risk - averse culture, policies and practices for public services. This trend has significantly influenced social work practice, frontline practice with families and children in child protection and child and family welfare generally. State responses to perceived risk to citizen safety have been characterised by increased implementation of rules and management practices that seek to control and regulate frontline practice. Unfortunately, many of these tools reflect linear and 'single-loop' thinking (Munro 2010a) which has the effect of preventing or suppressing more deliberative meaning–making and analysis. Analysis of the complex and contingent character of child and family welfare practice situations has to consider the multi-system influences and the multiple causes that characterise this practice. Application of simple causal and linear logic alone cannot lead to judicious decision-making and judgement when engaging with children and families who are clients of child and family welfare service systems.

Reflecting the increased influence of legal discourses in child and family welfare outlined in Chapter 2, detection of risk to a child's safety and forensic investigation have taken precedence over family engagement, a trend well documented in the literature (Higgins and Katz 2015; Venables et al. 2015). However, this trend seems to be changing towards greater emphasis on involving families in a more transparent way, and increasing emphasis on working with families. Risk appraisal and forensic social work have emerged as particular practice types within statutory child protection reflecting the ascendancy of legalistic

responses and legal discourse in child and family welfare. They are reviewed here because within child protection settings, social workers are employed to undertake investigative work that challenges conventional ideas about social work child and family practice.

3.3 Practice arenas for social worker: child protection, foster care and family support

3.3.1 Differential response

Services to children, young people and families is delivered through government instrumentalities that provide statutory child protection services and fund a wide range of primary, secondary and tertiary services and programs through non-government organisations. This configuration of services is based on the differential response model and includes child protection, family support, child and family intervention programs, services for young people and out-of-homecare.

The differential response model is now outlined followed by a review of the practice arenas of child protection, family support and foster care with specific focus on the social work role and what is known about social worker - client relationship practice in these contexts. These three practice arenas are chosen because the participants in the study sample were employed in these areas at the time of data collection.

Child and family welfare policy in Australia is organised according to the 'differential response' model. Differential response is based on the premise that child protection is a community as well as a state responsibility and is 'a form of practice in child protection services that allows for more than one method of response to reports of child abuse and neglect' (Lonne et al. 2009). Differential response

encourages a community-based approach that is led by statutory child protection in conjunction with a wide range of other government and non-government services that provide both preventative and protection services (Waldfogel 1998, p. 138).

Differential response comprises three main elements. These are: the provision of a case-specific response, on the basis that each family is unique; secondly, the provision of 'family' support services, aimed at improving parental capacity and family functioning by providing support, therapy, counselling and advice; and, thirdly, child protection intervention in more serious cases.

While the policy principle of 'differential response' has prevailed as the foundation for child and family service provision for decades now, it has been challenged by the advent of 'managerialism' and the introduction of state mandatory reporting legislation through the 1980s (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2016a). These developments in Australia, the UK, Canada, New Zealand and the USA have wide ranging and pervasive effects on service delivery and are comprehensively documented (Gillingham 2016; Lonne et al. 2013; Munro 2011b; Parton 2014a). The efficacy of differential response approaches, while still embedded in child and family service systems remains unclear, notwithstanding some positive service user feedback and evaluations (Lonne et al. 2015, Fernandez 2014).

Literature about child and family welfare is predominantly focused on child protection. However, many children and families who are clients of child protection are also clients of family support, youth services and/or out-of-home care services, either on a voluntary basis or as a result of legal intervention.

A primary aim of practice with clients in these arenas is to support families to prevent or minimise child protection intervention and/or to encourage increased parenting capacity and family welfare so that children can remain at home or be returned home (Davies et al. 2007). Some have argued that the balance between care and control has shifted so dramatically to the 'control' end of the continuum; it seems much is now not done to actually help families (Rogowski 2012).

3.3.2 Statutory child protection practice

The child protection practitioner role has been summarised by Lonne et al. (2009) as including the following tasks: receiving uncertain, complex and incomplete information about circumstances of children and families; applying professional knowledge to ascertain the degree of risk to safety or level of need; using high-level interpersonal skills to learn about the intimate, complex and often chaotic lives of children and families and their relationships; assessing information gathered with regard to relevant laws, policies and procedures; and making decisions about what should happen or what should occur that may have far-reaching consequences for the families and the children involved, and for which they are accountable to other stakeholders (Lonne et al. 2009, p. 66).

Empirical evidence about how social workers undertake their practice on a daily basis is limited and does not illustrate how social workers undertake the tasks outlined above. However, research evidence does indicate that the experience of practice is riven by high levels of stress, chaos, and high emotion and where more time is spent on meeting administrative requirements than spending time with families directly to facilitate positive change (Gillingham, 2015; Horwitz and Marshall 2015; Laming 2003; Lonne 2009; Munro 2010a). Holmes and McDermid (2013) investigated with social workers the amount of time they were spending on

administrative desk-based tasks in response to general concerns that administrative demands had increased, preventing workers from spending time working with, or on behalf of, their clients. This was raised as a concern in the light of other expectations on the same social workers to work with families, that entails developing effective working relationships with families, and progressing goals that enable improved family environments for their children. Holmes and McDermid (2013) gathered data using three sources; focus groups, verification questionnaires and event activity records that were triangulated to obtain an average estimation of time against each task. Tasks were broken down into clearly defined items of 'direct' tasks, denoting direct face-to-face or phone contact with children and their families, and 'indirect' tasks, including all other activities, such as attending meetings, case recordings and writing case reports.

Data were gathered between 2008 and 2010 from four municipalities, including one inner London municipality, two metropolitan boroughs and one county in the UK. The event activity records were completed by 35 social workers. Seventy professionals were involved in the focus groups and 71 social workers completed the verification questionnaires (Holmes and McDermid 2013).

A chief finding of the study was that estimating the amount of time social workers spend on direct work as opposed to indirect work is complex, because it is not easy to separate out some of the indirect work from the direct work. For example, ongoing cases require ongoing amounts of direct contact as well as indirect work such as case meetings liaising with other professionals and writing reports, all of which involves some administration. However the study confirmed the findings of other UK studies (Broadhurst et al. 2010; Featherstone et al. 2014; Gillingham 2016; Holmes and McDermid 2013; Munro 2010a, 2011, 2011a) and in

Australia (Burton and van den Broek 2009; Tilbury et al. 2015), that administrative work consumes a substantial amount of time; that in order to spend time directly with clients social workers are completing administrative work in the evenings or on weekends, and that social workers are spending up to ten hours or more beyond their contracted hours in order to complete their day to day work (Holmes and McDermid 2013). Undertaking a case assessment has also increasingly become an agency prescribed activity designed to meet the demands of evidence-based practice (Krane and Davies 2000).

In the UK, Jones (2001) explored the nature of interactions between social workers and clients. Interviews conducted with 40 social workers employed in government services during the early period of New Labour polices yielded findings that revealed increased stress amongst social workers, manifested in increases in sick leave and days off work; social worker frustration with their organisation's actions and changes, perceived as a greater source of frustration than practice challenges generated by clients. In addition, respondents believed the State was diminishing its care role towards the most disadvantaged and finally that they felt their skills and capacities were being devalued. While these are relevant findings for the current study, little explanation of the methodology or mode of analysis was given. Jones's study was a broad-brush exploration of the state of social work in the UK at that time and did not provide insights about practitioner - client engagement.

The overall effects of these tensions are serious for professional satisfaction and efficacy (McArthur et al. 2011; McFadden et al. 2015; Morris, K 2012) and for the occupational health of the workers caught in the 'crossfire' (Ellett et al. 2007). One of the practical outcomes of this conflict has been the attrition of social workers from this area of practice and the decline in the health of these workers, manifested

in fear of failure to save children from harm (Shoesmith 2016), burnout and anxiety (Stanley and Goddard 2002; Stanley et al. 2007; Tham 2007; van Heughten 2011) and being fearful about work (Gillingham 2016; Healy and Lonne 2010; Lonne et al. 2013; McFadden et al. 2015; Smith et al. 2003; Stalker et al. 2007). McFadden et al.'s (2015) systematic literature review of 65 articles on this subject identified nine themes pointing to individual and organisational reasons for social workers deciding either to leave or stay in a child protection workplace. Individual factors identified were social worker personal experience of maltreatment, training and preparation for child protection work, capacity for coping with stress, conflict and resulting emotional exhaustion. Organisational factors, consistent with findings of other studies, included commitment to the profession and/or the organisation, relationships with supervisors and colleagues, organisational culture, and workload. On the basis of her analysis of practitioner efficacy, in the aftermath of the death of baby Peter Connelly, Shoesmith (2016) argued that the politicisation of child abuse, which creates a culture of blame, combined with the prevailing technical - rational organisational and management approaches to child protection work, created a cultural trope where workers were fearful of not protecting children and also of being blamed for the death of a child. Shoesmith described this cultural trope as the 'habitual nature of blaming social workers that is devoid of reason, thought or understanding' (p. 209), a process that becomes the defence, a state of 'knowing and not knowing' about harm to children, and where the social workers become the vessels that 'hold' the community outrage (Shoesmith 2016). In the process, social workers take the blame, not confident to speak openly; in effect, becoming paralysed (Ferguson 2005; Laming 2003). Even though other professions involved in these outcomes suffer the same 'paralysis', social work as the lower order profession, and predominantly female, is arguably the

most vulnerable professional group in such emotionally charged episodes. Nevertheless, research clearly identifies that social work practice in statutory child protection has much to address.

An Australian study by McArthur et al. (2011) explored the significance of particular personal and professional values by surveying a sample of 859 child protection workers, 415 of whom were social workers. The study found broad support for values that equate with conventional social work values of inclusion and empowerment, and almost the entire sample indicated that protecting client rights and perspectives is important. However, other factors including having legal power to take regulatory action was also identified by 43% of the sample as important for working with families in statutory child protection (McArthur et al. 2011, p. 6). When Haworth (2007 examined the factors influencing social workers in their assessment of child neglect situations, she found that many non-rational-technical factors influence their practice, that it is a 'head and heart' activity and included personal and professional values, 'gut feeling', feelings about the child and family, the working context and the worker's own situation.

Fear of violence and aggression by clients towards practitioners is a particular issue in child protection practice (Ferguson 2005; Littlechild 2005, 2016; Smith, M 2001; Smith et al. 2003). Littlechild (2005) interviewed a sample of eight social workers about their experiences of violence. They revealed experiences of being harassed, intimidated and threatened with violence, creating 'developing violence scenarios' that is they were subject to violence through their contact with the clients. These 'developing violence scenarios', which occurred over a period of time, are believed to have greater impact on the confidence and wellbeing of social workers than discrete incidents of violence (Littlechild 2005, p. 66). Prevailing potential and

actual threats of violence, intimidation and harassment are not only problematic for the wellbeing of the practitioners involved, but clearly present significant challenges for building relationships with clients. Social worker – client relationship practice includes engaging with clients about issues that can be perceived by clients as personal and sensitive, for example, parenting styles, parental-couple dynamics and family culture about gender roles and domestic division of labour (Featherstone and White 2014; Featherstone, Morris and White, 2014). Raising such issues can increase the probability of client fear and trigger escalation of aggressive responses. These kinds of events can also occur in home visits presenting another challenge for practitioners. Ruch's study (2014) of the factors that mitigate against better communication between social workers and children in the UK include the actual or perceived dangers that can present themselves to social workers at home visits (Ruch 2014).

With regard to fear of becoming a potential victim of violence, Littlechild (2005) concluded:

> It was also clear that most workers considered and thought a great deal about the meaning of certain behaviours by certain service users, within their professional relationship with the service user; in particular the implications in terms of power dynamics … Staff were usually clear in their own minds about the causes and triggers for aggression and violence, based upon extensive consideration of their experiences. These relate in the main to service users' views of the power and control inherent in social services departments' child protection work (Littlechild 2005, p. 70).

Studies that explore social worker experience and thinking about their experience of fear and violence and working with conflict (Saini et al. 2012) are

important for this study because the potential for robust relationship practice is hindered where a social worker is concerned for their own safety as well as for children or other people in any given situation, such as a home visit. Research that has explored client experience of engagement with child protection workers has repeatedly documented clients finding this engagement and contact intimidating, humiliating, anxiety-provoking and difficult (Buckley et al. 2011).

Overall, knowledge about what social workers actually do in frontline practice on a daily basis, how they develop relationships with clients and navigate the unpredictability and complexity that reflects 'a social work practice', is patchy and limited to small-scale studies. A broad or comprehensive understanding of the nature of the work remains elusive (Lonne et al. 2009). These small-scale studies reported herein and in the previous chapter include studies that present insights about practice from the social workers themselves (De Boer and Coady 2007; Ryan et al. 2004), client views and client experience of their engagement with social workers (Buckley et al. 2011; De Boer and Coady 2007) and foster carers' perspectives (Fulcher and McGladdery 2011).

3.3.2.1 Mandatory reporting
Mandatory reporting legislation has had a significant impact on the lives of children and families, child and family welfare service provision and child and family social work practice. These laws exist in every Australian state and territory in Australia (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2014; Fernandez 2014; Mathews and Bross 2008). Mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect 'is a term used to describe the legislative requirement imposed on selected classes of people to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect to government authorities' (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2016b). Once a report is made to

the child protection authority, called a notification, cases are assessed by the statutory child protection authority to which the report is made, and a decision is made about whether the report requires further investigation or not, based on whether 'there is reasonable cause to believe that the child has been, is being, or is likely to be abused, neglected, or otherwise harmed' (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, p. 20). Where investigation leads to substantiation of the initial report of suspected child abuse and/or neglect, decisions are made by the authority to determine the most appropriate course of action which can involve making an application to court under the relevant state/territory legislation, outlined below.

Like other countries including Canada and some states of the USA, that have mandatory reporting laws, Australian states and territories have witnessed dramatic and extensive increases in numbers of cases of suspected child abuse and neglect, placing intense strain on the service system (Fernandez 2014; Lonne et al 2008; Parton 2014a). In Australia, between 2003 and 2012, the total number of reports made increased by 172%, from 3,463 in 2003 to 9,434 in 2012 (Mathews et al. 2016, p.91).

In 2013–14 across Australia, 304,097 notifications were made, involving 198,966 children, a rate of 37.8 per 1,000 children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015, p. 19). Of these notifications, 45% (137,585) were investigated. Of these, 54,438 resulted in substantiations relating to 40,844 children – a rate of 7.8 per 1,000 children (AIHW 2016, p. 19). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are eight times more likely to be the subject of substantiation (Fernandez 2014, p. 789) and so comprise a disproportionate percentage of all notifications. In 2015, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, nationally, were 9.5 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be in out-of-home care (Australian Institute of

Family Studies 2016). In the same period, NSW had 125,944 notifications and 26,215 substantiations (20.8% of all notifications), while the ACT saw 10,600 notifications and 449 substantiations (4.23% of all notifications). The number of children in these substantiations was 15,074 in NSW and 341 in the ACT. Depending on the outcome of legal and child protection intervention, members of these families can also become clients of family support and out-of-home care services. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reports that the data shows 'that a number of children were the subject of more than 1 notification and/or substantiation' in 2013–14 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015, p. 20). This means that children, their parents and other family members are coming in and out of the service system, through sporadic or sustained interaction with some form of state authority in their day to day lives.

Mandatory reporting laws have remained contentious since their introduction (Fernandez 2014; Lonne et al. 2009; Melton 2004). Criticisms include that the decision to introduce mandatory reporting was based on erroneous assumptions about the nature and prevalence of child abuse and neglect (Melton 2004; Lonne 2009), meaning that responding to reports of suspected child abuse and neglect trigger regulatory and legal responses rather than responses to the stressors and needs the individual family is experiencing (Melton 2004). Secondly, state responses to individual cases tend to be punitive and forensic rather than robust, proactive and supportive of children and families (Melton 2004). While some questions about the benefits of mandatory reporting for the protection of children remain unanswered (Ainsworth and Hansen 2006, Lonne 2009), advocates argue that a mandatory reporting system is needed because infants and young children, in particular, are not able to report on their own abuse/neglect experiences (Mathews

and Bross 2008). The lack of sufficient resources for effective intervention in the lives of children following reports made, should not be grounds for dropping mandatory reporting (Mathews and Bross 2008), and mandatory reporting can be used as a legal framework for introducing and containing well evidenced assessment, planning and interventions (Wekerle 2013).

The frontline social worker is the personal and human face of State authority whose intervention can have far-reaching impacts on family members and relationships (Wheatland and Ivec 2014). In this sense, the social worker has both a working relationship with clients which perpetuates State control through legalistic, punitive and forensic actions, and is hoping to provide care, support and trauma informed practice to support and facilitate relationship development within families. This contradictory set of expectations is documented as a challenge for establishing relationship practice by frontline workers. The message this emits to client families is also contradictory. Client families might interpret these contradictions by asking, for example, 'you say you are going to support me, yet what you say and what you do is not the same', where 'you' the worker is entwined with 'the system'.

Many aspects of the current State approach reflect that of a punitive uncaring parent. This has significant ramifications for the families who are the clients of these services. On the one hand, families are encouraged to engage with services as a safe alternative to the unsafe experience of their family environments. They are encouraged to change to become more emotionally attuned and disciplined parents to their children. At the same time, they can feel abused and oppressed by the State, with this traumatising experience mitigating their efforts to meet intervention goals and fulfil legal requirements. For people who are so vulnerable in their ability to form and maintain safe and healthy relationships, such experiences are a serious

142

concern. The overall aim for families and children who have traumatised relationship histories and who become clients of the child and family welfare system is to experience a service that operates in a way consistent with authoritative benevolent parenting. Viewing the State as in loco parentis, it is theoretically plausible to imagine a benevolent and authoritative State apparatus that prioritises family support based on the premise that engaging families is essentially concerned with enhancing relationships and relational capacity, and role models benevolent authoritative parenting. In practice, this is the case for a percentage of families. Swedish family services provide an example of a family support approach (Australian Institute of Family Studies July 2014), as opposed to a child protection approach, although this is also criticised for being too parent-oriented, risking children's safety (Leviner 2014). A current Australian policy development initiated by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children* (2009–2020). This national framework is a public health cross sectoral approach that promotes children's overall health and wellbeing, broadening existing narrow views of child protection. The framework is establishing nationwide uniformity and consistency in legislation and policy (Commonwealth of Australia 2009). It is a promising initiative that seeks to redress existing imbalances in current policy and practice, and incorporates directions for future workforce development. How practitioner – client relationship practice is envisaged in this Framework is not yet clear, however, it does portend recognition of the central importance of practitioner – client relationship practice of achieving beneficial outcomes for children and families.

The current study provides insight into the ways in which social workers think about their roles with families and how they balance their competing responsibilities

to children and children's relationships with their parents against the child's right to safe relationships.

3.3.3 Family support

Family support has been described as 'any activity or facility provided either by statutory agencies or community groups or by individuals aimed at providing advice and support to parents to help them bring up their children' (Parker and Bradley 2010, p.28). It is also a term, along with 'family welfare', that lost favour as the term 'child protection' gained precedence. This signified a change in the dominant discourse to reflect increased emphasis in a singular focus on 'the child' and on forensic assessment of children perceived to be 'at risk' of harm (Lonne et al. 2009).

Currently national data collection is limited to intensive family support services and does not include other types of family support services (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016). Intensive family support services aim to prevent imminent separation of children from their primary caregivers due to child protection concerns, and to reunify families where separation has already occurred (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, p.65; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015, p.61). In 2015-2016, the number of Australian children aged 0-17 years of age who commenced receiving intensive family support was almost 25,000, where 10,932 (44%) children were aged between 0-4 years of age. In the same period, in the ACT, 56 out of 237 (24%) were aged 0-4 years (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, p.66).

The social work role in family support practice aims:

To find some way of getting closer to the child and family in order to understand the reasons for their difficulties. Getting close enough to see what

may be hidden is a core social work skill but one that is hardly ever discussed..... Meeting the child and family in their normal environment, seeing the physical conditions in the home and community, listening and observing are all important. However, in the longer term the aim is to get beyond normal politeness and to be able to raise sensitive subjects, ask probing questions and explore things more deeply. Invariably, there will be barriers to an authentic meeting between the social worker and family, such as barriers of class, race and religion. Much will depend on whether the social worker has the necessary skills – such as accurate empathy and intuition – to develop effective working relationships (Searing 2003).

Building a sufficient level of agreement and even mutual respect and trust is required for beneficial work to progress. Many of the people who find themselves clients of the child protection system have enjoyed little positive life experience of 'relationship with others'. Many parents have themselves been victims of long term, entrenched and intergenerational trauma (Ruch et al. 2010). Many have also had long term and troubled engagement with statutory authorities (Featherstone and White 2014). People with troubled relationship histories tend to find engaging with others a challenging experience (Bennett and Nelson 2010; Stern 2002). This is the focus of social work attention. General agreement exists in the social work literature that a high level of interpersonal skills, a commitment to social justice, a genuine and heartfelt commitment to make things better for others, as well as compassion and empathy, are all required (Lonne et al, 2009, Howe 2013).

Gary (2009) evaluated the nature of family support with clients and family support workers (FSWs) in two localities in the UK which are described as the two most deprived boroughs in the UK, Tower Hamlets and Hackney. Using ethnographic methods, Gary (2009) conducted interviews with client families and focus groups with their worker, and triangulated these with case records. The profile

of the two populations is characterised by poverty, social exclusion and widespread unemployment. These boroughs had at the time the highest rate of male unemployment in the UK in some pockets and many women did not feature in formal economic contributions. The ethnic background of the populations in the two boroughs was typically Bangladeshi, Somalian and Pakistani, when the non-white population was about 36% of the overall population. The high immigrant population combined with the data about unemployment indicates significant social exclusion.

The key findings of Gary's study are consistent with other studies that indicate that close interpersonal relationships, referred to as 'befriending' are considered by families as helpful, requiring 'attentive and sustained emotional commitment of the FSW' (Gray 2009, p. 1002). The workers' non-stigmatising, non-intrusive responsiveness to families was valued by the families (Gray 2009, p. 1002). That the ethnic backgrounds of the workers were similar to the families was also appreciated by clients. The researchers maintained that family support work provided important social connection for families who were otherwise isolated. Their work also increased family capacity and confidence preventing families becoming clients of child protection authorities.

Clients also favoured family support workers over social workers. It is important to note that engagement with family support services is likely to be voluntary, and family support workers in the United Kingdom are unlikely to be social workers. Not discussed is the impact of the FSW involvement once the service is no longer involved with the family.

Family practice requires well-developed capacity for emotional labour and, importantly, reflection and decision-making (Gray 2002; Fernandez 2014; Munro

2011b; Trevithick 2011). Importantly, social workers need to be judicious decision makers, informed by a strong understanding of ethics in practice and a capacity to work with uncertainty and ambiguity (De Boer and Coady 2007; Munro 2011b; Ruch et al. 2010). The ability to grapple with and balance the two contradictory functions of providing care and regulating family life where children are at risk of harm has been espoused as important (Parton 2000). Yet on the basis of outcomes of child death reviews, the Munro Report (2011b) and significant research about the practice context of child protection, it seems social workers and other frontline practitioners struggle to maintain this balance to facilitate positive change. Such abilities have also been found wanting as many child death inquiries have identified (Cooper 2005; Lonne et al. 2009; Munro 2011b; Sheehan 2015). This balancing act can lend itself to denial that there is a problem (Ainsworth and Hansen 2011; Munro 2011b; Shoesmith 2016), or a fear of retribution by the family for addressing the problem (Munro 2011b). Such eventualities have been identified as one of the factors leading to child deaths in a number of cases (Ainsworth and Hansen 2011; Cooper 2005; Munro 2011b) as happened with Peter Connelly.

How social workers prevent these boundary shifts from occurring is not easily apparent from the literature. A study by Farmer and Lutnam (2014) investigated how cases involving child neglect were managed by practitioners. A sample of 110 cases where the children involved had experienced severe neglect and had been removed to live in out-of-home-care was investigated. Many children in this sample had been part of a sample for an earlier study undertaken by Farmer and Lutnam, and this 2014 study occurred three years after the children had returned home. The case files of another 138 children were examined and 36 social workers who had been involved as caseworkers with many of the sample were also interviewed.

Farmer and Lutnam (2014) found that a significant number of children suffered further abuse or neglect in the two year period following reunification and a further number, nearly two-thirds of the sample, experienced a family breakdown following reunification. These changes in the children's situations were meticulously recorded by the researchers. All children were given a wellbeing rating according to set descriptors. The analysis of all data revealed a number of practice issues. They found that identified problems were either not addressed and/or included situations where neglect was marginalised; where therapeutic help was lacking; lack of follow through; where social workers 'gave parents too many chances'; lack of parental engagement; inappropriate case closure; lack of recorded monitoring; and where there was a limited response to referrals about risk with workers awaiting a trigger event before intervening' (Farmer and Lutman 2014, p.266-70). These issues are serious and have serious consequences for social work practice and for the children involved. They also point to organisational factors. However the relative contribution of worker skills and expertise or lack thereof, is difficult to discern from the range of identified practice issues. Farmer and Lutnam (2014) identified the need for improvements in ongoing recording of observations of the child's health and wellbeing using credible reunification assessment scales, the importance of having a second worker observe and /or visit the child and family on a periodic basis to ensure acceptable levels of safety are being maintained and to ensure the primary worker is 'not missing anything' important that might suggest a change in intervention direction or strategy (Farmer and Lutman 2014).

This study provides a good picture about practice undertaken in these cases, enabling important insights about the practice challenges involved, including reinforcing the challenge identified by others (Fernandez 2014; Gillingham 2006;

Parton 2014b; Trevithick 2014) as the key contradiction in child and family welfare, namely, the monitoring function of child protection practice on the one hand, while working with family relationship process on the other. Maintaining the balance between these two roles and sets of responsibilities requires deft and at times nuanced application of communication, relationship, analytical skills and knowledge as well as constant and vigilant presence of mind within the context of demanding work pressures. Such findings identify particular attributes of relationship practice and also highlight the impact of context on the worker's practice approach and role manoeuvrability as well as on their formal roles.

3.3.4 Foster care

Apart from child protection practice, social work practice in family and child welfare includes practice in out-of-home care. The provision of foster care for children is one form of out-of-home care provided in Australia. 'Out-of-home care' is a term given to the placement of a child or young person with alternate caregivers on a short-term or long term basis (Department of Human Services, 22nd January, 2017). The child/young person, between the ages of 0-17 years is unable to live with their families usually for reasons of child abuse or neglect, and who are between the ages of 0-17 years. In Australia on 30th June 2015, there were 43,400 children in out-of-home care (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, p.48), almost 10 children per 1,000 total children in NSW and 8 per 1,000 children in the ACT (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, p.50).

The numbers of children admitted to out-of-home care in Australia increased between 2002-2015 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016; Fernandez 2014; O'Donnell et al. 2008). The numbers of children placed in out-of-home care in NSW in 2014-15 decreased from 3,542 in 2010 to 3,440 children in 2015; in the

ACT the number decreased over the same period from 224 in 2010 to 219 in 2014 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, p. 56). Most out-of-home care arrangements are formally decided, through statutory authorities or the courts (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016) and arranged, supported and monitored by government funded non-statutory programs. Nation-wide 93% children in out–of-home care were on child protection orders (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, p.52). The percentage of children on child protection orders living in out-of-home care as a percentage of all children in out-of-home care as of June 2015 was 98% in the Australian Capital Territory and 91% in New South Wales (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, p.53). The rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care is 9.5 times the rate for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, p.54). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children comprise 74.8 per 1000 children in out-of-home care in the ACT and 67.4 per 1000 in out-of-home care in NSW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, p.54). These figures highlight the well documented concern that child and welfare services have a particular responsibility to ensure that their interaction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities must reflect knowledge about and sensitivity to Australian Aboriginal values about family, kinship and community (Fejo-King 2013).

As at June 2015, across all jurisdictions there were 'almost 9,900 foster carer households and around 13,700 relative/kinship households that had 1 or more children placed with them' (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, p. 60). At the same time, 52% of all foster carer households had multiple children placed with them (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, p. 62).

The provision of foster care for children is a complex enterprise as it not only aims to provide a home for children unable to live with their own families, but also to help the child with trauma recovery and foster healthy development and identity formation. In addition, each foster care placement is governed by legal intervention, as well as the practices and procedures of government and non-government organisations providing the services to the child and to the foster family. As a consequence each child placement involves a number of stakeholders: the statutory authority, the courts, the foster care agency, the carers and the biological family and the child.

Depending on the particulars of the individual situation, each of these stakeholders might be represented by more than one person. There may also be other professionals involved, for example, speech therapists, psychologists and teachers. The social workers often coordinate these parties to limit over-servicing of families, to assist meeting legal requirements or case plan goals and to help with preparation for case conferences. The social workers responsible for placement arrangements or the child's care occupy a middle space where these competing interests vie for control and where the social worker role has to ensure the child's 'best interest' as articulated in the case plan and which is not always clear to or easy to achieve (Harkin and Houston 2016; Ruch 2014). The operationalisation of this role can provide opportunities for relationship building and engagement with the client about relationship issues; however, it often happens as part of the tasks identified or, for example, while travelling in a car taking the client to appointments. These 'natural' settings provide unplanned though often timely opportunities for exploring emotional, relational and behavioural issues. For example, taking a mother and her young child to an appointment is a routine task. The worker, mother and

child arrive at the destination, the child refuses to leave the car, the mother unsuccessfully encourages the child to leave the car, the child's mood escalates, triggering an escalation in the mother's emotional state. The worker uses diffusion strategies to encourage the mother through her experience of being emotionally overwhelmed, talking her down, repeating a simple message to the child until the child eventually calms down. The mother learns through this experience that she has the capacity to calm her child, and the child begins to learn that their feelings can be psychologically contained. The mother is encouraged to keep practising this new way of handling her own emotions and those of her child. However, the appointment is missed and so is recorded in a case note as a task not achieved, even though important work was done but which is not easily recorded against predetermined codes.

In Australia, an organising system for monitoring the care of children subject to state intervention is the 'Looked after Children' (LAC). LAC was adopted from the UK in the late 1990's and is comprehensively used in the ACT and by more than 20 non-government agencies in NSW, as well as other states (Tregeagle and Treleaven 2006). LAC is described here by Tregeagle and Treleaven (2006, p. 360):

> LAC aims to bring about systemic reforms by supporting children holistically, enforcing inter-agency collaboration across the usual service silos, and establishing standards of care identified as 'community norms'. LAC requires participation of the child and their family in decision-making and aims at 'system monitoring' by holding welfare workers accountable and collecting data on the welfare system.

In both NSW and the ACT, foster care is operated by non-government organisations that receive funding from state /territory governments. The purpose of the LAC 'package' of standardised timetables and forms, is to facilitate

comprehensive and ongoing assessment of the child's development and wellbeing, and transparent and timely decision-making relating to the child's progress according to individualised care plans. Foster care workers are expected to use these forms and indeed the practice of foster care is based around the implementation of LAC. As a 'package' of standardised procedures and forms, LAC regularises practice and potentially encourages uncritical practice, especially in an environment of high caseloads and where there is an emphasis on form filling and ticking boxes at the risk of not spending time with children and families. It provides an example of the increasing managerialist regulation that encourages proceduralism, and conformity to particular ideals of family functioning and identity perpetuated through state instrumentalities (Miller and Rose 2008). This risks foregoing engagement and work with children and their families that is nuanced to their individual needs and celebrates unique characteristics of each family. As a regularising instrument, LAC also runs the risk of encouraging a reductive practice that fails to reflect understanding of the impacts of complex relationship histories on healthy development.

Nevertheless, the introduction of LAC has also been viewed as a positive development by its advocates (Tregeagle and Treleaven 2006). How much LAC-guided practice 'interferes' with social workers' relationships with service users and adversely impacts on outcomes for children and families is not known (Tregeagle and Treleaven 2006), indicating the need for further research.

As well as supporting the placement of children with carers, foster care programs are responsible for ensuring a supply of suitable carers. Building a pool of foster carers is achieved through promotion of foster care, active recruitment of potential carers, comprehensive assessment of potential carers, and then, once they

are approved, providing training and ongoing professional development and support. These tasks usually constitute part of the foster care worker role in Australia. The agencies have close links with child protection authorities at an operational level as most referrals to foster care agencies stem from child protection authorities. They also have strong links with a wide range of other government and non-government agencies that provide various aspects of treatment, care and support for children and their families.

Once children are referred to the agency for placement, frontline practitioners, including social workers are responsible for ensuring that the child is safe with the carer, for ongoing assessment of the child's needs over time, for liaison with the biological parents, and for ensuring contact arrangements occur as arranged. The foster care role itself has suffered from a lack of scholarly attention (Cosis Brown et al. 2014; Fulcher and McGladdery 2011). An international literature review undertaken in the UK (Cosis Brown et al. 2014, p.11) found that little is known about what social workers in foster care actually do. Much more is known about foster carer perceptions of social workers (Cosis Brown et al. 2014, p.18).

In this review, only two studies were found that specifically focused on what foster care workers actually do in these roles. These are by Cosis Brown et al. (2014) and Gleeson and Philbin (1996). According to Cosis Brown et al. (2014), the Gleeson and Philbin (1996) in the UK, identified that the casework role conflated the children's social work role and the supervising worker role. They found that the casework role used case management to assess resources for families, to assess the needs of families, foster carers and children, to develop permanent care plans and to build relationships with families regarded as important (p.11). In Australia, the foster care worker role incorporates both functions: supporting the child as well as

supporting the foster family. In addition, workers have a responsibility to liaise with the biological parent with regard to parent-child contact arrangements. These sessions often generate considerable anxiety for both parent and child that in turn places considerable emotional demands on the foster care worker (social worker).

The second study, from Brown et al. (2014) in Canada, is the only study that actually asks social workers themselves what they do. The sample consisted of 68 foster care workers comprising those who supervised foster care placements as well as social workers whose primary role was to work with the children. Using a group interview methodology, 10 groups of activities were identified. These included monitoring placements, facilitating communication between parties, teaching communication skills, matching foster homes with children, retaining foster parents, promoting teamwork, addressing problems, exercising authority and ensuring smooth operations (Brown et al. 2014, p.1553).

Further, Fulcher and McGladdery (2011) in the UK, examined the tasks and roles of social workers as they engaged in transition from case manager roles to supervisor and/or manager roles. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model was used to analyse the practice context of foster care as a system of contexts. They identified that foster care involves both direct practice and indirect practice responsibilities and tasks, including collaborating with a large number of people who occupy any of the micro, exo and macro systems in which foster care operates, teamwork and/or working for common purpose across services and sectors, as well as ensuring that the child in care is accessing appropriate physical, emotional, social and educational supports and resources. In the UK foster care roles are performed by government employed social workers. In Australia, foster care casework is usually undertaken by a non-government worker, who may or may

not be a social worker, and where the child protection caseworker, who may or may not be a social worker, remains involved. Caseworkers remain in contact with the child, and maintain a relationship with the child as this is seen as important for facilitating a strong and safe placement for the child, and preventing placement breakdown (Harkin and Houston 2016). Caseworkers also seek to develop a network of supportive relationships around the placement, however this suffers when, for example, caseworkers do not return calls from foster carers in a timely manner during moments of placement crisis. The foster carer- caseworker is also subject to role confusion. It is often in this relationship occupied by two frontline workers that the agendas, purposes, constraints and possibilities of each of the agencies and of professional mandates and purposes are played out. Where the two workers involved have strong professional experience, skills and maturity, this can be managed capably and leads to foster carer satisfaction (Wade et al (2012). These working relationships are often fraught; where tensions relate to clarity of worker roles, communication, and what foster care workers can realistically undertake (Sheldon, 2004). How these sets of relationships are best managed and developed depends in part on the characteristics of each situation, though also on the relational expertise of the workers involved.

In summary, understanding of how social workers undertake these relationships, their experience of them, and their integral importance for achieving practice purposes, is patchy.

3.3.5 Gendered frontline workforce in child and family welfare

The child and family welfare workforce comprises a significant proportion of social workers, though they constitute a smaller professional group than in 1970s (Healy and Lonne 2010). As noted earlier, frontline practitioners in child and family

welfare are predominantly women and the responsibility for family relationships, parenting and caring largely remains the domain of women (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007b). The service disciplines such as nursing, teaching and social work continue to attract many more women than men, indicating entrenched traditional gender role socialisation. From a feminist perspective, this enduring characteristic has implications for the current study, prompting questions such as; to what extent is social worker understanding of their relationship practice with clients informed by their social work education and identity, as well as their identities as women, mothers and daughters?

Until the late 1970s in Australia, the professional occupation of most frontline staff in state government departments responsible for child and family welfare was that of social work. Since economic deregulation in the 1980s, de-professionalisation of these roles has occurred and led to a much greater diversity in professional qualifications and backgrounds. Qualified social workers are a proportionately much smaller group within this composition though Australia wide data is not available. The profile of the child protection workforce was examined in 2011 (McArthur and Thomson 2012). While all jurisdictions were invited to provide data about their workforce, five responded to the survey. Of these five, Australian Capital Territory and Western Australia published data on qualifications indicate that, as of June 2011, 'close to 80% of child protection workers had a degree-level qualification, and half of these were degrees in social work' (McArthur and Thomson 2012, p. 24). On the basis of the numbers presented for the five jurisdictions, about 40% of the total child protection workforce, at the time were social work qualified (McArthur and Thomson 2012, p.23). While this figure is approximate and does not include all jurisdictions, it indicates that social work presence is somewhat less than

157

had existed in the 1970s, and therefore, is arguably less influential in contemporary day to day practice. Social workers are also recruited to management positions within child protection services. Information about the size of this group and how their professional background influences their work in these positions could not be found.

As previously indicated social workers in child and family services are primarily women, making up 84–89% of the child protection workforce (McArthur and Thomson 2012, p.18). This is a similar figure for the human services workforce overall (Healy and Lonne 2010). The workforce in the human services is predominantly an older workforce with substantial growth in the proportion of workers in the 56-64 years (Healy and Lonne 2010). By contrast, the child protection workforce is generally young with 25–50% under the age of 35 (McArthur and Thomson 2012). This workforce is also characterised by a marked degree of cultural and ethnic diversity (Healy and Lonne 2010; McArthur et al. 2011). As highlighted in Chapter 2, this study argues that the predominance of women in this practice context has potential significance for social worker - client relationship practice as many of the adults that social workers work with in relation to their child clients are the child's mothers or female carers. This has been reported in studies that have explored client views about their engagement with social workers for example, in Maiter et al.'s (2006) Canadian study, where 93% (57) of the sample of 61 participants, were women (Maiter et al. 2006, p.175).

While men are not the predominant gender category (Healy and Lonne 2010; McArthur and Thomson 2012), it is important to note that male practitioners are employed in these services and do engage in relationship practice with women, men and children and young people (Ferguson 2016b).

The fact that women predominate in frontline practice positions, combined with the general agreed view that 'caring for' plays a central role in the identities and socialisation of most women, is further explored in this study to identify how this influences relationship practice. Feminist social work research has explored links between gender and aspects of social worker - client relationship practice (Dominelli, 2002, White, 2006, Fawcett, 2009, Featherstone and Fawcett, 2012, Featherstone and White 2014).

3.4 Types of practice in child and family welfare

Within these practice arenas, particular types of practice that involve social workers engaging with clients can be identified in the literature, although this literature does not involve relationship work in the way described earlier in the chapter. These practice types are case management, risk appraisal and forensic social work, which are typically situated within statutory child protection settings.

3.4.1 Case management

Case management is a generic term that is now used widely in the human services sector. It is a commonly used term to describe and formalise the relationship between the caseworker and the client, and is used in family support, child protection and foster care.

The concept of 'case management' derives from management theory (Mayers et al. 2004) and is widely used in health care as well as in human services. In the human services, it is a term used to describe linking and coordinating services for a client (Woodside and McClam 2013), although case management also includes direct contact with clients. Case management models vary across organisations,

tending to be devised by each agency that uses it. Unlike casework, it is not a professionally grounded practice framework (Gursansky et al. 2012).

The essential purpose of case management is to work through a stage process, similar to traditional case work models as outlined in Chapter 2 (Compton et al. 2005). The aim of case management is to ensure that the client is linked to appropriate services and supports and that this is achieved by social worker and client collaboration with other disciplines and services. Case management is not a therapeutic model. Case management aims for seamless service delivery and prevention of cases being 'lost in the system', an issue that, as reported here, also attracts media attention: 'Vulnerable children getting "lost" in New South Wales child protection system, ombudsman reports' (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2014. See: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-04-10/ombudsman-vunerable-teenagers-lost-in-child-protection-system/5381864). Regular reviews of case situations are built into the case management process to avoid such occurrences.

Case management has been seen to be an organisational mechanism for managing risk (Payne 2000; White et al. 2009; Woodside and McClam 2013) and for rationing resources, such as brokerage funds for client use.

Beyond these descriptors, case management practice varies across sectors and services (Gursansky et al. 2012; Woodside and McClam 2013). Exploring how well case management practice achieves these aims is not the purpose of this thesis; suffice to say that on the basis of these descriptions, case management is different from a social worker–client relationship where the focus is working with the child and/or family/caregiver to achieve change in family relationship and related

issues. Case management can also include risk assessment and forensic social work.

3.4.2 Risk assessment and forensic investigation

Risk assessment and forensic investigation of children and families have increased in significance over the last two decades, reflecting the ascendance of the 'risk society' and of legalistic and managerialist approaches to addressing perceived rates of children at risk of harm.

Social workers are employed to undertake both of these tasks. These tasks are now briefly overviewed with regard to how they inhibit or allow a social worker - client relationship to develop and secondly, to outline the nature of the relationship that emerges.

Risk appraisal and forensic social work are not necessarily mutually exclusive in practice. For example, a social worker may be employed as a caseworker assigned to case management duties that involve being allocated to a risk appraisal team where their purpose is to undertake risk assessments of cases where a notification has been made that a child is at risk of harm. The task of risk assessment is heavily prescribed by the law and by organisational policy and procedures. It is usually completed within a prescribed time frame of 2-3 days and can involve meeting a child and their family on more than one occasion. The focus is on assessing the risk to the child's safety. It does not have the aim at that time of identifying the issues of concern to the family and/or the child and working with the child to address them.

Risk assessment within the context of child protection is a type of assessment that has the aim of assessing the degree of risk of harm to which a child may be

exposed. Risk assessment is a typical first step undertaken by child protection authorities when they receive a formal notification of a case of alleged child abuse and/or neglect (Bromfield and Price-Robertson 2011).

While a system for assessing risk of harm to children is essential, use of risk assessment instruments is contentious. Actuarial risk assessment instruments are perceived as an evidenced-based mechanism for assessing the degree of risk that a child may be experiencing. However, it is criticised on a number of grounds: including focusing too much on the future rather than on the impact of cumulative harm; of not taking into account the individual variables unique to each case; for excluding the judgement and intuition of professionals involved (Bromfield and Price-Robertson 2011). Observations have also been made that the over-emphasis on actuarial risk assessment occurs at the cost of placing emphasis on what happens for the family once the assessment is completed (Krane and Davies 2000). The literature further suggests that risk assessment has been enshrined in government policy while policy that enables integrated system engagement with children and families and that facilitates change for the children and families enjoys less attention (Bromfield and Price-Robertson 2011; Krane and Davies 2000; White et al. 2009).

Social worker roles in child protection and in other areas that are solely focused on risk assessment are relevant to this study, in terms of the degree to which current risk assessment practices influence or work against the practice of relationship building in supporting families to change patterns of functioning and of protecting children.

Where a child's situation is deemed not to require further statutory intervention at the risk appraisal stage, but where a need for family support is identified, families can benefit from their engagement with social workers. Such engagement typically includes explaining that child protection services can offer access to services that the family may not have otherwise known about or to which they had previously had access. Social work relationship building and interpersonal skills are also useful for reducing client anxiety about the legal and organisational processes and their potential outcome.

As has been discussed, social worker - client relationship practice in child and family welfare wrestles with the dual and often contradictory functions of care and control. For social workers engaged in risk appraisal and forensic social work, this tension is perhaps the clearest cut.

3.4.3 Forensic social work

A type of social work practice that has received some recent attention is social work practice that exists in correctional, mental health and other forensic contexts. Termed 'forensic social work', this practice is concerned with providing forensic assessment to courts, being expert witnesses about the clients of those services and assisting legal teams in court case preparation and appearances (Barker 2000; Sheehan 2012). While the role is forensic, it has been shown that through applying a holistic 'person-in-environment' lens to their work, social workers can provide important perspectives that counter pathologising and risk analysis to client situations that otherwise dominate these practice contexts. Sheehan (2012), in her study undertaken in Victoria, Australia, asked social workers (N = 15) employed in forensic services if they regarded their work as a specialist area of social work practice. The participants were interviewed in groups of two and three. Sheehan

found that the social workers provide holistic assessments that identify short term as well as long term issues the client and their family may be experiencing. This is important where family members may be separated from each other for long periods and/or where the client may be planning their release to the community/family. Social workers also assist the family to build connections with the wider community, and enable the family and the client to process the impact of the stigma associated with involvement in these systems. The study also found that many of clients of forensic services are subject to numerous assessments while provision of support is neglected. Sheehan (2012) concluded that forensic social work is specialist practice as it requires knowledge and integration of 'legal and mental health approaches into a social work framework' (p. 424) to advocate for clients (Sheehan 2012).

3.5 Summary and conclusions

This chapter has outlined the practice context for the current research study. The context for social worker - client relationship practice in child and family welfare is shaped by public policy trends on statutory practice in child protection and the legislative framework including the impact of mandatory reporting legislation on child protection and welfare service delivery. Managerialist and risk-averse policy and practices on child and welfare services organisations have seen an increase in regulatory and auditing practices and the homogenising of organisational classification of discipline-specific frontline professional positions to generic case work positions. This has reduced the presence and visibility of the social work practice approach. In the process, workload stress and staff turnover have increased, compromising social worker health and wellbeing. These outcomes jeopardise practitioner capacity to spend time with families and children, to facilitate family relationships and enhance client relational capacity.

In this chapter, social worker - client relationship practice has been described as including emotional labour, relational skills, responsiveness and being non-stigmatising and inclusive. The relational work of social worker - client relationships is of secondary importance in case management, where the focus is generally on coordination of services, although different models exist in different contexts. Rapport building and engaging is still an important first step in case management with clients. In foster care, social workers can be involved in relational work with more than one stakeholder who is intimately involved with the child, including the child themselves.

Frontline practice with clients reflects the predominantly female workforce and the mostly adult clients are also women, the mothers of the child clients. As the focus of this study is on the practice of relationships within families, and relational know-how and socialisation continue to loom large in women's lived experience (Featherstone and Fawcett 2012; Gray 2009), feminist analysis that starts with seeking understanding about women's concrete experience (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007b), is invoked for how it may help the understanding of social workers' experiences and conceptualisation of their relationship practice with clients. That is, this study questions the influence of this demographic on social worker - client relationship practice and how 'relationship' is understood, what social workers see as important for this practice and for achieving outcomes with clients.

These two constructions of social worker - client relationship practice that reflect instrumentalist organisational cultures and practices on the one hand, and a focus on enhancing relational capacities within families on the other, seem fundamentally incompatible. Studies that have explored the interactions between clients and social workers in child and family welfare, mainly in child protection, do

suggest that social workers do practice relationship work. In some cases, these capacities seem to be used to good effect, while in other cases, less so. The literature that highlights the nature of social worker - client practice is predominantly focused on assessment of children at risk of harm, case management, including advocacy and coordination, home visiting, and court work. Overall, the literature indicates that little contemporary knowledge exists about how social workers think about and understand the relationships component of their work.

These considerations permeate this thesis and are discussed again later in the light of the study's findings. The next chapter outlines and explains the methodology for the qualitative study.

Chapter 4. Research methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodology for this study. Research methodology 'refers to the set of ideas, theory or philosophy that surrounds, encompasses, and literally, "holds together" a research project' (Carey 2012). The purpose of a methodology is to ensure 'the best fit' between the research question and the research process (Fossey et al. 2002) and goes to the heart of the nature of knowledge building (Crotty 1998). A clearly articulated methodology provides a clear structure for guiding decision-making as the research process unfolds (Crotty 1998).

This study is an exploration of contemporary social worker - client relationship practice. While this form of practice is elemental to social work identity, it is diffusely represented in the literature. As social worker - client relationship practice is a social phenomenon, and the meaning of relationships is socially constructed, a qualitative methodology was adopted for this study (Alston and Bowles 2003).

Qualitative research seeks to identify patterns and themes in data that help to answer the research question. For findings to be accepted as knowledge, qualitative methodology has to be nested within an ontological and epistemological framework and has to reflect principles of transparency, rigour and credibility (Alston and Bowles 2003; Crotty 1998). In qualitative research, a rigorous research process delivers trustworthy data (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Sarantakos 2013). This chapter outlines and explains the methodology for this study and includes an outline of the data analysis plan. Firstly, the research question is outlined.

4.2 Research question

The research question explored in this study is:

How do frontline social workers conceptualise their social worker - client relationship practice?

This question invites a number of subsidiary questions:

1. How do frontline social workers explain their relationship practice with clients?
2. How significant is social worker - client relationship practice to social workers for:
   a) Achieving client outcomes;
   b) Their employing agency; and,
   c) Their sense of social work identity?
3. What understandings can frontline social workers contribute about the day to day experience of relationship practice with clients?

4.3 The research approach

Using qualitative research approaches in social work research is not without contention. In the following sections, reference is made to broader epistemological debates in social work in order to contextualise this study's methodology. This context is important for understanding where this study 'fits' in the development of research epistemology in social work.

4.3.1 The ontological and epistemological framework

Knowledge building in social research in Western countries has its roots in the application of the scientific method and was originally applied to questions about the natural world (Neuman, 2007). Traditional scientific research methodology discovers and explains the 'true' reality of phenomena using observation and quantification to test hypotheses (Denzin and Lincoln 1994).

The process of scientific research relies on the use of deductive reasoning as a way of enhancing the objectivity of the research (Neuman 2007; Rooney 2005; Sarantakos 2013). The scientific method has contributed enormously to building knowledge about the natural world; however, it has limitations for accumulating knowledge about social phenomena (Neuman 2007; Rooney 2005; Sarantakos 2013). Scientific research approaches were challenged by sociological and anthropological research in the early twentieth century (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). These challenges formed the genesis of qualitative research, a name given to represent a new range of methodologies concerned with understanding social phenomena that derived from fields including phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, philosophical hermeneutics and feminism (Sarantakos 2013). Research about social phenomena is not, however, confined to qualitative methodology, because it can be informed by a range of theories, including positivist and critical theory (Carey, 2012).

Ontology and epistemology are branches of the philosophy of science that provide important guidance for choosing an appropriate methodology for qualitative research. They are interconnected concepts and are treated differently by different writers which creates confusion (Crotty 1998; D'Cruz and Jones 2004). In discussion about the ontological and epistemological framework for this study, the two concepts are discussed together, because together, they provide the philosophical basis for the current study.

Ontology is the study of the nature of being and is concerned with what constitutes the world and reality (Crotty 1998; D'Cruz and Jones 2004). Ontology helps to clarify the logic of knowledge building that underpins methodology. For example, the ontological view that reality is socially constructed means adopting

interpretive methods of inquiry (Crotty 1998; D'Cruz and Jones 2004; Denzin and Lincoln 1994). It is here that the interconnectedness between epistemological and ontological issues emerges.

Epistemology is the study of the nature and production of knowledge (Crotty 1998) and so is concerned with the methods and theories used to gain knowledge about 'reality'. Carey (2012) writes that epistemology is 'represented by the theories we use to support a methodology and also then gather and analyse findings (p. 78). The current study has the fundamental aim of exploring with social workers the construction of their relationship practice reality. Hence the epistemological basis for this study is that reality is socially constructed. Social constructionism is now explained with reference to this study.

4.3.2 Social constructionism

As stated, building knowledge about a social research problem or phenomenon relies on interpretation as a means of understanding the problem or phenomenon (Sarantakos 2013, p. 40-41).

Human beings are not value-free creatures (Sarantakos 2013). Their perspectives and understanding of the world reflect their own worldviews and beliefs, socio-political contexts and life experience (D'Cruz and Jones 2004).

The individual's construction of 'reality' is further shaped and influenced by their social and cultural environment and the interactions between them and their environment. Our sense of reality builds and changes as our experiences with the world evolve and change. 'Meaning is not discovered, but constructed' (Crotty 1998, p. 9). This view of the world is called social constructionism. Social constructionism is the ontological basis for this study (Crotty 1998; Fossey et al. 2002). From a

social constructionist view of reality, individual understanding of the world is possible through our capacity to interpret our experiences of being-in-the-world. As an epistemological approach this is referred to as interpretivism.

A social constructionist view is fundamental to this inquiry because it is seeking social worker perceptions about their relationship practice with clients. Asking participants for their views about their experience of undertaking relationship practice with clients as well as their experiences of how change is achieved through their client relationships, is, ipso facto, asking for their interpretation of relationship practice as they understand and experience it. Their interpretations are also informed by their professional education and training, values, life experiences and how they perceive their place in the world (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007b).

The epistemology of this study is further enhanced by using concepts from feminist and hermeneutic phenomenological research theory. The justification for this decision and an overview of the adopted concepts are provided in the following sections.

4.3.3 Feminist research theory

Feminist research knowledge has developed since the 1960s (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007b) and is primarily 'connected in principle to feminist struggle' (Sprague and Zimmerman, 1993, p. 266 cited in Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007b, p. 4). As a world view, feminism seeks to draw attention to, and challenge, the dominant masculine and patriarchal ideology and institutions in society that perpetuate marginalisation and oppression of women by men. Feminism draws attention to the previously hidden subject of women's experience, as it occurs in all

walks of life from family life to other spheres such as professional life (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007b, p. 57).

The aim of feminist research is to record 'women's lives, experiences, and concerns, illuminating gender-based stereotypes and biases, and unearthing women's subjugated knowledge; in so doing, 'feminist research challenges the basic structures and ideologies that oppress women' (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007a, p. 5). Feminist research thus gives 'voice' to women, as women's concrete experience of the world is different from men's experience (Reinharz 1992).

Since the 1960s feminist research theory has significantly influenced qualitative research (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007a). Feminist research incorporates a range of epistemologies and methodologies (Gringeri and Roche 2010). This study uses feminist standpoint epistemology (Collins, 1990), which aims to increase knowledge about women's experience in the world and through this lens to enhance understanding and knowledge about how society functions as a whole (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007b, p.58). The source of data used in feminist standpoint methodology is women's concrete experience. Research reports on women's lives *'as they themselves experience them'* (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007b, p. 56.). The current study elicits participant experience of social worker relationships with clients. It starts with their lived practice experience. Being in a relationship, including in the practice situation, is a lived experience.

It is perhaps surprising that social work features so little in feminist research (Gringeri et al. 2010). From their exploration and analysis of the feminist social work research landscape, Gringeri et al. (2010) concluded that there is much to do in the feminist social work research field and that social work can 'nudge feminist research

to consider new directions' (p. 402). Examples exist of feminist social work research on social work practice with clients in child protection (Featherstone and Fawcett 2012; Krane et al. 2010; Scourfield 2010; White 1995, 2009) and are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. These studies have used qualitative approaches to access lived experience of practice although few have specifically focused on the practice involved in building and maintaining the working relationship with clients.

4.3.3.1 Use of language

Language is socially, politically and culturally situated and is manifested through 'discourses'. Foucault, a major proponent of post-structuralism, emphasised that language reflects the way in which knowledge, institutions and power intersect at particular points in history (Featherstone and Fawcett 1995). Post-structural thinking has relevance for feminism and for researching women's experience because it draws attention to thinking about the way language is used to represent perceptions of reality, for instance, that language use is informed by particular discourses that are situated in particular times and places (Featherstone and Fawcett 1995).

In addition, post-structuralist and feminist research theory stress that because interpretation is fundamental to meaning-making, and meaning is communicated through language, how language is used reflects particular representations of reality (discourses) that are themselves constituted of power relations.

Thus, how people use language can provide clues about the speaker's social and political location and may also reveal aspects of the phenomenon that were previously not visible. Listening carefully to the language used by participants may provide useful insights about the way in which social workers think about their

relationship practice with clients and how they incorporate understandings of power in their relationship practice in relation to their clients, but also in their own positions as social workers.

4.3.3.2 Research as a holistic endeavour

Feminist research theory views research as 'a holistic endeavour' from beginning to end and 'emphasise[s] the synergy and interlinkages between epistemology, methodology, and method and… [is] interested in the different ways that a researcher's perspective on reality interacts with, and influences, how she goes about collecting and analysing her data' (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007b, p. 5).

This examination method is important for investigating the current research question, because the aim is to explore 'relationship practice' as a whole phenomenon. Understanding social work experience of relationship practice, means asking social workers what they think this is, how they do it, and how it is relevant (or not) to their social work purpose, social work identity and the meaning that this work provides for them. Adopting a holistic and iterative research approach helps to maintain a holistic perspective of the concept of 'relationship practice' as the research progresses. A phenomenological method of data analysis that militates against disaggregating data and its meaning is used in this study and is discussed later in this chapter.

4.3.3.3 Research participants

Critical feminist approaches are concerned with the role of power at various points of the research process, including the power and authority of the researcher, how the research is carried out, how research questions are constructed, dissemination of research and decision about who and what is studied (Gringeri et al. 2010). The relationship between the researcher and the 'researched' in the

current study is a key factor in determining the current research methodology. Feminist research methods place emphasis on participant involvement in the research process (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser 2004; Reinharz 1992). With its emphasis on empowering 'the researched' through the research process, feminist research has direct relevance to this study because the aim is to facilitate the social worker contribution to social work knowledge building and in so doing, bridge the practice-theory divide that has been problematic for social work knowledge building.

This study views the research 'subjects' as active participants in the research process and has set out to facilitate this by incorporating strategies into the data collection and data analysis phases of the methodology, such as asking participants for their feedback about the interviews, inviting them to participate in a focus group following the individual interviews, and seeking their feedback on a final draft of the research findings. This is referred to as 'mutuality' (Morrow 2006). Hesse-Biber and Yaiser (2004) explain that these methodologies acknowledge that the interviewee is not separate from the interviewer; rather, that they both influence the process of the interview.

Undertaking the research in this way means that the power dynamic between the 'researcher' role and participants reflects the adoption of participatory research principles. Seeking participant involvement in the research process as it progresses, including seeking participant feedback, enhances the authenticity of the methodology (Fossey et al. 2002) and trustworthiness of the findings (Tutty et al. 1996).

Feminist research theory provides concepts and ways of understanding phenomena that have relevance to this study's methodology. Attention now turns to

concepts from hermeneutic phenomenology research that speaks to this study's aim of exploring the social worker experience of social worker - client relationship practice.

4.3.4 Hermeneutic phenomenology

Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the meaning and interpretation of subjective human experience (Rubin and Babbie 2013). 'Phenomenology orients to the meanings that arise in experience' (van Manen 2014, p. 38), defined as:

> A project of sober reflection on the lived experience of human existence – sober, in the sense that reflecting on experience must be thoughtful, and as much as possible, free from theoretical, prejudicial and suppositional intoxications. But, phenomenology is also a project that is driven by fascination: being swept up in a spell of wonder, a fascination with meaning (van Manen 2007, p. 12).

A hallmark of phenomenological research is the idea that knowledge about human experience can only be accessed by 'honing in' on the 'essence' of human experience (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Hermeneutic phenomenology can be described using the German 'verstehen', a term used to convey that our understanding of the world emanates from the interpretations we make of our own actions and those of others in our everyday life (Crotty 1998, p. 67). This means that the research method has to enable seeing phenomena as 'things in themselves', a phrase attributed to Edmund Husserl, a philosopher and seminal contributor to phenomenological research theory in the 1960s and 70s. Husserl's work stimulated the development of a range of methodologies and research techniques collectively known as phenomenological research that bridged philosophical phenomenology and sociological research theory and today includes hermeneutic inquiry and

ethnomethodology (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). This 'bridging' has helpful relevance for research about social work practice. Gadamer (1975), an influential German philosopher observed that 'understanding is interpretation' (cited in Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p.194); that interpretation cannot be separated from experience, because it is integral to experience itself and, further, that 'understanding is itself a kind of practical experience in and of the world that, in part, constitutes the kind of persons that we are in the world' (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p. 196). In this way, hermeneutic phenomenology is consistent with, and builds on, the social constructionist ontology of this study.

Contemporary Australian researchers interested in the construction of professional practice knowledge have used a hermeneutic approach to understanding the nature of practice as it exists in the allied health professions. Paterson and Higgs (2005; p. 343) argue that analysing human experience, as it occurs in professional practice, from a hermeneutic perspective, gives prominence to the 'lived' experience of the participants, where the emphasis of the researcher is on recording the subject's interpretation of their experience. This application of hermeneutic principles has direct utility for the current study that is accessing practitioner experience through their understanding of the phenomenon (Paterson and Higgs 2005; p. 342). In her analysis of four major qualitative methodologies for the purpose of encouraging debate about 'best research practice' and achieving methodological clarity, Maggs-Rapport (2001) refers to her own PhD study, which used van Manen's phenomenological method to explore the lived experience of a particular group of women. While regarded as 'intensely in- depth and time consuming', this method nevertheless enabled deep understanding of a particular phenomenon using narrative material gained from participants (Maggs- Rapport

2001, p. 374). Analysis and then synthesis of data leads to the 'revealing of a structure or structures of a phenomenon' (ibid., p. 374). This experience informs the data analysis approach for this study.

The philosopher Heidegger coined a concept that also has relevance to the current study. Termed 'being-in-the-world-with-others', this concept refers to the idea that our understanding of experience comes from our relationship and dialogue with others. As a research methodology, hermeneutic/interpretive phenomenology enables understanding and interpreting of phenomena that reflect our experience of the world is inseparable from all that is around us; that personal prejudice is inseparable from our experience of the world; and that we can only make sense of the world through our existence within it, through experience of 'being-in-the-world'. Making sense of 'being-in- the-world' occurs through speech and language; and that historical understanding is only possible through our contemporary comprehension; thus, our 'horizons' become fused. Our understanding is interpretation occurs along a continuum, it is never ending and understanding is a hermeneutic circle (Maggs-Rapport 2001, p. 378).

The usefulness of interpretive phenomenology to the current study is that it provides a perspective of human social experience, and how meaning is derived, that acknowledges the subjective, relational and complex nature of human understanding. Social work relationship practice with clients employs 'dialogue' between worker and client to ascertain the past, current and future meaning of the current lived experience. In this dialogue, the worker is engaged in 'being-in-the-world with the other'. Thus, the relationship is a 'space' where the worker and client are intertwined to some degree in their shared experience, in which their purpose and goals provide the structure for their engagement, and they are engaged in co-

construction of meaning. It is also a place where each is engaged with the other in interpreting one another's thoughts, feelings and actions. Thus, in the Gadamerian sense, the experience of engagement informs, creates, challenges and modifies interpretations.

The researcher is also engaged in a 'being-in-the-world-with-others' in the sense that in dialogue with the participants about their perceptions and experience of relationship practice in social work, the researcher is also engaging in shared interpretations with the participants. It is out of the interviews and focus groups that shared understanding of relationship practice emerges.

As stated earlier, this study privileges the frontline experience and voices of social workers about their practice experience in social worker - client relationship practice. Consistent with the qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological approach to this study, participants' perspectives and stories are presented as they have expressed them. Thus participant contributions are presented with an eye to identifying the meaning social workers attribute to this area of practice experience. As a phenomenological study, it is concerned with revealing the experience of practitioners in their daily frontline work as a phenomenon in itself. Revealing social worker reflections about their relationship practice with clients is an attempt to reveal the relationship experience itself and to ponder those reflections for their meaning.

4.3.5 Phenomenology of practice

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature about the knowing-doing nexus that is utilised for practice. The knowing-doing nexus consists of a range of integrative knowledge types. For this thesis, these are collectively termed the phronesis of social worker - client relationship practice. The term phronesis alerts us to the idea that

transforming knowing into doing, and knowing-in-action, highlights the role of experience-derived knowledge and alerts us to the role of the practitioner's inner dialogue. This is relevant to the current study which explores social worker experience and interpretation of practice. In view of this, phenomenological inquiry is also utilised to inform the methodology for this study. The van Manen (2014) phenomenology of practice as applied to professional practice provides further insights about practice that highlight the seemingly inexplicable nature of some relationship practice experiences. He describes the phenomenology of practice as being:

> Sensitive to the realization that life as we live and experience it, is not only rational and logical, and thus in part transparent to reflection—it is also subtle, enigmatic, contradictory, mysterious, inexhaustible, and saturated with existential and transcendent meaning that can only be accessed through poetic, aesthetic, and ethical meanings and languages (van Manen 2014, p. 213).

Van Manen extrapolates from this observation that researching and understanding experience requires methods that encourage the mystery, that which is not easily understood or articulated, to come to the fore. This has relevance to the current study which explores the intersubjective processes between social workers and clients which are not always visible or easy to capture, but somehow must be put into words so that the experience can be communicated. Van Manen's reference to 'pathic knowing' described in Chapter 2, is an example of how language can be used to describe what is not easily describable, and this is explored again in the findings.

4.3.5.1 Hermeneutics and social work practice research

Social work researchers have espoused the relevance of hermeneutics in social work research on the basis that a fundamental epistemology of social work is interpretivism (White 1997). For example, empathising with the client is an interpretive act; however, for practice and research, interpretive activity that is unchecked can lead to 'the subject merg(ing) with the object' (White 1997). Interpretation is a basic human activity and is essential for sense-making. Seeking participant interpretations of particular life experience is the purpose of much social research. Applying a hermeneutic perspective to understanding phenomena can be both edifying and troublesome. As White (1997) explains, using interpretation in research of social work practice is integral to the nature of social work practice and building relationship with clients; however, research can only ever be a *representation* of that reality. It cannot be a reproduction of the reality. By citing case examples, White (1997) observes that the different interpretations of a client situation by professionals from different disciplines can lead to different consequences for the client, some or all of which may or may not be valuable to the client. Translating this to the research situation, White (1997) proposes that adopting an epistemic reflexivity prepares the researcher to be alert to the constructions of professional language and how it influences social worker interpretation of reality and to think about the consequences of that interpretation. The use of reflexivity has relevance for this research and in keeping with feminist research principles needs to be embedded in the methodological framework. This is further explained later in this chapter.

4.3.5.2 Lifeworlds

A final contribution of feminist research and hermeneutic phenomenology that has relevance for this study is the notion of 'lifeworlds' (Finlay 2012). The study seeks to access the day to day experience of the participants or their 'lifeworlds', described as 'the experiential world every person takes for granted—is produced and experienced by members' (Holstein and Gubrium 1994, p. 263). Exploring 'lifeworlds' typically refers to research that is concerned with understanding the lived experience of people in particular situations, trying to go 'beyond participants' words' (Finlay and Molano-Fisher 2008 cited in Finlay 2012, p. 183). While the aim of this research is to access the day to day professional experience of social workers rather than the life experience of a particular social group, the 'lifeworld' concept is helpful because the intent is to try to access the relationship experience of social workers as much as possible and to understand the meaning of relationship practice to their social work identity and to achieving outcomes with clients.

4.4 Qualitative research

Investigating social life is the basic purpose of qualitative research which is explained as follows:

Qualitative research is the study of human beings in their natural environments as they go about their daily lives. It tries to understand how people live, how they talk and behave, and what captivates and distresses them … More importantly it strives to understand the *meaning* people's words and behaviours have for them' (Emerson, 1983 cited in Tutty et al. 1996, p. 4).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) outline and explain the essential characteristics of qualitative research that distinguish it from quantitative research in a marked range of ways. Qualitative research acknowledges and values the importance of topic context; that people and their actions have to be understood with reference to their

meaning for the people involved; that qualitative research is more concerned with emic (insider), rather than etic (outsider) theory; and that the product of quantitative research is not helpful for understanding the uniqueness of individual situations (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p. 106-7). The logic that underpins qualitative research and applies to this study is inductive reasoning. Inductive reasoning is used when research data is scrutinised for patterns or themes, to induce an explanation or to make sense of the data in some way, for the purpose of theorising about the data (Carey 2012).

As qualitative research is concerned with investigating social phenomena, it is a type of research that seeks to understand inherently subjective material (Crotty 1998). Building knowledge about the 'truth' of a social problem or phenomenon inevitably involves researcher interpretation of their observations of the phenomenon (Sarantakos 2013).

Interpretation of qualitative data is an unavoidable part of qualitative research and is a value-laden exercise. Social phenomena can be interpreted in different ways, leading to the identification of multiple 'truths'. This has led to a body of literature that abounds with discussion about how to build rigour into the research process and attempts to establish criteria for ensuring high-quality research (Fossey et al. 2002; Tracy 2010). An example of this is the eight 'big tent' markers of high-quality qualitative research comprising of 'a worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, making significant contribution, ethics and meaningful coherence' (Tracy 2010, p. 832).

While qualitative research enjoys broad acceptance as a useful means for learning about our social world, contention exists about the criteria that make good

qualitative research studies (Fossey et al. 2002; Sandelowski and Barroso 2002; Tracy 2010).

Feminist researchers (Fossey et al. 2002) take this a step further by explaining that qualitative research seeks to 'authentically represent' participant perspectives in a way that assists in maintaining rigour throughout the research process (Fossey, et al. 2002). Checking for authentic representation can be achieved by using a range of strategies including member checking and triangulation (Gibson and Brown 2009) and asking participants to review a summary of findings:

> Thus, central to the quality of qualitative research is: whether participants' perspectives have been authentically represented in the research process and the interpretations made from the information gathered (authenticity); and whether the findings are coherent in the sense that they 'fit' the data and social context from which they were derived (Fossey et al. 2002, p. 723).

Broadly speaking, 'qualitative research uses a range of methods to collect information, and then seeks to understand or explain this "data" whilst offering cultural and/or political meaning and examining context alongside explanation' (Carey 2012, p. 31).

In any research, the epistemological framework and methodology require the researcher to undertake particular roles and actions. Tutty et al. (1996) identify qualitative researchers as having the following characteristics: they are directly involved with the people being studied; they have an insider's view while maintaining and/or complying with the convention and standards of undertaking qualitative research; they employ techniques and social skills flexibly; they produce data in the form of extensive written notes, detailed descriptions and other visual representations; they tend to see events holistically; they understand and empathise

with the participants/respondents; they notice explicit and tacit aspects of culture; they observe social processes with the intention of not disturbing them; and they have to tolerate uncertainty, ethical dilemmas and ambiguity (Tutty et al. 1996, p. 4) These charactersiatics are consistent with feminist research princoples identified earlier, thereby strengthening the study's metholdogy.

The researcher has had direct collegial contact with some study participants as the researcher works in the same geographical area and professional community as them. The researcher is a social worker with extensive practice experience in the family and children's services area in the same and in different geographical areas. The researcher is currently a university lecturer, and so also has outsider status, explained later in the chapter.

4.5 Methodology

A methodology 'is a research strategy that translates ontological and epistemological principles into guidelines that show how research is to be conducted' (Sarantakos 2013, p. 29). While conformity to rules and conventions is critical, it is also the case that 'in a very real sense, every piece of research is unique and calls for a unique methodology' (Tutty et al. 1996; Crotty 1998, p. 13-4). The specific methodology for this study is outlined.

4.5.1 Exploratory research

Exploratory research is a type of qualitative research used when little is known about a topic (Alston and Bowles 2003). It is useful for 'answer[ing] underexplored or under-researched experience or concepts' (Carey 2012, p. 31), eliciting a wide range of views, thoughts, perceptions and experiences about a particular topic, and it can be a prelude to more detailed research (Neuman 2006, p. 34).

As highlighted in the literature review, much has been written about social work practice and social work practice theory, the skills needed for social work direct practice, and the examination of specific approaches used when working with service users. Far less is known about relationship practice from the perspective of the social workers who are engaged in such work on a daily basis (Gladstone et al. 2012).

The current study explores social workers' experience and understanding about their relationship practice with clients to gain as comprehensive a picture as possible about this form of practice. Using interviews and focus groups is a data collection method that encourages participants to inform the researcher about their views and perceptions of practice and invites them to share examples from their practice to illustrate their views and meanings (Fook 2002, p. 87).

The second focus of the research question is learning about the experience of relationship practice for social workers and their sense of social work identity. Social work identity is a manifestation of professional socialisation gained through the social work education and practice experience. The socialisation process consists of the internal integration of theoretical, factual, practice and self-knowledge (Trevithick 2012) gained through academic study, practice experience, personal and professional growth and reflection (Fook et al. 2000).

Implicit in this exploration is listening to how frontline social workers express or convey their social work identity and expertise, how they understand and explain their practice experiences, and how their practice is shaped by their social work socialisation, identity and expertise. Findings from this research will identify areas

for further exploration and identify implications for practice and social work education.

As noted earlier, the researcher has both insider and outsider status in relation to the research question being investigated. The advantages and pitfalls of this status are now explored in more detail.

4.5.2 Insider researcher

Scientific research methodologies require the researcher to 'stand outside' the research process to ensure an objective stance to the research. By contrast, in qualitative research, the researcher has an active role, for example, conducting interviews with participants (Fossey et al. 2002; Reinharz 1992; van Manen 2006). The researcher may even have 'insider status' (Finlay 2002). As an insider researcher, one can benefit as well as challenge the credibility of the methodology (Ely et al. 1997; Finlay 2002; Hewitt-Taylor 2002; Kahuna, 2000; Padgett 2008; Rooney 2005).

Insider research is defined as 'research conducted by people who are already members of the organisation or community they are seeking to investigate' (Coghlan and Brannick 2007 cited in Humphrey 2012, p. 1.). It has also been embraced by feminist research methodology. Researchers can have degrees of 'insider' status (Humphrey 2007). The degree to which one is inside or outside is determined by researcher 'positionality' (D'Cruz and Jones 2004, p. 133), a term used to make explicit the social and political context of the researcher. Researcher positionality has implications in this study in relation to 'insider' status and taking a reflexive stance, both of which are discussed in this chapter. This has relevance for the current study because the researcher is neither 'completely' an insider researcher,

nor completely an 'outsider' (Hewitt-Taylor 2002; Humphrey 2007). As outlined in Chapter 1, I share some professional and personal experience with the participants. Of potential significance for the interviews and interpretation and analysis of finding is my positionality as a woman, mother and social worker.

An insider researcher may be more sensitive to meaning and richness of the data, however her capacity to 'stand back' and notice exceptions to trends in data or differences may be limited, leading to inaccuracy or misinterpretation (Hewitt-Taylor 2002).

Insider researcher intimacy with the subject has led to criticism that it flouts standards of objectivity (Hewitt-Taylor 2002; Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009) as researcher faithfulness to the data can be jeopardised. However, the premise that a researcher needs to be objective and can be 'objective' remains a contested area in much qualitative research discourse and is further discussed in the section on reflexive research.

Making researcher positionality explicit in the methodology is important for authenticity but also enhances methodological rigour because it allows the reader to judge the trustworthiness of the findings. Kanuha (2000) encapsulates this controversy:

> For each of the ways that being an insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a population that may not be accessible to a non-native scientist, questions about objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity of a research project are raised because perhaps one knows too much or is too close to the project and may be too similar to those being studied (Kanuha 2000, p. 444).

Insider experience lies in having familiarity with the technical knowledge, language and discourse used in this area of social work practice, as well as having knowledge and experience of practice challenges typical of this area. This familiarity can facilitate the interview process, because interviewees may feel more confident that what they are trying to convey will be accurately understood. They may also more readily give non-identifying case examples from their practice experience because they appreciate that I understand issues of confidentiality not only in a research context but also as a practitioner (Padgett 2008; Shaw and Gould 2001).

4.5.3 Action research

'Action research' is informed by emancipatory principles and emerged out of community development research and feminist research (Alston and Bowles 2013). Also termed 'participatory action research' (McTaggart 1997 cited in Alston and Bowles 2003, p.159), action research has been applied in diverse contexts and so has come to be seen 'as more of an orientation towards an inquiry rather than as a methodology in itself (Alston and Bowles 2013, p. 199). As an emancipatory form of inquiry action research sits comfortably with social constructionist epistemology and critical feminist research theory, making it attractive for social work practice research methodology and for this study's inquiry.

Fook (2002) refers to action research as one of the research methods that emerged with postmodernism, because it 'recognises that theories are generated in context, influenced and being influenced by a context of interactions as they are in the process of being developed' (p. 83). Action research typically comprises a focus on action or social change, and involves participants who are fundamental to the issue being researched. (Alston and Bowles 2003) write that:

The action research process is often viewed as a spiral of planning, observation, reflection and action moving into a new planning phase … It is especially important for social workers because of its symbiotic relationship with theory and practice, reflection and action. The researcher must consciously remove themselves from the role of expert and become an involved facilitator, colleague or co-researcher, empowering others to work with them for change (Alston and Bowles 2003, p. 166).

It is a research process that emphasises the role of reflection throughout the process itself, suggesting a circular progression from observing to action to reflection (Alston and Bowles 2013, p. 200) explained by Wadsworth (2011, p. 60). It is described as an iterative process: once data are gained from individual interviews, collated and analysed they are returned to the participants for their further scrutiny and reflection with each other and with the researcher (Grbich 1999).

Action researchers 'are oriented towards researching with people rather than doing research to them' (Alston and Bowles 2013, p. 201). This idea relates to the current study which is encouraging the participation of frontline social workers in the research process. The researcher approached the current topic and research process from the perspective that frontline social workers are experts in this practice knowledge.

The participatory nature of this research does not necessarily mean that the researcher and the participants enjoy equal status in the research process. In this study they have not, because the researcher is employed in academia and is undertaking the research for her own purposes, whereas the participants are practising frontline social workers employed in practice contexts. However, the research has been participatory in that the researcher has defined her role as providing an opportunity for frontline social workers to contribute to the knowledge

base of social work practice and to the vexed nature of 'praxis' in social work. Examining the social worker - client relationship with frontline social workers has enabled access to the knowledge-practice nexus, as it is manifested in the hallmark of social work practice, the client - social worker relationship.

The study was not an action research study in the sense that the researcher and the participants agreed on the focus of the inquiry and the research methodology. However, it was a participatory action research study in that the participants contributed at different points in the research process, engaged in a circular and reflective dialogue with the findings and with each other at different points, and were asked to reflect on their practice as the research project progressed.

4.5.4 Reflexivity in research

'Interpretation' is a key part of human experience in meaning–making and as noted earlier in the chapter, played a key role in the ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods of this qualitative study. The act of interpretation and understanding the role of interpretation in meaning–making has importance at different points in the research process. Making meaning of our experiences is constant and evolving and is the manifestation of the reciprocal influences individuals and others have on each other, including through dialogue (Crotty, 1998; Paterson and Higgs 2005).

The act of interpretation is also, therefore, critical to the researcher role in that they have to maintain a mindfulness of the ways in which meaning is being attributed to phenomena, how this meaning is communicated, and how the researchers themselves can reinforce, just as easily as fail to see, how

interpretations are being made by them or others in the process of doing the research. In qualitative research discourse, there has been increasing recognition that researchers cannot be separated from their research (Crotty 1998; Finlay 2012; Fook 2002; Fossey et al. 2002; Padgett 2008) and so need to remain alert to the social constructions of the various realities and relationships being discussed in the interview process:

> As qualitative researchers engaged in contemporary practice, we accept that the researcher is a central figure who influences, if not actively constructs, the collection, selection and interpretation of data. We recognise that research is co-constituted, a joint product of the participants, researcher and their relationship. We understand that meanings are negotiated within particular social contexts so that another researcher will unfold a different story. We no longer seek to eradicate the researcher's presence – instead subjectivity in research is transformed from a problem to an opportunity. In short, researchers no longer question the need for reflexivity: the question is how to do it (Finlay 2002, p. 212).

In order to militate against some of these interpretive and assumptive 'traps', adopting a reflexive stance when interviewing, collecting data, coding and analysing can maximise the participants' views being conveyed and understood as accurately and as fully as possible. Adopting a reflexive researcher stance encourages an 'interrogation of the practices that construct knowledge' (Daley 2010, p. 69). Defining reflexivity as 'reflection about our interpretive practices' (Reismann 1994a, p. 135; D'Cruz and Jones 2004, p. 32), creates a stance that encourages the researcher to be brave in the quest for clarity.

Reflexivity is defined by Lykes and Coquillon (2007 cited in Gringeri et al. 2010, p. 393.) as 'the process in which researchers and participants use themselves, their critical reflections about themselves, their praxis, and their

positionalities to create knowledge and collective action'. Fook (2002) refers to researcher reflexivity as one of the important issues for undertaking inclusive research because it entails sustaining awareness that one's own perspectives are inextricably involved in the research experience including the accessing of the practice experience through the interviews. Adopting a reflexive stance opens up the interpretive process, even 'influenc[ing] what counts as 'data' (Fook 2002, p. 89).

It urges researchers to approach work as transparently as possible. This includes integrating a commitment to transparency in the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the methodology as critical to being a reflexive researcher (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009). Rising to Finlay's (2002) challenge, the current study endeavoured to take a transparent approach to the research process by employing a number of strategies to maintain a consciousness about the researcher's role and involvement in the research process. The strategies included maintaining a reflective journal, keeping field notes, member checking, asking participants to review a summary of findings and discussion with supervisors.

4.6 Methods

With the ontological and epistemological framework established, the methods for data collection and analysis can be determined and outlined. Conducting interviews with participants is a common means of data collection in qualitative research in a range of disciplinary areas, including sociology and psychology. It is also widely used in social work research and, indeed, has been found to be a data collection technique that works well for interviewing social workers, because it 'mirrors' the interviews social workers conduct in their practice with clients (Shaw and Gould 2001).

The purpose of this study is to explore with social workers their views and experiences of their relationship practice with clients by accessing their practice experience and not pre-empting their responses or the findings. Fook (2002) observes that accessing practitioner experience can be achieved through various methods, including obtaining 'accounts of practice' (p. 87) through interviews. Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews and focus groups. They generated considerable in-depth material that helped to 'elicit their (participants') own descriptions of their practice' (Fook, 2002, p. 87), including practice examples that illustrate the multidimensionality, complexity and subjectivity of practitioner experience of working with client relationships.

4.7 Ethics

All research decision-making involves ensuring the safety and wellbeing of those who are the subject of the research and, secondly, ensuring, as much as possible, that research participants feel that they can choose to be involved or not without experiencing any adverse repercussions. In qualitative research, these ethical considerations usually revolve around ensuring that participants are not disadvantaged in any way by being involved in the research (Sarantakos 2005; Neuman 2007). Such disadvantage can include suffering emotional duress and being coerced into partaking in the research. Ethics decisions for this research project were guided by National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines (NHMRC 2015); these are the Australian guidelines for undertaking ethical research and provide the framework for University Research Ethics Committees decision-making. The National Statement on Ethical Human Research (NHMRC 2015, p. 12) outlines the two themes fundamental to human research: the risks and benefits of research, and participant consent.

4.7.1 Risks and benefits of the research

An inherent risk in research with human beings is the possibility of participants suffering harm as a result of their participation in the research (National Health and Medical Research Council 2015) and the potential severity of that harm.

With regard to this research study, the potential risk of harm to participants is minimised by ensuring that participants are recruited voluntarily, that potential participants are fully informed about the project prior to giving consent and that they are assured that they can withdraw their participation without consequence at any time throughout the research process.

This is undertaken by sending an 'Invitation to Participate in a Research Project' to managers of the agencies which employ qualified social workers working in family and children's services (Appendix 1). Potential participants are also assured in the 'Explanatory Statement' (Appendix 2), that they can withdraw anytime during the research process, even if they have consented to be involved at the beginning.

A second ethical issue concerned reducing the possibility of participant distress or discomfort as a result of their participation. This is undertaken by ensuring that participants are aware from the outset, before they make a decision to consent to the research, that they can contact the project supervisor with any queries or concerns. Participants are also provided with the phone number for the telephone counselling service Lifeline, should they experience any distress or discomfort through their involvement in the research.

A third ethical concern is to protect as much as possible, the identity of the participants. This is achieved by ensuring the interview data are kept in de-identified

form and in a locked cabinet in the office of the project supervisor in accordance with Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MURHEC) policy and guidelines. Before making practical arrangements for the focus group meeting, the researcher sought participant approval to have their identities known to each other. No one asked to be excluded from the focus group discussion on the basis of her identity being revealed.

These arrangements were clearly documented in the application submitted to the MURHEC. The project received initial Ethics approval 1 March 2011, with variation to increase the sample size from 10 to 20 participants approved 5 November 2012.

Following approval from MURHEC, participants were recruited from non-government and government agencies in the ACT and NSW.

4.8 Recruitment strategy

The sampling strategy and data gathering methods used in this study are consistent with sampling strategies used for exploratory qualitative research (Alston and Bowles 2013; Fernandez 2014; Grbich 2007; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007a; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Reinharz 1992).

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants for the study. Purposive sampling is suggested for exploratory qualitative research where the researcher selects participants with relevant knowledge and expertise in the research topic (Sarantakos 2013). This strategy was appropriate to the current research study because the aim was to recruit and interview frontline social workers about their practice.

For the current study, exploring the relationship practice of social workers, it was decided to confine the sample to social workers employed in the family and children's service area in the NSW and ACT. This contained the sample but did not unduly restrict the range of useful data that could be gathered. However, this did reduce the diversity in the sample population.

In order to recruit frontline social workers an 'Invitation to Participate in a Research project' was sent to managers of government and non-government agencies in NSW and the ACT, asking for their permission to recruit qualified social workers who were employees of their organisations and involved in frontline practice. It was stressed that consent to be involved in the study was voluntary. Sending the invitation to a third party removed recruitment of participants from the researcher. The Explanatory Statement and Consent forms were sent with the 'Invitation to Participate in a Research Project' and were authorised by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 6).

This recruitment strategy resulted in the initial recruitment of 10 social workers and a subsequent six social worker participants increased the number to 16.

4.8.1 Sample

The sample consists of 16 qualified social workers with current or recent experience of working at the frontline of service delivery with clients of family and children's services.

Ten social workers from non-government services and six from government services participated. The ten participants employed in non-government child and family services represent a range of programs in four different agencies. Of the six participants employed in government family and children's services, four were

employed in statutory child protection services. At the time of interview, 13 participants had more than two years of experience in frontline social work.

'Statutory' and 'voluntary' contexts place different demands on practitioners in terms of the approaches they can take in engaging and working with clients (Trotter, 2006). While some organisations are classified as voluntary, it is often the case that clients of these services are also statutory clients of child protection authorities. While, technically, these clients are regarded as voluntary by the non-government agency, the contractual arrangements and reporting requirements that exist between the child protection authority and the non-government agency tend to mean that, in many cases, the client may not see their involvement as voluntary.

While the study did not preclude men, all participants who responded to the invitation to participate were women. This reflected the demographic profile of social work as predominantly a female profession (Healy and Lonne 2010, p. 45). Only one participant identified as being from a particular cultural group. The estimated average age of the participants was 39 years.

Even though all participants were working in frontline child welfare, who their 'client' was depended on the purpose and mandate of the agency with which they were employed. Social work practice in family and child welfare can involve working with statutory clients as well as non-statutory clients, as outlined in Chapter 3. All participants in this sample worked with both statutory clients and non-statutory clients. In the statutory child protection agency, children are regarded as the client, although the social workers are likely to be primarily engaged with the children's biological parents, or the carers of those children if the children are residing in out-of-home care. The social workers employed in the non-statutory government and

non-government services also viewed the child as the client but were engaged primarily with the parents and carers of those children.

On a day to day practice level, the children, parents or carers may be the client. For the purposes of this study, the participants in the main reflected on their work with adult clients, who could be biological parents or carers. Some data related to their direct engagement and work with children and this is specifically noted in the findings.

4.8.2 Data collection

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with individual participants using a semi-structured interview schedule. Semi-structured is a term used to denote a midway point between structured and unstructured interviewing. To provide a simple structure to guide interviews, the interview schedule consisted of 13 general open-ended questions that reflected five topic areas. These topic areas were: introduction to the topic, how the participants explain and describe relationship practice, the importance of relationship practice to achieving client outcomes, the importance of relationship practice to the employing agency and the importance of relationship practice to social work identity.

The interviews took place at a venue chosen by the participant and were between 50 minutes and an hour and a half in length. Each participant was asked for her comments about the interview process at the conclusion of the interview. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The original 10 interviews were transcribed first, and a further six were transcribed when the sample size was increased.

As an exploratory study, the research questions were necessarily open ended, providing maximum opportunity for participants to say anything they wished that they thought related to the topic. At times, the interview developed more as a conversation, as participants expanded on their views or provided more detail or case examples to illustrate a point.

The first focus group was held in February 2012 and the researcher's supervisor also attended. Of the 10 people invited, four were able to attend on the day. Four participants were on leave at the time, one did not respond to the request, and one declined (although she expressed interest in commenting on the summary of findings on an individual basis).

4.9 Study limitations

A limitation of small qualitative studies is that their findings cannot be generalised beyond the participant group, so 'at best our outcomes will be suggestive rather than conclusive' (Crotty 1998, p. 13). At the same time, Fook (2002) argues that, while the findings of small studies cannot be generalised to larger populations, the knowledge generated from practice-based studies is transferrable to other contexts. Small-scale studies that seek 'rich description' and communication of meaning of experience can provide a depth of understanding not possible in large studies and, in providing the depth, illuminate aspects of human activity that are common to other contexts beyond the scope of any particular study.

An integral perspective on social worker - client relationship practice that is missing in this study is the client perspective. Seeking service user perspectives is critical to building our knowledge about what is important in both the process and purpose of social worker - client relationships and has been explored (Beresford et

al. 2008; Gladstone et al. 2012; Harries 2008; Healy and Darlington 2009; Reimer 2010). Service user involvement in research is an area that has gained prominence with the increased visibility and activity of the consumer movement. Seeking service user perspectives is consistent with social work's values of encouraging social change and social justice.

Conducting research and interviewing clients about their experience with social workers in the child and family area, including in statutory services, is complicated for various reasons including, for example, that clients may not want to reveal difficulties they have had, for fear of reprisal and perceived threat to contact they have with children (Buckley et al. 2011).

Furthermore, accessing client perspectives presents ethical and practical challenges. First, clients of family and children's services are typically experiencing a vulnerable time in their lives as they contend with many factors, not least of which is the invasion of public authorities in their private lives. This raises the ethics of having another body involved for research purposes. For these reasons a client perspective was not sought for this study.

4.10 Approach to data analysis

This section outlines the data analysis process used in this study. As stated earlier, credibility of the research process and trustworthiness of the data and findings rest on clear and appropriate methodology and analysis (Fossey et al., 2002). Data analysis in qualitative research can be undertaken in a variety of ways, depending on the topic and the epistemological framework of the study, although it essentially involves the use of three tools: the description of data; where themes, and relationships between themes, are identified; and, finally, the interpretation of

data to make sense of the data and produce insights in response to the research question (Gibson and Brown 2009, p. 4-5).

Thematic analysis is employed in this study: this is 'the process of analysing data according to commonalities, relationships and differences across a data set', and 'searching for aggregated themes within data' through inductive reasoning (Fook 2002; Gibson and Brown 2009, p. 127). Thematic analysis is an iterative process where coding, interpretation and analysis of the data proceeds in a step by step fashion to enable identification of patterns and themes in the data (Grbich 2007).

4.10.1 Method of analysis

The method used in this study is fundamentally aligned with thematic analysis principles as described above. To ensure that the experience of relationship practice is reported as accurately and authentically as possible, the data analysis process consists of two layers. The first layer uses conventional thematic analysis. The second layer of analysis uses a phenomenological data analysis framework.

The first phase of conventional thematic analysis entails identifying meaning units, referred to as open coding or first level coding (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007a; Padgett 2008; Richards 2009; Sarantakos 2013; Tutty et al. 1996). Meaning units are described as data segments which come to notice because of their relevance to the research question, and their similarities to, and differences from, codes or meaning units across different interviews (Tutty et al. 1996, p. 100).

This analysis is undertaken manually because it allows a 'hands-on' approach to gaining familiarity with the data. Each interview transcription is scrutinised to identify codes relating to the research question. For example, is the relationship with

clients considered important for their practice? How is it important? How do social

workers say that they undertake relationship practice? Interviews were then read

through again to identify text in all interviews that relate to the open codes. These

codes are assigned numbers that referred to the particular transcripts. Table 4.1

shows an excerpt from the table used to identify open codes.

Table 4.1: Excerpt from table identifying open codes

Code	Number to identify location of code in interview transcripts
Challenging work	79,80,262,263,264
Being persistent and persevering	79,81,143,173
Motivation is the client's children	81,190
Balance in workload	83,240,241,242
Relationship building with involuntary clients	85
Holistic approach	86,149,172,288,293
Impact of clients on workers, worker fallibility, humans too	87
Social justice language	91,153,163,197,198
Client centred	92,105
Value to client of having older worker	94

Each of these codes is then copied and pasted onto sheets of cardboard

(Figure 4.1) so that all codes relating to one topic can be examined together.

Figure 4.1: Codes pasted on cardboard for analysis

Viewing the codes in this way is helpful for then moving to second level coding (Gibson and Brown 2009), which is seen as more abstract and leading to identification of themes.

The open codes are scrutinised for how they address the research question about how participants perceive the significance of social worker – client relationship practice. These codes are then sorted and compiled into categories that lead to identification of codes that reflect different aspects of social worker –client relationship practice. This process results in categories such as these: what is relationship practice, the significance of relationship practice, things that help social workers do relationship practice, things that hinder social workers in their relationship practice and external factors that affect relationship practice. This process is repeated for the data that relate to each of the interview questions. Each transcription is initially examined identifying meaning units that related to: 1) the importance of relationship practice to social worker participants; and 2) how they described 'relationship practice'.

Coding, interpretation and analysis are steps of an iterative process which demands that the researcher questions the relevance of data to the research question and to checks that comments by participants that seem relevant and significant are not taken out of context. Peer cross checking with student researcher peers and journaling assisted with this endeavour.

Second level coding is the grouping of codes into meaningful categories that related to the research question. This process resulted in the generation of a number of broader categories, including, for example, 'what helps to do relationship practice', and the 'challenges of doing relationship practice'. While this analysis process revealed participant responses to the research question, it nevertheless disaggregated the data about the essence of relationship practice. Using only conventional thematic analysis of the current data set seemed to fall short of comprehensively capturing participant understanding and experience of relationship practice.

In view of this outcome, the first analysis is augmented with a second layer of analysis to illuminate the essence of relationship practice as viewed by the participants. This decision was made because the study aimed, firstly, to explore social worker - client relationship practice as a holistic phenomenon; and secondly, to as accurately and authentically as possible capture relationship practice as experienced by frontline social workers. A hermeneutic phenomenological perspective highlights the entwined nature of experience, and interpretation of experience. As this was an important aspect of the study, a phenomenological framework of analysis devised by Collaizzi (1978) was used as well.

Phenomenological data analysis privileges 'direct descriptions of the experience, rather than accounts about the experience' (van Manen 2014, p. 299). It says that 'experience' is 'objectively real to the self and others' and 'is existentially significant' (Collaizzi 1978. p. 52). This mode of analysis adopts a 'holistic reading approach' to the text (van Manen 2014, p. 320). In reading the text, the researcher is guided by the question 'What statement or phrase(s) seems particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?'

As stated earlier, analysing human experience from a hermeneutic perspective gives prominence to the 'lived' experience of the participants and where the emphasis of the researcher is on recording the subject's interpretation of their experience (Paterson and Higgs 2005, p. 342). As the study foregrounded participant experience of relationship practice, employing a hermeneutic phenomenological mode of analysis was desirable.

While a hermeneutic method still involves identifying items from the transcripts, a hermeneutic approach veers away from coding as such. To illustrate how this method is appropriate for the current study, it is informative to consider research undertaken by Paterson and Higgs in 2005. Their research explored the 'cognitive, meta-cognitive and humanistic aspects of artistry in professional practice decision-making' of occupational therapists (Paterson and Higgs 2005, p. 341). The researchers used an interpretive paradigm that allowed 'a focus on uncovering contextualised, professional craft knowledge, personal experiential knowledge, and understandings about the phenomenon judgement artistry in occupational therapy practice (ibid. p. 342). Paterson and Higgs (2005) developed a framework of hermeneutic analysis informed by constructs including 'the hermeneutic circle of interpretation', Gadamer's concept of 'fusion of horizons' and Koch's notion that

knowledge is constructed through dialogue (Koch, 1999 cited in Paterson et al. 2006). Their framework was designed to keep the phenomenon intact, by identifying and seeing the part of the whole but always in relation to the whole. They called the framework 'a hermeneutic spiral' which allowed them to maintain a focus on the whole of the construct of professional practice judgement artistry (PPJA) while also identifying and holding its parts in mind. Their task as they describe it was to 'bridge and interpret the gap in knowledge of PPJA as well as the gap between the familiar and the unfamiliar' (p. 346).

The relevance of this analysis framework to the current study is essentially twofold: the current study is also concerned with a construct of professional practice that involves knowledge and what could be called 'professional artistry'; and, secondly, the study involves recognition that the phenomenon of relationship practice is both familiar, that is, that it is dynamic and involves cognitive emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual dimensions, but is also unfamiliar, in that each situation is different from the last. While the theoretical and philosophical dimensions of this framework are helpful for the current study, the framework itself was more intricate than was needed.

A simpler framework, used to explore clinical practice education in nursing (Beattie 2001) effectively illuminated how accessing the experience of practice teaching in nursing provided valuable insights about the nature and quality of practice teaching that ultimately generated useful lessons for nursing practice education. This framework was devised by Collaizzi (1978) for phenomenological analysis in psychology research and was adopted for this study.

207

The Collaizzi framework comprises six main steps, called protocols: reading all protocols; extracting significant statements from the protocols; formulating the meaning for each significant statement; identifying clusters of themes, and noting discrepancies and points of difference referred to as final validation and writing an Exhaustive Statement (Collaizzi 1978, pp. 59-61). These steps are explained in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: The steps of hermeneutic data analysis framework (Collaizzi 1978)

Step	Task	Example
1. Protocol	Read protocols; read and listen to transcripts to 'get a feeling for them'	Reading each transcript and listening to voice recordings of interviews
2. Significant Statement	Return to each protocol and 'extract significant statements that directly pertain to the investigated phenomena' (p. 59). The significant statements from all protocols are compiled into one document.	Relationship practice is very important to the work we do. Working with young people to bring about change cannot be done unless they trust you, or are willing to take the risk to trust you.
3. Formulating meaning	Spelling out the meaning of each significant statement. This step involves the leap from what the subject is saying to what they mean. It is a precarious step because while there is a leap, connection to	That relationship practice with clients is critical to achieving outcomes with clients

	the original protocol needs to be maintained, that is, 'allowing the data to speak for itself'	
4. Aggregate	Aggregate significant statements into clusters of themes	Relationship practice is the work I enjoy the most
5. Validating themes	Refer clusters back to original data to validate, noting discrepancies between clusters, if not validated then re-examination of previous steps is required.	Relationship practice can be tiring and overwhelming
6 'Exhaustive statement'.	An effort is made to 'formulate the exhaustive description of the investigated phenomenon in as unequivocal a statement of identification of its fundamental structure as possible'. (p. 61).	
7. Return themes to participants	Return themes to participants for their reflection and discussion	

Using this process enabled scrutiny of the Significant Statements and themes

(the parts of the phenomenon) while also staying with relationship practice as a

holistic phenomenon (the whole). While this resonates with the hermeneutic circle (Paterson and Higgs 2005) using this process enhanced the rigour of the analysis and the trustworthiness of the data.

Finally, a summary of early findings was presented to participants through two different focus groups: one in the ACT and one in NSW. Participants were asked to provide comment as to the accuracy of the summary in relation to their own contributions in the earlier interviews and were also given opportunity to comment individually on the early findings. Focus group discussions were recorded and considered with each of the participant groups at a later date to invite their responses to preliminary findings.

4.11 Summary and conclusions

This chapter has outlined the methodology used for the research which is based on social constructionist epistemology and interpretivist ontology. This exploratory qualitative study, aimed at gaining access to social worker understanding and experience of relationship practice with clients, drew on relevant concepts from qualitative, feminist and phenomenological research theory to ensure the credibility, rigour and trustworthiness of the study's findings.

Feminist research aims to understand women's concrete experience of daily life, of understanding the 'lived experience' and has sought understanding about how power is exercised through language. Feminist research has also examined child protection and social work practice for themes about women social workers working with women clients, motherhood, family relationships and caring. As the daily life of families is the focus of practice in child and family welfare and social work practice with children and families usually involves working with parents, often

mothers, about social, emotional and practical issues related to the care of children and family relationships, a feminist research theory contributed to this study's methodology.

Both feminist and phenomenological research theory reiterate the importance of researcher reflexivity for enhancing transparency about researcher decision-making and interpretation.

A hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis framework was used to augment thematic analysis to enable the understandings about social worker - client relationship as a holistic phenomenon to be revealed.

The research included participants in a process informed by principles of action research that provided them with opportunities to revisit topics and themes throughout the process. An iterative process also enhanced the exploratory nature of the study as interpretations and themes evolved.

The methods used for data collection, interpretation and analysis of data were also outlined, as was the ethics approval process. The next chapter reports on the findings of the research.

Chapter 5. The study's findings: the centrality of the relationship process in social worker - client practice

5.1 Introduction

Chapters 5 and 6 present the study findings that contribute to answering the research question: *How do frontline social workers conceptualise their social worker - client relationship practice?* A key question asked of participants was how significant they thought social worker - client relationship practice was in social work. The study found that the social workers attached significance to social worker - client relationship practice and that this reflected a strong affiliation with professional social work's humanistic values.

To elicit detail from the study participants about the perceived significance of social worker - client relationship practice, they were asked a three-part subsidiary question: How significant do you think building relationships is for: a) achieving client outcomes; b) your employing agency; and c) your own sense of social work identity? Subsequent sections of this chapter report the findings about each of these parts.

A major component of the discussions with participants about the significance of social worker - client relationship practice centred on the practice itself: how they undertake their relationship practice with clients, how they determine their responses to, and actions about, client situations and how they address the challenges associated with engaging with clients through the medium of relationship. Participants drew on their experience of doing social worker - client relationship practice to illustrate that social worker - client relationship practice is significant for achieving client outcomes and social work purpose more generally.

These findings are reported in Chapter 6 and build on the findings considered in this chapter.

In this chapter and in Chapter 6, participant quotes are included to illustrate findings and to reflect the thoughts, perceptions and reflections of the participant's own experience of social worker - client relationship practice. Each social worker - client relationship is an individualised practice experience and so on a few occasions brief practice accounts provided by participants are also included to demonstrate particular findings. This presentation method is consistent with the overall aim of the study to make social worker - client relationship practice more visible.

It is revealed that social workers rely heavily on their own inner processing of the cognitive, emotional and physical inputs they receive from the client and the wider environment for their day to day work, and that this work is done through the relationship between themselves and the client. In essence, the findings indicate that, with each client relationship, the social worker carries the intricacies of that relationship on their own, hence the reliance on their own knowledge, skills and inner resources. Social worker - client relationship practice is a practice method that requires understanding of the process nature of human relationships and insofar as relationship processes can be particularly unpredictable in child and family welfare practice, requires social worker capacity to draw upon their personal resources. As depicted in Figure 5.1, social worker - client relationship practice is a practice method that is embodied within the social worker.
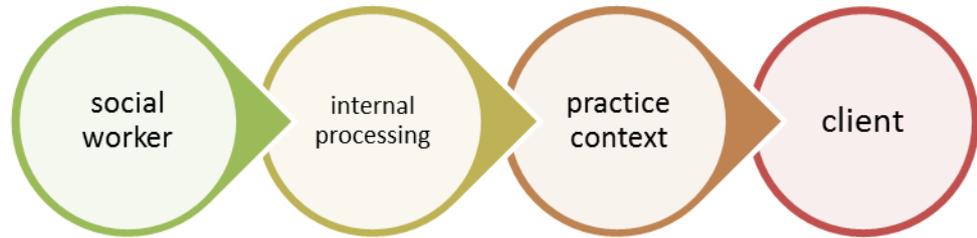
Figure 5.1: The link between social worker and client

To contextualise participant responses and the findings in this and the next chapter it is worth reiterating that at the time of data collection, the sample consisted of 16 women social workers who were, on average, 39 years of age. Participants indicated that they had between two and more than 20 years' frontline practice experience in child and family welfare and were employed in statutory child protection services, non-statutory government family support, and in the non-government sector, family support youth services and foster care. Thus, participant responses to the research questions reflect considerable social worker - client relationship practice experience. Elements of their practice experience particularly relevant to the research question include participant use of relationship practice with an extensive range of clients experiencing complex issues in their lives, experience of working across a wide range of organisational contexts and experience gained from occupying a range of practitioner roles. The distribution of practice contexts across the sample is presented in Figure 5.2. Six of the 16 participants were employed in non - government organised foster care, four were employed in statutory child protection and four in non-government family support and youth

services. Only two of the participants were employed in government family support services.
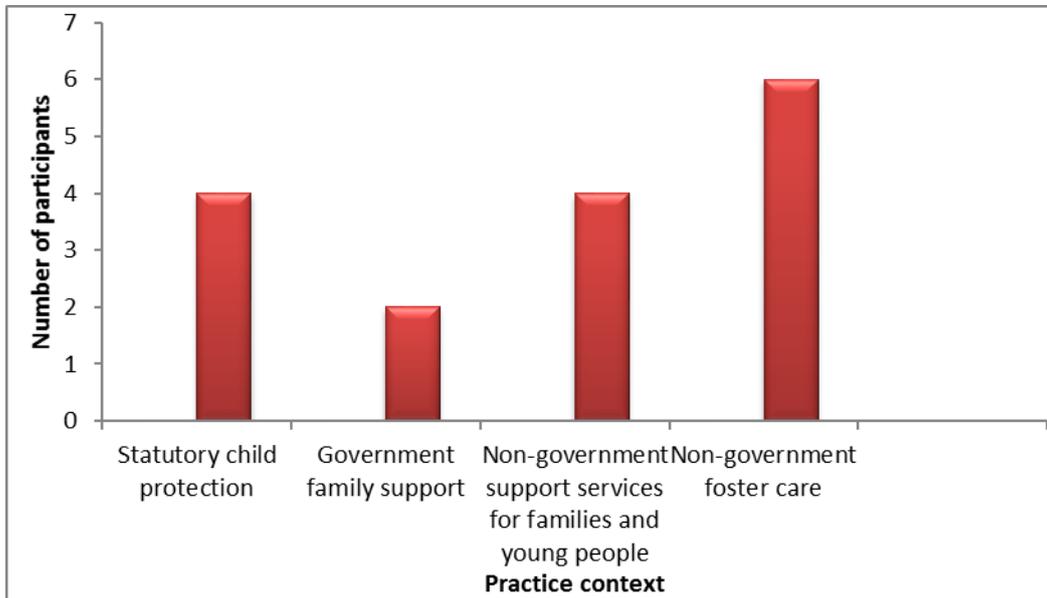
Figure 5.2: Distribution of sample participants by practice context

The stated purpose of the social worker's role with clients varies between each of these practice contexts that, in turn, influence the relationship that social workers develop with their clients. Even so, despite the variation in practice contexts, the findings in this chapter and Chapter 6 indicate that social workers from all practice contexts share a largely common approach to social worker - client relationship practice.

5.2 The significance of social worker - client relationship practice

This section of the chapter reports participant responses to the key research question: *How do frontline social workers conceptualise their social worker - client relationship practice?*

Participants were unanimous in their view that social worker - client relationship practice is significant for their work. The adjectives they used to describe the degree of significance ranged from 'it's absolutely vital' and 'critical' to 'very important', 'highly significant', and 'without the relationship you've got nothing'. This response is consistent with the literature, discussed in Chapter 2, that building safe, respectful and purposeful relationships with clients is pivotal to achieving change and is also what clients in human services contexts seek from their interaction with social workers and other professionals in these frontline roles.

The first part of this three-part question: 'How significant do you think building relationships is for a) achieving client outcomes?' is now considered.

5.2.1 The significance of social worker - client relationship practice for achieving client outcomes

Responses to the question about how social worker - client relationship practice is significant for achieving client outcomes consumed much of each interview. This is not surprising, given the focus of the research question and that, presumably, participants joined the study because they were interested in the part that relationship with clients play in social worker - client relationship practice.

The data analysis revealed five distinct ways in which social worker - client relationship practice is seen as significant for achieving client outcomes. These five ways are referred to as sequels because they may not be an explicit goal of the intervention but nevertheless arise out of the work of building a relationship. The sequels can occur simultaneously and do not necessarily have a causal relationship with each other. They are also seen by social workers as important because they can be an outcome of an intervention that has a lasting effect for the client beyond

the life of the relationship. The five sequels are termed: Enabling a Client to Build an Interpersonal Connection With Another Person; Enabling a Client to Have the Experience of a Meaningful Relationship With Another Person; Generating Hope and Purpose With The Client About their Life; Helping a Client to Trust In 'The System'; and Encouraging a Client to Take a Risk For The Benefit of their Own Personal Growth. These sequels are presented in Figure 5.3. The arrows in Figure 5.3 represent the interconnection between sequels. Each sequel is not necessarily independent of the others and in practice, the different sequels may well converge in any one social worker - client relationship.
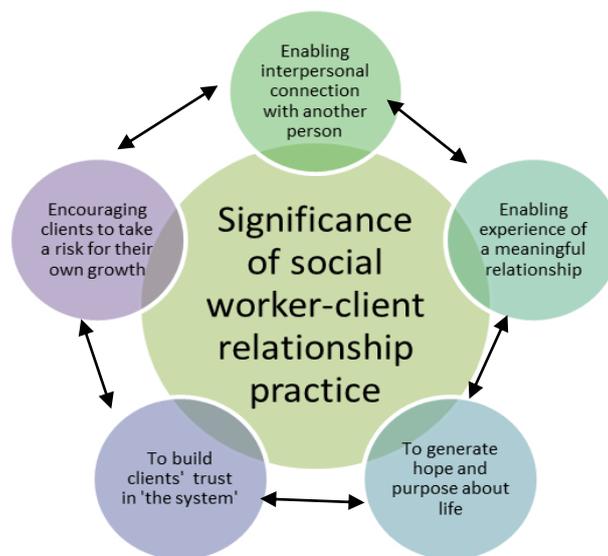
Figure 5.3: The five sequels of social worker - client relationship practice significant for achieving client outcomes

Each of these identified sequels of significance of the social worker - client relationship is now examined, commencing with Enabling Interpersonal Connection with Another Person as shown in Figure 5.4.

217

Figure 5.4: The sequel of Enabling Interpersonal Connection with Another Person

A sequel that clearly underpins the significance of social worker - client relationship practice is the importance of enabling interpersonal connections with another person. Social worker - client relationship practice can enable an individual to have a safe and worthwhile interpersonal connection with another individual. All participants spoke about the social isolation that many of their clients endure and said that many do not have affirming connections with any other people.

The social workers observed that clients tell them that the relationship they have with the social worker is the only constructive relationship they have in their lives. Social worker, Julie, explained that one mother had said that she was the only person with whom she had any interpersonal connection, prompting her observation that:

> The relationships clients build with their caseworkers can be some of the strongest relationships they've got in their lives and some of the most consistent.

Another participant, Helen, commented:

> I can see the benefits that it (the working relationship) can have for children, I see a lot of people who don't have positive relationships in the community, or their families, and sometimes I'm that one positive relationship they can have, I think that also applies to the children.

The importance of relationship practice for the child in care, was emphasised by Louise, reiterating that the relationship the child has with the social worker might be the only one in which the child feels that they trust enough to open up about whatever is bothering them. The importance of the relationship for children was noted by Kathy:

> Children in care often do have a lot of placements and in these cases, we try and keep a consistent caseworker so the relationship between them can become very strong; where the caseworker is really the one person in the child's life that they do trust and can know that they are doing their best to try and sort things out for them, at school, with their teachers or with their foster family or foster siblings. A strong relationship is also important so they feel they can make any disclosures and report any issues that are happening to them.

Social workers repeatedly stated that a client has to feel that the social worker is interested in them as a human being and is genuinely concerned for their wellbeing. Social workers explained that, while initial engagement is important for the social work task, and therefore important to the social worker, from the client's perspective it is also important, but for a different reason. The social workers said that in their experience, the client has to be convinced that it is worth their while to become involved with the social worker. Where the client feels their engagement with the social worker is sincere is regarded as critical for getting work done. These observations applied whether the client was a child or a biological parent and was

also seen as applicable to social worker – carer relationships. Carers also look for sincerity in their engagement with the social worker. As Hannah said:

> Being available to them is one of the main keys to building a relationship because they have this child in care, and no matter how much training they've done, they realise at some point the magnitude of their responsibility to the child who is also usually a traumatised child. I have to be available for ten phone calls a day, if needed to go out to visit them, to help out, and explain things to them; just need to have a close relationship so they feel supported to gain confidence, I think that's been the main key to it all.

While sincere interpersonal connection is required for building relationships with children, biological parents and carers, and for achieving outcomes, one participant explained that each situation is unique and so the approach taken with each can have its own emphasis. Each approach varies in the knowledge and skills required on the part of the social worker. Hannah explained that:

> Relationship building requires a different set of skills with each party involved. With the carer, it's a tricky thing, you've got to help them walk the legislative road and ensure they stick to that, while at the same time empowering them to be a solid parent for this child; acknowledge that they are doing an important role and not just being a baby sitter for the government, though they can feel they are treated like that. It's also important for building their relationship with the child protection worker, making them feel important, always deferring to them and then with the birth parent when decisions are being made. Being empathic and building a sense of partnership, i.e. let's work together. The relationship work is different again with a child, as it is important to make them feel their voice is heard and this is vastly different from relationships developed with other parties.

Establishing interpersonal connection is seen as a key foundation for the development of a purposeful working relationship. While interpersonal connection was identified as an end in itself, participants distinguished between this level of

220

connection with another person and situations where a meaningful relationship becomes possible, where the latter is an extension of the former. This is seen as an important corollary with social worker - client relationship practice, shown in Figure 5.5 as the sequel of Enabling Experience of a Meaningful Relationship.

Figure 5.5: The sequel of Enabling Experience of a Meaningful Relationship

An underlying premise of social worker - client relationship practice is that being able to trust in other people and form relationships with others is essential for life. Social workers in the study explained that most of the clients with whom they work do not easily trust other people. They maintained that this is an outcome of clients' own experience of having been abused and suffering the associated betrayal and abandonment in their relationships, often experienced over a long period of time, and often in their childhood relationships with primary caregivers. The long-term outcome of having weathered such troubled relationship histories is viewed as impeding an individual's tolerance for proximity with others, making them fearful of engaging with other people and potentially undermining their capacity for learning

221

how to manage safe and beneficial relationships. The significance of the work involved in creating a safe relationship space is articulated here by Louise:

> It's really important to be open and honest with people, that's *really* important in that rapport building, to be upfront, to allay people's fears … here is a huge group of people that just live with dread and fear (about relationships), so for me openness and honesty about what you're doing and why you're doing it and how you're doing it and what you will do if something goes (wrong) is really important.

Social worker - client relationships are often fragile, and even volatile. In many situations, client engagement can stop abruptly, only to re-engage at a later point. Engagement with clients can also end abruptly, resulting in all hope fading for the client, for the social worker or both people that goals and expectations can be attained. Participants agreed that clients need to perceive that the relationship will have some benefit to them, and this is an important element to the relationship being seen as meaningful. They need to see that the social worker is trustworthy.

Gaining understanding of the client's view of the way that they see their world includes, for the worker, being ready and open to the prospect that deep emotional pain will be expressed, as this account from Julie describes:

> I will always take time to listen, to be honest, acknowledge and believe their views about their distress: sometimes I think that it doesn't matter where we work as social workers, the important work is about being a witness to people's pain and trauma and to their innermost being, and that however much they share, they can see a benefit in having a relationship with me, and to trust that I will do the best that I can with the information they give me and my interventions with them.

This perspective of relationship practice is echoed where relationships are developed with young people. Sharon confirmed that many young people are wary at the beginning about getting help or going to a service.

The participants noted that the client has to develop some belief that the social worker accurately understands their circumstances or concerns. The complexity associated with inviting client engagement and how it could be a consequence of previous relationship experience was noted by Michelle:

> She (the client) is in a way blocking any relationship building and I would imagine she probably does that with most people. Some (people) fear that if 'I put my trust in you are you going to let me down like everyone else?' so I (as the worker) try to focus on something that is important to the client without (specifically first) trying to focus on building that relationship and that rapport.

Supporting clients to take the step to commit to the relationship with the social worker on the basis that it is potentially meaningful to them is achieved through a series of interactions that can occur through home visits, office interviews, telephone calls and email communication. Social workers in the study conveyed the view that engagement work is a continuous but highly significant component of social worker - client relationship practice.

Encouraging clients to take the step to become involved with a social worker is a key step towards establishing a relationship, a point reinforced by many participants including Louise:

> In a relationship we are holding the person in a safe space, it allows you to have the capacity to be open and honest with them, to be upfront with them and allay their fears.

For the social workers in this study, facilitating a positive and meaningful relationship experience for the client was seen as having critical social work practice significance, as clients may feel encouraged to subsequently engage with other people on the basis of having had experienced a constructive relationship experience. Much social worker - client relationship practice was therefore focused on creating a relationship space in which the client is willing to engage. The social worker also has to tailor their creation of the relationship space in a way that, at least in the initial stages, matches the client's individual level of tolerance for interpersonal engagement and relationship. The practical implication of social workers emphasising the importance of supporting the client to engage with them, that is, of relationship practice, is their knowing how to do the work entailed and is explored in more depth in Chapter 6.

Where a client responds to the offer of engagement, and where the resulting relationship yields outcomes perceived by the client as beneficial, social workers stated that, an important social work outcome has been achieved. On the basis of this purposeful and safe relationship experience, the social workers maintained that clients are more likely to feel encouraged to take the emotional risk associated with investing in a relationship in the future and are also better able to identify safe relationships over unsafe ones. So far, the first two sequels, which relate to the benefits that can derive from having interpersonal connection with another human being and the significance of having experience of a safe and constructive relationship, have been considered. The third sequel of the finding that social worker - client relationship practice is significant for achieving client outcomes relates to the hope and purpose that can be generated in the client about their life purpose and/or

reason for living, as seen in Figure 5.6, the sequel of Generating Hope and Purpose About Their Life.
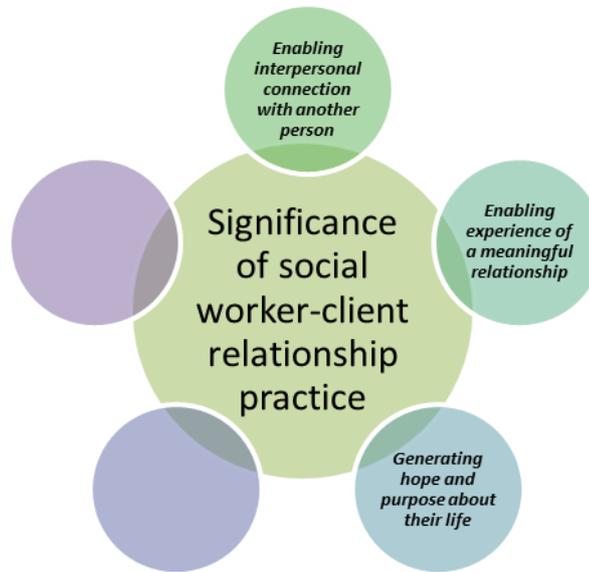
Figure 5.6: The sequel of Generating Hope and Purpose About Their Life

An important function of social worker - client relationship practice identified by participants is the potential it has for inspiring clients to feel hopeful and to commit to their own lives and futures. This sequel emerged as participants spoke about the difficulties that they find clients have in maintaining relationships with people in their lives. Engaging with clients requires persistent effort on the social worker's part, and that maintaining a focus on their child, bringing their children into the conversation all the time, can really help to inspire a parent that it is worth their effort to become engaged. Social workers identified strategies they had found useful for inspiring a parent to action. For example, Julie said that getting on the floor to play with the client's children encourages the parent to have an enjoyable moment with their children. Even for a short time, this feeling of enjoyment can alleviate despondency, inspire hope and lead to even a small change in the focus of the social worker -

client interaction. In the process, the parent is able to move beyond being preoccupied by their own troubles. Cara explained:

> Keeping the child as the focus all the time, what's it like for this child in that environment, trying to really keep that focus at the centre of the work, and seeing them regularly, being flexible about where you see them and how often within reason, and really including them in things that could help them make changes, so you might have a case conference, with a couple of agencies which are involved already, the adults are part of that decision-making around the difficulties that they can see how agencies can work with them, to help them make changes, what they're comfortable with, supporting them to understand the seriousness of the work to be done.

The social workers believed that social worker - client relationship practice can alleviate some of the effects of stress that clients experience at the time of the intervention. Social workers spoke about the effect on clients of being a statutory client where they are legally bound to comply with Court Orders. Complying with specific conditions of Court Orders, such as adhering to medical appointments, urinalysis schedules and/or scheduled contact visits, places important but additional expectations that many clients find difficult to consistently maintain. These stressors are carried by families while they are adjusting to the consequences of legal intervention, such as grieving over the loss of the care of their child, living with the threat of losing the care of their child and adjusting to being subject to the professional gaze. These experiences add an overlay to the engagement task in social worker - client relationship practice. Building a relationship with a client that expresses sincere interest in the client and their situation can generate hope, as described here by Sharon:

> The relationship is very, very important. For us to work with the family and be able to get to the underlying issues you have to build that relationship

to achieve better outcomes for them. But you have to build a relationship first before the clients (are) able to trust, work with you, and for them to be able to want to feel hopeful as well, like potential for change as well.

Social work relationships with carers were also identified as important for generating hope for carers as they responded to the challenges associated with caring for the children they had living with them. Hannah emphasised that the relationship the social worker has with the carers can help with assessing and addressing the challenging behaviours of the child, and build a sense of teamwork, and therefore safety net around the child. She gave one example where, following the carers' difficult personal experience of reconciling the grief from not being able to have their own children, had applied and were approved to become carers. The expectations that they had about what it was going to be like caring for a child living with them turned out to be very different for them in reality. The relationship with the worker became a place of generating hope where together, the worker and the carer could effectively manage the child and which helped to establish the care's parental authority with her/him.

Enabling experience of a meaningful relationship, enabling an interpersonal connection with another person and generating a sense of hope for themselves and in the future are the sequels of social worker - client relationship practice so far reported. The next, fourth, sequel of social worker - client relationship practice that occurs with or arises from the previous three is that the social worker - client relationship can encourage the client's trust in them as a benevolent authoritative person. The role of building trust in social worker - client relationships was much discussed by participants, called Building the Client's Trust in 'The System' now added to the depiction in Figure 5.7.
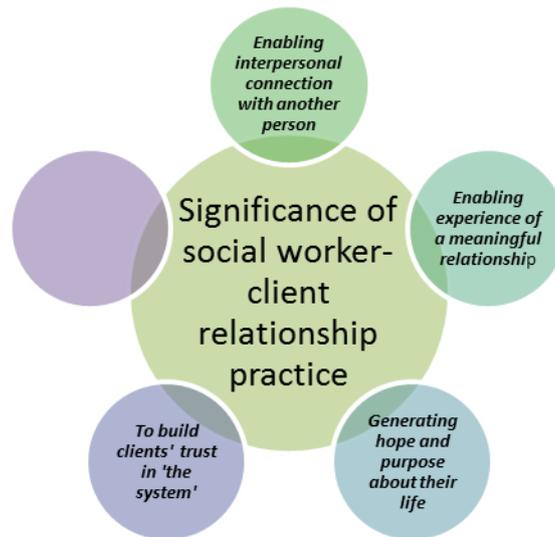
Figure 5.7: The sequel of Building Clients' Trust in 'The System'

Many participants spoke about the lack of trust that many of their clients have in 'the system'. They explained that 'the system' is a term used by clients to collectively denote all the professionals and the legal, child protection, family support and health services they represent. It is a term that appears to reflect a reification by clients that professional practitioners and their respective services are one aggregated entity. Participants saw that it was part of their role to reduce client frustration and fear of the system by encouraging the client to see that services can be helpful, a goal that can be partly achieved by providing an experience of a reliable and trusting relationship between themselves and the client. Cara noted that:

> A lot of the families that we work with, I'd say about 50% have been let down, or feel let down by other services, and so a large part of that trust is actually delivering on what you say that you are going to do, arriving for appointments and following through on things and delivering what you say you are going to do.

Commenting on the importance of the relationship for encouraging clients' trust in 'the system', social worker Ellie observed that, in her practice experience, 'Where clients lose heart it's usually where systemic issues or problems have impeded' .

Encouraging a client's faith in the social worker, and through this experience, learning to discriminate between helpful and hurtful people, is an important aim of social worker - client relationship practice. It is also something that can be progressed early on in the intervention, by taking steps to resolve practical and concrete needs that are identified by the client as a high priority or urgent. Many examples were given by social workers that illustrated the importance of promptly addressing the need for food, warmth or shelter. Spending time with the client to process vital information so that they could properly understand it and its significance for them was another valuable trust building strategy. In Sharon's words, this type of practical work 'takes a bit of … Not a bit but a lot of time and [is] relationship kind of … work'.

On a number of occasions, participants made the link between their own experience of having a client trust them and restoring or building the client's trust in 'the system': Ellie said 'They haven't had someone that says what they mean and does what they say'. This was reiterated by Michelle:

> Building a strong relationship with a client and working with them
> constructively can have the effect of providing them with a good experience of
> working relationships for their future engagement with other services and
> professionals.

Participants explained that where a client is able to see and feel the benefits that emerge from a safe, respectful and productive relationship with a social worker, where immediate problems can be fixed and goals realised, and a client can see

that being in a relationship can, of itself, enhanced client capacity and personal power. This can also have their faith in other people increased or restored, and feel hopeful for their own futures, then conditions are ripe for an individual to take the risk to change. This is the fifth and final sequel that underpins the finding that social worker - client relationship practice is significant for achieving client outcomes. Figure 5.8 is the sequel of Encouraging Clients to Take a Risk for Their Own Growth.

Enabling interpersonal connection with another person

Encouraging clients to take a risk for their own growth

Significance of social worker-client relationship practice

Enabling experience of a meaningful relationship with another person

Building clients' trust in the system

Generating hope and purpose about their life

Figure 5.8: The sequel of Encouraging Clients to Take a Risk for Their Own Growth

Participants identified that a strong relationship with a social worker can encourage a client to take a risk for the benefit of their personal growth and enhanced relationship capacity. Ellie's reflection illustrated where initial client distrust could evolve into something very different for the client over time:

This mother was initially distrustful of me. Through ongoing assessment and engagement, it became evident that a decision had to be made about whether the family should be referred to the child protection authority. After much discussion and reflection amongst our agency team, the decision was made

230

to not to refer the child to the child protection authority as it was felt the mother was more likely to remain engaged and motivated to undertake the various activities required for her children if this did not happen. The working relationship that ensued provided coordinated support for the family and enabled the mother to regain control. In the process the mother's parenting capacity grew and developed.

Ongoing social worker engagement with this client, assessment of the client's parenting and assessment of the client's capacity to engage reflected the overall assessment that the client was more likely to continue with the intervention. This is an important decision, because the potential consequences of the decision are important for the mother, the children, and the mother's parental relationship with the children. The process of assessment and deliberation by the social worker and the professional team occurs while the social worker continues her work with the mother. Enabling a meaningful interpersonal connection that leads to a deeper and purposeful relationship encourages the mother to feel hopeful and less mistrustful, ultimately leading to a situation where the mother feels supported enough to take the risk to change her behaviour. Ellie's reflection provides an illustration of how the sequels of social worker - client relationship practice can play out, leading to a valuable outcome.

Social worker - client relationship practice unfolds within an organisational context. The second part of the three-part subsidiary question asked participants, 'How significant do you think social worker - client relationship practice is to your employing agency?' This next section reports the findings that address this question.

5.3 The significance of social worker - client relationship practice for the social workers' employing agency

In the light of the contextualised nature of social work practice, participants were asked how significant social worker - client relationship practice is for their employing agencies. While social worker - client relationship practice was identified by the social workers as having significance for agencies, it was a topic that generated less interest in the interviews and focus groups than did the significance of social worker - client relationship practice for achieving client outcomes. Social worker - client relationship practice was seen as having significance for the employing agency in terms of the agency's financial viability, the agency's reputation in the wider community and teamwork and job satisfaction for employees. The agency was also seen as significant when the social worker's professional aims clashed with organisational goals. These four perspectives about the significance of social worker - client relationship practice to the agency are presented in Figure 5.9.

Figure 5.9: The significance of social worker - client relationship practice for the employing agency

The first perspective about how social workers identified the link between social worker - client relationship practice and the agency's financial viability is explained (Figure 5.10).

Figure 5.10: The significant of social worker - client relationship practice and the agency's financial viability

Social workers indicated that, at a general level, they were aware that the very existence of their workplace cannot be assumed. This perception of uncertainty was apparent in the connections that they made between the agency's financial viability and the agency's record of its work that reflected well on the agency's work with their clients.

Demonstrating positive and 'approved' outcomes with clients was seen as essential to submitting positive reports for funding bodies. Julie commented that:

> [Good working relationships with clients] has direct importance for the agency as if there is a good relationship between carers and children then the agency is seen as being able to offer a competent service to children

The link between the impact of reduced agency funding on the maintenance of relationships with carers and with clients was made by Louise who said:

But the funding is being cut, the caseloads are increased, we will be doing less home visits and fewer contacts with carers, we won't be as available and that will affect client outcomes. We'll have to work hard for it not to change … I am concerned that carers will not be as well supported.

In addition to contributing to the financial viability of agencies, participants felt that social worker - client relationship practice enhanced the agency's credibility and reputation in the wider community. Figure 5.11 is the significant of social worker - client relationship practice and the agency's credibility in the wider community.

Figure 5.11: The significant of social worker - client relationship practice and the agency's credibility in the wider community

Social workers explained that informal 'word of mouth' opinions expressed amongst services and within the broader community about the integrity of agencies could adversely or positively affect an agency's public credibility. When an agency is

234

perceived as not providing a professional service or beneficial outcomes for clients, its credibility within the community suffers. This can affect that agency's future prospects for survival or development. Conversely, Michelle believed that 'the social worker can feel pride in working for an organisation that has a good name and that has high expectations of professional practice'.

Agency credibility was seen as important in foster care, where there is a heavy reliance on the recruitment of potential carers from the general community. Having strong relationships between agency staff and the foster carers, developed through maintaining regular contact with carers, was seen by one participant Louise as contributing to the agency's low rate of placement breakdowns:

> We have very few placement breakdowns and that's what we really believe that works to support placements is the ongoing relationship that we have with the carers. We do regular home visits, we're regularly phoning and emailing just to find out how they're going, what's hard, and being there through the hard times … this is good for the child placed in the area too … and to stability of long-term placements.

The use of 'we' in this statement suggests that the social worker identified strongly with her agency and with the agency team. The word 'we' was used by many of the participants when describing the work they did, suggesting that they did not see themselves working as sole agents or did not want to feel that they were sole agents in their work. Team work and job satisfaction were identified as related but key elements of the agency context that was significant for social worker - client relationship practice, depicted in Figure 5 .12 and they are now considered.

Figure 5.12: The significant of social worker - client relationship practice and teamwork and social work satisfaction with their workplace

Participants placed considerable importance on feeling part of a supportive and strong team in order to do their work effectively and for overall job satisfaction. Teamwork with carers as well as with colleagues was regarded as important for having one's work valued and for feeling supported. Louise explained that:

It's the relationship that is in itself rewarding actually, seeing it work with a foster carer, having people say thank you and feeling like that effort was worth it for the child. It's about seeing it work. It's seeing placement stability. Relationships are really important in our team and we work hard on it and we're really proud of our team culture and I think that's a very, very important role in keeping people here as they earn a low amount of money. Everyone feels well supported and they feel valued and we want to make our clients feel valued too and I think we do a reasonable job.

Participants also identified the importance of good communication and trust between team members for maintaining good quality and safe placements for

children and ensuring that the whole team is working towards common purpose. Kathy explained that:

> Good communication and trust within a care team is pretty important for the children that we work with as all the professionals involved need to be informed and working towards a common goal for the child.

This section of the chapter has reported the finding that social worker - client relationship practice is perceived by social workers as significant for their employing agencies with regard to the agency's financial viability, the agency's perceived credibility in the community and the agency's future prospects. Social workers also expressed a link between social worker - client relationship practice on teamwork. The importance attached to teamwork reflected a number of factors: that teamwork counteracts the autonomous nature of much client interaction work, that team work provides a safe space for 'connecting' with colleagues and professional supervision and the relational orientation of the social workers. Strong teamwork was also identified as integral to overall job satisfaction. Teamwork was also seen as significant for counteracting complications of navigating or reconciling competing tensions between professional aims and agency management goals inherent in social worker - client relationship practice as shown in Figure 5.13.

Figure 5.13: The significant of social worker - client relationship practice and the tension between professional aims and organisational goals

Some participants described this tension as occupying a middle position between the clients on the one hand and organisational goals on the other. As Ellie, a non-government social worker described it like:

Being 'piggy in the middle' arguing with managers on the one hand in terms of statistics and reportable outcomes while on the other responding to the realities of human experience.

The significance of relationship practice for the agency was seen as something beyond the pragmatic and instrumental issues of satisfying funding bodies. Managing the tension between professional purpose and management goals was evident in decisions about the length of interventions and decisions to close cases and was also seen in the context of preserving agency integrity and public credibility. In one situation, the social worker explained that her manager wanted an intervention closed while she argued on the basis of her assessment and knowledge of the situation that the intervention should continue. Managing these competing

agenda was also evident in decisions relating to acceptance or rejection of referrals such as arguing for acceptance of a referral on the grounds of professional ethics even though the referral did not technically meet agency criteria.

A source of concern for some participants was management decision-making about individual clients. Reference was made to situations where a decision could be made about particular client situations without consulting the social worker who has intimate professional knowledge about the situation, and who could cogently argue the reasons for taking a particular approach. Participants explained that many constraints on practice such as time pressures, high workload and staff turnover, prevent managers from approving requests for continued and needed client intervention.

A number of social workers referred to the time involved in completing reporting requirements, documenting the hours involved in completing tasks and reporting outcomes; and how this detracted from the time available for actually working with clients and related tasks. While understanding the need for accounting for their practice, social workers thought that taking time away from what they saw as their central role of working with clients was problematic, as described here by Helen:

> We get measured by hours of service, but we also get measured by actual outcomes for clients: the latter is what's really important to us, about people actually achieving change.

Social workers were not specifically asked how the experience of managing these tensions affected their morale and job satisfaction. However; on the basis of their response to the question that asked which part of their work they most enjoyed,

it was clear that their practice with clients was the source of their professional satisfaction, as is reported below.

In the statutory environment, Cara, a statutory social worker, spoke about the complexity of maintaining accountability to professional issues and legislation in addition to other organisational and client priorities in her work with clients:

> The purpose of the agency, the (legislative) process happens through the workers and the worker – client relationship; however, you are also working towards the agency policies and procedures, and your own profession. If you're not comfortable with that, you need to work through that or work in another agency. If you're struggling with something, go back to policies and procedures and the legislation; because that often gives you the answers as well as discussing with your supervisor. But people do not look at policies and procedures, and it's really evident at times.

Participants expressed the complexities associated with managing the tensions between social work aims and organisational goals, and how this is exacerbated by workload and time pressures. This practice experience was seen as having real consequences for client outcomes, for the social worker's sense of their own efficacy and for the client's affiliation with the agency.

The next section in this chapter reports the findings that address the third part of the three – part subsidiary question, 'Is social worker - client relationship practice significant for social work purpose and identity?'

5.4 The significance of social worker - client relationship practice for social work purpose and social work identity

Social workers regarded social worker - client relationship practice as entwined with their professional identity and therefore significant. However, this was not extensively discussed. This view contrasted with the findings arising from the first

part of the question, which implied the general view that social worker - client relationship practice is integrally related to participants' identities as social workers.

The themes that support the finding that social worker - client relationship practice is significant for social work identity and purpose are presented in Figure 5.14. The themes are that social worker - client relationship practice aligns with social work values and with strong personal values and interests; it enables social workers to gain intimate and detailed understanding about a child and/or family's functioning, important for assessment and intervention; and the importance of one's own social work identity for effective practice and, in turn, for self-care. These themes, depicted in Figure 5.14, are now presented in more detail.

Reflects strong personal values and interests

Significant for social work purpose and identity

Enables cmprehensive social work assessment
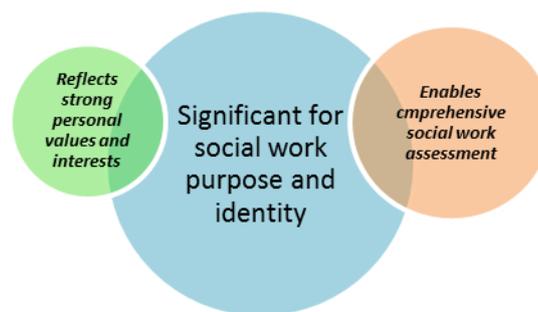
Figure 5.14: The significance of social worker - client relationship practice for social work purpose and social work identity

Social workers offered different perspectives about how they saw the link between social worker - client relationship practice and their sense of social work purpose and identity. Overall, their comments reiterate that social workers in this study had a commitment to their work that extended beyond their job descriptions.

241

This position is also reflected in comments about the importance of their personal values and interest as shown in Figure 5.15.

Figure 5.15: The significance of social worker - client relationship practice and personal values and interests

Social workers spoke about their clear preferences for working with adults and children, from a social work perspective. They spoke about the intrinsic rewards of seeing an individual's self-perception change as they see their lives changing for the better and see their children thrive and grow. Michelle commented:

Watching him, you know, freely go up and cuddle the carer. Not be stiff. And hearing from the carer when they call, or in reviews, having the carer say to you 'it's been 2 years. But finally when he sleeps, he sleeps like a floppy ragdoll. Not like a rigid little ball'.

Participants also said they felt privileged to hear their clients' life stories, many of which were tales of survival and resilience as well as suffering. Hannah said:

I just really enjoy people. That's why I do it. I just really enjoy people and I enjoy the differences in people and I feel really privileged to have worked with, you know, that really difficult woman.

It was also special to have been a part of the lives of these people as Kathy noted:

Having positive working relationships where the carer values your role in the child's life and gives you the opportunity to have that input, that makes things so much easier. You're in the home, you can see what's going on for the child and it becomes a normal routine that you're involved in those decisions. You know what's important for the child and what's going on in their life. It's a really privileged position that allows you ultimately to influence the child's life and their development.

Engaging clients in a social work capacity and 'walking alongside' them through the relationships they build with them was the essence of social work identity for all participants. It was engagement with clients through relationship practice that generated professional and job satisfaction for them. Some participants, like Louise, stated that they felt that it was a privilege to be 'allowed in' to other people's lives within the context of professional practice:

It is such a privilege to be able to see people reach their potential when they may have never been told that this is even possible. I see my work as a privilege. I am in awe of people who are willing to share their lives and their most painful parts with me. Who am I for them to do that to? Yet they open themselves up to do that.

For others, seeing their work as having potential long-term benefits for the client was a source of intrinsic satisfaction, powerfully explicated here by Louise:

To me social worker - client relationship practice is really important because I think we are not just number crunchers and we're not just people who work in the moment. For me, and maybe this is just a dreaming thing, but you have to

243

have that, if you only work for right now and worry about what happens today you would burnout very quickly in this job. I think of all the people that we work with, the things that we've shown them, and hopefully that we've helped them, and think that this isn't going to only help this generation but also the next; that we have given them other options for living and other ways of seeing things and that gives me job satisfaction; that we have not only made a change for right now in this present for this child, but that their experience of growing up is going to be different so that when they come to being parents, they'll have something different to draw from.

Genuine interest in how people are faring was expressed by Jessica:

I really care about what happens to this little boy and what happens with their family and because I think he's going to be great over time. I just want to know. You are emotionally involved.

The final measure of the significance attributed to social worker – client relationship practice is that it enables comprehensive social work assessment of the client situation, as shown in Figure 5.16.
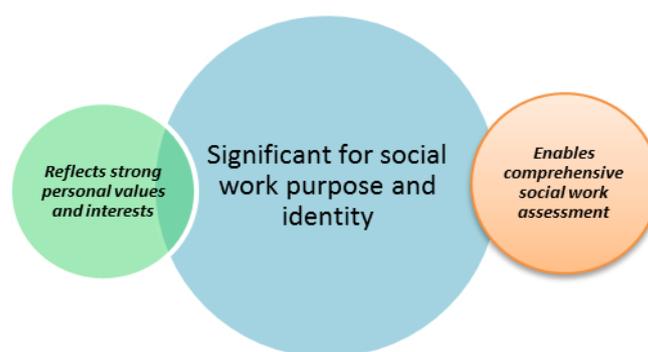
Figure 5.16: The significance of social worker - client relationship practice and enabling comprehensive social work assessment

Relationships with clients also enable the social worker to learn about the family's functioning, including how the family organises itself, how children and parents relate to each other, and parenting capacity. This is clearly important for sound assessment of a client's situation that provides the basis for identifying priority issues and an intervention plan. As Hannah explained, having this knowledge is important for providing assessment about the family:

> I think it [the relationship with the client] is a fundamental part of the work really. It's very hard to write a report on a family if you do not have a relation, well, you can I suppose. I don't know. I do see other professionals functioning a little bit differently to me and they still seem to get their work done, but to me, unless you've got the relationship it's very hard to write a report about how secure and integrated the child is within the family. If you haven't got that relationship then it's hard. You can't get the insight and you can't actually write a good report, I don't think.

Maintaining a clear sense of professional purpose and identity was critically entwined with being an effective practitioner for Michelle:

> It's important to understand your own identity; of keeping why you are doing what you are doing in your head; keeping your role clear in your head; you can't lose that though a lot of social workers do and in my experience some don't ever have it. Some social workers don't like doing some practical tasks like following up a client query about child minding options. I don't have a problem with that as long as I can justify it according to my role and purpose in that particular intervention.

Awareness of one's own social work identity grows over time with experience, as explained by Louise:

> Understanding your own social work identity I think doesn't really become clear until well after graduation … I think through meeting demands of employers over time, some social workers can take on a persona and in the

process lose their social work identity. This is why reflective practice and supervision are so important because it helps maintain clarity about your identity and purpose.

Awareness of one's own professional identity was also affirmed and/or questioned when working with other disciplines or when others' perceptions about what you do as a social worker are reflected back to you. The following example illustrated how social worker, Michelle, explained this:

> I work in a multidisciplinary team and my one focus is the client. They are the experts of their story; it certainly isn't me. I have noticed over time how I see things as a social worker and I see the difference when working with psychologists. I tend to be focused on the client's experience as a human being and in all its complexity. In team meetings and case presentations my psychologist colleagues are solely focused on the identified problem and sometimes they are not seeing the person. The focus between the two disciplines is sometimes starkly apparent. I work with some excellent psychologists. But when you build up the relationship with the client and you have that understanding about the client's situation and experience it is surprising what can be changed, it can be amazing. By taking a holistic approach change can be achieved in a way that can have benefits and/or outcomes that are way beyond solving/addressing the identified problem.

The findings reported in this chapter indicate that the perceived significance that social workers attached to social worker - client relationship practice had critical significance for achieving client outcomes. Social workers also regarded social worker - client relationship practice as having significance for their employing agencies and for their own social work identity and sense of purpose, although these were secondary to the significance attributed to their practice and engagement with clients.

The overall view social workers expressed in the study was working with relationships is a practice method that provides a way of engaging with clients that respects their humanity and in turn can alleviate entrenched distress and isolation.

5.5 Summary and conclusions

This chapter has reported the key finding in this study that social worker - client relationship practice is significant for social work. It has also reported findings that addressed the three-part subsidiary question that asked social workers about the significance they attach to social worker - client relationship practice for: a) achieving client outcomes; b) their employing agency; and c) their own sense of social work identity.

Social workers in this study regarded social worker - client relationship practice as having critical significance for achieving outcomes with, or for, clients. The study identified that social worker - client relationship practice is significant in five particular ways that become sequels to the relationship process. These sequels are termed: Enabling a Client To Build an Interpersonal Connection with Another Person; Enabling a Client to Have Experience of a Meaningful Relationship with Another Person; Generating Hope and Purpose with the Client About Their Life; Helping a Client to Trust in 'The System'; and Encouraging a Client to Take a Psychological Risk for the Benefit of their Own Personal Growth.

Social workers also identified that their relationship practice with clients was also significant for their employing agencies, for: maintaining the agency's financial viability and the agency's reputation in the wider community and for the teamwork and their job satisfaction. The final part of the three-part subsidiary question asked about the significance of social worker - client relationship practice for social work

identity and found that relationship practice with clients is regarded as integral to social work identity and professional purpose. Thus the findings in this chapter confirm the research findings in the literature review that the social worker - client relationship is a vital medium in social work practice for achieving outcomes with, or for, clients.

In the process of my learning from participants about their conceptualisation of social worker - client relationship practice, I heard them speak in depth about how they undertake or use social worker - client relationship practice in their day to day work. A key finding is that social worker - client relationship practice is a distinct practice approach. This is explored in the next chapter and including the sub-findings associated with the practice of maintaining relationships with clients, referred to as core practice aims. These findings re reported in the next chapter, Chapter 6.

Chapter 6. A distinct social work practice approach: social worker - client relationship practice

6.1 Introduction

The findings reported in Chapter 5 indicate that social workers regard social worker - client relationship practice as pivotal for achieving client outcomes, while also having some significance for their employing agencies and for their own social work purpose and identity.

The significance attached to social worker - client relationship practice by the social workers in this study also lies in the day to day intricacies of the practice itself. In this way, they brought an applied understanding of social worker - client relationship practice. The social workers' practice experience and knowledge emerged through the data analysis constituting the findings discussed in this chapter. These findings build on the findings in Chapter 5 and suggest that social worker - client relationship practice is a distinct practice approach.

These findings are shown in Figure 6.1 and are grouped into two main categories: setting up the relationship as the workspace, and using the relationship workspace for the course of the intervention. The sub-findings in each of the two main categories are shown in the figure and are progressively explored throughout this chapter.
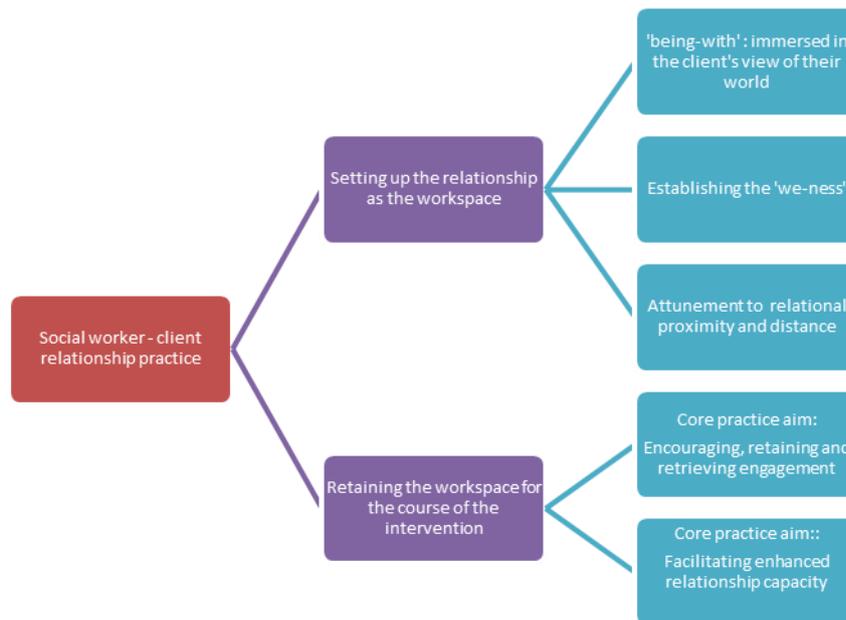
Figure 6.1: Social worker - client relationship practice – a distinct practice approach

As in Chapter 5, study participant interview excerpts that represent their thoughts, perceptions and reflections about their social work practice are included herein.

The practice components of how social workers go about setting up the relationship that in effect, becomes the workspace are presented in Figure 6.2 and are now explored.

6.2 Social worker - client relationship practice

6.2.1 Setting up the relationship as the workspace
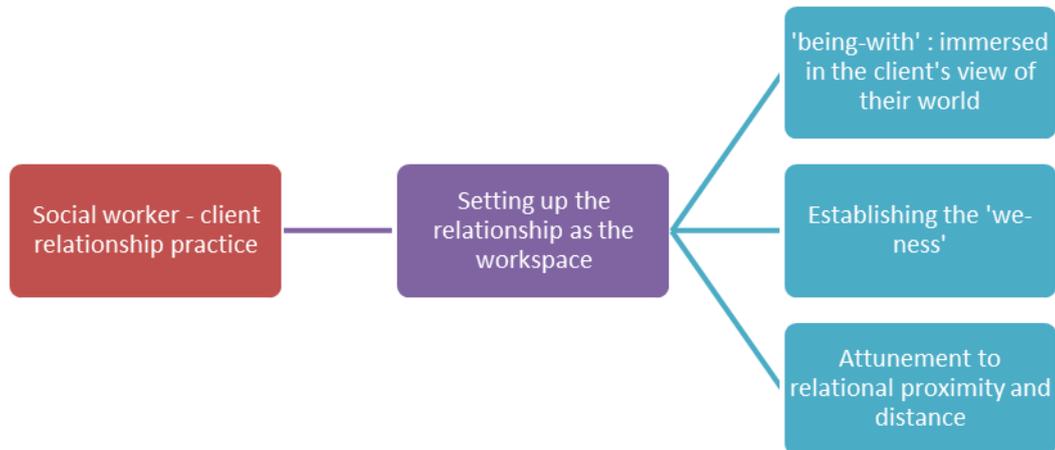
Figure 6.2: Setting up the relationship as the workspace

Setting up a working relationship comprises three main elements: 'being-with' the client and immersed in the client's view of their world, establishing a sense of 'we-ness' and being relationally attuned to the client's capacity for proximity or distance with them.

The relationship process between the social worker and the client as described by the social worker participants reflects a practice approach that encouraged 'natural' or everyday use of conversation where social workers were sensitive to their use of language, further discussed in the next chapter. Participants also said that they use child—parent attachment theory, child development, trauma-informed practice, strengths-based principles, systems theory and case work method. Using reflection to sort out their thoughts and feelings, supervision as well as consultation with the professional team, were cited as resources they regularly use for their practice with clients.

The social worker - client relationship was viewed as more than a means to an end: it becomes the workspace for the entire intervention. The first of the three elements of setting up the relationship workspace, the role of 'being-with' the client and social work immersion in the client's view of their world, is now explored.

6.2.1.1 'Being-with': immersion in the client's view of their world

The study found that considerable effort was expended by social workers to achieve engagement with clients. Engagement with the client requires the social worker to be actively interested in the client's story. In this moment of the intervention, the social worker physically stays alongside the client as they tell their story.

This practice was identified by participants as having critical importance, because they believe it is the client's impression of the social worker's response at this moment that will encourage or discourage a client to remain present in the interaction. It is a discrete component of social worker - client relationship practice that is both actively guided by the social worker and is also client led. Positioning themselves to 'be-with' the client at this time both reflects and enables social work use of active and deep listening and empathic relating to learn about how the client perceives their life experience. Being immersed in the client's world in this way also provides critical insight and opportunity for assessment of the client and their relationship with their context.

This process of 'being-with' the client and immersion in the client's view about their life was regarded as pivotal to achieving client engagement. 'Being -with' the client depicts the importance attached to sitting with, and listening to, the client and

heralds the establishment of a sense of 'we-ness' between the social worker and the client.

Social workers spoke about how important it can be to simply 'be-with' a client during particularly distressing moments in the intervention. In one instance, Ellie explained that the client she had worked with for a long time was having difficulty accessing support. Ellie described this client, who had the full time care responsibility of her severely disabled son, was desperate for assistance, evidently at 'breaking point' and could no longer care for her son. Ellie explained that a case conference was organised to respond to this mother's pleas for support. There were many agencies represented around the table and, according to Ellie, when each was asked if there was more they could do to assist, they each explained that this was not possible:

> This mother said over and over again 'I cannot cope'. The Chair said 'well, let's see what these agencies can do' when everyone there was saying they were already doing as much as they could do, and the poor woman, if she said it once she said it a hundred times, 'I'm telling you I cannot cope, you have to find someone to care for him'. The Chair then asked can't you get some more respite and the respite people said 'no' as they can only have him once a week.

This account describes how the relationship the client had with the social worker meant that the client was not isolated in her despair. This is significant in situations where a client feels hopeless about their immediate future, powerless to make their own situation tolerable and, and moreover, where real risk to a child's wellbeing is at stake. 'Being-with' a client and staying the course is not simple work and responding to serious predicaments such as this constitutes much day to day social worker - client relationship practice.

253

The importance of 'being-with' the client from a social worker perspective was seen in other practice reflections offered by the participants. Participants said, firstly, that 'being-with' the client creates the possibility for the sequels (reported in the previous chapter) to occur: namely, experiencing a safe interpersonal connection with another person and having experience of a meaningful relationship with another person. These, in turn, address commonly observed client experiences of having entrenched feelings of social isolation and worthlessness; regularly reported by participants about their clients; and client reluctance or apprehension to engage with another person or with a social worker.

A second practice reflection that underlined the importance of 'being-with' the client, was communicating to the client that the social worker genuinely cares about what the client is telling them. The social workers identified this as a critical step in the developing relationship. The third reflection identified was the importance of 'being-with' the client for learning about the client's situation and the capacity of the family to care for each other and their children.

Social worker Dianne gave an account of one mother she worked with over several years when her child was in the care of Dianne's agency's foster care program. In every interaction, the client was abusive and aggressive toward Dianne. Dianne believed this reflected the parent's struggle with her for power over decision-making about her child. Dianne explained that, with a lot of work, they eventually achieved a constructive working relationship where the mother was eventually able to speak with her without becoming aggressive, and, importantly, gradually learned how to verbalise her feelings:

The mother is now is able to say to me, 'you know me, don't get me

upset'. When she verbally erupts with us, she does come back and talk to us in a reasonable way. She's not abusive to us any longer (Dianne).

In this social worker - client relationship, the parent developed an understanding of how her behaviour affected other people. She also learnt to verbalise when she is feeling angry. Dianne believed this recollection exemplified the benefits of a sustained working relationship, and where a client feels safe in their interpersonal connection with the worker and the agency. The sustained relationship practice communicates to the client, a sense of 'being-with'; that they are not alone and that they do matter. The continuous interactions that occurred within the context of a social worker - client relationship established a safe workspace that, for the client, enabled an experience of meaningful interaction, of feeling trust in 'the system', and further it stimulated the client's personal growth; reflecting the sequels of practice identified in Chapter 5. Dianne's example provided an illustration of how social worker - client relationship practice can build a solid workspace and how the relationship process itself can be beneficial.

Sue described how important it was that a client attended a mental health appointment and gained access to prenatal care. The client acknowledged she was struggling to provide care for her children, but was reluctant to go to the appointment or sign the consent form for prenatal care. Sue said that her priority was to encourage the mother to attend the appointment; she worked in a step by step fashion with the mother, spending time 'being-with' her and then taking the practical step of offering to accompany the mother to the mental health appointment. The mother eventually agreed and also signed the written consent to receive parental support. Sue concluded that her engagement work with the mother including the practical tasks of accompanying her to an appointment was a visible way of

communicating to the client that she mattered, and that someone cared for the client's wellbeing. In the process, Sue was also able to address the client's initial mistrust. The combined effect of these social worker actions established a relationship workspace for subsequent intervention:

> To access prenatal support the client's consent is required. It took a while for her to actually consent as well, to sign her name onto paper. That took a few meetings. She would give verbal consent every time I met with her but not written consent. Eventually she did after being reassured many times and me, explaining clearly many times why the consent was required (Sue).

The second practice reflection outlined above, that 'being-with' the client and immersed in the client's telling of their life experience is a way of communicated for the client, was reported several times by the social workers as being integral to achieving engagement. 'Being-with' the client conveyed empathy, and requires empathic relating skills enables social workers to sit with people, and to bear witness to their pain. The social workers conveyed an engagement style that involves: patient listening and repeated use of paraphrasing and reflection about feelings and thoughts about their situation. This pattern of engagement is critical to setting up the relationship workspace and establishing a sense of 'we-ness', that we are in this together'.

While communicating care is seen as essential in social worker - client relationship practice, it carries emotional risks for practitioners that seem inescapable in this work. As Helen said:

> I think you have to be able to care and nurture. With this comes the risk of being hurt or feeling a failure at times; however, if you engage with clients

without bringing that empathy and compassion, so you don't get hurt, what's the point? Is there anything being gained … for anyone? I think not.

The third practice reflection advanced by social workers was that immersion in the client's view of their life situation so provides essential opportunity for gaining valuable insights about the client, how they negotiate their lives and context, and how they relate to others in their lives.

Finally, several social workers stressed that once a client indicates that they see the engagement as worth their while, the sense of 'we-ness' develops and signals that the relationship is now a workspace.

6.2.1.2 Establishing 'we-ness'

Taking time and being patient to provide space for the client to relate their experience in their own words and in their own time, the 'being-with' the client was found to be an important step for establishing, for the client and social worker, a sense of we-ness. This work requires considerable emotional labour for the social worker, who has to contain emotion while they seek to remain focused on issues at hand. The relationship is a process that develops incrementally and relies on the social worker being vigilant about how the client is assessing them as engagement is attempted. Social workers explained that careful and repeated acknowledgement of the client, the demands they are experiencing and their management of their current situation, all help to encourage the client to take the step to engage with the social worker. Taking action to respond to the priority issues as the client sees them also helps to facilitate engagement with the client. This was pointed out by Michelle, with reference to a particular client situation. Michelle's practice and agency role was to intervene to enhance attachment relationship between parents, usually the mother, and their young children. Michelle noted that encouraging a mother to better

engage with her child required the social worker to first feel that her relationship with the professional is safe. Building this safe workspace is challenging because the identified 'attachment problem' indicates that relationship building may be difficult for the client. Participants said they may have little awareness about what a good attachment looks like or feels like. One way of building a sense of safety, so that these subjects can be explored, is for the social worker to first respond to a client's identified needs, which in this case was helping her to establish a daily household routine. Based on her practice experience, Michelle realised she first she had to respond to the mother's request for practical help. This would encourage the client to trust her, an essential foundation for then tackling the emotional connection issue:

> The most significant part of the whole thing is the relationship with this mother. I worked hard initially to hear her story, to try and understand the issues from her perspective. At the same time, I could see a really poor attachment between Mum and baby and I know from my experience and research that this is a disaster for the baby's development. However, if Mum does not see this as an issue of significance, if her issues are for example, that she can't manage her finances or is having trouble with her relationship with her partner then [what I or the experts think] is irrelevant [from the mother's perspective]. I have to ensure that they can see I understand them to build trust … because it is what everything I do is based on.

The participants were unanimous in their view that creating a sense of 'we-ness', integral to developing the relationship workspace and progressing intervention goals was not possible without considerable emotional labour. It is emotionally intensive work. Relationship practice is seen as a developmental process that requires workers to be relationally aware and sensitive to relational issues that a client may express during engagement, including the degree of

closeness or distance that a client either wishes or can tolerate. This social work awareness of relational proximity is next considered.

6.2.1.3 Social worker awareness of relational proximity and distance

Intrinsic to development of a 'we-ness', is the social worker's capacity for relational connection with the client, which includes their sensitivity to their relational proximity and/or distance from the client. This was a key element of relationship practice.

The social workers seemed particularly watchful and attuned to the relational tone of their relationship with the client; the degree to which the client is being relationally responsive with them. This was seen as vital information for the social worker because it is a way of monitoring the client's engagement with them, which, in turn, provides information about possible reasons for changes they perceive occurring in the client's engagement with them. Being sensitive to the degree of relational proximity that a client may be able to tolerate was apparent in many of the interviews with social workers. One particular account that illustrated this involved an Aboriginal mother who had been a long-term client of a government family support service and had, at times, also been a client of child protection services. Responding to an initial simple referral to supply nappies prompted a home visit by the social worker. In this instance, the mother did not want the social worker to enter her home, so they sat outside. After talking for a while and delivering the nappies, the social worker asked if she could visit again and the mother agreed. On the second occasion, they continued to sit outside. The visits were leading to some useful decisions and actions, for example, making an appointment to visit the doctor. By the time of the third visit, it was raining, and rather than get wet, the client a bit apprehensively allowed the social worker to go inside. While this revealed further

troubling aspects of this client's situation, additional protections for the children were put into place and with the mother's cooperation. This relationship subsequently led to other interpersonal connections for the children and the mother. The social worker was then able to start working with the mother to increase her parental authority with the children.

In this scenario, the social worker was attuned to this woman's fear and apprehension about becoming involved with services and was able to judge the degree of proximity that the mother was prepared to tolerate. Engaging the mother in this way reflects a scaffolded approach to developing a relationship with a client. The social worker, Cara, concluded that:

> The relationship is important as it allows the particularities of that client and their situation to emerge so that a realistic and informed solution or response can be implemented.

Being in the presence of another person involves almost tacit mutual agreement about the degree of relational proximity that seems 'right' for each of the people involved in the encounter. For the social workers in this study, judging the right degree of proximity included accurately gauging how the client tolerates relational proximity, knowing when to increase or reduce the degree of relational proximity, and then working out the best way to address the client's verbal and nonverbal feedback about what they can tolerate at any given moment. This is highly skilled work that has space-time dimensions. It can also involve the clients' or the social workers' perception of their interpretation of the others' perception, highlighting the role of self-other dynamics and awareness.

The data analysis also revealed that perceptions of relational proximity vary throughout the time period of any one encounter with a client, such as a home visit,

and can create situations where perceived tacit understandings are not understood or are misinterpreted which can lead to unpredictable changes in the course of the interaction. As social worker - client relationship practice regularly occurs in settings where other practitioners or even other people may not be present, any misinterpretation of each other's verbal and nonverbal cues can present risks to psychological or physical safety, and risk to the longevity of the intervention work at hand.

The fragility of engagement in this practice context and how the relative safety of the relationship is felt by either person can pivot on the perceptions about what is safe or comfortable proximity. This finding is illuminated with reference to Jessica's practice experience although is typical of many provided.

This particular scenario involved a social worker - client relationship that endured many points of friction, commonly referred to in practice discourse as a 'volatile relationship'. It occurred in the context of foster care, and the social worker's role was to act as contact supervisor between the biological mother and her young child. The biological mother was described as often being aggressive and verbally abusive to the worker. There were a number of times when the social worker said she called security guards because she did not feel safe. To establish a working relationship with the mother, and being mindful of the child and the mother having some worthwhile time together, the social worker found herself grappling with her own inner conflict about the degree of proximity she would, could or ought to allow between herself and the client. Jessica felt empathic towards the mother, who had endured a particularly 'horrific' life. She felt a professional and possibly personal responsibility to give the client space and time to convey her story. At the same time, Jessica felt apprehensive about being too open towards the mother, because

she feared that if she did come across as too 'welcoming', and responded to the mother's request for a meeting outside the contact session, the mother would want to engage with her in way that made Jessica feel uncomfortable. Acquiescing to the mother's request for a meeting challenged the social worker's own threshold for proximity and her understanding of professional boundaries. She felt that, because of her agreement to the meeting the mother would receive the message that closer proximity is acceptable.

These deliberations can all occur within a few minutes of time, where the social worker is assessing her own thoughts, feelings and actions as well as her interpretation of the client's thoughts, feelings and actions, or anticipated feelings and actions. This account highlights the contradictory and conflicting external and internal factors that can influence the dynamics of relational proximity.

Social workers explained that the work involved in practice episodes is important to 'get right' because, if these factors are not well managed, the prospects for the longevity of the relationship and the intervention are diminished. Jessica decided to sit with the client, and over a two-hour period, which was emotionally difficult for her, she and the client did establish a relationship workspace that continued over time and did result in the client learning to contain her impulse to be verbally abusive and to develop capacity to express how she felt in words in her meetings with Jessica. The conventional social work language used to understand appropriate worker - client dynamics is role clarity and maintaining role boundaries; however, these terms do not reflect the relational essence of the social worker - client dynamic examined in this study.

The language of roles and role boundaries is used to explain this point, illustrated in this reflection from Louise about the relationships with carers:

> I am listening, always ready to listen and to be there for the full length of time. It is a professional relationship. We're not friends with the carers but they do feel that they're part of the team, that their work is valued and that they respect their work, we respect them. These are all important outcomes for the child.

Participants also referred to challenges that arose in maintaining appropriate distance in relationship practice. Cara noted:

> There are clients who are the same age as you, who have shared similar life experiences or development as you, that make you think that outside work, you could find these people very comfortable to be with. But you have to keep that aside, and really look at yourself as the comfortableness in that relationship could get in the way of what you are trying to achieve and distract from the challenges of that relationship with the parents, and that the child is still the centre of that work.

Communicating their role to the client is a way of maintaining appropriate degrees of relational proximity and seen as an aspect of relationship practice. In this observation from Michelle, she notes how their familiarity to children clients can be perceived by children:

> They (clients) are not friends, but you see them every, like twice a week and that's– like kids will say to me 'why can't I come to your house. When can I come to your house?' I say, 'oh no this is what I do for work.' 'Oh my Dad's at work. Why aren't you at work?' I say, 'I am at work. Everyone has different jobs. This is what I do'.

The findings reported thus far in this chapter have reflected participant accounts and perceptions about the practice issue of relational proximity, an inescapable component of social worker - client relationship practice.

Foregrounding 'the client' as a human being in distress influences the way in which a social worker constructs the relationship; that it is done with compassion, and which alleviates the sense of aloneness and/or loneliness, forming a sense of 'we-ness', and develops the relationship as a workspace. However, compassion and 'being-with' also challenges the social worker's own relational preferences and presents professional and ethical risks.

Ensuring that the relationship workspace continues is a constant element of social worker - client relationship practice for social workers. Many factors can impede the relationship. These factors can include decisions externally made that affect the client and their situation, such as a decision to reduce contact visits, or events in the client's life that might trigger a client's stress response, for example, a client's spouse suddenly leaving them, or a child committing a criminal offence or becoming mentally distressed. Social workers reported that they can never assume that a relationship will continue on the basis that it seems to be solid at any one point in the intervention. The work of retaining and nourishing the engagement with clients is a continuing activity and cannot be taken for granted. Relationship building work does not only occur at the beginning of an intervention.

The second component of the findings about how social workers undertake social worker - client relationship practice, depicted in Figure 6.3 concerns retaining the relationship workspace for the course of the intervention. This component of relationship practice includes two identified core practice aims. The first core

practice aim is the practice of retaining, retrieving and repairing engagement with the client. The second core practice aim is entwined with the first and is the practice of increasing the client's capacity for relationships with children, other family members or others in the community more broadly.
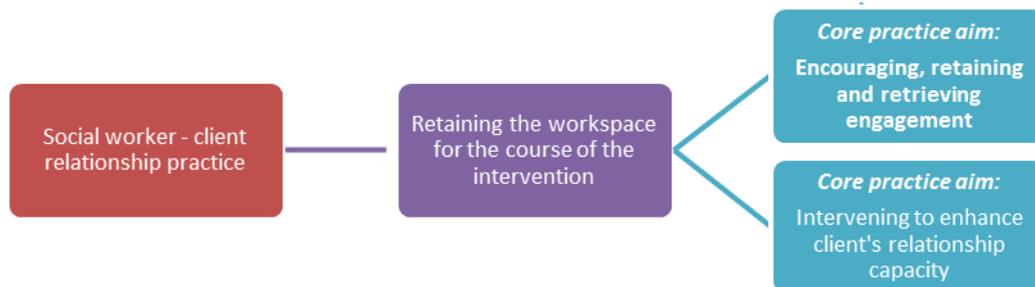
Figure 6.3: Retaining the workspace for the course of the intervention

6.2.2 Retaining the workspace for the course of the intervention

The continuous focus on how well the client is remaining engaged in the relationship workspace is a pervasive and consistent feature of social worker - client relationship practice. The social workers assume responsibility for 'carrying the relationship' with the client for the course of the intervention. To do this, social workers seem to keep the client 'in mind', because it helps them to anticipate and prepare for how a client might respond to an event or new information and to be ready to help a client process a changed decision or new event. Indeed, they identified that actively keeping the clients and other relevant people informed and up to date with planned and unplanned changes as they occur is a commonly used

strategy for helping the relationship and the work towards intervention goals to continue. This kind of monitoring and responsiveness to what is happening is seen as key to securing the 'we-ness' with the client and strengthening the relationship workspace over time.

Resolving difficulties associated with client engagement is an everyday part of the work, identified here as a core practice aim.

6.2.2.1 Core practice aim: Encouraging, retaining and retrieving engagement

The social worker - client relationship is not only focused on the tasks of achieving stated intervention goals. The process of being in a relationship, and working with the client through sensitive or difficult issues within the safety of the relationship workspace, can bring about deeper learning about self and 'being-in' relationship with others. While engagement is seen as a core practice aim of social worker - client relationship practice, it is challenging and emotionally demanding work requiring persistent and creative use of engagement strategies, described by one social worker as 'persistence is everything'. Cara believed that securing and retaining client engagement is 'the most challenging part of the work, it feels endless at times'.

> Relationship practice is really challenging. You draw on all communication skills that I think social workers have particular strengths in. You can have periods where it is difficult to truly go into the work at hand, because you're constantly being battered, when you are dealing with the same issues at every single meeting. This really challenges you; you try different approaches to try and engage with someone, such as reading material, finding out what has worked for using your supervision, maybe using a second worker. I had to do that with one case because I wasn't getting anywhere on my own; the conversations would often go round and round. The client would always start by contesting what I had said or hadn't said on the previous occasion. Their

focus on continuously arguing about the content of the previous meeting, meant we didn't get to the work at hand. So, then I visited the client with a second worker by way of offering another perspective, and this was helpful and the interaction moved forward so the second worker was helpful for me. The client can also bring in a second person and that can be helpful for them as well.

This client's resistance to engagement by repeatedly revisiting and contesting the content of previous meetings is not an uncommon experience, according to the social workers. While the behaviour is generally interpreted as reflecting limited capacity to trust other people, it is nevertheless an example that illustrates that relationship practice is continuous and singular to the individual client.

Participants also explained the work involved in encouraging a client to re-engage once a relationship has broken down, even temporarily, as Sarah reflects:

If you have a difficult beginning with a client it's very hard to re-engage with that client again. I think you have to do a lot of back work so you really need to get that first point of contact with the client nearly perfect. In our work sometimes it's not planned work – especially when we're going out sort of cold calling but showing respect for the client that you know they're as fearful about us coming into their lives as we may be about approaching them about a child protection concern and having – well for me that's what I would have is that 'how would I feel if I had a social worker come to my door about concerns about my children'?

Social workers can find themselves in situations where the power dynamics between staff and agencies and/or agencies and clients can adversely affect relationship building. Client perceptions of who they feel is trustworthy or not trustworthy in any one situation have to be understood by the social worker from a wider perspective, through a professional lens yet the feelings roused in the course

of relationship practice, for both the client and the social worker, are often experienced at a personal level.

Client perceptions of the social worker as 'being on their side' or 'not being on their side' are dynamics that has to be understood and addressed within social worker –client relationship practice. Being perceived negatively by the client was identified by two of the social workers as being particularly problematic for trying to build a relationship with a client. In one situation, a referral was made by the statutory agency to the non-statutory family support agency, but the client did not want to be referred because they had previously been informed by the statutory agency that the 'case' was closed. The two different narratives about the referral created confusion between the client and the respective agencies creating a situation where the client expressed hostility towards the family support social worker. In the study, the social worker explained that they had to work 'extra hard' to address the client's hostility in the interest of the engagement, because there was concern that the client's baby had a poor attachment to her mother. The social worker explained that many attempts to contact the mother, and engaging in a number of 'hard and long conversations' with her, did eventually regain the mother's commitment to the intervention. The practice of engagement with a client in social worker - client relationship practice often incorporates issues related to the broader context which have to be addressed for the main work to occur.

This example highlights the range of factors that can affect social worker - client relationship building. To illustrate from this case example, one important factor was that the client was given incorrect information about the status of her case which meant that she had to readjust to the resumption of agency intervention and weekly visits to her home. In the process the social worker indicated that the client

was left feeling angry and powerless in the face of what had happened. Such events placed additional demand on the social worker's effort to engage the client as she endeavoured to rectify the problem and achieve the client's engagement in the program. Social workers indicated that situations do regularly go awry for reasons such as staff turnover, clumsy referral processes and problematic communication between agencies which add to the complexity of social worker - client relationship practice.

A range of strategies was used by social workers in situations where securing client engagement proves difficult to achieve. Keeping the focus on the child all the time was found to be useful for maintaining a relationship that includes sharing in the joys of being a parent. Maintaining a focus on what is happening for the child can heal a relationship that has been tense or conflictual. Strategies identified by the social workers that can restore or strengthen an engagement with a client include: visiting a client regularly, being flexible about where visits occur — although there is a limit; including clients in working out what could help them make changes; holding case conferences with agencies already involved and who are familiar to the family, ensuring that the adults are part of decision-making around the difficulties; and encouraging them to see what can be done and what they are comfortable with, while supporting them to understand the seriousness of the work to be done. The combined effect of using such strategies is explained by Julie:

> It helps if they can come to believe that we are there for the same reason they are – for the children and for them to continue parenting them.

The impact on a social worker when they are constantly confronted with a client's reluctance to engage, is a particular professionally challenging experience because it confronts the values that underpin and motivate a social worker in their

day to day practice. This was how persistent client non-engagement was explained by Cara, a statutory child protection social worker:

> Where you constantly encounter non-engagement after a period of time, the possibility of it becoming a supportive relationship focused on change can start to feel quite punitive. If this is what the meetings become, and you don't get anywhere, there's no win for you or the parent or the child, and the knock-on effect is that the child is not going to have any sort of outcome. At the same time, being punitive doesn't sit comfortably with me in this area of work at all. If you can't hang on to that value of about believing people can change then you can't really work here, as you feel a bit defeated; feel disappointed as a practitioner, and the focus on the child is lost. You know that things could be different for this child, but you also know your job is very hard with the parent, to help them. Where there is no engagement you have to decide whether there is another agency that might be able to engage with them and in which they might be interested, at the same time trying to empower them to take on that change and to show there's some commitment. I do wonder at times whether the department's expectations are realistic, that they can make so difficult — it's a tricky balance to navigate.

In this reflection, where the social worker tries to reconcile for herself the fact that engagement may not be possible, the perceived alternative to a relationship-oriented approach is identified as a punitive approach and, while this is not an option for this social worker, it highlights her feeling that no other available practice approach exists.

Participants also spoke about 'getting stuck' at times with clients when building or maintaining effective working relationships, as this account form Helen indicates:

> I'm working with a family who have a long-term relationship with this organisation. The children aren't living with their parents at the moment. The parents have a long history of antagonistic behaviour with the agency and others and so I have a poor relationship with this parent. I can't move things

forward, and the outcomes for the children are unknown at the moment, because while this behaviour continues, there's nothing that can be achieved except continued disharmony. The situation is not moving in a positive way, though ultimately I think it can for the children and this would be by not including the parents. This is a particularly challenging both personally and professionally for me. I know the power I hold in this position in decision-making and with reference to court Orders. This is a massive decision, and I want to think the family can move forward, but it's like there's a brick wall there. My thoughts today are to use mediation. I have tried many things, different strategies, but there's just such little connection.

This reflection by the worker illustrates the engagement challenges involved in relationship practice and offers insight into the way the worker is thinking about what she believes can or cannot be done to progress the situation. Her feelings of hope and optimism about what can be done exist alongside her concerns for the children's wellbeing. In addition, her awareness of her power in the situation and the gravity of the decision that potentially excludes the parent in the child's life are also weighing on her mind.

In another instance, in statutory practice, Cara reflected on a situation where she had to come to grips with the idea that she could not engage with a family despite all her attempts:

It was like a bit of a lightning bolt really, I've never considered that this might happen, I was just trying to find the connection, and wasn't able to, and then I thought, well maybe that's true. We were going through a court process and that was coming to an end, so that was also the end of my work with that person. However, I still felt that it was a missed opportunity, it felt sad, to me it didn't have to be the outcome, but the child's developmental timetable can't wait and it was knowing that, that ultimately helped me to let the situation go.

Cara's reflections highlight once more the effort that can be involved in trying to secure engagement with a client. At the moment of realisation that engagement between herself and the client is unlikely, Cara becomes disappointed that she was not able to fulfil her responsibility and commitment as a social worker to garner a family focus around the child, despite the various strategies used. In reconciling herself to this outcome, Cara's thoughts turn to questioning whether the expectations placed on the family by the system more broadly are realistic in the first place. She identifies that the alternative to a relationship-oriented approach is a punitive one, which conflicts with her professional values but, in her experience, also does not achieve the right outcomes. It is the frontline where the practical outcomes of these broader expectations are played out.

6.2.2.2 Core practice aim: Intervening to enhance the client's relationship capacity

Social workers stated that social worker - client relationship as explained thus far creates the right environment for facilitating change in a client's relationship behaviour including intra-familial relationships, spousal relationships and parent - child relationships. They maintain that the sense of 'we-ness' and perceived relationship safety that results from active relationship building creates the workspace where a client can be challenged to explore their feelings, thoughts and actions more deeply and experiment with behaving and thinking in ways that are more constructive for themselves, their children and other family members.

This finding that a core practice aim of social worker - client relationship practice is to enhance a client's relationship capacity is explored in this section. Social workers explained that work undertaken to facilitate a client's enhanced

relationship capacity builds on the strength of the engagement achieved, the first core practice aim.

Building the security of the relationship for the client necessitates placing an emphasis on being transparent with the client all the way through the intervention. Being transparent includes continuous review of the relationship with the client, reviewing and restating goals, taking time to explain to the client what is happening and why, and taking time to ensure that the client is clear about the limits to client confidentiality and how that relates to the particular intervention. In moments where the social worker is unsure about which is the right action to take, being transparent with the client also includes taking steps to access information, taking time to ensure the client understands the information being given to them, and its ramifications, and providing the opportunity for the client to say how they understand and feel about, any current issues. Being transparent in these ways was seen as ethical practice that also models to the client how a safe and respectful relationship is conducted.

However, as the participants identified, being honest with a client brings its own risks to the social worker, the client and the relationship workspace. Jessica, a foster care worker, recounted that a difficult conversation she had with a father who had exited prison having served a four-year sentence and was now wanting to resume regular contact with his young son. The father became angry with Jessica when she explained that he was allowed only four face-to-face contacts each year. Jessica had to restate the decision and revisit the issue with the father over several interviews conducted over a few weeks. Her view was that even though this was difficult news for him to digest and difficult engagement for herself to undertake, a point was reached where he accepted the decision and was even able to acknowledge to some degree that he had contributed to his son needing to reside

away from him. For Jessica, hearing the father's acknowledgement was an important achievement for him, for the intervention and for the child. Jessica said that she and the father were able to identify things he could do to maintain a presence in his child's life, and that he could aim to engage with his child more fully when his son was older, and they can decide what contact they may each want with the other.

In social worker - client relationship practice, the social worker has to judge when the relationship is ripe for taking the risk to challenge the client about their thoughts and actions, while being wary that challenging them can potentially rupture the relationship and leave the client feeling fearful, hurt, angry, frustrated and ashamed. In such situations, social workers also become concerned about any repercussions that such expressed emotions may have on children involved:

> When I have built up the relationship and the trust is there I can challenge the client and they know this. Then when I do challenge them about a particular behaviour for example, many clients tell me 'I hate it when you do that' but they can also accept that this is part of the work. And that's when we can bring about that change and a shift in behaviour occurs. Being transparent about what I'm doing and why I'm doing it has to be revisited regularly; going over why we are meeting and what my role is and what we are trying to achieve and why. I make that very clear to my clients. I regularly review the role of confidentiality and their original consent to have our program involved. I have found this is really crucial as it seems to help with reassuring them to take a risk with me and to trust the process (Michelle).

In conclusion, this section of the chapter has reported on two core practice aims commonly associated with social worker - client relationship practice. These are the aims of persisting with engagement in the face of client reluctance or unwillingness to engage, and facilitating enhanced relationship capacity.

As the findings reported indicate, social worker - client relationship practice is continually focused on encouraging client engagement, building a relationship workspace, retaining client engagement, and working hard to encourage re-engagement if need be. The social worker - client relationship was seen as significant for achieving client outcomes on the basis that relationship practice provides a way of working that responds to the frailties that clients bring to their own relationship building and their limited experience of being in safe and constructive relationships. However, it is for these reasons, that social worker - client relationship practice is challenging work that involves social worker responsiveness, creativity and considerable emotional labour. When social worker - client relationships do develop well, important change is achieved, and of a type that for the client, is something they can carry well beyond the intervention. The experience of actively being engaged in a meaningful relationship and of seeing and feeling the good things that can come out of a meaningful relationship was seen by the social workers as the ultimate achievement of social worker - client relationship practice. As Tessa explained these are the professional rewards of this work:

> In my experience, part of that relational work is about sitting in a space with people as you work through a situation together. And there might be some tension or whatever, but you get through it and at the end of it you're all still together and there's almost a point of celebration of what we all went through.

Engagement with a client is the essence of social worker - client relationship practice. At the same time, achieving engagement with a client is not always possible. In these moments, social workers have to reconcile themselves that this is the case. This is not easy to do, because these moments bring into sharp focus the fact that the professional and personal values that drive them in their day to day work, that keep them future oriented and hopeful, are not sufficient in some

situations, despite the practice knowledge and relationship capacities social workers bring to the task.

6.3 Summary and conclusions

This chapter reported the findings that provide insight into how social workers undertake social worker - client relationship practice, which includes setting up the relationship as the workspace for the intervention and then using the relationship workspace to stay the course of the intervention. In social worker - client relationship practice, considerable emphasis is placed on encouraging the client to commit to them and to the developing relationship. The particular capacities that social workers bring to this endeavour and the particular strategies and approaches they utilise to achieve this aim reflect an emphasis placed on 'being-with' the client. It is through sitting with the client to learn about how they see their world, how they relate to their world and address the issues they are confronting, that facilitates engagement that develops a sense of 'we-ness' and the strengthening of the relationship as a workspace for the intervention. This 'we-ness' is also apparent when liaising with the many other people and agencies who may be involved with the client, because, in effect, the social worker is with the client at the centre. At these times, the social worker - client relationship is where the social worker is 'being-with-the-client-in-the-world'.

Social worker - client relationship practice is complex work that demands significant emotional labour by the social worker. Social workers contended that working in a relationship-focused way with clients is essential, a view based on the premise that many clients of child and family welfare services do not easily build constructive relationships with others. Having suffered from their experience of

traumatising relationships, and having insufficient experience of being in safe healthy relationships has, over time, resulted in limited opportunities to develop capacity for building and sustaining safe relationships. The way in which social workers recounted how they go about this practice reflects their sensitivity to the needs and level of tolerance that individual clients have for relational proximity and distance and their capacity, as workers, to be responsive to these needs and tolerances.

Two main core practice aims associated with social worker - client relationship practice identified in the data analysis were also considered in this chapter. The first core practice aim was the importance attached to the role of seeking engagement even where clients communicate non-engagement or reluctance to engage or cease to be engaged temporarily or permanently. The second core practice aim was encouraging and supporting clients to take the risk to change their relationship thinking and behaviour; this was regarded as central to enhancing the client's capacity to enhance their relationship with their children, with other family members and other people in their wider context.

These findings also indicated the social worker activities involved in achieving these core practice aims of social worker - client relationship practice and how intrinsic they are seen to be for everyday practice. Activities associated with sustaining client engagement and linking this activity with their perceptions of each client's relationship capacities are intrinsic to social worker - client relationship practice and the intervention as a whole; they are not an aberration from the intervention trajectory. Relationship practice uses the relationship as the workspace for facilitating client engagement and for building the client's knowledge and skills

about being in relationships. To this end, the social worker is, in effect, a relationship building agent.

Situations where client engagement is unlikely, or is not going to eventuate, appear to be infrequent occurrences. However, when it does occur, it is seen as personally and professionally confronting for social workers.

This concludes the findings for the study that address the research question about the perceived significance of social worker - client relationship practice from a social worker perspective. Social worker - client relationship practice is regarded as significant, in particular for achieving client outcomes, although it is also seen as having significance for social workers' employing agencies and for social work purpose and identity. The ways in which social workers identified social worker - client relationship practice as being significant relate to the social workers' own practice-generated knowledge and reflect five distinguishable sequels. These are: enabling a client to build an interpersonal connection with another person; providing the opportunity for a client to have the experience of a meaningful relationship with another person; generating hope and purpose with the client about their life; helping a client to trust in 'the system'; and encouraging a client to take a risk for the benefit of their own personal growth. These are termed 'sequels' because while they are identified by social workers as composite elements of the relationship building process, they are valuable by-products of the relationship building process, the experience of which can stay with the client beyond the life of the intervention.

These sequels form the basis of social worker - client relationship practice articulated in this study; they reinforce the emphasis placed on encouraging clients to engage, and help to establish the relationship workspace. Engagement work

continues throughout the intervention evident in the labour exerted to retain client engagement and to facilitate re-engagement following a client's withdrawal from an engagement or the breaking down of the relationship. Thus, for social workers in this study, social worker - client relationship practice was not only a means to achieving stated intervention goals, but had significance for the client's experience in and of itself.

Finally, social worker - client relationship practice is complex work, where day to day practice can involve confronting and addressing unpredictable and crisis situations, where emotions can run high and be intensely expressed, where complex decisions have to be made with often incomplete information and require a high degree of social worker autonomy while being relationally focused. To draw conclusions about the findings and how they address the research question, I next consider and discuss the findings about social worker - client relationship practice.

Chapter 7. Discussion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the study findings to explore how they address the research questions and how they link to the wider literature as reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. The research question articulated at the outset of the study was:

'*How do frontline social workers conceptualise their social worker - client relationship practice?*'

7.1.1 Summary of findings and themes

The study answered this research question through the findings that revealed a distinct social worker - client relationship practice. The findings have added to existing knowledge about social worker - client relationship practice through responding to an identified gap in social work knowledge (Fernandez, 2014; Ferguson 2016d; Healy, 2014; Smith and Donovan, 2013; Sudbery, 2009; Tilbury et al. 2015; Trevithick, 2012; Waterhouse and McGhee, 2013). Furthermore, the study has achieved its aim of representing the voice of practising social workers about their relationship practice with clients.

To set the scene for the discussion in this chapter, the findings and related themes are presented in Table 7.1 and briefly summarised with reference to the subsidiary research questions.

Table 7.1: A summary of the findings and themes about a social worker conceptualisation of social worker - client relationship practice

Part 1. Social worker - client relationship practice is significant to social workers	
Finding	Theme
Significance for achieving client outcomes	Sequels of Social worker - client relationship practice *Enabling a person to build an interpersonal connection with another person* *Making the experience of being in a meaningful relationship possible* *Generating hope and purpose about the client's life* *Building clients' trust in 'the system'* *Encouraging clients to take a risk for their own growth*
Significance for achieving agency outcomes	*The agency's financial viability* *The agency's credibility in the wider community context* *Teamwork and satisfaction with their workplace* *Conflict between professional aims and organisational goals*
Significance for social work identity	*Reflects strong personal values and interests* *Enables comprehensive social work understanding of client situation*
Part 2. Social worker - client relationship practice: key elements	
Finding	Theme
Building the Relationship Workspace	*Being-with the client and immersion in the client's perspective of their world* *Establishing sense of 'we-ness'* *Sensitivity and responsiveness to relational proximity*
Using the Relationship Workspace for the course of the intervention	*Core practice aim: Encouraging, retaining and retrieving engagement* *Core practice aim: Intervening to enhance client's relationship capacity*
Part 3. The social worker role	
Social worker as Relationship Building Agent	*Formation of social worker as Relationship Building Agent* *Gender and family socialisation* *Professional social work socialisation*

Part 1 of Table 7.1 lists the findings and themes that address the subsidiary question '*How significant is social worker - client relationship practice to social workers for a) achieving client outcomes, b) their employing agency and c) their sense of social work identity?*'

Essentially, the study found that social worker – client relationship practice is highly significant for achieving client outcomes, for the social workers' employing agencies and for social work identity. This finding broadly concurs with the literature that relationships are a central medium for social work intervention and for facilitating change in people's lives.

Part 2 of Table 7.1 presents the findings and themes that address the subsidiary question '*What understandings can frontline social workers contribute about the day to day experience of relationship practice with clients?*'

Social workers stressed that working with people through the medium of relationship can lead to increased client faith in being involved in relationships and in Enhanced Relationship Capacity. The study found that social worker – client relationship practice is heavily focussed on building engagement and that engagement activity is a continuing focus for the social worker throughout the intervention. This involves 'being-with' the client and being immersed in the client's perspective of their world. It is a practice approach that sets up the relationship as the intervention workspace. Engagement work is also required to retain, retrieve and repair the Relationship Workspace. In this complex, contingent and unpredictable area of practice, the Relationship Workspace is used to maximise opportunities for enhancing client relationship capacity and progressing other intervention goals.

The findings in Part 1 and Part 2 of Table 7.1 led to the insight that the social worker role in social worker – client relationship practice is heavily focused on promoting and supporting relationship processes, and so is termed 'Relationship Building Agent'. These findings are shown in Part 3 of Table 7.1. Informed by social work values and purpose, the social workers conveyed an awareness of, and responsiveness to, the nuances of relationship behaviour and experience; within these processes they use a range of skills, knowledge and capacities, including emotional labour and relational attunement with flexibility and discernment. These tripartite findings represent a distinct practice approach that is called Social Work Relationship Praxis (SWRP). SWRP is described as a practice approach as it offers a guide to practice unlike a model that can be more prescriptive. The contingent and unpredictable nature of child and family welfare practice examined in this thesis requires practitioner flexibility and responsiveness. At the same time, practitioners require knowledge to guide their practice. Offering SWRP as a practice approach provides a guide to practice that also enables social worker creativity and responsiveness to the imperatives of individual situations, an essential attribute in practice. Further development may result in a SWRP practice framework. SWRP and praxis is now explained in more detail.

7.2 Social Work Relationship Praxis (SWRP)

The term 'praxis' is rarely used in social work literature; however, it is invoked here as the term more accurately reflects the integrative nature of this work than does the term 'practice'. 'Praxis' is described by Kemmis (2012) as the 'sayings', 'doings' and 'relatings' [that] are more or less coherently bundled together' (p. 150), and further elaborated by Kinsella and Pitman as:

The kind of action people are engaged in when they think about what their action will mean *in the world. Praxis* is what people do when they take into account all the circumstances and exigencies that confront them at a particular moment and then, taking the broadest view they can of what it is *best* to do, they *act,* (emphases in original) (Kinsella and Pitman 2012, p. 150).

This view of praxis that sees action as a deliberative response to consideration of all 'circumstances and exigencies' that exist in the real world, is consistent with Social Work Relationship Praxis revealed in this study.
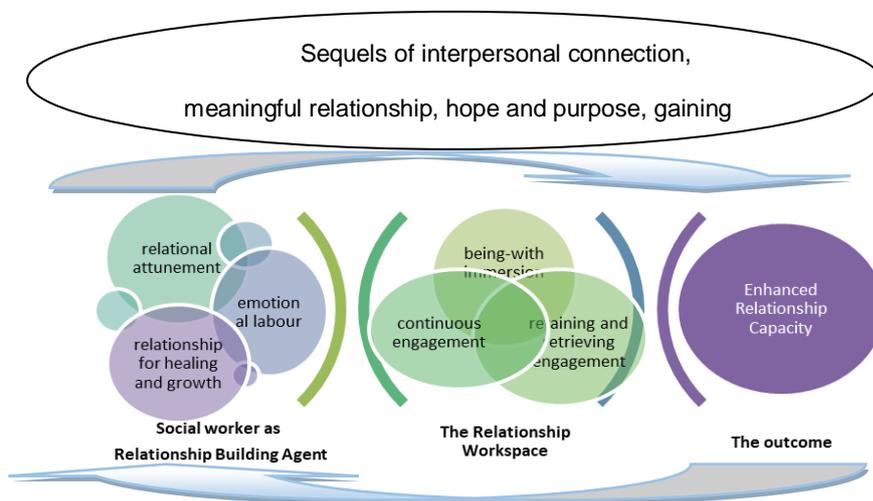
Figure 7.1: Social Work Relationship Praxis

As Figure 7.1 shows, Social Work Relationship Praxis has three main components. These components are drawn from the findings shown in Table 7.1 and placed in a different sequence from Table 7.1 to represent SWRP as a practice approach. The first two components are: the social worker as Relationship Building Agent and the Relationship Workspace. These two components give rise to the third

component, which is the outcome of Social Work Relationship Praxis called Enhanced Relationship Capacity. The remainder of this chapter discusses the first two components in more detail. Building the Relationship Workspace is first discussed. The characteristics and challenges of building the Relationship Workspace necessitate particular attributes of the social worker as Relationship Building Agent.

7.2.1 The Relationship Workspace

A key finding of the study that responds to the main research question is that Social Work Relationship Praxis is critically significant for achieving client outcomes. This finding is consistent with social work literature that demonstrates that relationships are central to social work purpose and practice (Alexander and Charles 2009; Connolly and Harms 2013; de Boer and Coady 2007; Dominelli 2009; Dybicz 2012; Ferguson 2016d; Folgheraiter and Raineri 2012; Healy 2012; Holmes and McDermid 2013; Howe 1998; Mandell 2007; McDonald and Jones 2000; Mishna et al. 2013; Parton 2003; Payne 2006; Trevithick 2003, 2012; Trotter 2012; Tsang 2000) and that helping relationships are characterised by qualities including empathy, warmth, respect, trust, openness, transparency and reliability (Alexander and Charles 2009; Beddoe and Maidment 2009; Brandon and Thoburn 2008; Compton et al. 2005; De Boer and Coady 2007; Duncan et al. 2010; Hamer 2006; Parton and O'Byrne 2000a ; Pilgrim et al. 2009; Norcross 2010; Reimer 2010; Ryan et al. 2004; Sudbery 2002; Trevithick 2003, 2012, 2014; Trotter 2015).

This study has confirmed that these qualities are integral to social worker – client relationships. While this is important confirmation, knowing the qualities that are characteristic of social worker – client relationships does not help us understand *how* social workers develop such relationships. According to the literature, these

qualities are only possible where the social worker has the right mix of ability and capacity, typically referred to as practice skills, engagement skills or relationship building skills. Social workers have to transform different types of knowledge, for example, the client's emotions, facts about the client's circumstances, professional and organisational information into action and this is achieved using a range of skills and capacities. In the Literature Review these skills and capacities were collectively labelled the phronesis of practice and included self-directed learning skills; critical thinking, judgement and decision-making; reflection, critical reflection and reflexivity; emotional intelligence, emotional regulation and attunement, and intuition; and finally, self-awareness and 'use of self'. To perform their roles as relationship building agents, this study found that social workers are heavily reliant on these skills and attributes. Social workers also draw on their own abilities for working with relationship processes, their awareness of themselves and others as relational beings, and their sensitivity to clients' perceptions of relationship dynamics. The mix of ability, skills and attributes identified through this study has highlighted social worker sensitivity to, and ability to work with, the multidimensionality and dynamism of relationship process and reveals a particular 'use of self' seen as pivotal to working with relationship processes. Social workers are intentionally proactive about their 'use of self' in this work.

The 'use of self' described in this study is a form of 'praxis' that enables and reflects the importance social workers attach to social worker 'self-other' awareness, of being attuned to themselves and the other person as relational beings, of 'being-with' the client, and of having knowledge about trauma and its effects. Engaging in this 'praxis' is the key practice tool.

For the social workers in this study, 'being-with' the client and being immersed in the client's perspective of their world is a form of social worker – client engagement that is necessary in the child and family welfare context. Engagement is a term used widely in social work practice literature. It is a term used to describe the first phase of the social work process, casework and case management (Chenoweth and McAuliffe 2015; Compton et al. 2005; Maidment and Egan 2016; Trevithick 2012) and is used interchangeably with other terms such as rapport building. It is a term that implies interaction and relationship between people. Where studies have sought to deconstruct the concept of engagement (Yatchmenoff 2005), to learn more about how social worker - client relationships unfold in practice (Ferguson 2016d), they have not found the depth of focus on the relationship dynamic indicated in this study, or the depth of social worker understanding about the challenges that confront the client when expected to build a relationship with a social worker. This study develops the concept of engagement that makes the role of the relationship process more visible. In so doing, the type of emotionally intense engagement evident in SWRP extends conventional descriptions of engagement. Praxis reflects a way of being in practice that emphasises the importance of 'being-with the client, and of achieving an in-depth understanding of how the client sees their world.

7.2.2 Setting up the Relationship Workspace: being-with, immersion and empathic relating in engagement

The social worker emphasis given to 'being-with' the client and being immersed in the client's perspective of their world, is mindful of the client group and the context in which clients live. It is an approach to engagement that reflects social worker knowledge about the lived experience of long term hardship: living in

poverty, social isolation and alienation, and of the long-term physical and mental health effects of having experienced abusive or oppressive relationships on relationship capacity.

The emphasis on 'being-with' the client, seen as necessary for developing a relationship, also reflects participants' social work values that every human being matters. Social Work Relationship Praxis makes intervention possible. The praxis is the responsibility of the social worker: it involves the complicated work of building the Relationship Workspace and heavily relies on use of empathic relating skills.

As discussed in the Literature Review, empathy is an essential ingredient to engagement. Practice examples offered in this study, confirm the importance of empathic relating as a communication method to encourage client commitment to engagement, seen as important given the intimate subjects that are often the focus of the intervention, an observation made by Ferguson (2016d).

The role of empathy is enjoying renewed attention in current literature (Gerdes and Segal 2011). Neuroscientific research about the relational nature of brain development in infants and in child development and how it helps to understand the impact of trauma on development has affirmed and refined established child—parent attachment theory. The use of empathic relating has been identified as a mechanism for stimulating psychological and spiritual healing (Bland et al. 2015; Howe 2013; Jordan et al. 2004; Ruch et al. 2010) and is key to providing a safe space that allows opportunity for corrective relationship experience (Knight 2015). These ideas resonate with the social worker reflections in this study that also stressed the importance of worker authenticity (Comstock 2008; Jordan et al. 2004). These observations concur with Winter's (2016) observations that social workers

draw upon personal capacities and their natural affinity 'for communicating' with others, that in Winter's research, were children (Winter 2016). The relational emphasis underpinning Social Work Relationship Praxis respects the humanity of the client, and understands that the client is struggling with particularly distressing issues that are inherently intertwined with relationship troubles. To effectively engage and provide relational opportunities for clients, this study found that the social worker is immersed in the client's context and that it is embodied praxis. This view resonates with Horwath's (2016) findings that social worker – client engagement in the UK child protection system, entails 'walking the walk' with clients.

Critical to stimulating healthy child development is the role of empathic relating by caregivers toward the child and caregiver attunement to the child's cues. Recent social work research that has explored client perspectives and social worker perspectives continues to confirm the importance of social worker warmth and empathy for client engagement (De Boer and Coady 2007; Gladstone et al. 2012; Yatchmenoff 2005).

Empathic relating is more than a set of technical skills. This study has shown it reflects a way of being-in-practice that is informed and supported by social worker commitment to social work values, and resonates with Payne's (2011) humanistic approach to social work practice reviewed in Chapter 2. It is an approach that enables social workers to prioritise being-with the client and to build their understanding about how the client sees and experiences their world. On the whole, this degree of immersion is not apparent in the literature, although the intimate nature of practice is acknowledged (Howe 2013, Payne 2011, Ruch 2005, Ruch et al. 2010). Furthermore, immersion in the client's lived experience as described in this study contrasts with conventional notions about rapport building. Social Work

Relationship Praxis sees the relationship as the practice medium and as a practice method.

In Social Work Relationship Praxis the importance of 'relationships' lies in humanistic ideas, whereas for Ruch et al. (2010) the social worker – client relationship places emphasis on the relationship as an anxiety containing mechanism. These two constructs of 'relationship practice' have different emphases and they each imply particular practitioner roles. Social Work Relationship Praxis leads the social worker to promote and facilitate relational opportunities and social connection, on the basis that being in relationships fosters identity development and enhances relationship capacity. Ruch's et al. (2010) relationship-based practice encourages the social worker to develop the relationship as a therapeutic tool, to reduce the client's anxiety so that change in relationship behaviour can be facilitated. In short, the former is rooted in humanistic existential ideals whereas the latter is rooted in psychological ideals. At the same time, the two constructs are neither mutually exclusive nor incompatible with each other.

In Social Work Relationship Praxis developing the Relationship Workspace is a major and ongoing focus for the social worker, shown in Figure 7.1, and involves action to retain, retrieve and repair the relationship. This study has highlighted that engagement practice is precarious and continuous.

7.2.3 The Relationship Workspace: retaining, retrieving and repairing

This study found that the relationship is an evolving space, as it is through the time spent 'being-with' the client, providing the client with the space to be heard, that increases the potential for achievement of intervention goals.

The awareness of the client's troubled relationship history and the knowledge about the long term effects of this on relationship capacity, and social worker commitment to try and understand how this affects each individual in their daily functioning, necessitates a strong emphasis on engagement: on retaining, retrieving and repairing engagements. Working on repair and seeking to overcome disruption is an important learning experience and requires social worker sensitivity and responsiveness to the client's tolerance for relational proximity.

Research about the challenges of maintaining client engagement exists (Forrester et al. 2012; Maiter et al. 2006; Trotter 2015). The phenomenon of client non-engagement, reluctance or resistance to engage tends to focus on the micro level: on how to make services more attractive to clients; how to improve practitioner approaches to engagement, and how to improve home visiting practice (Saïas et al. 2016). Client resistance or reluctance to engage has also attracted attention, including how such clients are labelled, such as 'the compliant family' (Yatchmenoff 2005) and the 'bad' client (Juhila 2003). Critiques of such terms and of constructs of client resistance, non-engagement to engagement exist in the social work literature (Beresford 2005; Juhila et al. 2003; Murphy et al. 2011) and point to the multiplicity of existing perspectives, including those driven by legal, policy, organisational and professional imperatives and practices (Murphy 2011). Examining these perspectives to identify how these constructions impact on the client experience has to inform development of Social Work Relationship Praxis.

Other factors that can impinge on social worker - client engagement, and are supported by this study, include levels of social worker stress (Gladstone et al. 2012), social worker fear of failure (Munro 2011b), client mistrust in 'the system' (Forrester et al. 2012; Gladstone et al. 2012), clients being 'exquisitely sensitive to

blame' (Miller 2016) and social worker fear of client aggression and violence (Littlechild 2005, 2016). Labelling of a client's behaviour as resistance can also reflect the social context of the social worker - client interactions (Forrester et al. 2012).

As the Literature Review identified, organisational practices, such as large caseloads also affect clients' lives and wellbeing, as well as practitioner wellbeing. In addition, structural factors such as the law and its implementation, income security, education, housing and health care policies and practices influence social worker - client engagement. Finally, deeply embedded cultural understandings and values about engagement with government authorities and accessing support from outside the family, can also affect engagement/non-engagement (Bennett et al. 2013; Bennett et al. 2011; Rosenberger 2014, Bennett 2015).

Pejorative judgements that blame the client for non-engagement while omitting to locate these actions within the many layers of the broader context are simplistic, ill-informed and fly in the face of practising an ethic of care. Building understanding about relationship engagement practice also needs to extend beyond the binary of engagement/non-engagement. Perceived client non-engagement and resistance to engagement need to be reconceptualised as a form of engagement and part of the relational continuum. Perceived non-engagement is an inextricable component of social worker - client relationship practice, and for the social workers in this study, was an inherent aspect of this work where people have been repeatedly betrayed, hurt and shamed in their relationships. Social workers in this study emphasised that their perseverance to navigate through tensions and threats to social worker - client engagement can lead to continued engagement and intervention and can also provide valuable experience and learning for both the client and the social worker.

Many studies have explored the client experience of being engaged with child protection services (De Boer and Coady 2007; Farrell et al. 2012; Forrester et al. 2012; Schreiber et al. 2013; Yatchmenoff 2005), although understanding about how to manage the nuances of relationships that are also unique to each practice situation and where engagement is threatened, volatile or reluctant is more limited (Forrester et al. 2012).

Within a service provision context, social worker – client relationship praxis provides relational opportunities that can facilitate social connection for individuals. In turn, this interpersonal and social connection for individuals incrementally builds social capital, especially important for those living at the fringes of the formal economy and society, an idea that has been recently explored by Barker and Thomson (2014).

Social Work Relationship Praxis acknowledges that clients do not come to their contact with child and family services well-equipped for engagement and relationship - building and for trusting people. Therefore considerable effort is required to encourage clients to commit to intervention and change that inherently entails interactions and engagement with a range of people and authority figures. It is for these reasons that the identified sequels of Social Work Relationship Praxis are also regarded as beneficial outcomes as experiencing any of these sequels as part of any Social Work Relationship Praxis intervention, can instil hope and also faith in other people and in their own capacities to build safe and constructive relationships.

7.2.4 The Sequels of Social Work Relationship Praxis and Enhanced Relationship Capacity

As listed in Table 7.1 and shown in the depiction of Social Work Relationship Praxis (Figure 7.1), the study found that engaging with clients through relationship can precipitate positive relationship experiences, identified as worthwhile outcomes for clients. I have named these sequels because they can arise anytime throughout the relationship process. The five sequels are: Enabling a Client to Build an Interpersonal Connection with Another Person; Enabling a Client to Have the Experience of a Meaningful Relationship with Another Person; Generating Hope and Purpose with the Client About Their Life; Helping a Client to Trust In 'The System'; and Encouraging a Client to Take a Risk for the Benefit of Their Own Personal Growth.

Each of these sequels reflects the client behaviours and perceptions identified by social workers as important outcomes or corollaries of Social Work Relationship Praxis. The experience of an interpersonal connection that is also meaningful is fundamental to being human. Absence of meaningful connection with others is a significant issue as it increases susceptibility to poverty and ill health. Much literature exists across many disciplines about the causes and effect of social isolation and loneliness, not least in the social and cultural determinants of health and wellbeing literature (World Health Organisation 2017), an issue of particular relevance to practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Australian Department of Health 2017). Within the confines of this thesis, social work practice contributes to generating hope, a key ingredient for mobilisation (Bland et al. 2015; Collins 2015; Miller and Rollnick 2014; Payne 2011; Ryan et al. 2004).

Another sequel identified is building client capacity to trust in 'the system'. This

sequel reflects the perception of social workers that clients often do not feel they can trust professionals or 'the system' more generally, an observation echoed in the literature (de Boer and Coady 2007; Smith 2005; Yatchmenoff, 2012). For social workers, encouraging clients to take the risk to trust in other people is an ongoing and fundamental task of Social Work Relationship Praxis. When clients demonstrate discernment and new confidence in trusting other people, it is identified by social workers as a significant outcome that emerges out of the relationship process and a corollary of relationship practice.

7.3 The social worker as Relationship Building Agent

In response to the subsidiary research question that asked about the significance of social worker – client relationship practice for social work purpose and identity, the participants were firm in their view that it was significant and that this practice was closely aligned with their professional social work values. The social worker role is in effect, one of a relationship building agent.

Attributes evident within the social work Relationship Building Agent role were social work values of respect for the humanity of the individual and addressing injustices. This was apparent in the participants' commitment to do what they can to make people's lives better and their strong motivation for advocating for the people they work with, particularly children.

A primary aim of the study was to make the practice of social worker – client relationships more visible by privileging the practitioner voice. This aim led to the key finding that social workers think in relationship terms and bring a relationship-informed approach to their engagement with clients and the identification of a Relationship Building Agent role, shown in Figure 7.1. The day to day work is often

chaotic and changeable, and the practice occurs through the relationship with the client. As Relationship Building Agent, the social worker employs emotional labour (discussed further in 7.3.1) and their ability to work relationally, to be relationally attuned and sensitive to the client's tolerance for being in relationships, and to utilise moments as they occur to facilitate Enhanced Relationship Capacity.

The study has illustrated how this role reflects social worker capacity for working with complexities that is the 'real world'. Social Work Relationship Praxis enables adaptation to the unique demands of each situation, and to the complex and dynamic interrelationships between client, agency, professional and other contextual factors.

It is established in social work practice that social workers are change agents and that to perform this role, they can assume a range of co-occurring roles such as advocate, mediator or coordinator (Compton et al. 2005). This study suggests the role of Relationship Building Agent can be added to the social work role repertoire.

Contemporary practice theory that most resembles SWRP as developed in this study is Ruch et al.'s (2010) theory of relationship-based practice, as it acknowledges the rational and affective dimensions of human life and that practice engages with the inner as well as the outer worlds of the client and the social worker. As previously mentioned, the social worker in relationship-based practice aims to create a secure base and act as container of client anxiety, offering a valuable medium for processing and understanding the destructive and threatening feelings that have developed out of traumatic life experience.

Both Ruch et al.'s (2010) relationship-based practice and SWRP confirm the purpose of the helping relationship as a place of psychological and physical safety

for the client that offers important space for trauma recovery, healing and further development. However, SWRP is additionally informed by a phenomenological understanding reflected in the emphasis placed on the importance of 'being-with' the client, being immersed in their perspective of the client's world, and the humanity that this expresses to the other person. This can be a powerful existential experience for the client because it brings hope and the feeling that they do matter, as reflected in Honneth's notion of 'recognition' (Honneth 1995). SWRP also stresses that Enhanced Relationship Capacity can result from maintaining the focus on building, retrieving and repairing relationships over time.

The phenomenological and feminist ideas discussed in this thesis, and described by the social workers in this study, that firstly privilege the humanity of the client, and their lived experience, and secondly, recognise how deeply disempowered many clients are, value the relational view of 'the self', and the humility, that we are all human beings.

Identifying the role of the social worker as Relationship Building Agent is a more specific role than the widely used terms of change agent or caseworker, even though relationship is widely seen as the medium for practice with clients, and for facilitating change. This particular role is not evident in the social work literature although working through relationship is articulated (Hennessey 2011; Howe 2013; Ruch et al. 2010; Trevithick 2012). Exploring the role of social worker as Relationship Building Agent within the context of SWRP requires further research discussed in Chapter 8.

7.3.1 Emotional labour

As noted in the literature review, understanding emotions and learning how to work with them is elemental to social work practice with children and families (Cooper 2005; Gausel 2011; Ferguson 2005; Howe 2008a, 2014; Ingram 2013; Munro 2011a; Ruch et al., 2010, 2014; Trevithick 2012). This reflects the emotional intensity of social work practice and this was illuminated in this study. Understanding emotion, facilitating client understanding about their own emotions and how they affect their behaviour and their relationships, appropriately responding to the expression of strong emotions, including anger and aggression, as well as monitoring and managing their own emotions were all activities evident in practice accounts provided in this study. These activities can be described as requiring the use of emotional labour. The use of emotional labour has been explored a little in social work (Leeson 2010); for example in relation to depression amongst child protection workers (van Heughten 2011; Stanley 2007). The current study suggests emotional labour needs to be better understood for social work practice.

7.3.2 Sensitivity and responsiveness to tolerance for relational proximity

This study found that social workers are sensitive to their relational proximity to clients and that this appears to be a practice response to their assessment of the client's tolerance for relational proximity and/or distance and for monitoring their own and others' safety, especially where signs of aggression and/or violence are identified.

The notion of relational proximity in practice is not discussed in social work literature, although it has relevance to practice concerns. Proximity and distance issues in social work literature are typically expressed using the conventional

language of roles and boundaries (Trevithick 2012). The traditional professional requirement for maintaining role boundaries, such as professional conduct, is embedded in professional documents such as the AASW Code of Ethics (Australian Association of Social Workers 2010). In this study, social workers stated that they continuously clarify and reiterate their roles and role boundaries with clients to ensure as much as possible that they and their clients remain clear about their roles. Iteration of roles has to be regularly reviewed in SWRP according to the social workers because the goals and plans change as the relationship and intervention progress. Emphasis on communicating role clarity in practice is consistent with existing practice ethics and principles of best practice (Alston and Bowles 2013; Harms and Connolly 2012; Maidment and Egan 2016).

However, the way social workers in the study spoke about role and boundaries extended beyond these fundamental understandings. Their sensitivity to relational proximity reflected attunement to, and capacity to respond to, the client's tolerance for relational proximity. In this child and family welfare practice context where navigating relationships, negotiating and interacting with people about their relationships is the content of daily practice, sensitivity to relational proximity is seen as an important professional ability. It is also helpful for practice where expectations and norms about the 'rules of engagement' can be very different from one's own or conventional customs, and where strong emotional responses are readily triggered, emotions can be volatile. Being attuned to the 'right' degree of proximity that is tolerable for the client is complex and potentially fraught. Judging the 'right' degree of relational proximity/distance was identified as an integral practice issue by the social workers in this study.

This feature of practice was identified by Alexander and Charles (2009) in their study, where intimacy and separateness between social workers and clients was identified as something that shifts and changes over time and is not rule bound or static. Ruch et al. (2010) also found that social workers described being 'too close in or too far out' when engaged with clients as one of the dilemmas associated with relationship practice (p. 151).

Such sensitivity and responsiveness therefore plays a significant role in retaining engagement and supporting client commitment to the intervention.

It has been reported that social workers may choose to avoid or navigate around pertinent issues for fear of making the wrong decision or suffering retribution, which may also be misinterpreted by a client or have some other adverse outcome for the client or for both people (Buckley et al. 2011; Gillingham 2016; Healy and Lonne 2010; Littlechild 2005; Lonne et al. 2013; McFadden et al. 2015; Saini et al. 2012; Smith 2001; Smith et al. 2003; Stalker et al. 2007). These studies highlight the safety risks that relational proximity can pose as well as the challenge in addressing these risks in the practice context. However, keen understanding about how the client sees their world requires preparedness to be 'close' to the client's interpretation of their experience.

While no studies could be found that have specifically focussed on how social workers demonstrate this sensitivity and attunement to relational proximity, the ethics of proximity has been explored for social work (Bozalek 2016). Engagement with clients entails care, which of itself is a relational concept. The ethics of care and ethics of proximity, underdeveloped in social work, have relevance to developing current findings about the role of relational proximity in social work practice.

Learning more about the nature and practice of relational proximity in SWRP is warranted for reasons identified in this study. Sensing proximity to another individual includes a range of experiences, from threatening to comforting, inducing a range of feelings and emotions. This is key knowledge for practice with clients whose relationship experience has been characterised by betrayal, abandonment or shame. Navigating issues of proximity can be risky and can have dramatic consequences for the relationship if not handled well. Children's safety can be overlooked. Feeling comfortable or confident with proximity to another individual can trigger trauma-based and unpredictable reactions from traumatised individuals, constituting a challenge to relationship practice and practitioners.

7.4 Social worker attributes for SWRP

Social workers have to have the capacity to be-with the client in their own space, and be attuned to the client's tolerance for relational proximity. Thus the 'self' of the social worker becomes a critically valuable resource in SWRP, reinforced in the social work literature. Included in this, is the social worker's capacity to maintain their own emotional regulation, wellbeing and practice effectiveness. This part of the discussion focuses on what the findings say about 'the self' of the social worker in Social Work Relationship Praxis.

7.4.1 Self-awareness, self-other awareness and use of self

'Use of self' is an established term in social work practice, although is not without contention, as discussed in Chapter 2. The type of 'use of self' evident in this study is closely aligned with 'the self' as a relational concept and the idea of 'self as process in interaction' (Arnd-Caddigan and Pozzuto 2008, p.235). Notwithstanding the fluctuating popularity over time in social work of the 'use of self', Gordon and

Dunworth's (2016) study noted that an increased focus on relationship-informed practice and the role of 'use of self' in practice has emerged in Scotland in recent years, suggesting increased emphasis on the concept and how it is enacted in practice in social work education.

In the main, in social work literature, 'use of self' has been informed by psychodynamic theory. While this conceptualisation of 'use of self' has endured, it has been challenged by others, such as Kondrat (1999), who reminds us to think about the epistemology of the concept of 'self'. Is 'self' reflecting an individualised understanding of self that aims towards self-actualisation and autonomy (Erikson 1950), or is the development of self inextricably tied to the development of the other (Bland et al. 2015; Freedberg 2009; Howe 2013; Jordan et al. 2004), where 'the other' is an individual, group or culture. This relational view of self is compatible with van Manen's (2007, p. 395) idea that we 'find-ourselves-being-in-relation-to-others' and is a theme featured in the findings of this study. Outcomes of intervention with social workers do lead to client Enhanced Relationship Capacity. These reflections suggest the importance of the concept of the 'relational self' and the importance of relationships for identity formation, concepts encapsulated in SWRP and underline the social worker role as Relationship Building Agent.

This study has highlighted that social workers are alert to the relationship process between themselves and the client. Social workers are watchful about how their perceptions of the client and the client's perceptions of them change over time. Monitoring the client's and their own comfort/discomfort with relational proximity at any one point in time is also important for assessing when a client needs some relational or emotional distance in the working relationship. Having this capacity, and knowing how to use it, demonstrates a type of attunement on the part of the social

worker. Furthermore, it requires the social worker simultaneously being part of the relationship while retaining separateness from it. This necessitates nuanced understanding of the benefits and the risks associated with perceived closeness to the client, and a continuing consciousness about this aspect of the relationship dynamic, thus reflecting a high level of skill in the 'use of self' in practice.

A degree of relational awareness and a level of confidence to be able to judge and adjust degrees of proximity as needed are required in SWRP. In other words, while the study confirmed the importance of awareness and use of self, it also identified the importance of social worker 'self-other' awareness as a component of 'use of self'.

7.4.2 Relational 'know-how'

Understanding why or how social workers have the capacity to be so relationship oriented is beyond the scope of this study. However, it does seem that social workers draw upon their identities and roles as carers: as mothers, women, daughters, spouses and their professional knowledge about families, parent-child attachment, the effects of trauma on development and capacity to sit with expression of painful feelings.

As social workers explained their approach to social worker - client relationship practice with children and families, they exuded a degree of 'knowing' about being in relationships, when they recounted how they interacted with clients, how they thought about their interactions with clients, their affinity for 'getting down' to the detail of family relationships and dynamics with clients and their families, and how they managed the lack of certainty and control that comprises much of this practice. In this, they seemed to be relationally oriented individuals, reinforced by their

motivation for doing this work which, as reported in Chapter 5, was almost entirely about working with people to make a difference in their lives, for families and for children. Their resolute commitment to building and supporting relationships was much of the work, and was seen to be pivotal to carrying out their official and professional responsibilities.

This seeming affinity with relational material could be identified in psychological terms as intuition (Hogarth 2010) or alternatively in sociological terms, as having a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1999). Each of these terms has been explored in social work for practice (Daniel 2003; Munro 1999; Ruch et al. 2010; Trevithick 2014). Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital have been explored in social work (Garrett 2007), although not with regard to affinity for Relationship Praxis. This apparent affinity for working with relationships with families and children does not define the social workers or the social work identity conveyed in this study. The social workers demonstrated well developed and integrated use of social work knowledge and practice that extended beyond this capacity.

For client mothers, on the other hand, socialisation for nurturing and mothering has been, in many cases, severely disrupted. The desire to be a 'good loving mother' is also inextricably bound up with profound experiences of hurt, betrayal and shame that can shadow their own desires to be a good mother (Fraiberg et al. 1975; Lieberman et al. 2005). Feelings of ambivalence towards being a mother and towards children, having the capacity to learn about their own identities as mothers, resolving feelings about themselves as mothers, processing their loss of the care of their children when they are placed in care, and becoming a mother by force rather than by choice are all examples of the 'motherhood' experience that can be inextricably bound up with the work of social worker - client relationship practice. It is

a complex life experience for the mothers involved, and complex practice for the social workers involved who see it as their role to create a safe space where these lived experiences can be processed. Social and cultural constructions of motherhood and the 'ideal' mother further add to the complexity and the sadness associated with this work. Exploring self-identities as mothers, spouses and as family members has to be a part of this relationship work, and social workers need to be prepared and equipped to facilitate dialogue with the client that enables meaning–making, and then healing, repair and building of new narratives.

Social work feminist research literature about constructions of motherhood and family and their relevance to social workers engaged in relationship with children and families in child and family welfare was discussed, and is revisited in Chapter 8 where implications of the study are outlined.

Overall, the study has revealed social work insights about social workers' relationship processes with clients in practice and that enhancing relationship capacity is a significant part of the work. The study has highlighted social workers' experience of these processes and the knowledge and attributes they regard as important for Social Work Relationship Praxis. In doing so, the study has identified a number of terms that relate to this praxis and might collectively be called the language of relationships.

7.5 The language and vocabulary of social worker - client relationship practice

This study has addressed a gap in current knowledge about what is known about contemporary social worker - client relationship practice that includes insights about the practice itself. A key observation from this study is that despite the

different practice roles and contexts in which social workers engage, there is shared understanding about social worker- client relationships that reflects a shared language and vocabulary of relationship practice. The vocabulary emerging from the study is presented in the following word cloud, preceding an outline of the study's limitations.

7.6 Limitations of the study

This study has a number of limitations that need to be considered when appraising the findings. The cultural profile of the sample was almost exclusively Anglo-Australian. How much this reflects the cultural profile of the Australian social worker population as a whole is not known; however, there is some evidence that the child protection worker population is increasing in cultural diversity (McArthur et al. 2011; McArthur and Thomson 2012).

The cultural profile of the sample also did not include Aboriginal and /or Torres Strait Islander social workers, and so their perspective is absent in this study. While their absence is not a limitation of the design of the methodology used in this study, the absence of their voice does serve as a reminder to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to undertake this kind of research, given the high rates

of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families who are clients of child and family welfare services, and the children and young people in out-of-home care.

The small size of the study can be seen as a limitation as the findings cannot be generalised to all social workers. However, small qualitative studies such as this one are not intended to be generalisable and they do add depth of understanding about phenomena. This in-depth study has made intricacies of social worker – client relationship practice more visible and has achieved an aim of the study by enabling social workers to contribute to social work practice knowledge.

The methodology for this study was legitimate for the purpose of seeking social worker views about their practice experience. However, as noted by Morris (2012), robust methodologies are needed to find out what social workers actually do in their relationship practice with clients. The recent use of ethnographic methodologies (Ferguson 2010, 2016) is an illustrative example for consideration.

As stated earlier, the sample of this study entirely comprised women social workers. Accessing male and LGBTI social worker perspectives and the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers and social workers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is also important. Seeking the views of other groups of social workers about their practice experience of relationships practice with mothers, fathers and children would enrich the findings.

This study did not interview clients which may be seen as a limitation of the study. While this idea was considered in the early stages of the study design, it was rejected because the central aim of the study was to access social worker practice experience with clients.

7.7 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has discussed each of the study's findings, addressing the research question 'How do practising social workers conceptualise social worker - client relationship practice?' and the subsidiary questions:

How do frontline social workers explain their relationship practice with clients?

How significant is social worker - client relationship practice to social workers for a) achieving client outcomes, b) their employing agency and c) their sense of social work identity?

What understandings can frontline social workers contribute about the day to day experience of relationship practice with clients?

The overall conclusion drawn from the study's findings is that social worker - client relationship practice remains central to social work identity and that, for social workers, it has critical significance for achieving client outcomes. The study has yielded answers to each of the above research questions. It has illuminated the centrality of the social worker - client relationship revealing that social workers heavily rely on their 'use of self'. The study has found that social worker – client relationship practice is a distinct practice approach and that social workers use their knowledge of relationship processes to do the work, that the social worker self is part of the process and heavily relies on discriminating 'use of self'. The study found social worker – client relationship practice is an approach that demands a way of being, referred to as Social Work Relationship Praxis (SWRP).

Social Work Relationship Praxis consists of three key elements: building the Relationship Workspace, using the Relationship Workspace to stay the course of the intervention with the client, and that to do this work, the social worker acts as relationship-building agent.

The findings indicated the significance of engagement work that involves empathic relating, considerable emotional labour and continuous actions that reflect social worker views that acts of respect and 'recognition' towards another person are beneficial for that person. The significance of engagement praxis also lies in the reality that securing client engagement is precarious, is ongoing and often involves retrieving and/or repairing a rupture in engagement or working to resolve a situation when engagement altogether ceases.

This chapter has also elaborated on the concept of the relationally oriented social worker and their role as relationship building agent. Social workers are relationally focused yet independent practitioners. They seem particularly attuned to their own and their clients'' tolerance for relational proximity. The practice approach of Social Work Relationship Praxis holds that social workers rely heavily on their own capacities of self-other awareness, empathic relating, relational attunement, clear thinking, decision-making, reflection and communication capacities. Engagement work is a daily task and often occurs away from the office. While the social workers in this study stated that they find the relationship work stimulating and satisfying, especially where positive change occurs, Social Work Relationship Praxis is complex, emotionally demanding and not for the faint hearted. To do this work, social workers need to have a strong sense of self-identity and clear professional identity that equips them to 'hold' the relationship with the client while also adhering to organisational imperatives.

The study also found that the affinity social workers seemed to have for working with relationship processes, and particularly family relationships, can potentially be understood using Bourdieu's concept of 'disposition', although this needs further research. These observations about social work affinity for working with family relationship and for the role of 'care' in social work practice would benefit from feminist analysis that explores the intersections between gender and family role socialisation and how this influences professional behaviour and capacity and predisposes some social workers to opt for this area of practice.

Finally, a vocabulary has emerged from this study that can be seen as an emerging language of relationship for social work praxis.

In the next and final chapter of this thesis, implications of the findings for social work practice, social work education and research are outlined, setting the scene for drawing final conclusions about this thesis.

Chapter 8. Social Work Relationship Praxis: implications and conclusions

8.1 Introduction

The thesis explored social worker - client relationship practice with frontline practising social workers employed in child and family welfare. The aim of the study was to elicit social worker views about their conceptualisation of social worker - client relationship practice. The study used qualitative methodology to elicit social worker perspectives and contextualised the findings with social work literature. The findings revealed the social worker view that social worker - client relationship practice has critical significance for achieving client outcomes and that the social worker - client relationship provides the workspace through which the work of the intervention can be done. A distinct practice approach has emerged from the study and is termed Social Worker Relationship Praxis (SWRP).

In addressing the subsidiary research question about the significance of social worker - client relationship practice for employing agencies and for social work purpose and identity, the study found that social workers believe social worker - client relationship practice has significance for both.

Overall, the study identified that Social Work Relationship Praxis entails a form of 'use of self' for the social worker that is based on a relational premise, emphases that have implications for social work practice, education and research. These are now summarised and discussed starting with suggestions for social work practice.

8.2 Implications of the study's findings

8.2.1 Social work practice

Experiencing trusting, reliable, constructive and meaningful relationships can be a taken- for- granted human experience. For many of the adults and children who have been subject to abusive relationships, and know the hurt, betrayal and developmental damage that can come from entrenched abusive family relationships and who come into contact with child and family welfare services, this is not the case. This study has illuminated how central the issue of being able to trust in other people is for the clients of child and family welfare services. A main objective of child and family welfare services is to improve children's relationships with their parents/caregivers. Achieving this objective is a complex task and how to achieve it remains problematic. Insights from this study stress the importance of offering clients the experience of being in healthy, safe relationships and indicate that social workers provide such relational opportunities through SWRP.

It is imperative that social workers choosing to engage in SWRP as a distinct practice approach have access to regular and high quality professional development and supervision that enables knowledge and skills development as well as access to support and intervention that supports the daily practice experience.

Particular areas for professional development include: providing safe opportunities for social workers to explore their own emotions, emotional intelligence and emotional regulation so they are better able to engage others about emotions and relationships; identifying and developing strategies for use in practice that faciliate reflective capacity, emotional self-awareness and emotional regulation and a focus on the social worker self in relationhip processes. Professional supervision

provided regularly in-house and externally also facilitates skills and capacity for praxis.

Social Worker Relationship Praxis thus requires knowledge about the effects of trauma on relationship building capacity and understands that engagement with the client requires continuous attention. Continuous engagement activity includes retaining, retrieving and repairing relationships when they rupture. The findings reflect social workers' views that SWRP prioritises client participation in, and experience of, a meaningful and safe relationship process, and that this involvement facilitates client development of their own relationship capacity and skills. The practice of retrieving and repairing ruptures in relationships is vexed and demanding practice: 'becoming engaged and remaining engaged are not necessarily the same conceptually or in practice' (Gladstone et al. 2012, p.117). The challenges associated with maintaining a relationship need to be understood within the context of trauma and its effects and their personal histories of economic, cultural and social disadvantage that epitomises the lives of many clients. This recommendation for continuing professional development presupposes that organisations also develop their policies and practices informed by relational premises identified and discussed in this study and 'humanising managerialism' Trevithick (2014, p. 304).

SWRP offers a starting point for organisations to think about how relational opportunities can be embedded in its practices for clients, and how they can be best utilised to facilitate experience of being in reliable, meaningful, caring relationships, learning about relationships and promoting social connection. Community development and public health approaches to service provision provide a conceptual foundation for delivering services and protecting children and families in less stigmatising ways.

SWRP is informed by the often unpredictable and ambiguous nature of social work practice and the precarious nature of the lives of many clients. SWRP recognises that the practitioner is the primary 'tool' on which organisations rely to offer and provide services to children and families. As the thesis has pointed out, organisations are increasingly using outcomes-driven and risk averse policies and practices. While outcomes are important, and organisations and their staff and clients need to be kept as safe as possible, it is a responsibility of organisations and of the community more broadly, to acknowledge that trauma has devastating effects on human development and relationship capacity, and that healing from trauma usually requires an individual to (re)learn to feel safe and to (re)learn how to build and maintain safe and healthy relationships. Building confidence and skill in forming relationships necessarily entails experiential learning. Providing relational opportunities is an essential precondition for this to occur. Such an approach places emphasis on the importance of relationship building over many current practices that see services reducing the length of interventions and pursuing outcomes that are often not realistic for individuals to achieve in the time available. Existing centres that provide universal childcare and are the hubs of multi-service centres can provide a range of such relational opportunities.

A further recommendation for practice is to explore the usefulness of Social Work Relationship Praxis with other groups of social workers, including male social workers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers, social workers from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds and social workers employed in other practice contexts.

SWRP also precipitates questions about the role of 'care' in social work practice including caring, gender and family roles, the social role of caring; and the

links between caring and power relations endemic to family life. Studies that explore and define what 'care' with practitioners engaged in SWRP might involve inviting social workers to videorecord and reflect on the actions they take when they are engaging with clients. Using observation, videorecording and worker reflection as research methodology would help to clarify behaviour that is informed by life experience such as mothering, and to evaluate how it relates to social work skills used in practice, further articulating SWRP. The Literature Review referred to social work research that has begun to examine how the multiplicity of family and practice roles influences social work practice with clients; however it is an underdeveloped area. Adding to this knowledge about the practice experience has potential relevance to practitioners, children and families and statutory and non-statutory child and family welfare organisations.

The findings of this study encapsulated in SWRP could also be explored for their relevance to theoretical and practice in practice disciplines outside social work, including the use of mindfulness (Hick, 2009), and developments in social work practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The conceptualisation of the social worker role as Relationship Building Agent in SWRP requires further scrutiny and development as an approach to practice. Observational research to learn more about how social workers undertake their relationship praxis with clients is imperative. Ferguson's (2016d) ethnographic methodology is instructive in this regard. Further to this, SWRP could contribute to development of a practise epistemology for social work that has application across all social work practice fields (Higgs et al. 2012), preparing social work for oncoming areas of need such as caring for an aging population.

8.2.2 Social work education

The themes underpinning Social Work Relationship Praxis also have implications for social work education, curriculum and pedagogy.

A key implication of the study's findings is to promote student awareness about 'the relational self' and Social Work Relationship Praxis in social work curriculum. . Relationship themes also lend themselves to being integrated across content areas. Thinking about practice as 'praxis', where 'use of self' is inherently embedded in the practice experience foregrounds the integrative nature of the act of practice. Learning about and preparing for praxis could be vertically and horizontally integrated and scaffolded into curriculum content. This would include theoretical knowledge about the nature of the self, the relational self and human development and knowledge about trauma and its effects on development. Curriculum content that includes topics such as 'the relational self', understanding 'self-other' awareness, the role of emotions in relationships, relational attunement and relational proximity would elevate a relationship-informed approach to practice within the curriculum. The ultimate aim is to facilitate student understanding about praxis as a proactive and to encourage embodied practice in which the 'self' of the social worker is instrumental.

Using experiential, scaffolded interactive and reflection teaching and learning strategies programs could be developed that foster incremental student awareness and development. Relationship themes also lend themselves to being integrated across content areas. Experiential learning is an established feature of social work classroom pedagogy, most notably, learning through roleplay, case studies, skills

development and field education. Advances in work integrated learning (Cooper 2010) and pedagogy of practice learning (Bogo 2010, 2015; Eraut 2002; Higgs et al. 2012; Higgs et al. 2004) can also be harnessed for social work to develop praxis pedagogy for social work. Innovative interactive opportunities that provide students with safe opportunities to better explore their emotional selves and their awareness about themselves in relation to others is essential (Bogo et al. 2014; Gordon and Dunworth 2016; Konrad 2010; Smith et al. 2015).

These ideas are congruent with social work's emphasis on 'relationship' and working with others to achieve change and extend current theory about 'the self' in social work literature. In the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards Guidelines (2017), there is no explicit reference to self-awareness and use of self, either as a graduate attribute, or as a mandatory area of knowledge or skills, although the Standards explicitly state that 'Teaching must also equip student with the skills values and attitudes required for the effective translation of knowledge and understanding into professional development' (Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards Guidelines 2017, p.16). This study has highlighted that SWRP is more than skills acquisition and application. It is a praxis that holistically integrates relationship-informed skills, values and knowledge: it is an embodied practice and a way of being. This integrated view of self-in-practice, that is, praxis, is integral to social work professional identity development, and also sought in assessment of student learning and performance in field placement experience.

Currently, field education provides the real world experience for students to explore, analyse and reflect on themselves in practice. Field education is informed by developmental learning and adult learning principles and provides the opportunity

for students to embody and integrate knowledge, skills and values. Elevating the relational paradigm and linking relational knowledge and skills development to praxis could become key elements of social field education work curriculum. In the placement learning environment students are practicing a way of being, that is transformative and results in social work identity formation and practice readiness. Integrative learning as described here offers potential learning for placement agencies and field educators and could also be linked to development of work integrated learning. Conceptualising direct practice with clients as 'praxis' centres the practitioner in the practice context, an abstraction that could be applied to undergraduate education and field education pedagogy.

Finally, this study has signalled possible links between family role experience, gender role socialisation of social workers with their capacity for working with relationship and for praxis. This link is worthy of further exploration for screening suitability for practice and/or placement that require further exploration to determine how they can assist with knowledge about inherent requirements for social work. Outcome of such research could also inform course entry requirements.

8.2.3 Social work research

Several recommendations for further research arise from the study findings and research outcomes of this study. The study has illuminated social worker thinking about social worker – client relationships and how this informs practice. This is evident in the emphases given to: 'being with' the client, understanding a client's capacity for forming and maintaining relationships, gauging tolerance for relational proximity and stressing the importance of focusing on retaining, retrieving and repairing engagement with the client. Informed by phenomenological views about 'the relational self', these emphases contrast with conventional individualistic notions

of 'the self' found in social work literature. This study recommends further conceptual development of these emphases for social work.

Social work literature and theory about relationship informed practice (Comstock 2008; Ruch et al. 2010) would also benefit from further theoretical development about the ethics of care and the ethics of proximity. Existing knowledge about the relational context of human development can also be developed for Social Work Relationship Praxis. These endeavours would help to build a language of Social Work Relationship Praxis, identified in the previous chapter.

The social worker – client relationship is a social construction which is simultaneously located in the public sphere of family and child welfare policy and the private lives of families, and so is a space where a complex array of policy, legal, economic, social and emotional factors converges. Multifactorial analysis and process studies of the social worker – client relationship could lead to more sophisticated understanding of the factors that influence SWRP providing clues for further practice theory development and organisational development.

8.3 Summary and conclusions of the thesis

This research set out to explore contemporary conceptualisations of social worker- client relationship practice from the perspective of the frontline social worker.

The study has resulted in findings that confirm the critical significance of the relationship as the medium for achieving change. The relationship processes between social workers and clients that deliver positive and safe relationship

experiences can facilitate Enhanced Relationship Capacity and confidence; outcomes that are reached in addition to stated intervention goals.

The emphasis on the relationship process as a medium for facilitating change, and the importance of relationship experience for development and for healing identified in this study rests on the premise that 'the self' is a relational concept, and that individuals are social beings. The study's findings that see the social worker as a relationship building agent, reinforces this relational perspective. For these reasons, the findings suggest that the practice explored in this study is a distinct social work practice called Social Work Relationship Praxis. While this research outcome requires further conceptual development and investigation, the study is important as it has drawn upon the practice experience and knowledge of experienced social workers to uncover the nature of frontline child and family social work practice.

The study has added to existing knowledge about the practice of relationships with clients in social work, that includes knowledge about the role of the social worker in this praxis, and the approaches social workers use to increase client confidence and faith in building relationships with others.

The thesis recommends further research to develop relationship theory for Social Work Relationship Praxis. Developing these ideas that are premised on the notion of the 'relational self' and that acknowledge that human development is a relational phenomenon is critical for social work practice and education. Such development would also explicate the relationship emphasis espoused in the social work literature. The findings of this study contained within Social Work Relationship Praxis provide one way forward for this endeavour. Elevating the relational paradigm

in social work education would better reflect the emphasis placed on the role of relationship and better prepare students for the complex and contingent practice that awaits them upon graduation. Potentially a developed relational paradigm presents opportunity for informing course entry criteria that can better inform potential candidates for enrolment in social work programs.

The unpredictable, contingent and contextual nature of Social Work Relationship Praxis is inherently challenging for practitioners. It is a praxis that carries risks for client and practitioner safety as it often occurs in non-office, 'natural' settings where, compared with office environments, practitioners have less control over the interactional processes. Paradoxically, as a 'real life' setting of families, these 'natural' settings provide greater opportunity for developing authentic relationships with children and families, for observing family life, and for creating real life learning opportunities. While Social Work Relationship Praxis can make an important contribution to child and family social work practice, it is not acontextual, and so has to be investigated with regard to the contextual influences identified in this study and others, that include high social worker workloads, the complexity of clients' lives and the identified issues of client aggression and violence.

Little Australian research exists that has sought social worker perspectives about social worker – client relationship practice. Social work practice is under pressure in child and family welfare as is the public provision of child and welfare services more generally. Social work practice has to develop in a way that understands the need for relationship and connection in people's lives while also being adaptable and responsive to the changing context of service provision

This study has unearthed the importance of relationship process in social work practice in the child and welfare context. The social worker perspectives revealed about the role and nature of relationship-informed practice confirm the integral importance they attach to 'relationship' as a practice medium and that the social worker is a relationship building agent. The thesis recommends that these ideas be further explored with other groups of social workers and in other practice settings. It further recommends that the concept of the relational self be considered and further developed to inform social work education.

Having social workers versed in relational theory and praxis reinforces a key aim of social work that seeks change through working alongside and with people. It also supports social work values of respect for the individual and for social justice, and recognises the health and wellbeing benefits individuals can enjoy from being in relationships with others.

Overall, Social Work Relationship Praxis has the potential to promote the importance of providing relational opportunities to people who otherwise continue to experience the debilitating social, economic, political and cultural effects of loneliness, economic deprivation and alienation. Children and families who endure the debilitating impacts of long-term traumatic and abusive relationships have a right to access services that offer safe and growth-enhancing relationships and which instil hope that being part of safe and healthy relationships is possible in their own lives.

References

*Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (*Parliament of New South Wales*)*

*Children and Young People Act (2008) (*ACT Legislative Assembly*)*

Adams, R, Dominelli, L and Payne, M, Eds. 2009, *Practising social work in a complex world.* New York, Palgrave Macmillam.

Ainsworth, F and Hansen, P 2006,"Five tumultuous years in Australian child protection: little progress." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 11, pp. 33-41.

Ainsworth, F and Hansen, P 2011,"The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report -- A Child-Centred System: A Review and Commentary." *Children Australia* vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 164-168.

Ainsworth, M 1969,"Object Relations, Dependency and Attachment: A Theoretical Review of the Infant-Mother Relationship." *Child Development* vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 969-1025.

Alexander, C and Charles, G 2009,"Caring, mutuality and reciprocity in social worker client relationships: rethinking principles of practice." *Journal of Social Work* vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 5-22.

Allan, J, Pease, B and Briskman, L, Eds. 2003, *Critical social work: an introduction to theories and practices.* Crows Nest, Allen and Unwin.

Alston, M and Bowles, W 2003, *Research for social workers: an introduction to methods.* Crows Nest, Allen and Unwin.

Alston, M and Bowles, W 2013, *Research for social workers: an introduction to methods.* Abingdon, Oxon; New York, Routledge.

Alvesson, M and Skoldberg, K 2009, *Reflexive methodology: new vistas for qualitative research.* London, Sage Publications.

Arnd-Caddigan, M and Pozzuto, R 2008,"Use of self in relational clinical social work." *Clinical Social Work Journal* vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 235-243.

Australian Association of Social Workers 2010, Code of ethics. Canberra ACT, AASW.

Australian Association of Social Workers 2017, Australian Socail Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS). North Melbourne, Victoria.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation. (2014). "Vulnerable children getting 'lost' in New South Wales child protection system, ombudsman reports."   viewed 23 June, 2017, from http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-04-10/ombudsman-vunerable-teenagers-lost-in-child-protection-system/5381864.

Australian Capital Territory Government 2014, *Human Services Blueprint*, viewed https://www.betterservices.act.gov.au/human-services-blueprint/human-services-blueprint-final

Australian Council of Social Service 2016, *Poverty in Australia 2016.* Strawberry Hills, NSW, Australian Council of Social Service and the Social Policy Research Centre.

Australian Department of Health 2017, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Performance Framework,* viewed 13th November 2017 https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-health-welfare/health-performance-framework/data#page2

Australian Institute of Family Studies 2014, *Australian child protection legislation*, CFCA Fact Sheet. Melbourne, Australian Institute of Family Studies. Retrieved 23 January 2017 from https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/australian-child-protection-legislation.

Australian Institute of Family Studies 2016, *Child protection and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, CFCA Resource Sheet. Melbourne, Victoria, AIFS. https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-protection-and-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children.

Australian Institute of Family Studies 2016a, History of child protection services, viewed 21 May 2017 https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/history-child-protection-services

Australian Institute of Family Studies 2016b, Mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect, viewed 21 May 2017 https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/mandatory-reporting-child-abuse-and-neglect

Australian Institute of Family Studies July 2014, *International approaches to child protection: What can Australia learn?* Melbourne Vic., CFCA Fact Sheet viewed 21 May 2017 https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/international-approaches-child-protection/international-examples-child-protection.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015, *Child Protection Australia: 2013-14*. Canberra, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, viewed 21 May 2017 http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129550762.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, *Child protection Australia: 2014–15*. Canberra, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, viewed 21 May 2017 http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129550762.

Aylward, P, Murphy, P, Colmer, K and O'Neill, M 2010, Findings from an evaluation of an intervention targeting Australian parents of young children with attachment issues: the 'Through the Looking Glass' (TtLG) project., *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood.* 35**:** 13.

Banks, S 2012a, *Ethics and values in social work*. London, England, Palgrave Macmillan.

Banks, S 2012b,"Negotiating personal engagement and professional accountability: professional wisdom and ethics work." *European Journal of Social Work* vol.16, no.5, pp. 587-604 doi: 10.1080/13691457.2012.732931.

Baradon, T 2009, *Relational Trauma in Infancy Psychoanalytic, Attachment and Neuropsychological Contributions to Parent-Infant Psychotherapy*. Hoboken, Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.

Barker, J and Thomson, L 2014,"Helpful Relationships with Service Users: Linking Social Capital." *Australian Social Work* vol.68, no.1, pp. 130-145, doi: 10.1080/0312407X.2014.905795

Barker, R L 2000, *Forensic social work : legal aspects of professional practice*. New York, New York: Haworth Press.

Bauman, Z 1995, *Life in Fragments:Essays in Postmodern Morality*. Oxford, UK, Blackwell.

Bauman, Z 2000a, *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge, UK, Polity Press.

Bauman, Z 2000b,"Special essay. Am I my brother's keeper?" *European Journal of Social Work* vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 5-11.

Baxter, L A 2010, *Voicing Relationships: A Dialogic Perspective*. United States, Sage Publications Inc.

Beattie, H 2001, *The theory practice interface: a case study of experienced nurses' perception of their role as clinical teachers*. PhD, Australian Catholic University.

Beck, U, Ed. 2014, *Ulrich Beck Pioneer in Cosmopolitan Sociology and Risk Society*. SpringerBriefs on Pioneers in Science and Practice. Cham, Springer International Publishing.

Beddoe, E and Maidment, J, Eds. 2009, *Mapping knowledge for social work practice :critical intersection*s, Cengage Learning.

Beddoe, L 2015,"Continuing education, registration and professional identity in New Zealand social work." *International Social Work* vol. 58, pp. 165-174.

Bennett, B, Green, S, Gilbert, S and Bessarab, D, Eds. 2013, *Our voices : Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social work*. South Yarra, Victoria, Palgrave Macmillan.

Bennett, B, Zubrzycki, J and Bacon, V 2011,"What Do We Know? The Experiences of Social Workers Working Alongside Aboriginal People." *Australian Social Work* vol. 64, no. 1, pp. 20-37.

Bennett, S and Nelson, J 2010, *Adult Attachment in Clinical Social Work: Practice, Research, and Policy*. Dordrecht, Springer. Viewed 21 May 2017 http://ezproxy.acu.edu.au/login?url=https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007%2F978-1-4419-6241-6

Beresford, P 2005,""Service user": Regressive or liberatory terminology?" *Disability and Society* vol. 20, no. 4, pp. 469 – 477.

Beresford, P, Croft, S and Adshead, L 2008,""We Don't See Her as a Social Worker": A Service User Case Study of the Importance of the Social Worker's Relationship and Humanity." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 38, no. 7, pp. 1388-1407.

Bielby, D 2006, 'Gender and Family Relations'. *Handbook of the sociology of gender*. J. Saltzman Chafetz. New York, Springer.

Biestek, F 1957, *The Casework Relationship.* London, Unwin Hyman Ltd, Loyola University Press.

Bland, R, Renouf, N and Tullgren, A 2009, *Social work practice in mental health: an introduction.* Crows Nest, N.S.W., Allen and Unwin.

Bland, R, Renouf, N and Tullgren, A 2015, *Social work practice in mental health : an introduction.* Crows Nest, N.S.W., Allen and Unwin.

Boehm, A 2012,"Clients and Social Workers' Perceptions of Social Work: An Israeli Case Study." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. *43, pp. 964-986 doi:* 10.1093/bjsw/bcs028.

Bogo, M, Rawlings, M, Katz, E and Logie, C 2014, *Using Simulation in Assessment and Teaching: OSCE Adapted for Social Work (Objective Structured Clinical Examination).* Alexandria, VI., CSWE.

Bosly, F R 2007, *Frontline Service Workers conceptualisation of their Clients Anger and how it shapes their Practice*, University of Queensland, School of Social Work and Applied Human Sciences.

Boud, D 2007,"Avoiding the traps: seeking good practice in the use of self assessment and reflection in professional courses." *Social Work Education* vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 121-132.

Boud, D and Brew, A 2013,"Reconceptualising academic work as professional practice: implications for academic development." *International Journal for Academic Development* vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 208-221.

Bourdieu, P 1999, *The weight of the world: social suffering in contemporary society*. Oxford, Polity.

Bowlby, J 1988, *A secure base : parent-child attachment and healthy human development*. New York, Basic Books.

Bozalek, V 2016, 'The political ethics of care and feminist posthuman ethics: contributions to social work'. *Rethinking values and ethics in social work*. R. Hugman and J. Carter. London, Palgrave.

Brandon, M and Thoburn, J 2008,"Safeguarding children in the UK: a longitudinal study of services to children suffering or likely to suffer significant harm." *Child and Family social Work* vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 365-377.

Broadhurst, K, Hall, C, Wastell, D, White, S and Pithouse, A 2010,"Risk, Instrumentalism and the Humane Project in Social Work: Identifying the Informal Logics of Risk Management in Children's Statutory Services." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 1046-1064.

Broadhurst, K and Mason, C 2014, *Social Work beyond the VDU: Foregrounding co-presence in situated practice - Why face-to-face practice matters*. British Journal of Social Work vol. 44, no.3, pp.578-595.

Bromfield, L and Holzer, P 2008, *A national approach for child protection: Project report*. Melbourne, Australian Institute of Family Studies viewed 21 May 2017 www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/reports/cdsmac/cdsmac.pdf.

Bromfield, L and Price-Robertson, R 2011, *Risk assessment in child protection*, National Child Protection Clearinghouse.

Bronfenbrenner, U 1979, *The ecology of human development: experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.

Brookfield, S 2000, 'Transformative learning as ideology critique'. *Learning as transformation: critical perspectives on a theory of progress*. M. Associates. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

Brown, J, Rodgers, J and Anderson, L 2014,"Roles of foster parent resource workers." *Journal of Child and Family Studies* vol.24, pp. 1551-1558 *doi:* 10.1007/s10826-014-9959-7

Buber, M 1958, *I and Thou*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.

Buckley, H, Carr, N and Whelan, S 2011,"'Like walking on eggshells': service user views and expectations of the child protection system." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 101-110.

Burton, J and van den Broek, D 2009,"Accountable and Countable: Information Management Systems and the Bureaucratization of Social Work." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 39, no. 7, pp. 1326-1342.

Butler, A, Ford, D and Tregaskis, C 2007,"Who do we think we are? Self and reflexivity in social work practice." *Qualitative Social Work* vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 281-299.

Callahan, M 2000, 'Best practice in child welfare: lessons form the field'. *Valuing the field: Child welfare in international context*. M. Callahan, S. Hessle and S. Strega. Ashgate, Aldershot.

Cameron, N and McDermott, F 2007, *Social Work and the Body*. Basinsgtoke Hampshire., Palgrave Macmillan.

Campo, M 2015, Children's exposure to domestic and family violence: Key issues and responses. Melbourne, Australian Institute of Family Studies, viewed 21 May 2017 https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/childrens-exposure-domestic-and-family-violence/introduction.

Carey, M 2012, *Qualitative Research Skills for Social Workers: Theory and Practice*, Taylor and Francis

Cassidy, J and Shaver, P R 2008, *Handbook of attachment : theory, research, and clinical applications*. New York, Guilford Press.

Cassidy, J, Ziv, Y, Stupica, B, Sherman, L, Butler, H, Karfgin, A, Cooper, G, Hoffman, K and Powell, B 2010,"Enhancing attachment security in the infants of women in a jail-diversion program." *Attachment and Human Development* vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 333-353.

Cerbone, D R 2008, *Heidegger: Guides for the Perplexed*. London, Continuum International Publishing

Chafetz, J S, Ed. 2006, *Handbook of the sociology of gender.* Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research. New York, Dordrecht, Springer.

Chenoweth, L and McAuliffe, D 2015, *The Road to Social Work and Human Services Practice.* South Melbourne, Cengage Learning.

Clare, B 2011,"Promoting deep learning: a teaching, learning and assessment endeavour." *Social Work Education* vol. 26, no. 5, pp. 433– 446.

Coady, N and Lehmann, P, Eds. 2008, *Theoretical perspectives for direct social work practice: a generalist-eclectic approach.* New York, Springer.

Coghlan, D and Brannick, T 2007,"In defence of being "Native": The case for insider academic research." *Organizational research methods* vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 59-74.

Collaizzi, P 1978, 'Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it'. *Existential-phenomenological alternatives for psychology*. R. Valle and M. King. New York, Oxford University Press**:** 48-71.

Collins, S 2015, "Hope and Helping in Social Work" *Practice: Social Work in Action* vol.27,no.3, pp.197-213.

Commonwealth of Australia 2009, *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–202*0. Canberra, Council of Australian Governments.

Compton, B, Galaway, B and Courneyer, B 2005, *Social Work Processes.* Belmont, CA, Brooks Cole.

Comstock, D, Hammer, T, Strentzsch, J, Cannon, K, Parsons, J and Salazar, G 2008,"Relational-Cultural Theory: A Framework for Bridging Relational, Multicultural and Social Justice Competencies." *Journal of Counseling and Development* vol. 86, Summer, pp. 279-287.

Connolly, M 2007,"Practice Frameworks: Conceptual Maps to Guide Interventions in Child Welfare." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 37, no. 5, pp. 825-837.

Connolly, M and Harms, L 2012, *Social work: from theory to practice.* Port Melbourne, Cambridge Univesity Press.

Connolly, M and Harms, L, Eds. 2013, *Social Work: Contexts and Practice.* South Melbourne, Oxford University Press.

Cooper, A 2005,"Surface and Depth in the Victoria Climbie Inquiry Report." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 10, pp. 1-9.

Cooper, A 2006, *The centre cannot hold: childcare social work, emotional dynamics and modern organizations*, Annual Childcare Lecture. University of East Anglia.

Cooper, A 2008, 'Doing Psychodynamic Social Work: A Basic Introduction'. *Introduction to Social Work*. L. M. Wilson K, Ruch G and Cooper A, Pearson Education.

Cooper, M G 2008, *Clinical social work practice: an integrated approach*. Boston, Mass., Pearson.

Cosis Brown, H, Sebba, J and Luke, N 2014, *The role of the supervising social worker in foster care: An international literature review*. Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education University of Oxford.

Coulshed, V and Orme, J, Eds. 2006, *Social work practice*. Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.

Cozolino, L 2014, *The neuroscience of human relationships: attachment and the developing social brain*. New York, W.W. Norton and Company.

Cree, V, Ed. 2011, *Social Work: A Reader*. Oxon UK, Routledge.

Crossley, N 2005, *Key concepts in critical social theory*. London, SAGE Publications Ltd.

Crotty, M 1998, *The foundations of social research: meaning and perspective in the research process*. St Leonards, N.S.W, Allen and Unwin.

Curtis Mcmillen, J, Katz, C C and Claypool, E J 2014,"An Emotion Regulation Framework for Child Welfare Intervention and Programming." *Social Service Review* vol. 88, no. 3, pp. 443-468.

D'Cruz, H, Gillingham, P and Melendes, S 2007,"Reflexivity, its meanings and relevance for social work: A critical review of the Literature." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 37, pp. 73-90.

D'Cruz, H, Jacobs, S and Schoo, A, Eds. 2009, *Knowledge-in-practice in the caring professions*. Farnham, Surrey, GBR, Ashgate Publishing Group.

D'Cruz, H and Jones, M 2004, *Social work research: ethical and political contexts*. London, SAGE Publications.

Daley, A 2010,"Reflections on reflexivity and critical reflection as critical research practices." *Affilia* vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 68-82.

Daniel, R 2003, *Disciplined intuition: Subjective aspects of judgment and decision-making in child protective services*. C. M. Clark, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Davies, L, Krane, J, Collings, S and Wexler, S 2007,"Developing mothering narratives in child protection practice." *Journal of social work practice* vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 23-34.

Davys, A and Beddoe, E 2009,"The Reflective Learning Model:Supervision of Social Work Students." *Social Work Education,* vol. 28, no. 8, pp. 919-933.

Davys, A and Beddoe, L 2010, *Best practice in professional supervision: a guide for the helping professions*. London; Philadelphia, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

De Boer, C and Coady, N 2007,"Good helping relationships in child welfare: learning from stories of success." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 12, no., pp. 32-42.

Denzin, N and Lincoln, Y, Eds. 1994, *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.

Denzin, N and Lincoln, Y, Eds. 2000, *The handbook of qualitative research*. Qualitative research. Thousand Oaks, Calif., Sage Publications.

Department of Human Services. (28/7/2015). "Out-of-home care support services." Retrieved 22nd January, 2017, from http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-service-providers/children,-youth-and-families/child-and-youth-placement-and-support/out-of-home-care-support-services.

Devaney, C and Smith, M 2010,"Family Support and Child Protection: Natural Bedfellows." *Practice* vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 103-114.

Development Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood 2000, *From neurons to neighbourhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, US, National Academies Press viewed 21 May 2017 https://acu-edu-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=TN_ericED446866&context=PC&vid=61ACU&search_scope=61ACU_All&tab=61ACU_All&lang=en_US

Dewey, J 1938, *Experience and education*. New York, Kappa Delta Pi.

Doidge, J C, Higgins, D J, Delfabbro, P, Edwards, B, Vassallo, S, Toumbourou, J W and Segal, L 2016,"Economic predictors of child maltreatment in an Australian population-based birth cohort." *Children and Youth Services Review* 10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.10.012, vol.72, pp. 14-25.

Domestic Violence Resource Centre, V 2016, *Living in Fear Infographic*. Victoria, Domestic Violence Resource Centre, viewed 21 May 2017 http://www.dvrcv.org.au/sites/default/files/DVRCV-Living-In-Fear-Infographic-2016. .

Dominelli, L 2002a, *Anti-oppressive social work theory and practice*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

Dominelli, L 2002b, *Feminist social work theory and practice*. Basingstoke Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.

Dominelli, L 2009, *Introducing social work*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Drury Hudson, J 1997,"A model of professional knowledge for social work practice." *Australian Social Work* vol. 50, no. 3, pp. 35-44.

Duncan, B, Miller, S, Wampold, B and Hubble, M, Eds. 2010, *The Heart and Soul of Change.* Washington DC, American Psychological Association.

Dybicz, P 2012,"The Ethic of Care: Recapturing Social Work's First Voice." *National Association of Sociai Workers* vol., 57, no.3, pp. 271-280

Ellett, A J, Ellis, J I, Westbrook, T M and Dews, D 2007,"A qualitative study of 369 child welfare professionals' perspectives about factors contributing to employee retention and turnover." *Children and Youth Services Review* vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 264-281.

Ely, M, Vinz, R, Downing, M and Anzul, M 1997, *On Writing Qualitative Research: Living by Words.* London, Routledge Falmer.

Eraut, M 1985,"Knowledge creation and knowledge use in professional contexts." *Studies in Higher Education* vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 117-133.

Eraut, M 1994, *Developing professional knowledge and competence*. London, Routledge Falmer.

Eraut, M 2000,"Non-formal learning and tacit knowledge in professional work." *British Journal of Educational Psychology* vol. 70, pp. 113-136.

Eraut, M 2002, 'Kinds of professional knowledge: modes of knowledge use and knowledge creation'. *Developing professional knowledge and competence.* Hoboken, Taylor and Francis.

Erikson, E 1950, *Childhood and Society.* New York, W. W. Norton and Company.

Farmer, E and Lutman, E 2014,"Working effectively with neglected children and their families – What needs to change?" *Child Abuse Review* vol. 23, no. 4, pp. 262-273.

Farrell, A F, Luján, M L, Britner, P A, Randall, K G and Goodrich, S A 2012,"'I am part of every decision': client perceptions of engagement within a supportive housing child welfare programme." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 254-264.

Featherstone, B and Fawcett, B 1995,"Oh no! Not more isms: feminism, postmodernism and poststructuralism in social work education." *Social Work Education: The International Journal* vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 25-43.

Featherstone, B and Fawcett, B 2012,"'I'm just a mother. I'm nothing special, they're all professionals': parental advocacy as an aid to parental engagement." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 17, pp. 244-253.

Featherstone, B, Morris, K and White, S 2014,"A Marriage Made in Hell: Early Intervention Meets Child Protection." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 44, pp. 1735-1749.

Featherstone, B and White, S 2014, *Re-imagining child protection*, Policy Press.

Fejo-King, C 2013, *Lets talk kinship: innovating Australian social work education, theory, research and practice through Aboriginal knowledge : insights from social work research with the Larrakia and Warumungu Peoples of the Northern Territory*. Australia, Christine Fejo-King Consulting.

Ferguson, H 2005,"Working with violence, the emotions and the psycho‑social dynamics of child protection: Reflections on the Victoria Climbié case." *Social Work Education* vol. 24, no. 7, pp. 781-795.

Ferguson, H 2010,"Walks, Home Visits and Atmospheres: Risk and the Everyday Practices and Mobilities of Social Work and Child Protection." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 1100-1117.

Ferguson, H 2016a,"How Children Become Invisible in Child Protection Work: Findings from Research into Day-to-Day Social Work Practice." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 10., no.0, pp.1-17. 1093/bjsw/bcw065, pp. bcw065.

Ferguson, H 2016b,"Patterns of Engagement and Non-Engagement of Young Fathers in Early Intervention and Safeguarding Work." *Social Policy and Society* vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 99-111.

Ferguson, H 2016c,"Researching Social Work Practice Close Up: Using Ethnographic and Mobile Methods to Understand Encounters between Social Workers, Children and Families." *The British Journal of Social Work* vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 153-168.

Ferguson, H 2016d,"What social workers do in performing child protection work: evidence from research into face‑to‑face practice." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 283-294.

Fernandez, E 2014,"Child Protection and Vulnerable Families: Trends and Issues in the Australian Context." *Social Sciences* vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 785-808.

Finlay, L 2002,"Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice." *Qualitative Research* vol. 2, pp. 209-231.

Finlay, L 2012,"Unfolding the phenomenonological research process: iterative stages of 'seeing afresh'." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* vol. 53, no. 2, pp. 172-196.

Flyvbjerg, B, Landman, T and Schram, S, Eds. 2012, *Real social science: applied phronesi*s. New York, Cambridge University Press.

Folgheraiter, F and Raineri, M L 2012,"A critical analysis of the social work definition according to the relational paradigm." *International Social Work* vol. 1, pp. 1-15.

Fook, J 2002,"*Theorising from practice: towards an inclusive approach for social work research*." *Qualitative Social Work* vol. 1, pp. 79.

Fook, J and Askeland, G 2007,"Challenges of Critical Reflection: 'Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained'." *Social Work Education* vol. 26, no.5, pp. 520-533.

Fook, J and Gardner, F 2007, *Practising critical reflection: a resource handbook.* Berkshire, England, Open University.

Fook, J and Napier, L, Eds. 2000, *Breakthroughs in practice: theorising critical moments in social work.* London, Whiting and Birch.

Fook, J, Ryan, M and Hawkins, L 2000, *Professional expertise: practice theory and education for working in uncertainty*. London, Whiting and Birch Limited.

Forrester, D, Kershaw, S, Moss, H and Hughes, L 2008,"Communication skills in child protection: how do social workers talk to parents?" *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 41-51.

Forrester, D, Westlake, D and Glynn, G 2012,"Parental resistance and social worker skills: towards a theory of motivational social work." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 118-129.

Fossey, E, Harvey, C, McDermott, F and Davidson, L 2002,"Understanding and Evaluating Qualitative Research." *Australian and New Zealand Journal Of Psychiatry* vol. 36, pp. 717-732.

Fraiberg, S, Adelson, E and Shapiro, V 1975,"Ghosts in the nursery. A psychoanalytic approach to the problems of impaired infant- mother relationships." *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry* vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 387.

Fraser, S 2011,"What do we see when we look in the mirror? A critical reflection on the missing role of the social worker as an educator in everyday practice." *Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education* vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 50-63.

Freedberg, S 2009, *Relational theory for social work practice: a feminist perspective*. New York, Routledge.

Friere, P, Ed. 1972, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. USA, Herder and Herder.

Fulcher, L and McGladdery, S 2011,"Re-examining social work roles and tasks with foster care." *Child and Youth Services* vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 19-38.

Gadamer, H G 1975, *Truth and method*. London, Sheed and Ward.

Gallagher, M, Smith, M, Wosu, H, Stewart, J, Hunter, S, Cree, V E and Wilkinson, H 2011,"Engaging with families in child protection: lessons from practitioner research in Scotland." *Child Welfare* vol. 90, no. 4, pp. 117.

Gambrill, E D 2013, *Social work practice: a critical thinker's guide*. New York, Oxford University Press.

Garrett, P 2003, *Remaking social work with children and families: a critical discussion of the 'modernisation' of social care*. London, Routledge.

Garrett, P M 2007,"The Relevance of Bourdieu for Social Work: A Reflection on Obstacles and Omissions." *Journal of Social Work* vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 355-379.

Garrett, P M 2010,"Recognizing the limitations of the political theory of recognition: Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser and Social Work." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 40, no. 5, pp. 1517-1533.

Gausel, N 2011,"The importance of emotions in social work: thematic directions from a national conference." *European Journal of Social Work* vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 287-291.

Gerdes, K E and Segal, E 2011,"Importance of Empathy for Social Work Practice: Integrating New Science." *Social Work* vol. 56, no. 2, pp. 141-148.

Gibson, M 2014,"Social Worker Shame in Child and Family Social Work: Inadequacy, Failure, and the Struggle to Practise Humanely." *Journal of social work practice.* vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 417.

Gibson, W and Brown, A 2009, *Working with qualitative data*. London, Sage.

Gil, D 2010,"From tribal consciousness and subjective rationality toward global consciousness and objective rationality." *Journal of Comparative Social Welfare* vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 1-14.

Giles, R, Jude Irwin, J, Lynch, D and Waugh, F 2010, *In the field: from learning to practice*. South Melbourne, Vic, Oxford University Press.

Gillingham, P 2006,"Risk assessment in child protection: problem rather than solution?" *Australian Social Work* vol. 59, no. 1, pp. 86 - 98.

Gillingham, P 2016,"Social Work and Child Protection in Australia: Whose Job is it Anyway?" *Practice: Social Work in Action* vol. 28, no.2, pp. 83-96, doi: 10.1080/09503153.2015.1074670

Gillingham, P and Humphreys, C 2010,"Child Protection Practitioners and Decision-Making Tools: Observations and Reflections from the Front Line." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 40, no. 8, pp. 2598-2616.

Gladstone, J, Dumbrill, G, Leslie, B, Koster, A, Young, M and Ismaila, A 2012,"Looking at engagement and outcome from the perspectives of child protection workers and parents." *Children and Youth Services Review* vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 112.

Goldstein, E, Miehls, D and Ringel, S 2009, *Advanced Clinical Social Work Practice Relational Principles and Techniques*. New York, Columbia University Press

Gordon, J and Dunworth, M 2017,"The fall and rise of 'use of self'? An exploration of the positioning of use of self in social work education." *Social Work Education vol.,* 36, no.5, pp. 591-603, doi: 10.1080/02615479.2016.1267722

Gordon, M 2011,"Listening as embracing the other: Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue." *Educational Theory* vol. 61, no. 2, pp. 207-212.

Graham, J, Dettlaff, A, Baumann, D and Fluke, J 2015,"The Decision-making Ecology of placing a child into foster care: A structural equation model." *Child Abuse and Neglect* vol. 49, pp. 12.

Gray, B 2002,"Emotional labour and befriending in family support and child protection in Tower Hamlets." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 13-22.

Gray, B 2009,"Befriending Excluded Families in Tower Hamlets: The Emotional Labour of Family Support Workers in Cases of Child Protection and Family Support." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 39, no. 6, pp. 990-1007.

Gray, M and Schubert, L 2010,"Turning base metal into gold: transmuting art, practice, research and experience into knowledge." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 40, pp. 2308 -2325.

Gray, M and Schubert, L 2013,"Knowing what we know about knowledge in social work: The search for a comprehensive model of knowledge production." *International Journal of Social Welfare* vol. 22, pp. 334–346.

Grbich, C 1999, *Qualitative Research in Health: An Introduction*. St. Leonards, NSW, Allen and Unwin.

Grbich, C 2007, *Qualitatve data analysis: an introduction*. London, Sage.

Green, R, Gregory, R and Mason, R 2006,"Professional distance and social work: Stretching the elastic?" *Australian Social Work,* vol. 59, no. 4, pp. 449–461.

Greenhalgh, T and Hurwitz, B 1999,"Narrative based medicine: Why study narrative?" *British Medical Journal* vol. 318, pp. 48–50.

Gringeri, C, Wahab, S and Anderson-Nathe, B 2010,"What makes it feminist: mapping the landscape of feminist research." *Affilia* vol. 25, pp. 390-405.

Gringeri, C E and Roche, S E 2010,"Beyond the binary: critical feminisms in social work." *Affilia Journal of Women and Social Work* vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 337-340.

Guerin, S, Devitt, C and Redmond, B 2010,"Experiences of Early-Career Social Workers in Ireland." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 40, no. 8, pp. 2467-2484.

Gursansky, D, Kennedy, R and Camilleri, P 2012, *The practice of case management: effective strategies for positive outcomes*. Crows Nest, N.S.W., Allen and Unwin.

Gustavsson, B 2004, 'Revisiting the philosophical roots of practical knowledge'. *Developing practice knowledge for health professionals*. J. Higgs, B. Richardson and M. Abrandt Dahlgren. London UK, Butterworth Heinemann: pp. 35-50.

Hackett, S, Kuronen, M, Matthies, A and Kresal, B 2003,"The motivation, professional development and identity of social work students in four European countries." *European Journal of Social Work* vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 163-178.

Harkin, C and Houston, S 2016,"Reviewing the literature on the breakdown of foster care placements for young people: complexity and the social work task." *Child Care in Practice*, vol.22, no.2, pp. 98-112, doi: 10.1080/13575279.2015.1102124

Harms, L 2007, *Working with People: communication skills for reflective practice*. Melbourne, Oxford University Press.

Harms, L and Connolly, M 2012, *Social work: from theory to practice*. London, Cambridge University Press.

Harms, L, Middleton, J, Whyte, J, Anderson, I, Clarke, A, Sloan, J, Hagel, M and Smith, M 2011,"Social Work with Aboriginal Clients: Perspectives on Educational Preparation and Practice." *Australian Social Work* vol. 64, no. 2, pp. 156-168.

Harries, M 2008, *The experiences of parents and families of children and young people in care.* Perth, Anglicare, WA.

Haworth, J 2007,"The Missing Assessment Domain: Personal, Professional and Organizational Factors Influencing Professional Judgements when Identifying and Referring Child Neglect." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 37, no. 8, pp. 1285-1303.

Healy, K 2000, *Social work practices: contemporary perspectives on change*. London, Sage.

Healy, K 2001, "Reinventing Critical Social Work: Challenges from Practice, Context and Postmodernism" *Critical Social Work* vol. 2, no. 1.

Healy, K 2012, *Social work methods and skills: the essential foundations of practice*. Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.

Healy, K, Ed. 2014, *Social work theories in context: creating frameworks for practice.* Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.

Healy, K and Darlington, Y 2009,"Service user participation in diverse child protection contexts: principles for practices." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 14, pp. 420–430.

Healy, K and Lonne, B 2010, *The social work and human services workforce: report from a national study of education training and workforce needs*. Strawberry Hills, NSW, Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd.

Healy, K and Meagher, G 2007,"Social Workers' Preparation for Child Protection: Revisiting the Question of Specialisation." *Australian Social Work* vol. 60, no. 3, pp. 321-335.

Heidegger, M 1978, *Being and time*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

Helm, D 2014,"Sense-making in a social work office: an ethnographic study of safeguarding judgements." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 18, pp. 1-10.

Hennessey, R 2011, *Relationship skills in social work*. London, Sage.

Hermsen, M and Embregts, P J C M 2015,"An explorative study of the place of the ethics of care and reflective practice in social work education and practice." *Social Work Education* vol. 34, no. 7, pp. 815-828.

Hesse-Biber, S and Leavy, P 2007a, *An invitation to feminist research*, Sage Research Methods

Hesse-Biber, S and Leavy, P 2007b, *Feminist research practice: a primer*. Thousand Oaks, California, Sage Publications.

Hesse-Biber, S and Yaiser, M 2004, *Feminist Perspectives in Social Research*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Hewitt-Taylor, J 2002,"Insider knowledge: issues in insider research." *Nursing Standard,* vol. 16, no. 46, pp. 33-35.

Higgins, D and Katz, I 2015,"Enhancing service systems for protecting children: Promoting child wellbeing and child protection reform in Australia." *Family Matters* vol. 80, pp. 43-50.

Higgs, J, Barnett, R, Billett, S, Hutchings, M and Trede, F, Eds. 2012, *Practice-Based Education: Perspectives and Strategies*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands, Sense Publishers.

Higgs, J, Richardson, B and Abrandt Dahlgren, M, Eds. 2004, *Developing practice knowledge for health professionals*. London, Butterworth Heinemann.

Hingley-Jones, H and Ruch, G 2016,"'Stumbling through'? Relationship-based social work practice in austere times." *Journal of Social Work Practice* vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 235-248.

Hoffman, K T, Marvin, R S, Cooper, G and Powell, B 2006,"Changing Toddlers and Preschoolers Attachment Classifications: The Circle of Security Intervention." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* vol. 74, no. 6, pp. 1017-1026.

Hogarth, R M 2010,"Intuition: A Challenge for Psychological Research on Decision-making." *Psychological Inquiry* vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 338-353.

Holland, S 2000,"The assessment relationship: interactions between social workers and parents in child protection assessments." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 149-163.

Holmes, L and McDermid, S 2013,"How social workers spend their time in frontline children's social care in England." *Journal of Childrens Services* vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 123-133.

Holstein, J and Gubrium, J 1994, 'Phenomenology, ethnomethodology and interpretive practice'. *Handbook of Qualitative research.* N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage**.** Chapter 16, p.263.

Honneth, A 1995, *The struggle for recognition: the moral grammar of social conflicts*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.

Horwitz, M and Marshall, T 2015,"Family Engagement in Child Protection Social Work." *Journal of Family Social Work* vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 288-301.

Hoskins, M and White, J 2010,"Processes of Discernment when Considering Issues of Neglect in Child Protection Practice." *Child Youth Care Forum* vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 27-45.

Houston, S 2009,"Communication, Recognition and Social Work: Aligning the Ethical Theories of Habermas and Honneth." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 39, no. 7, pp. 1274-1290.

Howe, D 1998,"Relationship-based thinking and practice in social work." *Journal of Social Work Practice: Psychotherapeutic Approaches in Health, Welfare and the Community* vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 45-56.

Howe, D 2008a, *The emotionally intelligent social worker*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

Howe, D 2008b, *An introduction to social work theory: making sense in practice*. Aldershot, England, Ashgate.

Howe, D 2009, *A brief introduction to social work theory*. Basingstoke Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.

Howe, D 2011, *Attachment across the lifecourse: a brief introduction*. Basingstoke Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.

Howe, D 2013, *Empathy: what it is and why it matters*. Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.

Hugman, R 2003,"Professional Values and Ethics in Social Work: Reconsidering Postmodernism?" *The British Journal of Social Work* vol. 33, no. 8, pp. 1025-1041.

Humphrey, C 2007,"Insider-Outsider: activating the hyphen." *Action Research* vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 11- 26.

Humphrey, C 2011, *Becoming a social worker: a guide for students*. London, SAGE.

Husserl, E 1900, *Logical Investigations*. London, Routledge.

Ingram, R 2013,"Locating emotional intelligence at the heart of social work practice." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 43, pp. 987-1004.

Ingram, R 2015,"Exploring Emotions within Formal and Informal Forums: Messages from Social Work Practitioners." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 45, no. 3, pp. 896-913.

Jacobs, S 2009, 'Ideas of knowledge in practice'. *Knowledge-in-practice on the caring professions*. H. D'Cruz, S. Jacobs and A. Schoo. Farmgate, Surrey, GBR, Ashgate Publishing.

Janko, S 1994, *Vulnerable children, vulnerable families: The social construction of child abuse*. New York, Aldine de Gruyter.

Janzen, J 2007, *Towards developing strong early therapeutic relationships: Client attachment and therapist responsiveness in relationship building incidents*, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Jones, C 2001,"Voices from the frontline: state social workers and new labour." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 31, pp. 547-562.

Jonsson, C O, Clinton, D, Fahrman, M, Mazzaglia, G, Novak, S and Sörhus, K 2001,"How do mothers signal shared feeling‐states to their infants? An investigation of affect attunement and imitation during the first year of life." *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology* vol. 42, no. 4, pp. 377-381.

Jordan, J, Walker, M and Hartling, L, (eds.) 2004. *The complexity of connection: Writings from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Insti*tute. New York, Guildford Press.

Juhila, K 2003, 'Creating a 'bad' client: disaligning of institutional identities in social work interaction' in *Constructing clienthood in soical work and human services*. K. Juhila, T. Poso, S. White, C. Hall and N. Parton, Jessica Kingsley.

Juhila, K, Parton, N, Poso, T, White, S and Hall, C 2003, *Constructing Clienthood in Social Work and Human Services: Interaction, Identities and Practices* London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Kanuha, V 2000,""Being native" versus "going native": conducting social work research as an insider." *Social Work* vol. 45, no. 5, pp. 439 - 447.

Kaur, J 2012, *Cultural Diversity and Child Protection: A review of the Australian research on the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and refugee children and families.* Queensland, Australia, Diversity Consultants.

Kelly, L 2016,"Reconceptualising professional knowledge: the changing role of knowledge and evidence in social work practice." *Social Work Education vol.* 36, no.3, pp. 245-256, doi: 10.1080/02615479.2016.1217986.

Kemmis, S 2012, 'Phronesis, experience and the primacy of praxis'. *Phronesis as profesisonal knowledge.* E. Kinsell and A. Pitman. Rotterdam, NL, Sense Publishers.

Kemshall, H, Wilkinson, B and Baker, K 2013, *Working with Risk: Skills for Contemporary Social Work*, United Kingdom: Polity Press.

Kinsella, E and Pitman, A, Eds. 2012, *Phronesis as professional knowledge: practical wisdom in the professions.* Rotterdam, Netherlands, Sense Publishers.

Knight, C 2015,"Trauma-Informed Social Work Practice: Practice Considerations and Challenges." *Clinical Social Work Journal* vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 25-37.

Knott, C and Scragg, T, Eds. 2007, *Reflective Practice in Social Work*. Exeter UK, Learning Matters Ltd.

Kolb, D A 1984, *Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall.

Kondrat, M 1999,"Who is the 'self' in self-aware: professional self-awareness from a critical theory perspective." *Social Services Review* vol. 73, no. 4, pp. 451-477.

Konrad, S C 2010,"Relational Learning in Social Work Education: Transformative Education for Teaching a Course on Loss, Grief and Death." *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 15-28.

Koritsas, S, Coles, J and Boyle, M 2010,"Workplace Violence towards Social Workers: The Australian Experience." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 40, pp. 257-271.

Krane, J and Davies, L 2000,"Mothering and child protection practice: rethinking risk assessment." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 35-45.

Krane, J, Davies, L, Carlton, R and Mulcahy, M 2010, 'The clock starts now: feminism, mothering and attachment theory in child protection practice' in *Gender and child welfare in society*. B. Featherstone, C. Hooper, J. Scourfield and J. Taylor, John Wiley and Sons.

LaMendola, W 2010,"Social Work and Social Presence in an Online World Journal of Technology in Human Services." *Journal of Technology in Human Services* vol. 28, pp. 108–119.

Lamont, A 2009, Evaluating child abuse and neglect intervention programs. Melbourne, Austraian Institute of Family Studies.

Leeson, C 2010,"The emotional labour of caring about looked-after children." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 15, pp. 483–491.

Leung, T T F 2008,"Accountability to Welfare Service Users: Challenges and Responses of Service Providers." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 531-545.

Leviner, P 2014,"Child protection under Swedish law—legal duality and uncertainty." *European Journal of Social Work* vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 206-220.

Lieberman, A F, Padrón, E, Van Horn, P and Harris, W W 2005,"Angels in the nursery: The intergenerational transmission of benevolent parental influences." *Infant Mental Health Journal* vol. 26, no. 6, pp. 504-520.

Lincoln, Y S and Guba, E C 1985, *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, California, Sage.

Lishman, J, Ed. 2012, Social work education and training. London, Jessica Kingsley.

Littlechild, B 2005,"The Stresses Arising from Violence, Threats and Aggression Against Child Protection Social Workers." *Journal of Social Work* vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 61-82.

Local Safeguarding Childrens Board 2009, Serious Case review: Baby Peter Executive Summary, viewed

Longhofer, J, Floersch, J and Soydan, H 2012,"The Coming Crisis in Social Work." *Research on Social Work Practice* vol. 22, no. 5, pp. 499-519.

Lonne, B, Brown, G, Wagner, I and Gillespie, K 2015,"Victoria's Child FIRST and IFS differential response system: Progress and issues." *Child abuse and neglect* vol. 39, pp. 41-49.

Lonne, B and Gillespie, K 2014,"How Do Australian Print Media Representations of Child Abuse and Neglect Inform the Public and System Reform?" *Child Abuse and Neglect* vol. 38, pp. 837–850.

Lonne, B, Harries, M and Lantz, S 2013,"Workforce development: A pathway to reforming child protection systems in Australia." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 43, no. 8, pp. 1630-1648.

Lonne, B, Thomson, J and Harries, M 2009, *Reforming Child Protection*. Abingdon,Oxon, Routledge.

Macaulay, C and Cree, V 1999,"Transfer of learning: concept and process." *Social Work Education* vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 183-194.

Maggs-Rapport, F 2001,"Best research practice: In pursuit of methodological rigour." *Journal of Advanced Nursing* vol. 35, no. 3, pp. 373.

Maidment, J and Egan, R Eds. 2016, 'Practice skills in social work and welfare: more than just common sense'. *Practice skills in social work and welfare.* J. Maidment and R. Egan. Crows Nest, N.S.W., Allen and Unwin.

Maiter, S, Palmer, S and Manji, S 2006,"Strengthening social worker-client relationships in child protective services: addressing power imbalances and 'ruptured' relationships." *Qualitative social work* vol. 5, no. 61, pp. 167-186.

Mandell, D 2007, 'Use of self: contexts and dimensions'. *Revisitng the use of self: questioning professional identities.* D. Mandell. Toronto, Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.

Marsh, J, Angell, B, Andrews, C and Curry, A 2012,"Client-provider relationship and treatment outcome: a systematic review of substance abuse,child abuse and mental health services research." *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research* vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 233-267.

Marsh, P and Fisher, M 2008,"The development of problem-solving knowledge for social care practice." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 38, no. 5, pp. 971-987.

Mason, C 2012,"Social work the 'art of relationship': parents' perspectives on an intensive family support project." *Child and Family Work* vol. 17, no., pp.

Mathews, B and Bross, D 2008,"Mandated reporting is still a policy with reason: Empirical evidence and philosophical grounds." *Child Abuse and Neglect* vol. 32, no., pp. 511–516.

Mathews, B, Xing, J and Norman, R 2016,"Impact of a new mandatory reporting law on reporting and identification of child sexual abuse: A seven year time trend analysis." *Child Abuse and Neglect* vol. 56, pp. 62-79.

Mayers, R, Souflee, F and Schoech, D 2004, *Dilemmas in Human Services Management Illustrative Case Studies.* New York, Springer Publishing Company

McArthur, M, Braithwaite, V, Winkworth, G, Conroy, S, Thomson, B, Ivec, M, Harris, N and Reinhart, M 2011, How relevant is the role of values in child protection practice? A national survey of statutory child protection staff 2009. Canberra, Regulatory Institutions Network, ANU.

McArthur, M and Thomson, L 2012, *National analysis of workforce trends in statutory child protection.* Canberra, Institute of Child Protection Studies.

McDonald, C 2006, *Challenging social work: the context of practice.* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

McDonald, C, Craik, C, Hawkins, L and Williams, J 2011, *Professional practice in human service organizations.* Crows Nest NSW, Allen and Unwin.

McDonald, C and Jones, A 2000,"Reconstructing and re-conceptualising social work in the emerging milieu." *Australian Social Work* vol. 53, no. 3, pp. 3-11.

McFadden, P, Campbell, A and Taylor, B 2015,"Resilience and burnout in child protecion social work: individual and organizational themes from a sytematic literature review." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 45, pp. 1546-1563.

McLeod, A 2010,"'A friend and an equal': do young people in care seek the impossible from their social workers?" *British Journal of Social Workers* vol. 40, pp. 772-788.

Melton, G 2004,"Mandated reporting: a policy without reason." *Child abuse and neglect* vol.29, no.1, pp.9-18. doi: 10.1080/02615479.2015.1125878.

Menashe, A, Possick, C and Buchbinder, E 2012,"Between the maternal and the professional: the impact of being a child welfare officer on motherhood." *Child and Family Social Work* vol.19, pp. 391-40 *doi:10.1111/cfs.12029.*

Mezirow, J and Associates, a 2000, *Learning as transformation: critical perspectives on a Theory in Progress.* San Francisco CA., John Wiley and Sons Inc.

Miller, P and Rose, N 2008, *Governing the present: administering economic, Social and personal life.* Cambridge, UK, Polity Press.

Miller, W R and Rollnick, S 2014, *Motivational Interviewing: helping people change.* New York, Guilford Press.

Miller, J B and Stiver, I P 1997, The healing connection:how women form relationships in therapy and in life. Boston, Beacon Press.

Mishna, F, Van Wert, M and Asakura, K 2013,"The best kept secret in social work: empirical support for contemporary psychodynamic social work practice." *Journal of Social Work Practice* vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 289-303.

Montgomery, CL, 1993 *Healing through communication: The practice of caring* Newbury Park, CA. Sage.

Moore, S 2012, 'Now instead of being disgusted by poverty, we are disgusted by poor people themselves', The Guardian. UK, The Guardian**:** 10.

Morley, C and Dunstan, J 2013,"Critical Reflection: a response to neoliberal challenges to field education?" *Social Work Education* vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 141-156.

Morley, C, Macfarlane, S and Ablett, P 2014, *Engaging with social work: a critical introduction.* Port Melbourne, Australia, Cambridge Univeristy Press.

Morris, K 2012,"Thinking Family? The complexities for family engagement in care and protection." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 42, no. 5, pp. 906-920.

Morrison, J, Mishna, F, Cook, C and Aitken, G 2011,"Access visits: perceptions of child protection workers, fosterparents and children who are Crown wards." *Child and Youth Services Review* vol. 33, pp.1476–1482.

Morrison, T 2007,"Emotional intelligence, emotion and social work: context, characteristics, complications and contributon." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 37, no., pp. 245-263.

Morrow, S 2006, 'Honour and respect: feminist collaborative research with sexually abused women'. *Qualitative Research Methods for Psychologists: Introduction to Empirical Studies.* In C. Fischer. Burlington MA, Elsevier Inc.pp.143-172.

Munro, E 1999,"Common errors of reasoning in child protection work." *Child Abuse and Neglect* vol. 23, no. 8, pp. 745-758.

Munro, E 2008, *Effective child protection.* Los Angeles, SAGE

Munro, E 2010a,"Learning to reduce risk in child protection." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 1135-1151.

Munro, E 2010b, Munro Review of Child Protection—Part One: A Systems Analysis. London, Department of Education.

Munro, E 2011a, Munro Review of Child Protection: a Child Centred System. Norwich, Crown Copyright.

Munro, E 2011b, Munro Review of Child Protection: Interim Report: the child's journey. London, Depertment of Education.

Murphy, D, Duggan, M and Joseph, S 2013,"Relationship-based social work and its compatibility with person-centred approach: principled versus instrumental approaches." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 43, no.4, pp.703-719. doi*:* 10.1093/bjsw/bcs003.

Murphy, J, Murray, S, Chalmers, J and Martin, S 2011, *Half a Citizen Life on welfare in Australia.* Sydney, Allen and Unwin

Murray, L and Barnes, M 2010,"Have Families Been Rethought? Ethic of Care, Family and 'Whole Family' Approaches." *Social Policy and Society* vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 533-544.

Myers, S 2008,"Revisiting Lancaster: More Things that every Social worker should know." *Social Work Education,* vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 203-211.

Mythen, G 2014, *Understanding the Risk Society: Crime, Security and Justice*. Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.

Napier, L 2005, 'Practising Critical Reflection'. *Skills for Human Services: Working with Individuals, Groups and Communities*. A. O'Hara and Z. Weber, Oxford University Press.**: pp.7-16.

National Health and Medical Research Council 2015, National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated May 2015), viewed 27 June 2017 https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/e72

Nelson, D, Price, E and Zubrzycki, J 2016,"Critical social work with unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people: Restoring hope, agency and meaning for the client and worker." *International Social Work* vol. 60, no. 3, pp.601-613. doi: 10.1177/0020872816637663.

Neuman, W L 2007, *Basics of social research: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Boston, Pearson, Allyn and Bacon.

New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services 2017, *A framework that guides service provision and works towards improving outcomes for children and young people in statutory Out of Home Care* (OOHC), viewed

Norcross, J 2010, 'The Therapeutic relationship'. *The heart and soul of change: delivering what works in therapy*. B. Duncan, S. Miller, B. Wampold and M. Hubble. Washington DC, American Psychological Association.

O'Connor, L and Leonard, K 2014,"Decision-making in Children and Families Social Work: The Practitioner's Voice." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 44, no. 7, pp. 1805-1822.

O'Donnell, M, Scott, D and Stanley, F 2008,"Child abuse and neglect - is it time for a public health approach?" *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 325-330.

O'Hara, A and Pockett, R 2011, *Skills for human services practice: working with individuals, groups and communities*. South Melbourne, Oxford University Press.

Ornstein, E and Ganzer, C 2005,"Relational and social work: a model for the future." *Families in Society* vol. 86, no. 4, pp. 565-572.

Osmond, J and O'Connor, I 2006,"Use of Theory and Research in Social Work Practice: Implications for Knowledge-Based Practice." *Australian Social Work* vol. 59, no. 1, pp. 5-19.

Osmond, J and O'Connor, I 2004,"Formalising the Unformalised: Practitioners' Communication of Knowledge in Practice." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 34, pp. 677-692.

Padgett, D 2008, *Qualitative methods in social work research*. Thousand Oaks, California, Sage Publications.

Palmer, S, Maiter, S and Manji, S 2006,"Effective intervention in child protective services: Learning from parents." *Children and Youth Services Review* vol. 28, pp. 812-824.

Parker, J and Bradley, G 2010, *Social work practice: assessment, planning, intervention and review*. Exeter, Learning Matters.

Parton, N 2000,"Some thoughts on the relationship between theory and practice in and for social work." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 30, pp. 449-463.

Parton, N 2003,"Rethinking Professional Practice: the contributions of social constructionism and feminist 'ethics of care'." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 13, pp. 1-16.

Parton, N 2011,"Child Protection and Safeguarding in England: Changing and Competing Conceptions of Risk and their Implications for Social Work." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 41, pp. 854–875.

Parton, N 2014,"Social Work, Child Protection and Politics: Some Critical and Constructive Reflections." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 44, no. 7, pp. 2042-2056.

Parton, N 2014a, *The politics of child protection: Contemporary developments and future directions*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Parton, N 2014b,"Social Work, Child Protection and Politics: Some Critical and Constructive Reflections." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 44, no. 7, pp. 2042-2056.

Parton, N and O'Byrne, P 2000a, *Constructive social work: towards a new practice*. Basingstoke, Macmillan.

Parton, N and O'Byrne, P 2000b,"What do we mean by constructive social work?" *Critical Social Work* vol. 1, no. 2.

Paterson, M and Higgs, J 2005,"Using hermeneutics as a qualitative research approach in professional practice." *The Qualitative Journal* vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 339-357.

Paterson, M, Wilcox, S and Higgs, J 2006,"Exploring dimensions of artistry in reflective practice." *International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives* vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 455-468.

Payne, M 2000,"The politics of case management and social work." *International Journal of Social Welfare* vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 82-91.

Payne, M 2006, *What is professional social work?* Bristol, UK, Policy Press.

Payne, M 2011, *Humanistic social work: core principles in practice*. Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.

Payne, M 2014, *Modern social work theory*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Pease, B 2003, 'Rethinking the relationship between self and society'. *Critical social work: an introduction to theories and practice*. in J. Allan, B. Pease and L. Briskman. Crows Nest, NSW, Allen and Unwin. pp. 187-202.

Pease, B, Goldingay, S, Hosken, N and Nipperess, S, Eds. 2016, Doing critical social work: transformative practices for social justice. Crows Nest, NSW, Allen and Unwin.

Perlman, H 1962, *So you want to be a social worker*. New York, Harper and Row.

Perry, R and Sullivan, R M 2014,"Neurobiology of attachment to an abusive caregiver: short-term benefits and long-term costs." *Developmental psychobiology* vol. 56, no. 8, pp. 1626.

Petersen, A and Olsson, J 2015,"Calling evidence-based practice into question: acknowledging phronetic knowledge in social work." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 45, pp. 1581-1597.

Pettersen, T 2012,"Conceptions of Care: Altruism, Feminism, and Mature Care." *Hypatia* vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 366-389.

Phillips, B, Riyana, M, Vidyattama, Y and Cassells, R 2013, Poverty, Social Exclusion and Disadvantage in Australia. University of Canberra, ACT, National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling.

Pilgrim, D, Rogers, A and Bentall, R 2009,"The centrality of personal relationships in the creation and amelioration of mental health problems: the current interdisciplinary case." *Health* vol. 13, pp. 235.

Plath, D 2003,"An experience based model of practice learning: International perspective from Australia." *Journal of Practice Teaching* vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 23-38.

Pockett, R and Giles, R 2008, *Critical reflection : generating theory from practice : the graduating social work student experience.* Sydney, Darlington Press.

Polanyi, M 1962, *Personal knowledge: towards a post-critical philosophy.* London, Routledge, Kegan Paul.

Pollio, D E 2006,"The Art of Evidence-Based Practice." *Research on Social Work Practice* vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 224-232.

Powell, B, Cooper, G, Hoffman, K and Marvin, B 2014, *The Circe of Security intervention: enhancing attachment in early parent-child relationships.* New York, Guildford Press.

Pozzuto, R and Arnd-Caddigan, M 2006,"Commentary on Relational social work: a model for the future." *Families in Society* vol. 87, no. 2, pp. 301-302.

Prynn, B 2008, Reflections on past social work practice: the central role of relationship, The critical practitioner in social work and health care. S. Fraser and S. Matthews. London, Sage Publications.

Ramvi, E and Davies, L 2010,"Gendering, mothering and relational work." *Journal of Social Work Practice* vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 445-460.

Regehr, C, Hemsworth, D, Leslie, B, Howe, P and Chau, S 2004,"Predictors of post-traumatic distress in child welfare workers: a linear structural equation model." *Children and Youth Services Review* vol. 26, no. 4, pp. 331-346.

Reilly, R, Luck, L, Wilkes, L and Jackson, D 2011,"Child protection workers: what they do.(Case study)." *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches* vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 122.

Reimer, E 2010, *Exploring the Parent-Family Worker Relationship in Rural Family Support Services: "You build a relationship…and before you know it you start working on the problems that you have got.".* PhD, University of South Australia.

Reinharz, S 1992, *Feminist methods in social research.* NewYork, Oxford University Press.

Ribner, D and Knei-Paz, C 2002,"Client's view of a successful relationship." *Social Work* vol. 47, no. 4, pp. 379-386.

Richards, L 2009, *Handling qualitative data: A practical guide.* London, Sage.

Richmond, M 1917, *Social Diagnosis.* New York, Russell Sage Foundation Harvard University.

Rogowski, S 2012,"Social work with children and families: challenge and possibilities in the neo-liberal world." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 42, pp. 921-940.

Rolfe, G, Jasper, M and Freshwater, D 2011, *Critical reflection in practice: generating knowledge for care.* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Rooney, P 2005, Researching from the inside — does it compromise validity? A discussion. University of Dublin.

Rose, S and Meezan, W 1996,"Variations in perceptions of child neglect." *Child Welfare* vol. 75, no. 2, pp. 139-160.

Rosenberger, J B 2014, *Relational Social Work Practice with Diverse Populations.* Dordrecht, Springer.

Rossiter, A 2011,"Unsettled Social Work: The Challenge of Levinas's Ethics." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 41, no. 5, pp. 980-995.

Rubin, A and Babbie, E 2013, *Essential research methods for social work.* Belmont, CA, Cengage.

Rubin, A and Parrish, D E 2012,"Comparing Social Worker and Non-Social Worker Outcomes: A Research Review." *Social Work* vol. 57, no. 4, pp. 309-320.

Ruch, G 2000,"Self and social work: towards an integrated model of learning." *Journal of Social Work Practice* vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 99-112.

Ruch, G 2002,"From triangle to spiral: reflective practice in social work education, practice and research." *Social Work Education* vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 199-214.

Ruch, G 2005,"Relationship-based practice and reflective practice: holistic approaches to contemporary child care social work." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 10, pp. 111–123.

Ruch, G 2007a,"Reflective Practice in Contemporary Child-care Social Work: The Role of Containment." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 37, no.4, pp. 659–680.

Ruch, G 2007b,"'Thoughtful' practice: child care social work and the role of case discussion." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 12, pp. 370–379.

Ruch, G 2011,"Where Have All the Feelings Gone? Developing Reflective and Relationship-Based Management in Child-Care Social Work." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 42, no.7, pp. 1315-1332. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcr134.

Ruch, G 2014,"'Helping Children Is a Human Process': Researching the Challenges Social Workers Face in Communicating with Children." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 44, no. 8, pp. 2145-2162.

Ruch, G, Turney, D and Ward, A, Eds. 2010, *Relationship-based social work: getting to the heart of practice.* London, Jessica Kingsley.

Ryan, M, Merighi, J, Healy, B and Renouf, N 2004,"Belief, Optimism and Caring: Findings from a Cross-national study of Expertise in Mental Health Social Work." *Qualitative Social Work* vol. 3, pp. 411.

Ryle, G 2009, *The Concept of Mind*. Hoboken, Taylor and Francis

Saïas, T, Lerner, E, Greacen, T, Emer, A, Guédeney, A, Dugravier, R, Tubach, F, Tereno, S and Guédeney, N 2016,"Parent- provider relationship in home visiting interventions." *Children and Youth Services Review* vol. 69, pp. 106-115.

Saini, M, Black, T, Lwin, K, Marshall, A, Fallon, B and Goodman, D 2012,"Child protection workers' experiences of working with high-conflict separating families." *Children and Youth Services Review* vol. 34, pp. 1309-1316.

Sandelowski, M and Barroso, J 2002,"Reading Qualitative Studies." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1047.

Sarantakos, S 2013, *Social research*. Basingstoke, England, Palgrave Macmillan.

Savaya, R, Gardner, F and Stange, D 2011,"Stressful Encounters with Social Work Clients: A Descriptive Account Based on Critical Incidents." *National Association of Social Workers,* pp. 63-71.

Schon, D 1983, *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*. Aldershot England, Ashgate Publishing.

Schon, D 1992,"The crisis of professional knowledge and the pursuit of an epistemology of practice." *Journal of Interprofessional Care* vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 49-63.

Schore, A 2009, The Paradigm Shift: The Right Brain and the relational unconscious, American Psychological Association. Toronto Canada.

Schreiber, J C, Fuller, T and Paceley, M S 2013,"Engagement in child protective services: Parent perceptions of worker skills." *Children and Youth Services Review* vol. 35, no. 4, pp. 707-715.

Scott, D and Arney, F 2010, *Working with Vulnerable Families: A Partnership Approach*, Cambridge University Press.

Scourfield, J 2006,"Gendered Organizational Culture in Child Protection Social Work." *Social Work* vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 80-82.

Scourfield, J 2010, 'Gender and child welfare in society: Introduction to some key concepts'. *Gender and child welfare in society*. in B. Featherstone, A. Hooper, J. Scourfield and J. Taylor, John Wiley and Sons.

Searing, H 2003,"The continuing relevance of casework ideas to long‐term child protection work." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 311-320.

Segal, E 2013,"Beyond the Pale of Psychoanalysis: Relational Theory and Generalist Social Work Practice." *Clinical Social Work Journal* vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 376-386.

Sellman, D 2012, 'Reclaiming competence for professional phronesis'. *Phronesis in Professional Knowledge*. in E. Kinsell and A. Pitman. Rotterdam, NL, Sense Publishers.

Shaw, I and Gould, N 2001, *Qualitative Research in Social Work*. London, Sage Publications.

Sheehan, R 2012,"Forensic Social Work: A Distinctive Framework for Intervention." *Social Work in Mental Health* vol. 10, no. 5, pp. 409-425.

Sheehan, R 2015," Responding to child deaths: the work of Australia's Victorian Child Death Review Committee" *European Journal of Social Work* vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 236-246.

Sheldon, B and MacDonald, G 2009, *A textbook of social work*. Abingdon,Oxon, Routledge.

Sheppard, M 1995,"Social work, social science and practice wisdom." *Bristish Journal of Social Work* vol. 25, pp. 265-293.

Sheppard, M 2007, *Social Work and Social Exclusion: The Idea of Practice*. Aldershot England, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

Sheppard, M and Charles, M 2015,"Head and Heart: An Examination of the Relationship between the Intellectual and Interpersonal in Social Work." *The British Journal of Social Work* vol. 45, no. 6, pp. 1837-1854.

Shoesmith, S 2016, *Learning from baby P: the politics of blame, fear and denial*. London, Jessica Kingsley.

Slade, A 2005,"Parental reflective functioning: an introduction." *Attachment and Human development* vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 269-281.

Slade, A 2014,"Ghosts in the Psychoanalytic Nursery: Response to Lieberman and Harris." *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 282.

Smith, C 2001,"Trust and confidence: possibilities for social work in 'high modernity'." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 31, pp. 287-305.

Smith, D, Cleak , H and Vreugdenhil, A 2015,""What Are They Really Doing" An Exploration of Student Learning Activities in Field Placement." *Australian social work* vol. 68, no. 4, pp. 515.

Smith, M 2001,"The terrors of night and the arrows of day: Social workers' processes in the aftermath of murder." *Journal of Social Work Practice: Psychotherapeutic Approaches in Health, Welfare and the Community* vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 57-65.

Smith, M, McMahon, L and Nursten, J 2003,"Social workers' experiences of fear." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 33, pp. 659-671.

Smith, R 2012,"Values, practice and meaning in social work research." *European Journal of Social Work* vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 433-448.

Stanley, J and Goddard, C 2002, *In the firing line: violence and power in child protection work*. Chichester; New York, Wiley.

Stanley, N, Manthorpe, J and White, M 2007,"Depression in the Profession: Social Workers' Experiences and Perceptions." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 37, no.2, pp. 281-298 doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcl058

Stark, C 2010,"The Neoliberal Ideology and the Challenges for Social Work Ethics and Practice." *Social Work Review,* vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 9-19.

Steele, M and Baradon, T 2004,"Clinical use of the adult attachment interview in parent–infant psychotherapy." *Infant Mental Health Journal* vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 284-299.

Steiner, G 1978, *Heidegger*. Great Britain, Fontana.

Stepney, P 2009,"English Social Work at the Crossroads: A Critical Review." *Australian Social Work* vol. 62, no. 1, pp. 10-27.

Stern, D 2002, *The first relationship: infant and mother*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press. Viewed 21 May 2017 http://ezproxy.acu.edu.au/login?url=https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/acu/detail.action?docID=3300370

Stern, D N 1985, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology*. London, Karnac Books.

Sudbery, J 2002,"Key features of therapeutic social work: the use of relationship." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 149-162.

Sykes, J 2011,"Negotiating stigma: Understanding mothers responses to accusations of child neglect." *Children and Youth Services Review* vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 448-456.

Tascon, S 2010, 'Ethics of reponsibilty'. *Ethics and value pespectives in social work*. M. Gray and S. Webb. Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.

Taylor, C and White, S 2001,"Knowledge, truth and reflexivity: the problem of judgement in social work." *Journal of Social Work* vol. 1, pp. 37-59.

Taylor, C and White, S 2006,"Knowledge and Reasoning in Social Work: Educating for Humane Judgement." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 36, pp. 937–954.

Tham, P 2007,"Why Are They Leaving? Factors Affecting Intention to Leave among Social Workers in Child Welfare." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 37, no. 7, pp. 1225-1246.

The Lord Laming, 2003, Victoria Climbié Inquiry: Report of an Inquiry by Lord Laming, London: Crown Copyright. Viewed 21 May 2017 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-victoria-climbie-inquiry-report-of-an-inquiry-by-lord-laming

Thomas, G 2007,"The power of the therapeutic relationship: bringing balance to the evidence-based practice." *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work Review* pp. 55–66.

Thomas, G 2007,"The power of the therapeutic relationship: bringing balance to the evidence-based practice." *Aotearoa New Zealand Socail Work Review* vol., pp. 55-66.

Tilbury, C, Hughes, M, Bigby, C and Osmond, J 2015,"Social Work Research in the Child Protection Field in Australia." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 47, pp. 256–274 10.1093/bjsw/bcv123.

Tosone, C 2013,"On being a relational practitioner in an evidenced-based world." *Journal of Social Work Practice* vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 24 -257.

Tracy, S 2010,"Qualitative quality: eight "big tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research." *Qualitative Inquiry* vol. 16, no. 10, pp. 837-851.

Tregeagle, S and Treleaven, L 2006,"Key questions in considering guided practice for vulnerable Australian children." *Australian Journal of Social Issues* vol. 41, no. 3, pp. 359-368.

Trevithick, P 2003,"Effective relationship-based practice: a theoretical exploration." *Journal of Social Work Practice* vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 163-176.

Trevithick, P 2011,"Understanding Defences and Defensiveness in Social Work." *Journal of Social Work Practice: Psychotherapeutic Approaches in Health, Welfare and the Community* vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 389-412.

Trevithick, P 2012, *Social work skills and knowledge: a practice handbook.* Maidenhead, McGraw-Hill, Open University Press.

Trevithick, P 2014,"Humanising managerialism: reclaiming emotional reasoning, intuition, the relationship, and knowledge and skills in social work." *Journal of Social Work Practice: Psychotherapeutic Approaches in Health, Welfare and the Community* vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 287-311.

Tronto, J C 2010,"Creating Caring Institutions: Politics, Plurality, and Purpose." *Ethics and Social Welfare* vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 158-171.

Trotter, C 2015, *Working with involuntary clients: a guide to practice.* Crows Nest, Allen and Unwin.

Tsang, N M 2000,"Dialectics in social work." *International Social Work* vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 421.

Tsang, N M 2014,"Knowledge, Professional and Practice Integration in Social Work Education." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 44, no. 6, pp. 1384-1401.

Turney, D 2012,"A relationship‑based approach to engaging involuntary clients: the contribution of recognition theory." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 149-159.

Tutty, L, Rothery, M and Grinnell, R 1996, *Qualitative research: phases, steps and tasks.* Boston, Allyn and Bacon.

unknown 2015, Guiding principles for strengthening the participation of local Aboriginal community in child protection decision-making. NSW, Department of Family and Community Services, NSW.

Urry, J 2012, *Sociology Beyond Societies Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century.* Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.

Valentine, M 1994,"The social worker as 'bad object'." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 71-86.

van Heughten, K 2011, *Social work under pressure: how to overcome stress, fatigue and burnout in the workplace.* London, Jessica Kingsley.

van Manen, M 2007,"Phenomenology of Practice." *Phenomenology and Practice* vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 11-30.

van Manen, M 2014, *Phenomenology of practice: meaning giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Walnut Creek, CA, Left Coast Inc.

van Nijnatten, C 2010,"Deadlocked Dialogues in Child Welfare." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 40, pp. 826–840.

Venables, J, Healy, K and Harrison, G 2015,"From investigation to collaboration: Practitioner perspectives on the transition phase of parental agreements." *Children and Youth Services Review* vol. 52, pp. 9-16.

Wadsworth, Y 2011, *Do It Yourself Social Research*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.

Waldfogel, J 1998, *The future of child protection: how to break the cycle of abuse and neglect*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.

Warner, J 2013,"Social work, class politics and risk in the moral panic over Baby P." *Health, Risk and Society* vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 217-233.

Warner, J 2014,"'Heads Must Roll'? Emotional Politics, the Press and the Death of Baby P." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 44, no. 6, pp. 1637-1653.

Waterhouse, L and McGhee, J 2013,"Practitioner–mother relationships and the processes that bind them." *Child and Family Work* vol. 18, no., pp. 1-18.

Weaver, D, Chang, J, Clark, S and Rhee, S 2007,"Keeping Public Child Welfare Workers on the Job." *Administration in Social Work* vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 5-25.

Webb, S 2015, *Professional identity and social work,* 5th International Conference on Sociology and Social Work: New Directions in Critical Sociology and Social Work: Identity, Narratives and Praxis. Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland.

Wekerle, C 2013,"Resilience in the context of child maltreatment: Connections to the practice of mandatory reporting." *Child Abuse and Neglect* vol. 37, pp. 93-101.

Western Australia Department of Child Protection 2011, *The Signs of Safety Child Protection Practice Framework*, viewed 27 June 2017

Wheatland, F and Ivec, M 2014, *Moving to a restorative and relationally based child protection system in the ACT*. Canberra, Australian National University.

Whincup, H 2016,"What do social workers and children do when they are together? A typology of direct work." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 22, pp. 972-980.

White, S 1997,"Beyond retroduction: reflexivity, hermeneutics and social work practice." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 27, no. 5, pp. 739-753.

White, S 2006, *Critical reflection in health and social care*. Maidenhead, McGraw-Hill Education

White, S, Hall, C and Peckover, S 2009,"The decriptive tyranny of the common framework: technologies of categorization and professional practice in child welfare." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 39, no. 7, pp. 1197-1217.

White, V 1995,"Commonality and diversity in feminist social work." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 143.

White, V 2006, *The state of feminist social work*. Abingdon,Oxon, Routledge.

William, C K C and Ming-sum, T 2008,"The nature of practice wisdom in social work revisited." *International Social Work* vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 47-54.

Winter, K 2009,"Relationships matter: the problems and prospects for social workers' relationships with young children in care." *Child and Family Social Work* vol. 14, pp. 450-460.

Winter, K, Cree, V, Hallett, S, Hadfield, M, Ruch, G, Morrison, F and Holland, S 2016,"Exploring Communication between Social Workers, Children and Young People." *British Journal of Social Work* vol. 0, pp. 1-18.

Woodside, M and McClam, T 2013, *Generalist case management: a method of human service delivery*. Belmont, CA, Brooks/Cole Cengage Learning.

World Health Organisation 2017, viewed 13th November 2017
http://www.who.int/hia/evidence/doh/en

Yatchmenoff, D K 2005,"Measuring Client Engagement from the Client's Perspective in Nonvoluntary Child Protective Services." *Research on Social Work Practice* vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 84-96.

Young, S 2004, '*Social Work theory and practice: the invisibility of whiteness*'. *Whitening race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*. in A. Moreton-Robinson. Canberra, Aboriginal Press.

Appendix 1 – Invitation to Participate in a Research Project, Explanatory Statement and Consent Form

AN INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

TITLE OF PROJECT: Exploring Client-Social Worker Relationships In Contemporary Social Work Practice

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Associate Professor Rosemary Sheehan

NAME OF SUPERVISOR: Dr Robyn Mason

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: Wendy Rollins

This is an invitation to participate in a research project about the social worker-client relationship as it is currently being practised by social workers. I understand you are a qualified social worker currently practising in a family and children's service agency.

This research will be undertaken by Wendy Rollins, who is a student at Monash University and she is undertaking this research as part of her Master of Social Work thesis in the School of Social Work.

While the literature affirms that the social worker - client relationship is a significant component of family and children's social work practice, there is less literature about what this relationship work means for clients, social workers and the agencies.

This research will provide more information about how social workers currently working in family and children's services view this work, and its relative importance for clients, agencies and the social workers themselves. Your knowledge and experience will be valuable for increasing knowledge of the relationship work which occurs between clients and social workers.

You are invited to participate in a face to face interview, or a telephone interview, at a time and place which is convenient to you. The interview will take up to one and a half hours of your time.

If you are interested in participating please read the Explanatory Statement and sign both copies of the Consent form. One copy of the Consent form and the Explanatory Statement are for your records.

The signed consent form can then be scanned and emailed, or faxed to:

> Dr Robyn Mason
> Senior Lecturer
> School of Social Work
> Department of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences

Monash University

██████████████████████
██████████████
Email: ████████████████████

Dr. Mason is also available to ask any questions you may have about the project.

Yours sincerely,

Wendy Rollins
15th March 2011

Appendix 2 – Explanatory Statement

Topic: Exploring Client-Social Worker Relationships In

Contemporary Social Work Practice

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

This information sheet is for you to keep.

My name is Wendy Rollins and I am conducting a research project with Associate Professor Rosemary Sheehan, Department of Social Work, Monash University towards a Master of Social Work (Research) degree. This means that I will be writing a thesis which is the equivalent of a small book.

The purpose of the research

The aim of this study is to explore with practicing social workers their views about how they undertake their relationship work with clients, how important they think client relationships are to their practice and the meaning they gain from engaging with clients in terms of their identity as social workers.

Who is eligible to participate?

I am interested in interviewing qualified social workers in both government and non-government human service contexts in the ACT in order to explore the ways in which social workers are thinking about and developing relationships with clients in their social work practice. I have written to government and non-government human services agencies in the ACT seeking their involvement in the study. I have asked

these organisations to inform their social work staff of the project, inviting interested social workers to participate in an individual interview followed by a group interview. By interviewing only qualified social workers the study ensures all study participants share a common professional background.

Possible benefits

The benefit of this study lies in its contribution to social work knowledge as it explores working relationships developed between social workers and clients. The study findings offer significant benefits for social work practice, social work education and ultimately client outcomes. Gaining a picture of how this type of work is currently being practised helps to inform future development of direct practice in social work. The findings will also inform social work education as it relates to preparing future social workers for direct practice with clients.

What does the research involve?

The study involves conducting individual semi-structured interviews with social workers. The study participants are also invited to participate in a focus group discussion at a subsequent date. The interviews will be audio taped with participant permission and transcribed.

How much time will the research take?

I anticipate each individual interview may take up to an hour and a half and the subsequent focus group up to two hours. The interviews will be conducted at a mutually convenient time and venue. I may need to contact you at a later date after the interview to clarify any information you have given.

Inconvenience/discomfort

As a participant in this study you will be discussing your work practices which may cause some discomfort, however it is not anticipated that the interview will create any inconvenience or discomfort beyond that which is experienced in your day to day social work practice. If any inconvenience or discomfort is experienced, I will stop the interview to give you a break. I will discuss with you whether you would like to be connected to an appropriate support or if appropriate, discuss the issue with me. The Lifeline Telephone Counselling Service can be contacted on 13 11 14.

Can I withdraw from the research?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. You can participate in the individual interview and choose to abstain from participating in the group interview. If you do consent to participate, you may withdraw at any time prior to the point of data analysis. At that point in the research process, individual comments cannot be separated from the data set as a whole.

Confidentiality

Information collected in the interview will be confidential to this research. In writing up the results of the research all care will be taken to provide anonymity to the participants and the services/agencies in which they work.

The interviews and the focus group discussion will be conducted at a mutually agreed venue to ensure confidentiality.

The data collected will be kept in locked storage in accordance with university requirements. The data will be kept in a separate place from any identifying information. Names of workers and agencies will not be included in the final report.

While every attempt is being made to ensure the confidentiality of the participants, it is not possible to absolutely guarantee that published findings will ensure anonymity. Participants will not be named and will not be identified in any way through the research process.

Storage of data

Storage of the data collected will adhere to university regulations and kept in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet or database for 5 years.

A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report. The data obtained in this research maybe used in conference presentations or journal articles and will not contain identifiable material.

Results

If you would like to be informed of the research findings, please contact Wendy Rollins on **wendy.rollins@acu.edu.au** or telephone (during working hours) 02 6209 1208. A summary of the findings will be available once the thesis is submitted.

If you would like to contact the **researchers** about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:	If you have a **complaint** concerning the manner in which this research **<insert your project number here>** is being conducted, please contact:
Associate Professor Rosemary	Executive Officer, Human

Sheehan

[redacted]

Phone number: [redacted]

Fax number: [redacted]

Research Ethics

Monash University Human

Research Ethics Committee

(MUHREC)

[redacted]

Research Office

Monash University VIC 3800

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Thank you.

Wendy Rollins

Appendix 3 – Ethics Approvals

ANGLICARE
CANBERRA & GOULBURN

To: Monash University Research Ethics Committee

Re: Ethics Application for Research Project for MSW (Research)

Student: Wendy Rollins

Project Supervisor: Associate Professor Rosemary Sheehan

This memo is to confirm that Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn in address is willing to be involved in the recruitment of social work qualified staff within our agency to participate in this small research study.

We understand that the research process will comply with ethical research standards and that participants will be fully informed about the project and will be involved in a voluntary capacity.

Yours sincerely

Jenny Kitchin

Manager

....

18th November 2010

Strength for Today
Hope for Tomorrow

Jamieson House, 43 Constitution Avenue, Reid ACT 2612 ● GPO Box 360, Canberra ACT 2601

Anglicare Youth and Family Services ABN 54 404 450 4624 Anglican Council ABN 70 367 562 017

![marymead Child and Family Centre logo]

CARING FOR CHILDREN • SUPPORTING FAMILIES

<u>To: Monash University Research Ethics Committee</u>

<u>Re:</u> Ethics Application for Research Project for MSW (Research)

Student: Wendy Rollins

Project Supervisor: Associate Professor Rosemary Sheehan

This memo is to confirm that Marymead Child and Family Centre in Goyder Street Narrabundah ACT 2604 is willing to be involved in the recruitment of social work qualified staff within our agency to participate in this small research study. We understand that the research process will comply with ethical research standards and that participants will be fully informed about the project and that they will be involved in a voluntary capacity.

Yours Sincerely

███████████████████

Fiona MacGregor

Senior Manager

Family Support Programs

Marymead Child and Family Centre

18th November 2010
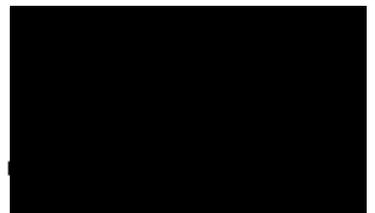
Appendix 4 – Questions for Individual Interview

Title of project: Exploring client-social worker relationships in contemporary social work practice

Thank you for participating in this interview today. I will be asking you a series of questions to elicit your thoughts and responses about the research topic. I would like to begin by asking how you engage with service users in your agency.

1. How do clients first come into contact with your agency?

2. How do you commence your contact with clients?

3. How significant do you think the rapport and/or relationships developed with clients are for interventions and outcomes?
   - A. For the client
   - B. For the agency
   - C. For you, the social worker

4. Are there factors you have not already mentioned that you believe are important for your work with clients in your agency?

5. What do you consider are the key elements of a good working relationship with a client?

6. What knowledge, skills, values, attributes or other factors contribute to the development of an effective working relationship between a social worker and a client?

7. In thinking about the relationship part of your work with clients, is it a part of the work you enjoy doing?

8. How important is it to your own sense of job satisfaction?

9. Do you feel you are able to give the emphasis to your relationship work with clients that you think is necessary in your organisation?

10. What do you believe helps this to happen?

   - A. If you think you are not able to give the emphasis to client relationships that you think is necessary, what stops this from happening?

   - B. Can you propose any solutions to this issue?

11. How important do you think developing relationships with clients is to being a social worker?

12. How important do you think developing relationships with clients is for the identity of the social work profession?

13. Would you like to make any other comments?

Appendix 5 – Questions for Focus Group Interview

<u>Title of project: Exploring client-social worker relationships in contemporary social work practice</u>

Thank you for participating in this focus group interview. The purpose of this discussion is to gather data about the nature of the relationships that are developed between social workers and clients in your practice contexts.

I will be asking a series of questions to elicit your views and ideas about this topic and will begin by asking how you initiate contact with service users in your agencies.

1. How do you and/or your agencies begin the process of making contact and building rapport with clients? How do people usually contact your agency?

2. How important do you think the interactions and/or relationships developed between social workers and clients are for pursuing interventions and achieving outcomes for:

    A.   Clients
    B.   Your agencies and,
    C.   You as social workers?

3. Are there factors or considerations not already mentioned that you believe are important for your work with clients?

4. What do you consider are the key elements of a good working relationship with a client?

5. What knowledge, skills, values, attributes or other factors contribute to the development of an effective working relationship between a social worker and a client?

6. In thinking about the relationship part of your work with clients, is it a part of the work you enjoy doing?

7. How important is it to your own sense of job satisfaction?

8. Do you believe relationship practice between social workers and clients is recognised in your workplaces or is given the importance you think it should?

    A.   If yes, what factors helps this to happen?
    B.   If no, what do you believe prevents this from happening?

9. How important is relationship development with clients to being a social worker?

10. Do you think it is an aspect of practice that is changing? How?

11. How important do you think developing relationships with clients is for the identity of the social work profession?

12. Would you like to make any other comments?

Appendix 6 - Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

MONASH University

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)
Research Office

Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

Date:	**1 March 2011**
Project Number:	CF10/3426 - 2010001807
Project Title:	**Exploring client-social worker relationships in contemporary social work practice**
Chief Investigator:	**Assoc Prof Rosemary Sheehan**
Approved:	**From: 1 March 2011 to 1 March 2016**

Terms of approval

1. The Chief investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to MUHREC before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. **Failure to provide permission letters to MUHREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.**
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must contain your project number.
6. **Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel):** Requires the submission of a Request for Amendment form to MUHREC and must not begin without written approval from MUHREC. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. **Future correspondence:** Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. **Annual reports:** Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. **Final report:** A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. **Monitoring:** Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
11. **Retention and storage of data:** The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

Professor Ben Canny
Chair, MUHREC

Cc: Dr Robyn Mason; Ms Wendy Rollins;

Postal – Monash University, Vic 3800, Australia

ABN 12 377 614 012 CRICOS Provider #00008C