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Navigating Knowledge: A constructivist grounded theory of contextual social work knowledge for Aotearoa New Zealand's practice

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Social Work

at Massey University, Manawatū, Aotearoa New Zealand

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2026

Abstract

Social work knowledge in Aotearoa New Zealand is inherently value-laden, historical, political, contextual, and contingent, directly shaping social work practice and its outcomes. Using a Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) methodology, this study explored how these factors influence the interpretation, construction, and application of knowledge through semi-structured interviews with 37 social workers. The findings indicate that providing meaningful and contextually responsive services requires a robust integration of personal, professional, and contextual knowledge. The application of this knowledge is an iterative process that involves technical rationality, practical rationality, and reflective practice.

The study proposes a theory of *Navigating Knowledge*, which conceptualises social workers as continuously engaging in the processes of *Interpreting Knowledge* to address its inherent complexity, *Constructing Knowledge* to inform practice, and *Applying Knowledge* toward *Producing Outcomes*. This theory offers a lens for understanding how social workers develop knowledge that is both purposeful and useful, all while remaining grounded in the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Dedication

I dedicate this PhD thesis to my beloved son and daughter: Ruben Manasye Setiawan and Kezia Tabitha Setiawan Matthews. You are my heart, my world, and the light that guides me. In every moment of struggle, it is your love and laughter that lift me, reminding me of what truly matters.

You are the greatest gift a mother could ever receive, and it is because of you that I find strength, joy, and purpose. Thank you for filling my life with boundless love and meaning. I love you, Mum.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the participants of this study for their generous contribution of time and expertise. Their involvement was vital to the completion of this research.

I am deeply thankful for the steadfast support and invaluable feedback provided by my PhD supervisors at Massey University: Professor Kieran O'Donoghue, Associate Professor Kathryn Hay, and Dr. Hagyun Kim. Their guidance has been instrumental throughout this journey.

I also extend my appreciation to my social work supervisor, Dr. Moses Fale'olo, and mentor, Dr. Jean Mitaera, for their ongoing encouragement, wisdom, and commitment to my professional development and practice.

I am profoundly grateful to my family: Grant Wright, Ruben M. Setiawan, Kezia Tabitha S. Matthews, Shannon Fitzgerald, Avrillia S. Setiawati, Byanca Kiara Salsabila for their constant love, support, and motivation.

A special thanks to my gym buddies and friends: David Cunliffe, Kevin Forward, Andrew Coster, Tim Shaw, Rollie Heke, Dennis and Barry Brown, Allan Shew, Cristine Robbie, Lee, Megan Davis, Dominika Zmuda, Agustilia Rodrigues, Tangi Edwards, Epifania Moors, Brendan Jacobsen, Stacey, Apii Rongo-Raea. The gym, coffee catch-ups and conversations have been my sanctuary during the challenging moments of this thesis, and you made those times more bearable.

I would also like to thank the dancers at Elegancia Samba, Caraka Seni and Estudio de Samba: Claire Wilde, Satya Priyomarsono, Solene Trousse, Suzi Imes Bryce, Darlya Redfern, Saoirse Choistealla, Jenny Bloomfield, and Fiona Mackenzie for the laughter, fun, and positive energy,

as well as Matt Barnacott and the musicians at Samba Ao Vento for their joyful contributions. Additionally, my thanks go to the Indonesian community in Wellington for their encouragement and for reminding me to stay focused and positive throughout the process.

Finally, I am grateful to my colleagues at Whitireia WelTec and my broader professional network within the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) and the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) for their ongoing support and collaboration.

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Glossary

Hapū: kinship group, clan, tribe, subtribe.

Iwi: extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality, race.

Kanohi ki te kanohi: face-to-face, in person, emphasising direct, physical presence for authentic connection, communication, and relationship-building, often involving all senses beyond just sight, and is a core concept in tikanga (Māori customs).

Kaupapa Māori: Māori approach, Māori topic, Māori customary practice, Māori institution, Māori agenda, Māori principles, Māori ideology.

Mātauranga Māori: Māori knowledge, wisdom, understanding, skill - sometimes used in the plural.

Pākehā: New Zealander of European descent.

Tangata whenua: the Indigenous or native Māori people of Aotearoa New Zealand, the land's original inhabitants.

Tauiwi: a Māori term for the non-Indigenous or non-Māori people of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Tikanga Māori: correct procedure, custom, habit, lore, method, manner, rule, way, code, meaning, plan, practice, convention, protocol - the customary system of values and practices that have developed over time and are deeply embedded in the social context.

Whakapapa: genealogy, descent, a lineage or ancestry, tracing the connection to one's forebears or family heritage.

Whānau: extended family, family group, a familiar term of address to a number of people - the primary economic unit of traditional Māori society. In the modern context the term is sometimes used to include friends who may not have any kinship ties to other members.

Whanaungatanga: relationship, kinship, sense of family connection; a relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging.

Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis presents a study using Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) to generate a substantive theory explaining the processes through which social work knowledge is enacted in Aotearoa New Zealand. To situate the study within its professional context, I adopt a definition of social work that understands the profession in Aotearoa New Zealand as one committed to promoting wellbeing, equity, and social justice by supporting individuals, whānau, and communities to thrive (ANZASW, 2026; IFSW, 2014). This understanding is grounded in the bicultural foundations of practice in Aotearoa New Zealand and recognises the influence of historical, political, cultural, and social contexts on social work knowledge and practice (Ruwhiu, 2003).

Consistent with the principles of CGT, as articulated by Charmaz (2014, 2017), I acknowledge that my perspectives, positionality, and lived and professional experiences inevitably shape the research process and the interpretations derived from it. Rather than viewing this influence as a limitation, I consider it an integral component of constructivist inquiry (Charmaz, 2014). Accordingly, I commit to transparency regarding my background, enabling both the reader and myself to critically engage with how my standpoint informs the study and may introduce potential biases. Throughout the research process, I address this through ongoing reflexivity and analytic self-examination.

In this chapter, I begin by introducing my positionality as the researcher and outlining the problem that motivated this study, drawing attention to how my positionality has shaped my engagement with the research topic. I then briefly discuss the key challenges encountered during the study and provide an overview of the thesis structure. Together, these elements

establish the context for the research, clarify the central focus of the thesis, and foreground the significance of the study while offering the reader insight into the perspective from which this work has been undertaken.

1.1. My PhD Journey

In qualitative research, significant importance is placed on acknowledging the researcher's background to gain deeper insight into the foundations of their perspective (Belgrave & Seide, 2019; Hardwick & Worsley, 2011). Within CGT methodology specifically, considering the researcher's background is essential (Charmaz, 2014). Recognising the value of lived experience in shaping social work knowledge, I find it important to begin my self-introduction by acknowledging my experiences as a client, frontline practitioner, and academic within the field of social work.

1.1.1. Self-introduction - Who am I?

My journey of migration from Indonesia to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2008 was a deliberate pursuit of broader life and educational opportunities for my family. My academic interest in the process of navigating knowledge is deeply personal, stemming from my upbringing as a girl in a patriarchal society where the construction of knowledge and its application beyond the domestic sphere were not common. Growing up, even formal education for women was often valued for its ability to enhance a woman's role as a wife and mother, rather than as a foundation for a profession. The societal ideal of a good woman was defined by her mastery of household skills, with marriage being the ultimate goal. In this context, an unmarried woman was often viewed as lacking direction, likened to a ship without a captain.

My father, however, presented a different narrative. My father, a medical doctor with a master's degree from the University of Southern California, actively encouraged my intellectual curiosity and pursuit of higher education. His international exposure likely influenced his belief

that each generation should strive to surpass the last regardless of gender. In contrast, my mother did not complete high school, and my grandmother was illiterate, a common reality at the time, and they seemed content with the knowledge passed down through family traditions. This contrast highlights how knowledge for women in my community was primarily constructed through generational customs rather than critical thinking. My father's untimely death during my teenage years was a profound loss, but his teachings inspired me to continue my education while working full-time, despite the lack of governmental support for students.

As an adult and a mother of two children, I have a heightened awareness of how our environments and relationships influence the knowledge we construct, which in turn shapes our worldview and decision-making. Observing my children's development, I have come to believe that providing opportunities, access to knowledge, and the freedom to express oneself are vital for fostering critical thinking. My experience in helping to shape my adult children's thinking has reinforced my belief in the profound impact we have on those around us. This personal history provides the foundation for my belief that social workers similarly construct their knowledge from their environments and relationships, and the application of this knowledge directly influences their behaviour and decision-making.

1.1.2. My Profession

As a trained social worker, my professional identity shapes every stage of this research. Social work is grounded in relational practice, social justice, and critical reflection, and these values inevitably influence my epistemological stance. I approach knowledge as contextual, relational, and co-constructed rather than objective or detached, and this orientation informs the types of questions I ask, the methodological decisions I make, and the way I interpret participants' experiences.

My position as an insider within the profession brings both strengths and challenges. I am familiar with the language, norms, and complexities of social work practice, which allows me to engage deeply with participants and recognise subtleties that might not be visible to a researcher outside the field. This shared professional grounding helps build trust and supports richer, more nuanced data. At the same time, I am aware that my familiarity with the profession creates risks. I may carry assumptions that go unexamined or overlook aspects of practice that appear self-evident to me but require critical scrutiny. The possibility of role ambiguity or perceived power differences also requires attention, as participants may view me simultaneously as a researcher, colleague, or practitioner. Because of these dynamics, I commit to ongoing reflexivity to ensure that my interpretations remain transparent, critical, and ethically grounded.

Conducting this research in Aotearoa New Zealand also means that my professional positionality is situated within a wider Tiriti-based and bicultural landscape. As a social worker, I am obligated to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi and to engage respectfully with mātauranga Māori, Māori-led approaches, and the aspirations of iwi, hapū, and whānau. These commitments shape how I design and carry out my research, how I interpret knowledge, and how I understand my responsibilities to Māori participants and communities. Likewise, in contexts where Pasifika worldviews and communal values are central, I acknowledge the cultural expectations of reciprocity, service, and respectful engagement that arise in both social work practice and research settings.

My professional background in social services began in Indonesia, where I was involved in community initiatives. Following my migration to Aotearoa New Zealand, my experience expanded to include various roles, such as a team leader for a disability service provider and a frontline social worker in child development, refugee resettlement, and child protection. I

currently hold a senior academic position, teaching in a Bachelor of Social Work programme at Whitireia Community Polytechnic.

I acknowledge that my professional experience does not encompass every field of social work represented by the participants in this study. Furthermore, as a researcher, I do not claim to possess comprehensive cultural knowledge or expertise, particularly within the context of bicultural practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. Instead, my commitment is to accurately and authentically represent the voices of the social workers involved in this research, providing a true account of their experiences and insights.

Overall, my professional positionality as a social worker deeply influences the research process. By maintaining a critically reflexive stance, I aim to recognise the influence of my professional values, practice experience, and relational commitments while ensuring that the research remains rigorous, transparent, and culturally grounded. This awareness allows me to honour both the ethical foundations of social work and the bicultural responsibilities of research in Aotearoa New Zealand.

1.1.3. My Research Experience

My early academic journey in agricultural science in 1993 was characterised by quantitative research methods. This focus shifted during my Master's studies in Development Studies, where I became deeply engaged with qualitative research. This experience nurtured a profound interest in its methodologies and a commitment to further exploration of its various strategies.

Prior to starting my PhD, I had no practical experience with Grounded Theory (GT) methodology, as my knowledge was purely theoretical. When narrowing my PhD topic, I chose GT as my primary methodological approach. During a meeting with Professor O'Donoghue, he provided a detailed explanation of GT, highlighting its complexities and variations. At the time, I found the methodology challenging and somewhat intimidating due to its theoretical demands

and the commitment it required for rigorous theoretical development. Initially, the time and energy-intensive nature of GT led me to question my ability to apply it effectively. However, with Professor O'Donoghue's guidance and my engagement with key foundational texts on GT, I gained greater clarity. Ultimately, I made a deliberate choice to adopt CGT for my PhD research, as it best aligned with the study's purpose, aims, and research questions.

During this academic journey, I encountered another challenge when my supervisor, Associate Professor Kathryn Hay, undertook a Fulbright scholarship for 7 months in 2024 in the United States, requiring a supervision change. This transition caused significant anxiety. However, I was relieved and grateful when Dr. Hagyun Kim became my new supervisor. His extensive experience with GT reaffirmed that my chosen methodology and methods of analysis aligned with the CGT approach.

1.2. Problem Statement

Numerous studies (e.g., Ballantyne et al., 2019; Beddoe, 2018; Hyslop, 2013; Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019) have explored how knowledge is integrated into social workers' decision-making processes in Aotearoa New Zealand. Despite inconsistencies in the delivery of course content across social work education providers, a range of knowledge domains are covered in different programmes. This issue has gained particular importance following the mandatory registration introduced on 27 February 2021, which requires practitioners to be registered to identify as social workers, aligning with competency standards set by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB, 2024a).

The registration requirement emphasises the need for all social workers to possess a comprehensive body of knowledge essential for engaging effectively with diverse populations across various practice contexts. Currently, educational institutions are responsible for ensuring that graduates meet competence standards. While this may be less concerning for recent

graduates, it is important to acknowledge that many experienced practitioners have extensive field experience but lack formal social work qualifications (Aotearoa New Zealand Parliament, 2024). The 2024 Social Worker Workforce Report identifies that 2% of survey respondents—representing 124 social workers—achieved registration via the Social Workers Registration Board's (SWRB) Experience Pathway: S13 (SWRB, 2024b). This transitional registration route is scheduled to close on 27 February 2026 (SWRB, 2024c). Despite its continued use, the pathway is underpinned by an unresolved lack of clarity regarding the parameters of sufficient experience, with no agreed standard defining either the required duration or the scope of practice necessary to meet eligibility expectations.

These practitioners must still draw on diverse forms of knowledge to demonstrate competence in their roles. Despite the critical importance of knowledge in the social work profession, there is a paucity of studies in Aotearoa New Zealand that explored how social workers interpret, construct, apply knowledge in practice, and produce outcomes from its application.

1.2.1. Research Questions and Aims

A defining feature of a profession is its reliance on a distinct body of knowledge (Saks, 2012). Social work, as a profession, requires not only extensive knowledge but also intellectual capacities and practical skills (Connolly et al., 2018; Hair & O'Donoghue, 2009; Hyslop, 2013; Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019; O'Donoghue & Tsui, 2012; Payne, 2007; Trevithick, 2012). Knowledge can be described as a "justified true belief" (Dawson, 1981, p. 315), where justification involves having sound reasons for believing a claim to be true (Pritchard, 2023). Hudson (1997) defines professional knowledge as the accumulation of information that enhances understanding within a profession and serves as a guide for roles and tasks, with theory, research, and practice experience being primary sources of such knowledge. Similarly, Hay (2019) emphasises the need for social workers to apply both micro and macro knowledge,

combining contextual understanding with practice experience to strengthen specialised practice. O'Donoghue (2019) also highlights the importance of integrating both general and specific knowledge in ways that consider practice wisdom and local knowledge for each case situation.

This thesis aims to develop an explanatory theory, that accounts for how participants' experience and process knowledge. It explores how they engage in interpreting existing knowledge, constructing new understanding, applying what they have constructed, and producing outcomes from this application. The study acknowledges that social reality is subjectively constructed and shaped by the researcher and participants' own experiences and biases, a recognition that is central to understanding how participants make sense of and act within their social worlds (Charmaz, 2014). The research questions guiding this study are: What are the experiences of social workers in interpreting, constructing and applying knowledge in practice? How does social workers' knowledge influence their behaviour and practice outcomes with clients?

To aid in finding answers, the following questions were posed to participants:

1. What is your understanding of knowledge?
2. How did you obtain the knowledge you have?
3. With reference to a recent practice situation, can you please discuss your experiences of using knowledge in your social work practice?
4. What contributes to the development of your knowledge?
5. As a social worker, how important do you think it is to be active in developing knowledge?
6. How do you apply knowledge into practice?

7. How does your application of knowledge and reflection in practice influence your interactions, behaviour and practice outcomes with clients?
8. If anything, what would you change in terms of knowledge for social workers?

1.2.2. The Rationale for the Research

While numerous studies have examined social work knowledge (Hyslop, 2013; Imre, 1984; Rosen, 1994; Trevithick, 2012), there remains a gap in the critical exploration of how social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand interpret, construct, apply knowledge, and produce outcomes from its application. The practical significance of this research lies in mapping the types of knowledge social workers construct and apply in practice (Ballantyne et al., 2019; Beddoe & Maidment, 2018) and strengthening the connection between knowledge application and practice outcomes, as described in both international and Aotearoa New Zealand social work literature (Börjesson & Ulmestik, 2022; Cha et al., 2006; Holosko, 2009; Hudson, 1997; McDermott et al., 2017; Rutter & Fisher, 2013). Additionally, the findings from this study have the potential to contribute to the application of a CGT in social work knowledge specific to the Aotearoa New Zealand context.

1.2.3. Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Treaty of Waitangi of Waitangi

The history of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Treaty of Waitangi of Waitangi is profoundly significant to the field of social work in Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZASW, 2024; Beddoe, 2018; Maidment & Beddoe, 2016; Ruwhiu, 2003; SWRB, 2024; Walker, 2012). In 1840, Britain sought to establish a colony, motivated by the existing settler population, the expectation of thousands more immigrants, and the stated desire to protect Māori rights. To achieve this, Captain William Hobson, appointed consul, was instructed to secure the “free and intelligent consent” of chiefs (Orange, 2013, p. 17). The resulting document, signed on February 6, 1840, between the British Crown and Māori chiefs, serves as Aotearoa New Zealand's founding

compact. Critically, the process yielded two texts with fundamental differences: the English version (the Treaty of Waitangi) ceded full sovereignty to the Crown, while the Māori version (Te Tiriti) ceded only governorship (kāwanatanga) but guaranteed Māori ongoing authority and proprietary rights over their lands and treasures (taonga) (Buick, 1936; Kawharu, 1989; Orange, 2013; Moon, 2024). This divergence has fuelled persistent legal and political conflict. Following 1840, the Crown frequently failed to uphold its promises, particularly concerning the protection of Māori land and resources, generating widespread grievances (Patterson et al., 2016). To address these historical breaches, the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975 established the Waitangi Tribunal to investigate claims and provide redress recommendations (Moon, 2024).

The Tribunal uses three core principles derived from the Treaty of Waitangi: Partnership, Participation, and Protection to interpret the Crown-Māori relationship (Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1988). Partnership requires the Crown and Māori to work in good faith, Participation mandates opportunities for Māori involvement in decision-making, and Protection necessitates the Crown safeguarding Māori interests, rights, and taonga.

The principles of Partnership, Protection, and Participation are applied in social work across all topics in Aotearoa New Zealand, not just those concerning Māori, by requiring social workers and services to establish bicultural practices. One of the core competencies for social workers involves proficiently engaging with Māori communities and necessitates the seamless application of this competence across any undertakings (SWRB, 2024a).

The core tenets underpinning the practices of registered social workers revolve around the subsequent precepts of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Treaty of Waitangi:

- Te Rangatiratanga: Fostering relationships that enhance mana, prioritising self-determination, exhibiting reverence, recognising cultural distinctiveness, and acknowledging cultural identity.

- Te Manaakitanga: Applying behavioural principles in practice that engender mauri ora (wellbeing) within a secure environment, promoting mana enhancement and respect, honouring boundaries, and fulfilling obligations.
- Te Whanaungatanga: Enacting practices that perpetuate cultural endurance, reinforce interpersonal connections, exhibit mutuality and collaboration, and propagate warmth and rapport (SWRB, 2024a).

These principles are applied in this study by ensuring that the mutual collaborative relationship with participants is mana enhancing, upholds self-determination, recognises cultural distinctiveness, acknowledges cultural identity and honours boundaries, while also recognising that the topic of knowledge within the theory of Navigating Knowledge is framed in the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand society.

1.2.4. The Researcher's Personal Interest and Positionality

In professional practice, social workers are encouraged to critically examine their perspectives (Connolly et al., 2018). Charmaz (2014) emphasises that researchers must understand their background and positionality to gain insight into their perspective and effectively position themselves in their research and practice. To situate myself effectively, I will reflect on my past experiences and consider how they influence my worldviews. This section outlines my values, perspectives, personal interests, and positionality within this research. Higgs (2019) suggests that linking past experiences to current professional contexts and reflecting on their impact on our perspectives is essential for understanding positionality.

As discussed above, my positionality is shaped by my identity as an immigrant from Indonesia who resettled in Aotearoa New Zealand in search of better opportunities, a social worker, and a mother. Prior to migration, my practice was grounded in community-based social work within local Indonesian contexts. It was only after settling in Aotearoa New Zealand that I came to

understand social work as a formally regulated profession, characterised by professional accountability, ethical obligations, and the integration of diverse and systematic bodies of knowledge to support responsible practice. In this context, social work is clearly distinguished from informal helping roles, such as support within familial relationships, by its structured theoretical foundations, regulatory frameworks, and professional standards. This reconceptualisation of social work motivated me to undertake formal social work education, with the explicit aim of developing a robust professional knowledge base and establishing a career encompassing both statutory and non-statutory practice settings in Aotearoa New Zealand.

While practicing social work, I found that my fellow social work practitioners had significantly different interpretations of knowledge and processes of constructing knowledge. Many were very heuristic or practical, while others were systematic and technical. I sought to understand these processes and how the different choices in applying the knowledge we constructed influenced the outcomes of our practice with clients. I found there was not much research on this topic. My personal interest lies in addressing these gaps in social work knowledge and in experiencing applying the CGT methodology for the first time.

1.2.5. Philosophical Position in Research

In research, the concept of positionality refers to how researchers define their relationship with the study and its participants (Clarke et al., 2023; Hardwick & Worsley, 2011; Holstein & Gubrium, 2007). This includes factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, education, social and political context, as well as personal philosophical viewpoints and subconscious assumptions that develop over time. Positioning in research requires awareness of, and sensitivity to, internal dialogues that help shape how past knowledge and experiences inform current work.

My self-reflection on positionality in research led me to recognise that my stance as a researcher is dynamic and evolves as a study progresses; therefore, documenting it from the beginning is essential. Several questions arose for me: How might my prior knowledge, personal history, and experiences influence my approach to the study? How can I use this knowledge and experience effectively while minimising bias or undue detachment? These reflections guided me toward a methodology that incorporates my personal narrative and experience.

My experience in interpreting the complexities of knowledge is now more nuanced than it was during my frontline work 20 years ago. The process of constructing knowledge significantly influenced my decision-making, while my choice of applying knowledge helped guide my interventions. All personal and professional knowledge, as well as contextual knowledge, informed my everyday practice. For example, when assessing child development, I applied human development theories and research on child milestones (Allan et al., 2021; Cha et al., 2006) to determine whether a child had reached certain milestones. On occasions when children I cared for had not reached milestones, I constructed knowledge through most recent studies on treatment and then applied that knowledge in my intervention to stimulate development.

My experience in navigating knowledge has evolved across different fields and stages of practice, and I continue the process of constructing knowledge through various avenues. Regular supervision, networking with other practitioners, attending seminars and conferences, reading empirical research, and interacting with clients and students all contribute to the construction of my knowledge. Equally important are the values, culture, and life experiences I bring to the profession. In the process of applying knowledge, not all forms of knowledge are used simultaneously; some are kept and applied as needed, while others may be set aside

if deemed irrelevant. I believe that the knowledge applied by social workers affects their decision-making and, consequently, the outcome of their practice with clients.

Furthermore, social work case situations change over time, and social workers' knowledge must undergo continuous evolution, embracing a layered and segregated reality. Consequently, it becomes evident that equating knowledge with direct experience is inadequate. Likewise, the notion that knowledge emerges from nothing lacks intelligibility. Instead, knowledge can only emerge as the outcome of an ongoing process, as refined insights materialise through the transformation of pre-existing knowledge (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2010). More importantly, this ongoing process aligns with the principles of social constructionism (Houston, 2001), which form a central element of the theoretical framework for this study.

1.2.6. Theoretical Framework: Social Constructionism

The theoretical framework for this research is social constructionism, a concept first introduced by Berger and Luckmann in their foundational work *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966). Further exploration of social constructionism's principles will be provided in the following chapters.

The term social construction of reality refers to the theory that our presentation to others is shaped by our interactions and life experiences (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Our upbringing and beliefs influence how we present ourselves, how we perceive others, and how we are perceived. Reality is a complex negotiation, with its authenticity tied to societal acceptance. While we contribute to the construction of reality, it is not solely of our making. In other words, we shape our social environments and interactions through our words and actions in various social contexts (Blumer, 1969).

In social work, the application of social constructionism starts with an understanding of identity. Houston (2001) argues that from a constructionist perspective, identity is composed of a

narrative, the story of the self. This narrative consists of a sequence of life events connected over time, following a specific plot. This organised series of events and the plot together form what is recognised as identity. A more detailed exploration of the concept of narrative will be presented in Chapter Two, but for now, understanding identity as a perception of life events and relationships signifies a significant shift. This shift moves away from viewing self-understanding as an individual process to understanding self as a social process, where mainstream values become entrenched as traditions and alternative values are marginalised. Societal perceptions then solidify, and power imbalances subtly influence individuals to adopt self-beliefs that are contrary to their best interests. These power dynamics restrict individuals' narratives by limiting the interpretations they make from life's events and relationships, with social and familial discourse playing a guiding and constraining role in shaping those interpretations (Foucault, 1972; Lewis et al., 2009).

1.2.7. The Choice of Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology

Grounded theory (GT) is a research methodology that provides a systematic approach for developing theory from data. While different variations exist, CGT emphasises that the researcher's role is not merely to discover an existing reality, but to actively engage in the process of constructing theory. This involves interpreting unfolding events based on the rich data collected (Bryant, 2017; Charmaz, 2014). Unlike classical GT, which originally advocated for a more objective, researcher-distanced stance (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), CGT adopts an interactive and collaborative approach, allowing participants the freedom to express their experiences and perspectives fully (Birks & Mills, 2015). In this manner, the researcher collaborates with participants, using their existing knowledge and lived experiences to guide and inform the exploration of the research topic. The different variants of GT will be discussed in Chapter Three.

My choice of CGT was influenced by both my professional practice and personal experiences, which I believe enhanced my understanding of the data provided by participants and institutions. I also believed that adopting an objective stance would limit my ability to fully capture the complexity of social workers' knowledge experiences in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, as discussed further in Chapter Three.

CGT requires an ongoing and introspective journey for the researcher (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). This process of reflexivity involves a deep and self-critical examination of the researcher's internal landscape. Within CGT, recognising and reflecting on the researcher's positionality has become a key component (Charmaz, 2014). This acknowledgment plays a critical role in shaping the development of research questions, study design, data analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings. The interaction between the researcher's personal, epistemological, and theoretical perspectives significantly influences the direction of the inquiry (Bryant, 2017). Therefore, considering the diverse backgrounds, beliefs, values, and experiences of researchers is essential, as these factors may differ from those of the participants, highlighting the need to carefully consider and document their influence on the research process.

Failing to clearly explain the researcher's positionality can obscure the contextual background of the study, making it harder for the audience to fully understand the research (Hardwick & Worsley, 2011). In contrast, openly communicating the researcher's positionality enhances the study's credibility by providing transparency about the decisions made throughout the research process. For novice CGT researchers, this reflective journey can be difficult, especially when trying to develop reflective tools such as memos, journal entries, or field notes. The lack of guidance on how to approach reflexive writing can hinder the effectiveness of these practices.

1.2.8. Reflective Thinking through Reflective Journals, Memos, & Field Notes

The concept of reflective thinking dates to the early 20th century, with John Dewey's influential work in 1933, *How We Think*, where he emphasised its role in promoting cognitive and educational growth. Dewey (1933) proposed that thought is not spontaneous but often triggered by situations that cause doubt, confusion, or uncertainty. Reflective thinking, according to Dewey (1929), drives individuals to seek potential solutions by drawing upon their existing knowledge and experiences.

While Dewey (1933) established reflective thinking as an inherent cognitive process in daily life, Donald Schön expanded its application to professional contexts in his seminal work, *The Reflective Practitioner* (Schön, 1983). Schön introduced the concept of reflective practice, positioning reflective thinking as a fundamental element of professional expertise. He argued that reflective thinking is an essential skill for researchers, helping them transition from technicians to skilled practitioners (Schön, 1983, 1987, 1991).

Birks and Mills (2015) advocate for using memos, written records of the researcher's thought process, as a primary method for developing reflexivity. In line with this approach, I began my research by engaging in reflective practices, such as writing memos, keeping a reflective journal, and taking field notes, to explore and articulate my positionality. The following section presents a collection of these reflective entries from the early stages of my research proposal. These entries provide insight into the motivations that guided my choice of doctoral research topics, focusing on aspects such as my cultural background, migration to Aotearoa New Zealand, challenges as an immigrant, and my motivation to study social work knowledge. Additionally, they examine my interaction with the theoretical foundations that support reflective practice.

1.2.8.1 My Culture

My Indonesian cultural background offers two significant principles for navigating knowledge. The first is a collectivist approach, which aligns with the concept of *gotong royong*, or mutual cooperation. In a collectivistic society like Indonesia's, the needs of the community often take precedence over individual desires (Davidson & Henley, 2007). This principle informs my belief that the process of constructing knowledge in social work should be a collaborative endeavour, with participants collectively contributing their perspectives and experiences. This shared, community-oriented approach fosters a strong sense of togetherness and mutual support, which are core values in Indonesian tradition (Burns, 2007).

The second cultural value is adaptability. With over 17,500 islands and approximately 1,300 ethnic groups, Indonesia is a highly diverse nation where adaptability is a necessary and fundamental value. This cultural trait has shaped my perspective on the process of navigating knowledge, as I believe it must be flexible and adaptable to be relevant to the diverse backgrounds and needs of clients. My own experience as a migrant to Aotearoa New Zealand, where I have learned to navigate a bicultural society with both tangata whenua (people of the land) and tauiwi (settlers), has reinforced the importance of this value in social work practice. The customary Indonesian values of showing respect, friendship, and dignity to both hosts and newcomers (Davidson & Henley, 2007) have also informed my approach to working with people from all walks of life.

1.2.8.2 My Migration Story

My decision to migrate to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2008 was informed by a significant process of constructing knowledge about the opportunities for my children, as well as the substantial financial costs and high living expenses associated with the move. While this knowledge was daunting, I ultimately took a "leap of faith," a decision influenced by the knowledge that I no

longer had familial responsibilities in Indonesia following my parents' deaths. This experience highlights how personal circumstances and priorities are central to navigating knowledge to inform life-changing decisions.

Despite my previous experience living in the United States, adapting to a new country presented fresh challenges. The process of constructing knowledge about a new physical environment, culture, and lifestyle was critical for me to settle and thrive. This journey was not linear; it highlighted how constructing and applying knowledge is an ongoing process. For example, my experience purchasing a home as a single mother required navigating knowledge from various sources, including colleagues and friends, to successfully apply for a mortgage. This was a complex and empowering process that demonstrated the importance of networking in building the knowledge needed to overcome significant life challenges.

My migration journey also enhanced my understanding of language and discourse, as English is my third language. The need to make informed decisions at each stage, from purchasing a home to the significant choice of renouncing my Indonesian citizenship to become a Aotearoa New Zealand citizen, has resonated with the challenges many immigrants face. Overall, these experiences have sparked my interest in understanding how others interpret, construct, and apply knowledge, particularly when making life-altering decisions for themselves and their clients.

1.2.8.3. Motivation to Study Navigating Knowledge in Social Work

My initial motivation to explore the area of social work knowledge originates from my own lived experiences, where comprehending the origins of knowledge has proven to be as vital, if not more so, than the knowledge itself. To illustrate, when seeking insights into maintaining a

healthy lifestyle that includes workout routines, rest and nutrition, it became imperative for me to ascertain the credibility of the information source alongside the knowledge it imparts.

My second drive stems from my practical experience as a social worker, wherein the construction and application of diverse knowledge areas are integral in all things work-related, and especially within the context of the research conducted for this thesis. Hence, navigating these complexities of this process necessitated a versatile knowledge base.

Lastly, my third incentive is rooted in my present role as an academic, centred within the knowledge industry. In this capacity, the exploration of social work knowledge is propelled by the context of my work, which revolves around the dissemination and construction of knowledge.

1.2.9. The Research Context

In Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural society, the social work community is diverse, consisting of both tangata whenua and tauiwi representing various cultural backgrounds among social workers and their clients. Tangata whenua refers to the indigenous people of a place, specifically those who are native to the land where their ancestors have lived for generations (Te Aka Māori Dictionary, 2025). The term signifies a deep connection to both the land and ancestry, as it also relates to the tradition of burying the placenta in the land. In contrast, tauiwi refers to settlers, non-Māori individuals, including Europeans and colonists (Te Aka Māori Dictionary, 2025). The 2024 annual Social Workers Workforce Report (SWRB, 2024b) reflects the diversity within the social work profession. The largest ethnic group among workforce survey participants was European, accounting for 66%, which comprised NZ European/Pākehā (51%) and other European (17%). Almost one quarter of participants identify as Māori (24%), which is an increase from 19% reported in 2022. Eleven percent of social workers identify as

Pacific peoples, also showing an increase from 8% in 2022. This diversity requires a broad range of knowledge to effectively respond to differing values, beliefs, and practices. While knowledge is widely acknowledged as essential for guiding social work practice, limited research has examined the deeper aspects of navigating social work knowledge within the Aotearoa New Zealand context.

The report also indicated that social workers continue to pursue Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to enhance their capability and demonstrate competency in working effectively with Māori, Pacific peoples, and other ethnic minorities (SWRB, 2024a). This drive is a response to Aotearoa New Zealand's ongoing cultural diversification. According to 2023 census data on the national population, the ethnic breakdown is: European (67.8%), Māori (17.8%), Asian (17.3%), and Pacific peoples (8.9%). The Middle Eastern/Latin American/African group is also increasing, although specific statistics can vary by source. Stats NZ (2023) notes that the Māori, Asian, and Pacific populations are growing at a faster rate than the European population, contributing to a more diverse makeup of the country. While social workers are committed to enhancing competency for working with this diverse population, little is currently known about how social workers perceive and engage with knowledge or how these views ultimately influence their interpretation and application of knowledge in practice.

To address this gap, the present study is aimed at exploring social workers' personal and professional experiences with knowledge. Its primary goal is to develop an understanding of how knowledge is experienced and to consider the broader implications of how social workers apply knowledge in practice, with attention to power dynamics, knowledge and values.

1.2.10. Power, Knowledge and Values

Extensive knowledge and a deep understanding of the world can enhance one's ability to influence others. This capacity to influence, which is a form of power, emanates from

knowledge itself, often operating in subtle ways. Foucault argues that knowledge and power are not distinct entities but are instead so closely interconnected that they ultimately merge into a single, unified entity (1972, 1973, 1975). He challenges the conventional view of knowledge as a simple accumulation of factual information, asserting that facts alone do not constitute true knowledge (Foucault, 1988). Instead, knowledge functions as a form of authority. Its influence is not derived from the sheer volume of information but from its alignment with the dominant discourses of a particular social context (Foucault, 1973). The true significance of knowledge, according to Foucault, lies in its capacity to resonate with prevailing social norms and discourses. This alignment necessitates both linguistic and ideological consistency with a specific social group, often linked to popular theories or practices. Consequently, power becomes unevenly distributed as certain dominant discourses shape and maintain social structures.

Foucault's perspective on freedom is also central to understanding the relationship between knowledge and power. He describes freedom as both a tool for defence and a security justification, a view that challenges the common belief that power increases personal accountability for free will (Foucault, 1972). Because power can be pervasive and difficult to recognise, individuals may be vulnerable to subtle forms of control.

1.3. Challenges in Conducting This Study

Conducting research during a pandemic involves significant challenges. Key stages of this study, including data collection, detailed analysis, and the sharing of findings, took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. To manage these difficulties, I developed and applied various strategies to address the constraints and disruptions caused by the pandemic. The substantial impact of Covid-19 on the study's progress is further explained in Chapters Three and Four.

Another challenge I encountered was language, as English is my third language. My first language is Javanese, while Bahasa Indonesia is the national language. Javanese and Bahasa differ from English in several important ways, such as the absence of verb tenses, gender-specific pronouns, and plural suffixes like the English *s*, relying instead on context or additional words for clarification. These differences can sometimes lead to misunderstandings. To address this, I regularly seek guidance from Dr. Cherie Todd-Williamson and Dr. Huan Zhao, academic writing consultants at Massey University, whose support has also contributed to improving my writing skills. Moreover, the consistent supervision from my three PhD supervisors has been crucial in helping me navigate the nuanced interpretations of terminology, concepts, and disciplinary discourses, thereby empowering me to effectively contribute to the academic conversation.

1.4. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis adopts a monograph structure and incorporates three published journal articles. Chapter One introduces the study and provides an overview of the thesis, followed by ten chapters presenting the research in detail.

Chapter Two situates the study within its research context, identifies gaps in the literature, and addresses debates surrounding literature reviews in GT. Drawing on social constructionism, it critiques social work knowledge and justifies a participant-driven approach within Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural context.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological framework, including research paradigms, philosophical positioning, versions of GT, and the rationale for selecting CGT, emphasising the co-construction of knowledge to foreground social workers' voices. Chapter Four details the

CGT methods used for sampling, data collection, and analysis, alongside evaluation strategies and ethical considerations.

Chapters Five to Eight present the findings, exploring the interconnected processes of Interpreting, Constructing, Applying, and Producing Knowledge, which together form the Navigating Knowledge theory. Chapter Nine synthesises this theory and situates it within existing scholarship by linking it to Fook's critical reflection, Foucault's power–knowledge framework, and Payne's modern social work theory.

Chapter Ten examines the implications of the Navigating Knowledge theory for social work practice, supervision, education, agencies, and research. Chapter Eleven concludes the thesis by outlining its contributions, strengths and limitations, and recommendations for practice and future research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This literature review seeks to comprehensively examine the core debates surrounding the nature and foundations of social work knowledge. By exploring discussions on the interpretation, construction, application, and outcomes of social work knowledge, this review aims to illustrate the most significant aspects of these complex issues. A social constructionist lens is used to explore the interplay of social and cultural factors in shaping social work knowledge and practice. Hair and O'Donoghue (2009) argue that social workers' credibility in the subject area of social work, methodical procedures, and expertise status is not the only subjects worthy of attention. This means every component of social work knowledge can be applied or critiqued and reconstructed (Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019; O'Donoghue, 2003). Furthermore, social constructionists recognise the plurality of knowledge, and its dependence on social and cultural contexts (Hair & O'Donoghue, 2009).

This section begins with an analysis of the role and timing of literature reviews in CGT, detailing the stance used in my literature review and exploring the complexities of social constructionism. The next part reflects on the interpretation of knowledge, including various forms of social work knowledge - professional, personal, and contextual. It reviews the literature on social work knowledge within the Aotearoa New Zealand context, addressing bicultural practice and knowledge related to Māori, Pākehā, Pacific peoples, migrants, and former refugees, and connects these contexts to social work practice. The third section discusses the construction and development of social work knowledge in Aotearoa New Zealand. The fourth section covers the application of this knowledge, and the final part identifies the outcomes and gaps in the application of social work knowledge, highlighting the specific gap that this thesis seeks to address.

2.1. The Debated Function and Timing of Literature Reviews in Grounded Theory

The literature review serves multiple essential functions and remains significant throughout the research process (Ferrari, 2015; Jesson et al., 2011; Snyder, 2023). Within CGT, I understand its primary role as establishing the research problem and justifying the study's relevance while avoiding the imposition of pre-existing theoretical frameworks on the data (Charmaz, 2014). Although CGT asserts that theory should emerge inductively from participants' accounts, the researcher is nonetheless responsible for situating the study within wider scholarly conversations. Early engagement with the literature enables the identification of gaps, tensions, and unresolved issues, thereby strengthening the rationale for the study without predetermining its findings. This balance preserves the grounded nature of CGT while ensuring that the research is academically located and justified (Keane & Thornberg, 2025).

A further function of the literature review is the development of theoretical sensitivity (Charmaz, 2014). In classical grounded theory, literature was often regarded as a potential source of contamination that could force data into preconceived categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). CGT reframes this concern by conceptualising literature as a sensitising resource rather than a set of definitive concepts. Engaging with prior scholarship enhances my capacity to discern patterns, meanings, and processes within the data, supporting a more nuanced and interpretive analysis (Morse & Clark, 2019). This form of sensitivity strengthens the inductive logic of CGT and deepens engagement with participants' experiences without constraining analytic openness.

The literature review also performs a critical reflexive function. Because CGT foregrounds the co-construction of data and analysis, it requires sustained attention to my assumptions, positionality, and theoretical influences (Charmaz, 2014; Morse et al., 2021). Engaging with the literature enables these influences to be made visible rather than implicit, supporting

transparency and methodological integrity. Rather than attempting to eliminate prior knowledge, CGT encourages reflexive engagement with it, thereby guarding against premature analytical closure and fostering a disciplined and accountable process of theory development (Birks & Mills, 2015).

In addition, the literature review plays a crucial role in ensuring originality. While CGT privileges emergent theory, it also requires that newly developed concepts constitute a genuine contribution to knowledge (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). Systematic engagement with existing scholarship allows me to identify what has already been examined and where this study offers new conceptual insights. This positioning strengthens claims to originality and ensures that the resulting theory is meaningful beyond the immediate research context.

The literature review further assists in clarifying the theoretical and epistemological positioning of the study. As CGT is closely aligned with constructivist tradition, engagement with methodological, theoretical, and contextual literature enables coherence between the research question, methods, and analytic approach (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). Embedding the study within broader theoretical landscapes enhances the intellectual rigour and conceptual clarity of the resulting theory.

The timing of the literature review within grounded theory remains contested. Glaser and Strauss (1967) cautioned against extensive early engagement with domain-specific literature, arguing that it could inhibit theoretical emergence. This stance contrasts with research traditions that regard a comprehensive literature review as a foundational requirement. From a classical GT perspective, early immersion in the substantive literature was seen as potentially constraining analysis and undermining originality (Glaser, 2012). Two broad positions have subsequently emerged: conducting an initial literature review as customary or deferring engagement until after data collection and category development (Charmaz, 2014). Glaser later

advised researchers to read outside their substantive area to avoid analytic restriction (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1994). Critics, however, contend that researchers inevitably bring prior knowledge into their studies, which may unconsciously shape data interpretation regardless of when the literature is reviewed (Strauss, 1987). Moreover, delaying engagement with the literature risks duplicating existing work, overlooking valuable insights, and producing superficial analyses (Charmaz, 2014, 2017). Charmaz further suggests that Glaser's position is internally inconsistent, as he simultaneously discourages engagement with literature while encouraging familiarity with theoretical codes, raising questions about the researcher's knowledge base. Corbin and Strauss (1990) similarly assert that familiarity with relevant literature enhances theoretical sensitivity, supports conceptual development, facilitates comparison, and stimulates analytic questioning.

In undertaking this study, I do not advocate abstaining from engagement with existing literature. I align with Strauss's (1987) position that open-mindedness is not synonymous with an empty mind. Rather, I view the central issue as one of timing and purpose. Interpreted through Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original concerns, their caution relates specifically to early immersion in substantive literature that may constrain analytic emergence. They nonetheless acknowledge the importance of integrating relevant literature during later stages of grounded theory development, once categories and theoretical structures begin to stabilise. This approach reflects a balanced stance in which established theories are approached with both respect and critical discernment.

Consistent with informed grounded theory, Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) postulate that literature should be engaged with creatively and reflexively rather than treated as an analytic obstacle. Guided by this perspective, I adopted an iterative and non-linear approach to the literature review, interweaving relevant scholarship throughout the thesis. This strategy aligns

with CGT and supports a deeper exploration of the epistemological experiences of the social workers (Clarke et al., 2023). Accordingly, the literature review in this study spans three phases: prior to commencing the research, during data collection and analysis, and following theory development. This staged engagement informed the theorising process and enriched my understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

At the outset of my PhD journey, I conducted a preliminary literature review to identify knowledge gaps and meet ethical and programme requirements. Following Birks and Mills (2015), this review was deliberately limited to material necessary to justify the study. In line with Charmaz's (2014) caution against extensive early reviews, I undertook a focused rather than exhaustive narrative review. I examined literature on how social workers construct knowledge across practice contexts and cultural settings within Aotearoa New Zealand, informed by a social constructionist perspective. This process provided a broad understanding of the existing knowledge base and informed the introductory sections of this thesis, as recommended by Charmaz (2014).

Charmaz (2014) emphasises the importance of a literature review section in a thesis to establish the foundation for the research, while Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) conceptualise literature as a source of data, inspiration, and critical reflection throughout a CGT study. As data collection and analysis progressed, I returned selectively to the literature to explore emerging analytic directions. This secondary engagement supported the development of provisional concepts that informed subsequent inquiry. Drawing on Thornberg's principles of informed CGT, I treated literature as a form of data, using it to stimulate analytic sensitivity rather than constrain theoretical emergence (Keane & Thornberg, 2024).

Following data analysis, I undertook a final literature review to deepen theoretical understanding and support the development of theoretical codes, consistent with CGT

principles. The narrative literature review presented later in this chapter encompasses sources consulted throughout the study and after theory development. At this stage, I broadened my search to include literature addressing the contextual knowledge demands of social workers working with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. This expanded engagement yielded deeper insight into the complexities of culturally situated practice and enhanced my capacity for theoretical synthesis. The narrative review, interwoven with the analytic process, strengthened my theoretical sensitivity and supported the theoretical integration phase outlined in Chapter Four. Chapter Ten further engages with literature reviewed during the final phase, demonstrating the importance of comprehensive theoretical engagement in strengthening the explanatory power of the grounded theory developed from this study's findings.

2.2. Narrative Review

I conducted a narrative review (NR) to explore the existing literature on the topic and GT methodology. Reviews help summarise and integrate published work, highlighting the current state of knowledge (Snyder, 2023), and are useful for study design and developing practice guidelines. Unlike systematic reviews, which focus on empirical studies with specific designs, NR offers flexibility. Following Beethge et al. (2019), I use NR as an approach that allows a broader synthesis of relevant studies without strictly adhering to systematic review principles. This section discusses how to structure an NR, covering text organisation, analysis, and synthesis. There is no universally agreed framework for NRs. While some use the IMRAD structure (Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion), others may follow a chronological approach to highlight historical trends (Ferrari, 2015) or a conceptual framework to group content by variables and their relationships. For the literature search, I followed Ferrari's (2015) NR framework, summarised in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Structure for Narrative Review

Introduction: • Content: describe the rationale. • Structure: organisation of the collected information. • Limits: define the objective (and scope).
Literature search: • Searching strategy: databases, keywords. • Inclusion/exclusion criteria: types of studies, languages, time periods, others. • Verify the availability of all the selected studies. • Citing and listing the researched references.
Central body/Discussion: Section 1 First key concept: Discuss and evaluate. Summarise in relation to the research query Section 2 Another key concept: Discuss and evaluate. Summarise in relation to the research query. Added sections Following the same pattern
Conclusions: From each summarised section: • Highlight the main points. • Connect with the research needs. • Repeat meaning for the research design.
Abstract • According to the journal style. • Descriptive or structured (IMRAD pattern).

Note. Adapted from Ferrari's (2015, p. 3) article titled *Writing Narrative Style Literature Reviews*.

I selected specific terms to find relevant articles while excluding irrelevant ones. Core concepts were turned into keywords, refined using a thesaurus for better alignment with the topic. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were set, excluding articles about knowledge unrelated to social work. According to Ferrari (2015), exclusion criteria ensure relevance, while inclusion criteria define the review's scope.

I documented the date, keywords, and combinations used in each search, then manually identified additional publications cited in the initial articles. This process was repeated to ensure a thorough review of the literature.

Initially, I reviewed books and articles published from November 1, 1963, up to November 1, 2023. My search encompassed databases such as Google Scholar, ProQuest, Springer, and EBSCO. The search terms included “epistemology”, “ontology”, “knowledge”, “information”, and “data”, as well as “practice-wisdom”. These terms were used individually and in combination with “social work”, “social constructionism”, “practice development”, “professional development”, “Aotearoa New Zealand”, “Aotearoa”, “social service”, “social care”, and “health care”. The focus was on academic literature, including books and peer-reviewed journal articles, all in English.

To determine the foundational principles of social work knowledge, I scrutinised the content of the articles and books, summarising related information for synthesis whenever relevant. Additionally, I extended my search by examining the reference lists of relevant publications to uncover any missed sources. This process was complemented by a review of relevant journals. In instances where questions arose from the collected material, I broadened my search to encompass the broader landscape of social work research. This exploration extended to topics such as GT and narrative research. I employed search terms such as “outsider researcher”, “insider researcher”, “social work researcher”, and “researcher-researched relationship”, combined with “qualitative research”, “grounded theory”, “constructivist grounded theory”, and “narrative research”.

I incorporated other literature to ensure a solid understanding of social work knowledge, CGT principles, narrative research, and related topics, contributing to a high-quality thesis. The review is thematically organised for clarity, focusing on relevant subtopics in social work knowledge.

To diversify sources, I limited citations from the same journal and prioritised original articles over other reviews on similar topics. After gathering a substantial collection of articles, I organised them and documented bibliographic references in the latest APA style.

2.3. Social Constructionism Underpinning Literature Review

The foundational principles of social constructionism underpin the framework applied for this review. Originally formulated by Berger and Luckmann (1966), social constructionism posits that the meanings attributed to social reality are not uncovered but rather fashioned through interactions within a particular context. Furthermore, our response to the social world is fundamentally influenced by how we perceive it. While this might seem obvious to casual observers, the connection between meaning and action takes centre stage in genuine social study (Young & Collin, 2004). These foundational beliefs can be grouped into two overarching viewpoints: one that highlights the significance of human agency in forming the social world (Mead, 1934), and another that focuses on the impact of discourse on shaping our worldviews (Foucault, 1972). Foucault's primary objective encompassed an exploration of how human subjectivity evolved into an autonomous subject of investigation. This pursuit led him to formulate theories regarding the pivotal roles of knowledge and power in both constraining and empowering the human subject. In the field of social work, Payne's (1991, 1997) ground-breaking work on social work theory mirrors this progression, as he observes social work as an inherently socially constructed endeavour. From this standpoint, Payne proceeds to outline how, in the era of postmodernity, social work should adopt a reflexive stance, acknowledging the influences of profession expectations and client dynamics.

Payne (1999) expands upon this analysis, presenting a comprehensive framework that examines social work through three interconnected and multidirectional cycles. These cycles entail the involvement of client, social worker and agency dynamic, involving face-to-face interactions

between clients and social workers; the political, social, and ideological sphere, encompassing broader societal discussions concerning the nature of social issues; and finally, the agency and profession dimension, where the knowledge of social work is cultivated (Houston, 2001). Therefore, social workers construct interpretations and shared meanings concerning the diverse manifestations and origins of knowledge. These constructs are embedded within specific social, cultural, historical and political settings, and are subject to flux as time unfolds.

This suggests that social workers must remain attuned to their own transitive perceptions of the social world. In simpler terms, our assertions are constantly susceptible to challenge, as we may be influenced by these processes or by the unquestioned assumptions of our field. This highlights the importance of professional reflexivity, which prompts social workers to critically examine the complex frameworks shaping their personal and professional fields (Fook, 2016). Social structures, including those embedded in our profession, become interwoven into the very fabric of our awareness, subtly moulding our speech, actions, and behaviours (Houston, 2001). Furthermore, social workers should be conscious of how we reshape these structures as purposeful agents of our profession and how this reshaping directly or indirectly impacts those with whom we engage. Drawing on social constructionism, I construct the following review of social knowledge rooted in reputable sources.

2.4. The Interpretation of Social Work Knowledge

This section discusses the range of debates and perspectives regarding knowledge and findings from previous research studies. There are varied views on what constitutes knowledge in social work and unsurprisingly there is no single correct way to conceptualise the knowledge base for social work practice. Many authors have come up with interpretations of the knowledge base for social work and different features of social work knowledge (Allan et al., 2021; Harms & Connolly, 2023; Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019; Pawar & Anscombe, 2015). In this section, I

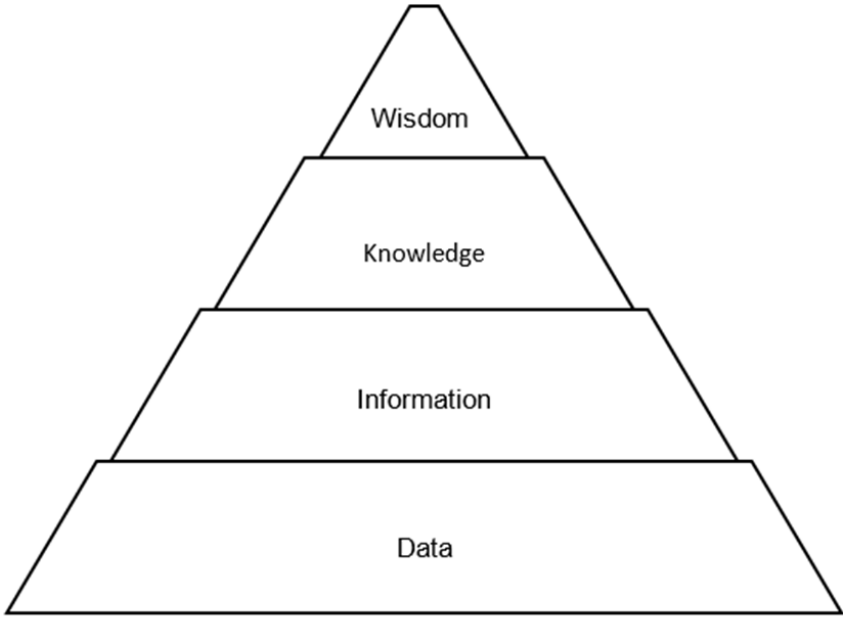
will discuss: 1. Social work knowledge; and 2. Social work knowledge in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.4.1. Social Work Knowledge

Social work involves multiple tasks and complex problems; therefore, a multi-dimensional approach to social work knowledge is required to help social workers make decisions in their practice. Thus, it is impossible to emphasise one dimension of knowledge over the others. For example, the use of scientific-based knowledge may help determine treatment with a client, but it is not possible to address the nature of the multidimensional and complexities of the environment that may influence the social work case. In the literature review, there is an increasing analysis of knowledge used to inform social workers' decision-making process (Hyslop, 2013). For example, Hay et al. (2021) argue that the development of individual and collective strengths have also been recognised as important aspects of the decision-making process in social work response to disasters. In particular, the knowledge that social workers possess as part of their strengths influences their decision-making processes which contribute to the success of their practice with clients. However, one of the biggest questions is what is knowledge? To answer the question, Ackoff (1989) discusses a hierarchy of information literacy illustrated in Figure 2.1 below:

Figure 2.1

Hierarchy of Information Literacy



Note. DIKW pyramid as presented in Frické (2018), *Encyclopedia of Big Data*, Fig. 1.

Data is at the base of the hierarchy, Ackoff (1989) maintains that data can become information when it has meaning; when information is regarded as true in its meaning and leads to understanding, it can then be defined as knowledge, and when knowledge is critically used to make intelligent decisions, it might be called wisdom. This thesis focuses on knowledge. Three main types of knowledge in social work will be discussed in the following sub-sections namely: personal knowledge, professional knowledge and contextual knowledge.

2.4.1.1. Personal Knowledge

Pawar and Anscombe (2015) contend that personal knowledge influences one's professional identity, as the personal and professional aspects of being are intertwined. Despite efforts in some positivist traditions to separate personal and professional spheres, the reality is that human existence necessitates integrating diverse sources of knowledge, which may extend beyond

formal professional or academic training. Personal knowledge has been discussed under several forms in the literature. For example, Hudson (1997) differentiates personal knowledge into three forms namely cultural, common-sense and intuitive, while Rosen and Zeira (2000) refers to personal knowledge as tacit knowledge which consists of intuition and common-sense. Additionally, Polanyi's (1958) view of personal knowledge is of the passionate participation of the knower in the act of knowing.

Cultural knowledge, according to Hudson (1997) is derived from shared beliefs and experiences of a group of people. The origin of common-sense knowledge is "guidelines of socially-acceptable order and reason" (Hudson, 1997, p. 41). Finally, intuitive knowledge is obtained from spontaneous process which is often based upon instinct and feeling. Rosen and Zeira (2000) categorise this type of knowledge as implicit knowledge, whilst explicit knowledge is a type of knowledge that can be explicitly learned and formulated. They argue that both implicit and explicit knowledge influence practitioners' decision-making. Additionally, Rosen and Zeira (2000) assert for social work research to take benefit from such knowledge, however, implicit knowledge needs to be made explicit first to test the effectiveness.

Rosen (1994) in relation to the debates regarding division between professional knowledge and professional values maintains that personal knowledge contributes to professional values. Rosen (1994) found in a study of social workers' knowledge in Israel that both professional knowledge and professional values were key components in practice. Moreover, Rosen contends "the profession of social work has long been committed to development and validation of its knowledge through scientific process" (1994, p. 562). However, Rosen's research findings showed the heavy use of value-based knowledge in practice. Similarly, a research study conducted by Munro (1998) analysing social workers' knowledge base in child protection in Britain found concerns regarding the social workers' preference for a personal style of

working that may become a significant barrier to using theory and evaluating practice. Kwan and Reupert (2019) emphasised the importance of critical examination and reflection on social workers' personal knowledge instead of formal knowledge. In their research study involving Chinese social workers in Hong Kong, they found relationships between social workers' professional practices and their personal experiences. Taking into consideration their acknowledgement of personal knowledge as less legitimate, they suggest more attention should be focused on knowledge from personal practice experiences.

In the area of personal knowledge, another vital sphere is emotional intelligence (EI) (Goleman, 1996; Grant, 2014; Howe, 2008; Ingram, 2013; Matthews, 2022). Social workers hold a pivotal role in furnishing emotional support to aid vulnerable individuals. Moreover, the proficient handling of emotions, encompassing recognition, utilisation, and adept navigation, lies at the core of effective social work, enhancing critical thinking and serving as a robust predictor of resilience exhibited by social workers. This aligns with Salovey and Mayer's (1990) conceptualisation of EI, wherein they delineate three integral components: 1. Appraising and expressing emotions, both in oneself and others, through verbal and non-verbal means; 2. Regulating emotions within oneself and others; and 3. Harnessing emotions to facilitate flexible planning, innovative thinking, focused attention, and motivation. Furthermore, the capacity to evaluate and articulate emotions significantly underpins proficient social functioning. Possessing these aptitudes empowers individuals to accurately perceive and respond to their own emotional states and those of others. Concerning emotion regulation, an individual's adeptness in adapting and reinforcing mood states correlates strongly with their EI (Grant, 2014). They can uplift their own and other's moods positively, as well as motivate individuals, or conversely, employ manipulative behaviours. Once EI is adeptly regulated, individuals

harness emotions as problem-solving tools, delineating problems and rafting potential solutions with acumen and intention.

Regardless of the debates around the types of knowledge by different authors, one agreed upon principle is the indispensable requirement of the use of personal knowledge to inform social workers' choice and decisions in their practice (Trevithick, 2012). The second form of knowledge applied by social workers is professional knowledge, which will be discussed in the following section.

2.4.1.2. Professional Knowledge

Professional knowledge encompasses the foundational knowledge and practical skills that support professional work. Edgar Schein (as cited in Schön, 1983) identifies three essential elements of professional knowledge:

1. Fundamental Science: The underlying scientific principles that inform professional practice.
2. Application of Science: The use of scientific knowledge to address and resolve problems.
3. Skills and Attitudes: The competencies and mindset necessary for effectively implementing both foundational and applied scientific knowledge (Schein, 1974).

In the context of social work, Trevithick (2012) asserts that professional knowledge includes factual, theoretical, and practical dimensions. Factual knowledge encompasses research findings, data, statistics, and records, often reflecting specific theoretical perspectives. This type of knowledge is crucial in social work across various areas, including law, social policy, agency protocols, and information related to specific groups or issues. Munford and O'Donoghue (2019) emphasise that the reliability of factual knowledge hinges on the credibility of its

sources, including their accuracy, reputation, and corroboration with other evidence. This multi-dimensional approach requires critical evaluation of research while appreciating diverse forms of knowledge such as professional ethics, practice theory, and cultural wisdom to deliver the most effective responses to clients (O'Donoghue, 2019; Thyer, 2002).

Broome (2014) and O'Donoghue (2019) affirm for the term *evidence-informed practice* over *evidence-based practice*, suggesting that relying solely on proven scientific evidence could limit social workers' effectiveness. Gilgun (2005) adds that research should complement, rather than replace, clinical evidence and professional judgment, incorporating professionalism, values, and client perspectives.

Regarding theoretical knowledge, Trevithick (2012) asserts that theory plays a central role in enabling social workers to make sense of clients' lived experiences and the social contexts in which these occur. Theoretical frameworks assist in reducing uncertainty, identifying patterns, and establishing shared meanings for phenomena encountered in practice. Trevithick (2012) categorises social work theories into three broad groups: those borrowed or adapted from other disciplines, those that analyse the aims and purposes of social work, and those that directly inform practice interventions. Similarly, Harms and Connolly (2023) maintain that theory supports both practitioners and clients in understanding why problems exist, the factors contributing to them, and how they develop over time. They further emphasise the necessity of integrating theory with empirical evidence and contextual considerations in social work practice.

However, Trevithick (2012) cautions that uncritically applied theoretical knowledge may lead to rigid or prescriptive practice, particularly given social work's interdisciplinary foundations in fields such as psychology, sociology, and law. In contrast, grounding practice in established theoretical and empirical knowledge, rather than personal assumptions or biases, strengthens

professional accountability and ensures that interventions are evidence-informed (Haultain, 2011). Accordingly, theory-informed practice is particularly critical in health social work, where her research participants have highlighted the importance of broad and comprehensive theoretical knowledge, reflective practice, and access to credible resources and experienced supervision.

Further evidence supporting the significance of theoretical knowledge is provided by Smeby and Heggen (2012), whose study of knowledge acquisition across professional groups found that social workers viewed theory as guiding practice strategies that promote client wellbeing. Their findings also indicate that theoretical knowledge is acquired alongside practical skills during professional education and continues to be developed within workplace settings, reinforcing the dynamic relationship between theory and practice in social work.

Theoretical knowledge encompasses the concepts, principles, and theories that provide an understanding of a subject, typically acquired through reading, formal education, or study materials. Harms and Connolly (2023) assert that social work theories are employed to clarify both the nature of individuals' difficulties and the processes of change. These theories systematically organise ideas from various sources to aid in understanding a person's situation and devising effective interventions. As knowledge evolves, theories adapt to incorporate new insights or challenge previous assumptions. Connolly et al. (2018) further contend that theories are crucial for practice, offering valuable insights into human existence and behaviour. For instance, deviance theories examine social norms and violations, moral reasoning theories illuminate ethical decision-making (Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019), attachment theory explores relational aspects of human experience and development (Payne & Reith-Hall, 2019), and feminist theory sheds light on gender dynamics and power relations (Allan et al., 2021; Healy, 2022). Theoretical knowledge focuses on the reasoning behind techniques and the

underlying theory, whereas practical knowledge is developed through direct engagement in tasks and activities.

Practical knowledge is rooted in real-life experiences and ensures that individuals can apply what they have learned effectively (Trevithick, 2012). Furthermore, practical knowledge involves the application of these concepts in real-world situations, gained through hands-on experience and actual practice. This form of knowledge often involves learning by doing, which helps embed information more deeply and makes the learning process more engaging and memorable. In social work, practical knowledge is particularly valuable, as it allows practitioners to navigate real-world challenges and apply theoretical insights in meaningful ways (Hay & Brown, 2015). For instance, social workers gain critical insights through field placements and on-the-job experiences that theoretical study alone cannot provide. This experiential learning often leads to a more profound and nuanced understanding of concepts and better prepares individuals for professional practice. While theoretical knowledge provides the foundational understanding of a subject, practical knowledge equips social workers with the skills and experience needed to apply this understanding effectively. Practical knowledge in social work focuses on applying theoretical and factual knowledge in real-world interventions.

Fook (2016) contends that theoretical and practical knowledge are interconnected. Furthermore, she argues that practical knowledge can be viewed as a comprehensive experience or a collection of specific techniques and skills. Integrating both modes of knowledge offers a comprehensive approach to learning and professional development, where theory informs practice, and practical experiences enrich theoretical insights.

Overall, professional knowledge serves as the epistemological foundation of professional practice. It shapes the profession's conceptual framework and is deeply embedded in training and research institutions. Some view professional knowledge through the lens of technical

rationality, which prioritizes research-based solutions (Schön, 1983). Glazer (1974) critiques this approach, arguing that social work, as a less established profession compared to law or medicine, may struggle with integrating scientific knowledge and maintaining a coherent training curriculum. Conversely, Schön (1991) advocates for a broader definition of professional knowledge that includes competencies and insights beyond scientific evidence, such as personal knowledge, which will be further explored in the subsequent section.

Regardless of the debates around the types of knowledge by different authors, one agreed upon principle is the indispensable requirement of the use of personal and professional knowledge to inform social workers' choice and decisions in their practice (Trevithick, 2012). The third form of knowledge applied by social workers is contextual knowledge, which will be discussed in the following section.

2.4.1.3. Contextual Knowledge

Contextual knowledge refers to knowledge situated within specific contexts, including an understanding of the lived experiences of individuals, groups, families and communities (Allan et al., 2021; Hyslop, 2013; O'Donoghue, 2003). Imre (1984) maintains contextual knowledge is knowledge gained by practitioners through experience in the job, consisting of general experience as well as specific knowledge. Thus, social workers require practical experience for the contextual knowledge to develop. Building on the topic of practical experience, Payne (2007) conducted a study with novice social work practitioners focusing on the development of their professional identity. The study revealed that participants "did not feel they possessed adequate knowledge as new social workers" (p. 81), not only in general social work practice but also in the specific contextual knowledge required for particular areas of the field. Some participants in her study felt the inevitability to possess specialist knowledge in order to practice in their field area such as in child protection practice. Recommendations were made to tertiary

educators to enhance students' understanding of micro and macro social work to help them become more prepared to step into the profession and applying knowledge to the specific context of their social work area. The importance of micro and macro knowledge has also been recognised in Hay's (2019) work focusing on social work response in disasters. Specifically, contextual knowledge is required to develop social workers' speciality in practice which is usually enhanced with the length of experience in practicing social work.

O'Donoghue (2019) postulates that it is necessary for social workers to include the application of knowledge in general to a specific social work case considering practice wisdom and local knowledge in order to establish and maintain a "constructive, considerate, culturally appropriate and caring relationship" (p. 279) with their clients. Crucially, for social workers to be effective in their practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, they must have contextual knowledge that aligns with the core competencies established by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB, 2024). For instance, to competently work with Māori communities, social workers need specific knowledge relevant to Māori. Similarly, when working with ethnic and cultural groups in Aotearoa New Zealand, social workers must possess knowledge that is pertinent to each specific group.

Imre (1984) contends that contextual knowledge is essential for social workers to practice a form of social work that is deeply rooted in and responsive to local contexts. This approach emphasises that the demands of the local context should take precedence, highlights the importance of understanding power dynamics, history and politics within that context, and actively resists professional imperialism. Moreover, Munford and O'Donoghue (2019) posit that this form of social work prioritises local and indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being, and focuses on locally grounded methods for identifying and addressing social conditions and issues. It places importance on local approaches to assistance and values cultural responses.

While it acknowledges the interplay between local and global factors, it gives priority to local perspectives. By using contextual knowledge, social work interventions can be more attuned to their significance and impact on local communities. This approach challenges the dominant person-in-environment paradigm, which centres on the individual and expects adaptation to external systems and instead adopts a structural perspective that views context as a force influencing the individual, family, or community (Imre, 1984). Further to this contextual knowledge, social work knowledge in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand will be discussed in the next section.

2.4.2. Social Work Knowledge in Aotearoa New Zealand Context

This section critically reviews social work knowledge in Aotearoa New Zealand within its bicultural context, drawing on academic literature from the 1960s to the present. The review foregrounds Māori as tangata whenua and examines the development of social work knowledge in relation to Pākehā, Pacific peoples, migrants, and former refugees. Central to this discussion is that social work knowledge in Aotearoa New Zealand is culturally situated and inseparable from the diverse groups shaping the nation's social, political, and historical landscape (Dale et al., 2017; Kim, 2021a, 2021b; Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019; Munford & Sanders, 2011; O'Donoghue & Tsui, 2012; Walker, 2012).

Social constructionist perspectives are particularly relevant in this context, as they legitimate multiple voices and forms of knowledge and recognise culture as dynamic, relational, and contextually produced (Hair & O'Donoghue, 2009). Within social work, this orientation enables the profession to value Indigenous knowledge alongside Western theoretical traditions and to engage meaningfully with cultural diversity without essentialising or homogenising cultural identities.

2.4.2.1. Bicultural Foundations of Social Work Knowledge

Social work in Aotearoa New Zealand operates within a bicultural context that recognises Māori as tangata whenua and all others as tauiwi (ANZASW, 2024; Munford & Sanders, 2011; SWRB, 2024). Biculturalism is grounded in the relationship between Māori and the British Crown, formalised in 1840 through Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Treaty of Waitangi (Campbell, 2005). Although the Māori and English texts differ significantly in meaning (Buick, 1936; Burns, 2024; Kawharu, 1989), together they form the constitutional and moral foundation for contemporary social, political, and professional life in Aotearoa New Zealand (Patterson et al. 2016).

Te Tiriti o Waitangi affirms tino rangatiratanga, guaranteeing Māori authority over lands, resources, and taonga, while granting the Crown kāwanatanga—understood as a limited form of governance (O'Sullivan et al., 2021). In contrast, the English text asserts the cession of sovereignty to the Crown while promising Māori protection of land and rights equivalent to British subjects (Burns et al., 2024). These divergent interpretations have generated an enduring constitutional duality that contemporary biculturalism seeks to address by recognising both Māori authority and Crown governance as coexisting realities (O'Sullivan et al., 2021).

Renewed emphasis on biculturalism since the 1970s reflects the Māori renaissance and growing recognition of Treaty obligations, including the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975 and its expanded mandate in 1985 (Te Ara, 2026). These developments have influenced public institutions, education, and professional practice, embedding Māori language, protocols, and values into national life.

Biculturalism is not optional within social work; it constitutes an ethical, professional, and regulatory requirement (Ide & Beddoe, 2022; Ruwhiu, 2003). Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Treaty of Waitangi provide the guiding frameworks for how social workers engage with Māori,

uphold Māori rights, and honour Indigenous worldviews. Research consistently demonstrates that effective bicultural practice involves reciprocal partnership between Māori and non-Māori practitioners, grounded in respect, shared responsibility, and recognition of power (Dale et al., 2017).

Bicultural social work education plays a crucial role in preparing practitioners to meet these responsibilities. Embedding biculturalism within curricula supports the development of culturally responsive practitioners who can challenge systemic inequities and support Māori aspirations for justice and self-determination (Hamley et al., 2023). Empirical research shows that all social work programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand incorporate Indigenous concepts and models as part of their commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Ballantyne et al., 2019). Munford and Sanders (2021) and Munford (2023) describe this orientation as transformative social work practice—an approach that challenges the dominance of Western knowledge by recognising the legitimacy and significance of local, cultural, and Indigenous knowledge systems in the construction of social work knowledge.

2.4.2.2. Indigenous Māori Knowledge in Social Work

The latter half of the 20th century marked a period of Indigenous cultural resurgence in Aotearoa New Zealand, with the 1960s and 1970s witnessing an awakening followed by consolidation and self-determination through the 1980s and 1990s (Ruwhiu, 2013). This period saw increased Māori participation across social service professions and the emergence of Māori-led approaches to wellbeing that centred whānau, hapū, and iwi (Pihama et al., 2004).

Indigenous scholarship has consistently demonstrated the inseparability of culture, health, and wellbeing (Durie, 2003). In social work, this has led to the development and application of Māori models such as Te Whare Tapa Whā, which conceptualises wellbeing as an interconnection of spiritual, physical, mental, and whānau dimensions (Durie, 1998).

Furthermore, Indigenous social work research emphasises the centrality of decolonisation, cultural integrity, and epistemological equality. Ruwhiu (2019) identifies the importance of practitioner self-discovery, robust bicultural curricula, and competency standards that explicitly include decolonised practice. Central Māori values such as manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, and mana are foundational to competent practice with Māori (Hollis-English, 2016; McNabb, 2019).

Mana, encompassing mana atua, mana tupuna, mana tangata, and mana whenua, is inseparable from Māori worldview and relational practice (Eketone, 2013). Respecting the mana of others requires social workers to engage ethically, relationally, and with humility, acknowledging the authority and dignity of Māori clients and communities. Understanding Kaupapa Māori and tikanga Māori is also essential. Kaupapa Māori provides a philosophical framework grounded in Māori principles and aspirations, while tikanga Māori offers guidance on correct processes and behaviours (Ruwhiu, 2003; Walker, 2012). Competent practice requires more than awareness; it demands the ability to apply these frameworks meaningfully in practice contexts.

Professional standards in Aotearoa New Zealand explicitly require social workers to demonstrate competence in Māori knowledge and Te Tiriti-based practice (ANZASW, 2024; SWRB, 2024). Research highlights that effective practice involves skills such as mihimihi, karakia, waiata, and working collaboratively with whānau (Bishop, 2003). Hollis-English's (2017) study of Māori social workers further illustrates that Māori social work theories are grounded in mātauranga Māori and shaped by whānau, hapū, and iwi relationships. These findings reinforce the need for all social workers to develop a foundational understanding of Māori values and epistemologies.

2.4.2.3. Social Work Knowledge in Relation to Pākehā

Understanding Pākehā identity is an essential component of bicultural social work practice. The term Pākehā is most straightforwardly defined as referring to the predominantly white European settlers who migrated to Aotearoa New Zealand in steadily increasing numbers from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (Crocket, 2010). In contemporary usage, Pākehā continues to denote primarily New Zealanders of white European descent (Penwarden, 2023). Despite its longstanding and well-documented use by both Māori and Pākehā—including its appearance in Te Tiriti o Waitangi itself (Crosby, 2015; Orange, 2013; Kawharu, 1989)—the term has been persistently contested by some European New Zealanders, particularly with respect to its meaning and implications (Marcetic, 2018). This contestation, however, underscores rather than diminishes the conceptual significance of Pākehā as an identity category. Crucially, as a descriptor articulated by Māori, Pākehā is inherently relational: its use explicitly signals a relationship to Māori as tangata whenua (Penwarden, 2023). To identify as Pākehā is therefore not merely to claim an ethnic or cultural label, but to occupy a position that is historically situated in relation to Māori, requiring an acknowledgement of both that relationship and the colonial histories through which it was produced (Jones, 2020).Pākehā identity is not a neutral or fixed category; it is shaped by colonisation, shifting national narratives, and evolving expectations of partnership with Māori (Forsyth, 2018). Research highlights that Pākehā practitioners often experience discomfort, guilt, or uncertainty as they confront colonial histories and their own privilege (Black, 2000; Huygens et al., 2003).

Developing a reflective and accountable Pākehā identity enables practitioners to engage more ethically and effectively in bicultural relationships. Experienced Pākehā social workers emphasise that bicultural competence involves long-term commitment to learning, humility, and responsibility under Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Campbell, 2005). Importantly, Pākehā identity is

diverse and shaped by multiple life experiences, reinforcing the need for reflexive and context-sensitive practice (Ide & Beddoe, 2022). Knowledge of Pākehā identity supports cultural safety by enabling practitioners to recognise their own assumptions, power, and positioning (Tolich, 2002). When approached constructively, Pākehā identity can become a site of ethical action that contributes positively to partnership, equity, and justice (Eketone & Walker, 2015).

2.4.2.4. Social Work Knowledge Relevant to Pacific Peoples

Pacific peoples form a significant and growing population in Aotearoa New Zealand, requiring social workers to develop culturally grounded knowledge and practice skills (Ravulo et al., 2019). Pacific communities are diverse, encompassing multiple ethnic groups with distinct languages, spiritual traditions, and social structures (Pasefika Proud, 2016).

Pacific worldviews are grounded in an epistemological and ontological emphasis on relationality, spirituality, collective responsibility, and the fundamental interconnectedness of people, land, and the cosmos (Crichton-Hill, 2018). Central to these worldviews are relational concepts such as *vā*, which articulate the ethical space between people and provide guiding principles for respectful engagement, accountability, and the maintenance of social harmony (Ravulo et al., 2019). These principles actively shape how relationships are initiated, nurtured, and sustained, foregrounding responsibility to others over individual autonomy. Pacific-centred of practice, including the Cook Islands Model *Turanga Māori* (Mitaera et al., 2016) and the Samoan wellbeing framework *Fonofale* (Pulotu-Endemann, 2009), explicitly challenge dominant Western assumptions that privilege individualism and biomedical understandings of wellbeing. Instead, they offer culturally grounded and relationally informed frameworks for assessment and intervention that centre collective wellbeing, spirituality, and cultural continuity, thereby expanding and reframing what constitutes ethical and effective practice (Ravulo, 2016).

Research highlights that Pacific communities experience macro-level social and structural challenges shaped by migration, economic inequities, and systemic barriers that influence their ability to access equitable services and support (Mafile'o et al., 2022; Mitaera et al., 2016). Within Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural context, these challenges intersect with a Treaty-based landscape in which Māori, as tangata whenua, hold a foundational status, and Pacific peoples—as tauiwi—navigate systems historically structured around Pākehā norms and governance. Recognising this bicultural foundation requires practitioners to develop responses at the micro- and mezzo-levels that not only address individual and family needs but do so in ways that honour Te Tiriti principles while also respecting the distinct cultural identities of Pacific communities. Effective practice therefore requires understanding family leadership structures, community networks, and cultural values such as *fa'aaloalo* (respect) and *tautua* (service), which guide relational obligations and collective wellbeing within Pacific worldviews (Pulotu-Endemann, 2009). Integrating Pacific Indigenous knowledge into assessment and intervention enhances cultural safety by ensuring that practice is both Tiriti-responsive and culturally grounded, ultimately strengthening outcomes for Pacific individuals, families, and communities living within a bicultural nation (Mafile'o & Vakalahi, 2018).

2.4.2.5. Social Work Knowledge Relevant to Migrants and Former Refugees

Migration has transformed Aotearoa New Zealand into one of the most culturally diverse nations in the region (Statistics New Zealand, 2023). Social workers must distinguish between migrants—who generally relocate voluntarily—and former refugees, who are forcibly displaced due to persecution or conflict (Fitzgerald, 2021; Marlowe et al., 2023). Understanding these distinctions is critical for responsive and ethical practice. Former refugees often experience trauma, loss, and complex resettlement challenges, while migrants may face barriers related to language, social isolation, and unfamiliarity with local systems (Kim, 2014; Kim &

Hocking, 2018). Social workers must also understand related categories such as asylum seekers, stateless persons, and internally displaced persons (UNHCR, 2024).

Working with migrants and former refugees within a bicultural framework requires practitioners to support cultural inclusion without undermining Māori rights or reproducing colonial patterns (Human Rights Commission, 2026; Kim & Cooper, 2021). Research highlights the importance of culturally appropriate services, language support, and systemic advocacy (Blackmore et al., 2020; Kamri-McGurk, 2012).

Overall, social work knowledge in Aotearoa New Zealand is multifaceted, drawing on practitioner knowledge across macro, mezzo, and micro levels and shaped by diverse cultural contexts (Ballantyne et al., 2019; Beddoe & Maidment, 2009; O'Donoghue, 2019). Indigenous Māori knowledge provides the foundational framework for practice, while knowledge relating to Pākehā, Pacific peoples, migrants, and former refugees enriches social work within an increasingly diverse society. Together, these knowledge systems inform culturally responsive, ethical, and contextually grounded social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.5. The Construction of Social Work Knowledge

This section draws on Charmaz's (2014) perspective, which suggests that while familiarity with literature, theories, concepts, and hypotheses in the field is valuable, researchers should avoid basing their research solely on these pre-existing theories. Instead, theory should emerge through interactions between researchers and participants during the data collection process. Although researchers cannot fully eliminate their prior exposure to literature, Charmaz (2014) contends that such knowledge should not serve as the basis for their research. In this study, I examine three significant works that, while not the primary focus of my research, are essential in contextualising my previous engagement with relevant theories and models in knowledge construction. The theories explored in this review contribute to understanding knowledge

construction in social work. These include Jan Fook's critical reflection model, Michel Foucault's theory of power and knowledge, and Malcolm Payne's contemporary social work theories.

2.5.1. Jan Fook's Critical Reflection Theory

The construction of knowledge through reflection allows us to pause and evaluate what we have learned, understand the processes through which we acquired this knowledge, and consider how to apply it to future learning experiences. Within this context, Fook (2002, 2012, 2016, 2022) recognises three key traditions that play a pivotal role: reflective practice, deconstruction, and critical social theory. Within the framework of reflective practice tradition, critical reflection involves shifting one's focus towards power-related assumptions, encompassing multifaceted mechanisms through which power operates, as well as an individual's subjective power dynamics and their interrelation. These traditions do not exist in isolation and, naturally, possess numerous shared characteristics. Moreover, gaining familiarity with the fundamental principles of each tradition is advantageous in developing a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical foundations of critical reflection. Furthermore, a deeper grasp of these ideologies aids in establishing a deeper understanding of the links between personal assumptions and the social and cultural environments that shape social workers' knowledge. The following section provides an elaborate account of each primary tradition and their significant contributions to the concept of critical reflection.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity entails acknowledging that researchers' personal characteristics and contextual circumstances shape their engagement in knowledge creation (or in Fook's precise word "research") (Fook, 2022). By utilising the term "research" in this context, Fook encompasses the diverse methods through which knowledge is constructed – ranging from structured and

methodical approaches to informal, everyday practices that help us comprehend our immediate environment without explicitly articulating them. Thus, research or knowledge creation is understood as an inseparable component of our everyday existence.

Hence, to achieve reflexivity, it is imperative to acknowledge the multitude of ways in which we can contribute to or exert influence over the knowledge we utilise (Fook & Gardner, 2012). This can occur through various avenues. Firstly, knowledge construction is fundamentally shaped by our embodiment and social interactions (Blumer, 1969), as it is mediated through our physical and societal perspectives. As a result, our physical condition and social status influence both how we interpret, select and construct knowledge, and how we are perceived and engaged within social contexts (Fook, 2016). Likewise, our subjectivity plays a pivotal role in constructing knowledge as our unique identities, experiences, and social standings influence the phenomena we observe and the lens in which we perceive them (Fook et al., 2016).

Secondly, there exists an element of reactivity in knowledge acquisition, wherein the tools and processes we utilise to construct knowledge partially determine the outcome. Therefore, our personal beliefs regarding what qualifies as legitimate knowledge and how it should be created, as well as the methodologies we utilise, impact the discoveries we make (Fook, 2016). For instance, knowledge obtained through observation might differ significantly from that derived from a conversation. Finally, knowledge is also shaped by reflective engagement with interactions, which includes the historical and structural contexts that influence its form and content.

By utilising the concept of reflexivity, critical reflection serves as a method to investigate personal practices or experiences, thereby enhancing our understanding of ourselves as knowers and creators of knowledge. Thus, this approach facilitates the establishment of meaningful connections between our individual selves and the broader social, cultural, and structural

environment we inhabit. Through this process, we can determine how our ideas, beliefs, and assumptions are influenced, at least in part, by our social circumstances.

Postmodernism

In this section, the use of the term *postmodernism* should not be understood as synonymous with post-structuralism, despite the frequent tendency within the literature to conflate or jointly discuss these perspectives. Although both orientations advance critiques of universalising claims, stable meanings, and overarching meta-narratives, they do so from distinct theoretical positions and with differing emphases. Postmodernism, as articulated by Fook and Gardner (2016), is best understood as a fundamental challenge to linear, coherent, and totalising approaches to critical inquiry, foregrounding multiplicity, fragmentation, and the contestability of knowledge rather than the pursuit of singular or unified explanations. They question the notion that knowledge must progress in a predetermined manner, free from conflicts. Hence, postmodern thinking draws attention to the intricate relationship between knowledge and power, offering valuable insights for critical reflection. By highlighting the influential role of dominant discourses in shaping what is considered valid knowledge and consequently exerting power, postmodernism unveils the dynamics of power distribution and maintenance. It directs our focus towards how certain modes of thinking, associated with specific groups, serve to fortify their position in relation to others. Additionally, post-structuralists emphasise the significance of language in shaping our understanding (Fook, 2002). The manner in which we articulate ideas, the labels we choose, and the implicit relationships implied through language usage all contribute to the establishment of legitimacy, and subsequently, power.

In general terms, Fook (2022) posits that both postmodern and post structural thought acknowledge how knowledge is shaped by society. For example, when practitioners assume that certain knowledge is valid and true, they inadvertently uphold a dominant power structure

and unknowingly perpetuate these power dynamics through the very language we use to describe our world. As a result, postmodern thought prompts practitioners to recognise the potential for contradiction, transformation, and conflict in our thinking (Fook, 2002). It also acknowledges that various experiences can be valid and offers a foundation to question established dominant ideologies.

From a post-structural perspective, critical reflection can be enhanced by deconstructing our thinking to reveal how we participate in the construction and exercise of power (Fook, 2002). This approach enables us to explore suppressed conflicts and contradictions that may have gone unnoticed before. Moreover, it proves particularly useful in examining practical challenges that arise due to perceived conventional dilemmas. For instance, social workers often perceive a basic dilemma in their work as a choice between 'care' and 'control', or between 'value-based practice' and 'outcome-driven practice', as if these categories are mutually exclusive (Fook, 2022). However, postmodern thinking encourages us to question these divisions and develop more nuanced approaches to our work (Fook, 2016).

Furthermore, postmodern and post-structural thought falls short in terms of providing detailed insights into the evaluative aspects, such as how we determine which forms of power actually reinforce or challenge domination and how we can bring about necessary changes (Fook et al., 2016). To explore these aspects, we need to turn to critical social theory for further clarification and elaboration.

Critical social theory

Fook (2002, 2016) argues that critical social theory acknowledges how both personal experiences and social structures contribute to the perpetuation of domination. As a result, individuals may unconsciously participate in their own subjugation by adopting self-defeating beliefs about their societal position, personal power, and potential for change (Fook & Gardner,

2016). Therefore, effecting social change requires both individual reflection and collective action. It also involves recognising that, while knowledge may possess empirical validity, its usage and interpretation are socially and personally constructed. To catalyse social and personal transformation, effective communication and dialogue are essential for fostering the creation of new shared understandings.

Critical social theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the objectives that critical reflection should strive to achieve (Fook, 2002). By establishing connections between personal experiences and structural forces and highlighting the significance of communication, critical social theory emphasises how the process of critical reflection can help bridge the gap between individual experiences and those of others, ultimately leading to desired societal transformations.

Fook's critical reflection approach

Fook's (2002, 2016) model of critical reflection encompasses two essential aspects: uncovering concealed and influential assumptions and empowering individuals to encourage a sense of agency. As a result, the model does not align exclusively with any of the previously outlined perspectives, but rather it represents a synthesis of multiple approaches. In workshop settings, this approach has involved utilising the theories and processes of critical reflection in a more implicit manner. Fook (2022) has further developed an integrated approach to critical reflection, which places a stronger emphasis on learning from experience.

Subsequently, Fook tends to view critical reflection as a broader process of learning from experience, initially prompted by the unveiling of hidden assumptions. This transformative process enables a fundamental re-examination of personal experiences in a supportive manner, offering new guidelines for action and enhancing professional practice. It is also important to note that for Fook (2016), this was not solely about uncovering assumptions but also about

looking into the meaning, essence, and emotional aspects for the individuals engaging in reflection.

In a critical reflection approach, gaining knowledge of various theories can enhance introspection by offering diverse analysis of underlying assumptions and their influential nature (Fook, 2002). The concept of power, with its multifaceted interpretations, holds significance in illuminating an individual's comprehension of their personal encounters. The conversation unfolds in two structured phases: the initial stage concentrates on finding concealed assumptions and refraining from extensive judgment. Here, the primary focus of this stage lies in fostering openness to exposing assumptions to explore their implications. The second stage focuses on the newfound awareness that has emerged from uncovering assumptions in the initial stage (Fook, 2022). In this second stage, it is vital that the new terminology encompasses the individual's own fresh understanding of their experiences, utilising language that has arisen from their personal reflection.

2.5.2. Michel Foucault's Power and Knowledge Theory

Foucault introduces the notion of power/knowledge as a pivotal concept in his work. Contrary to conventional understanding, which treat power as a political force and knowledge as truth or education, Foucault contends that power and knowledge are intricately intertwined (1972, 1973, 1975, 1988). He asserts that separating the two is illogical, rendering it impossible to discuss one without acknowledging the other. Therefore, Foucault amalgamates power and knowledge into a unified entity, which he labels 'power/knowledge'.

Foucault (1972) posits that power in modern society no longer resides solely as a personal privilege but rather operates within a dynamic network of relations that is in constant flux and activeness. This implies that power is not confined to specific individuals who exert dominance over others but rather emerges through social interactions and the negotiation of meaning within

existing power structures and knowledge systems. These interpretive processes shape the acceptance and validation of particular truth claims.

With this in mind, Foucault argues that specific forms of knowledge are shaped and operationalised within multiple discourses, each representing different perspectives (Foucault, 1972). Since all statements or claims of truth are embedded within these discourses, they are inherently influenced by them. Moreover, every truth claim within a particular discourse is an exercise of power, with varying degrees of impact depending on the specific it is utilised (Foucault, 1988).

Applying Foucault's power/knowledge framework to the analysis of these practices illuminates the inherently relational and systemic nature of both dysfunctional and collaborative relationships within organisations, demonstrating how such dynamics are constituted through, and sustained by, particular modes of communication. Whereas a resource-based conception of power privileges the capacity of individual actors to mobilise power resources, a Foucauldian perspective foregrounds the fact that such practices acquire meaning and effectiveness only insofar as they are embedded within, and authorised by, broader structures of authority. From this standpoint, power does not reside solely in individuals but circulates through discursive practices, institutional norms, and everyday interactions. Consequently, the communicative strategies employed by organisational actors are not merely personal choices but are actively shaped by—and in turn reproduce or contest—wider structures of power/knowledge.

In essence, Foucault's power/knowledge framework presents power as productive, which generates distinct truth assertions and rationalities that shape societies as a whole, and more specifically organisations and individuals (Foucault, 1988; Garrett, 2020). More importantly, within this power/knowledge framework, there is an opportunity to create a space that accommodates various forms of knowledge and marginalised voices (Foucault, 1973). It also

facilitates the deconstruction of seemingly self-evident power dynamics and discursive practices (Foucault, 1988). Moreover, acknowledging and being attuned to these diverse forms of knowledge and voices can offer social workers a deeper comprehension of the intricate "regime of truth" (Foucault, 1975, p. 30) that underlies knowledge sharing, generation and utilisation in the social work field of practice (Chambon et al., 1999; Garrett, 2020).

2.5.3. Malcolm Payne's Ideas of Modern Social Work Theory

Payne (1997, 2000, 2002, 2007, 2014, 2021) asserts that modern social work theories function as narratives that elucidate the complexities of the field and organise our understanding of the world through generalised sets of ideas. These encompass formal and informal theories detailing the nature of social work, its methodologies, and the societal context of our clients. Social work theories, being socially constructed, imply the perpetual potential for change in both social institutions and individuals. Additionally, Payne postulates that the social construction of social work theory inherently shapes its political dimensions (2021). Each theoretical framework seeks to represent specific aspects of social work's aims and practices. It is also important to note that no single theory can encompass the entirety of social work (Payne & Reith-Hall, 2019). Instead, theories converge around significant facets carefully chosen from the broader landscape. These theories take the form of stories because the intricate connections between different aspects of social work resist narrow definitions. Moreover, through stories, theories illustrate the diverse ways in which these connections are linked and perceived, and some unfold in a sequence, presenting encounters between ideas (Payne et al., 2009).

Theories and the discourse surrounding them challenge, interweave with, and elude one another. Interconnected theories form groups that share common ideas and approach social work in similar ways (Payne, 2021). Examples of such groupings include approaches grounded

in positive psychology and critical perspectives in social work, with each theoretical position elaborating on the shared perspectives in unique directions (Payne et al., 2009). For instance, in the positive psychology group, strengths perspectives highlight the positive contributions of social networks and relationships, while solution-focused practice emphasises positive thinking. In the critical theory group, critical perspectives question 'taken for granted' assumptions, macro perspectives concentrate on interventions targeting social groups, empowerment explores how individuals harness available power, anti-discrimination practice seeks to overcome social barriers, and advocacy theory aims to help individuals strengthen their influence and voice to advance their lives (Payne, 2000).

Unsurprisingly, the field of social work thrives on a rich tapestry of theories. This abundance of theoretical perspectives stems from a wide array of possibilities presented by diverse narratives, which serve as valuable tools for practitioners and scholars in managing knowledge (Payne et al., 2009). Engaging in social work, teaching it, and conducting research entails similar processes, such as extracting information from individuals who are immersed in the human contexts we encounter, and then evaluating and structuring that information.

Moreover, although the effectiveness of some forms of knowledge applied in social work practice have not been scientifically tested, they hold promise and thus merit further application in practice (Payne, 2007). I sought to discuss social workers' knowledge application in practice, which will be further discussed in the next sections.

2.6. The Application of Knowledge in Practice

The literature indicates that the three previously discussed domains of knowledge—professional, personal, and contextual—shape social workers' decision-making processes and significantly affect the outcomes of their engagement with clients. Knowledge construction and application in social work practice appears to be a critical phenomenon in the context of this

study of social work knowledge. It is a phenomenon experienced by social workers and can demonstrate an awareness of how they construct, manage and apply knowledge in an ethical manner and the skills to do so effectively.

The application of knowledge encompasses the cognitive and interpretive processes through which social workers inform and justify their decision-making; these processes can be conceptualised as forms of professional rationality. For example, Cha et al. (2006) mention awareness, consideration and use of knowledge as part of the activities of knowledge application in social work practice by utilising technical and practical rationality. Similarly, Kwan and Reupert (2019) also found the participants in their study apply knowledge in their practice and the knowledge application was strongly influenced by many factors including their previous experience.

Further to the context of rationality, Simon (1965) argues that decision-making process involves thought processes, some of which consist of straightforward means-ends reasoning, while others involve much reflection on the selections. Correspondingly, Polanyi (1969) emphasises that rationality is an ideology to justify decisions and guide actions, particularly in uncertain situations. Several types of rationality (Polanyi, 1956; Schön, 1987; Simon, 1969) - technical rationality, practical rationality and reflective practice, are relevant to the application of knowledge in social work, and these will be discussed in the following sections.

2.6.1. Technical Rationality

Polanyi (1965) asserts that technical rationality views scientific inquiry as the only pathway to true knowledge. Furthermore, Simon (1969) contends that technical rationality is displayed in regulating one's beliefs and, perhaps, other cognitive states. The technical rational perspective defines professional activity as instrumental problem-solving by applying rigorous and

scientifically tested and derived methods (Schön, 1983). Additionally, Schön (1987) defines technical rationality as an "epistemology of practice derived from positivist philosophy" (p.3). Polanyi (1978) suggests that technical rationality involves producing specialised, well-defined knowledge through scientific theories and methods, leading professionals to become experts in their fields. She further notes that the technical rational model posits that technology or methods are directly derived from science or theory. This perspective creates a divide between knowledge and practice, establishing a hierarchy where researchers are seen as superior to practitioners, and practitioners are considered superior to clients. Schön and Argyris (1996) added that technical rationality alone is not sufficient to inform practitioners in their decision-making process, for example, when a professional begins to prefer academic order and categorisation over the rich sensory experience of life, something is amiss. Historically social work has had challenges to resolve the inherent tension between scientifically tested knowledge and practice experience-based knowledge.

A tendency in applying science over practice wisdom in social work training, research and practice has been noted and critiqued (Ingram, 2013; Schön, 1983), which makes practitioners effectively cut off from the complexity of reality of everyday life. Thus, creating dependency on experts or scientists to explain and oversee their life experience.

Professional practice relies upon the application of technical rationality—the idea that practitioners identify problems and apply established, evidence-informed techniques. However, Schön (1991) maintains that the reality of practice is far more complex. He contends that only a small proportion of professional work involves situations that can be resolved through the straightforward application of technical knowledge. Instead, most professional practitioners face issues that occur within what he calls the *indeterminate zones*; zones characterised by uncertainty, ambiguity, instability, and value conflict. These situations are not neatly covered

by procedural manuals or technical guidelines, and therefore cannot be resolved through technical rationality alone.

This framing process is illustrated in the example of poverty. Although poverty may be observable, what it means and how it should be responded to are not fixed. Different professionals bring different assumptions, values, and disciplinary lenses, producing multiple, competing frames. Social workers may frame poverty as an issue of structural inequality and social exclusion; politicians may emphasise welfare dependency or economic productivity; economists may view it as a labour-market or resource-distribution problem; environmental scientists may frame it in relation to climate vulnerability or resource scarcity. Each framing produces different interpretations of the problem, and therefore supports different interventions and solutions.

Thus, Schön's argument exposes a core tension in professional practice: although technical rationality is often taught as the hallmark of competent practice, actual professional work requires reflection, improvisation, responsiveness, and the ability to navigate contested meanings. Practitioners must move beyond technical expertise and develop the capacity to inquire, interpret, and adapt in uncertain and value-laden situations. This is why Schön insists that professionalism is not defined by the ability to apply technical knowledge, but by the ability to reflectively frame, reframe, and act within the indeterminate complexities that define real practice (Schön, 1983, 1987, 1991).

In summary, a substantial body of scholarship (Kwan & Rupert, 2019; Rosen, 2000; Trevithick, 2012) emphasises that professional practice extends well beyond the narrow application of technical rationality. In particular, Schön (1987) critiques the dominance of technical rationality—characterised by an emphasis on the instrumental application of technical and theoretical knowledge—and demonstrated its inadequacy for capturing the complexity and

uncertainty of professional practice. Schön advanced the necessity of recognising the role of values, judgement, and reflection within conceptions of rationality, thereby foregrounding what can be understood as practical rationality. The following section introduces and elaborates on this concept.

2.6.2. Practical Rationality

Practical rationality encompasses rationality based on values, culture, intuition emotions, implicit knowledge, tacit knowledge, intentions, desires and emotions (Bion, 1962; Casement, 2006; Higgs, 2019; Imre, 1984; Ingram, 2013; Rosen & Zeira, 2000).

Adding to a range of literature that have indicated the factors that influence social workers' knowledge application in practice, Ingram (2013) suggests that there are relationships between social workers' emotions and their knowledge use in practice, in that social workers' emotions influence the knowledge used to inform their understanding of situations and to determine actions. Trevithick (2012) also contends that knowledge construction in predicting outcomes cannot rely on theories alone because knowledge construction involves not only gathering but also the analysis process. Rosen and Zeira (2000) similarly contend that social work practice often involves the use of clinical hypotheses to predict client outcomes. They further suggest that this predictive knowledge can be drawn from both explicit (e.g., theories) and implicit (e.g., tacit) sources. Polanyi (1958) argues that practical rationality is a psychological process culminating in a decision, intention, plan, or action. An individual's practical rationality, therefore, is intrinsically linked to their reasoning processes in determining and evaluating ends and means, with cognition being a necessary component.

Furthermore, in a study on social work knowledge and its application, Hyslop (2013) observes that social workers are susceptible to making errors in practice, regardless of their level of experience. Notably, all participants in his study had at least three years of social work practice.

He recommends that social work agencies develop strategies to promote learning from practice errors and foster mechanisms supporting social dynamics within practice. This study exemplifies the challenges of attaining perfect practical rationality in social work. Additionally, Rosen (1994) contends that it is crucial for social workers to apply knowledge appropriately, specifically by acknowledging the role of uncertainty within the context of scientific knowledge. An alternative to applying a single rationality was proposed by Schön (1983) in his work of reflective practice; he considers both certain knowledge to understand and act upon a situation, and an uncertain situation that cannot be comprehended by a firm knowledge base.

2.6.3. Reflective Practice

An alternative path to applying knowledge, discussed by many authors (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2017; Dewey, 1929; Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019; Schön, 1983), proposes that theory and analysis may actually follow practice rather than guide it. A reflective practice framework is one such model, offering an epistemological approach to practice that builds on a close analysis of practical experiences (Schön, 1983, 1987, 1991). This framework integrates both technical and practical rationality in social work practice. The heart of Schön's work on reflective practice is the analysis of reflection-in-action. Within social work, reflective practice involves the deliberate examination of practice encounters to make explicit the forms of knowledge informing action, and to subject that knowledge to ongoing interpretation and critique in order to enhance practice effectiveness (Fook, 2022). This process requires social workers to identify tacit and taken-for-granted knowledge, sustain a posture of curiosity, and remain open to unexpected insights that arise from the practice situation itself. practice

In social work, the construction of a problem does not necessarily allow social workers to categorise it according to standard categories in applied science. When a problem does not fit within established theories or techniques, practitioners may be unable to apply strategies that

lack empirical validation. For that reason, practitioners constrained by technical rationality found exceptionality and unpredictability difficult. Therefore, a continuous reflection is necessary when practicing social work (Beddoe & Maidment, 2009; Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019; O'Donoghue, 2019; Payne et al., 2009). Furthermore, full rationality is an ideal that social workers can strive for but never fully achieve, and there is often criticism against practitioners' lack of rationality.

Schön (1983) introduces the concepts of knowing and doing, suggesting that much of the knowledge practitioners seek emerges through action rather than preceding it. He called this approach *knowing-in-action*, wherein he suggests that practitioners can reflect on their actions while performing them. Reflection can serve as a corrective to overlearning, which occurs when phenomena cannot fit into standard categories, making problem-solving difficult. When social workers engage in reflection-in-action, they act as examiners in their practice context, relying not on established theories or categories but developing new theories suited to the exclusive situations they face. The social workers do not isolate thinking from doing, they make judgement on the process to a decision which they later transform into action. Every process leading on to the decision is influenced by the social workers' knowledge.

Often practitioners' knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in their patterns of action that their knowing is in their action (Schön, 1992), which seems to be identified as the knowledge gaps in professional practice. The next section will briefly discuss knowledge outcomes in social work practice.

2.7. The Outcomes of Knowledge Application in Practice

The outcome of applying knowledge is to ensure that the insights generated are effectively disseminated and preserved within an organisation, community, and among practitioners (Fook & Gardner, 2012). By sharing expertise and experiences, practitioners can enhance their

successful practices, learn from both their own and others' mistakes, and ultimately improve decision-making and performance.

Knowledge outcomes emerge from dynamic social interactions in which practitioners share experiences, skills, and knowledge throughout an organisation. These outcomes are also shaped by human behaviour, including the exchange of explicit and implicit experiences and the integration of ideas and skills that drive workplace innovation (Rosen, 1994). Additionally, knowledge outcomes encompass peer-to-peer learning processes that enhance problem-solving, decision-making, professional development, and overall performance (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2017). They also involve making relevant knowledge accessible to practitioners, agencies, policymakers, and researchers, a process essential for fostering knowledge acquisition, innovation, and organisational effectiveness.

Rather than being a static product, knowledge outcomes represent an ongoing process where practitioners continuously exchange implicit and explicit knowledge to generate new insights (Rutter & Fisher, 2013). This exchange includes sharing information, data, advice, and expertise to facilitate collaboration, address daily tasks, solve problems, and develop innovative ideas. Knowledge outcomes also involve actively transferring lived experiences, professional insights, practical knowledge and practice wisdom into organisational processes through various communication channels among practitioners, groups, organisations, and communities (Higgs, 2019; Rosen, 1994).

In synthesising the literature, this review examines knowledge outcomes at micro, mezzo, and macro levels within social work. At the micro level, the focus is on social workers; at the mezzo level, it pertains to social service organisations; and at the macro level, it involves policymakers, academics, and researchers, which will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

2.7.1. Knowledge Outcomes at the Micro Level of Social Work

At the micro level, one outcome of applying knowledge is the development of mutual trust and reciprocity among practitioners (Liljegren, 2011). The effectiveness of knowledge transfer is often influenced by the quality of the relationship between the knowledge seeker and provider. Similarly, Knight and Gitterman (2018) suggest that practitioners fully benefit from knowledge only when they establish a strong connection, facilitating a deeper understanding of the knowledge shared. Additionally, the social bond between the knowledge seekers and providers, as well as trust in the knowledge itself, plays a crucial role in shaping knowledge-related behaviours, both externally and internally.

The outcome of knowledge application is to enhance the status of social work practice (Rutter & Fisher, 2013). In a field often subject to significant public scrutiny, the use of evidence-informed practice can elevate social work from intuitive approaches to more rational, accountable methods. Social workers who adopt an evidence-informed approach are expected to combine scientific information with informed professional judgment and the preferences of service users to ensure effective and ethical practice (O'Donoghue, 2019).

Another significant outcome of applying knowledge for practitioners is the enhancement of reward and motivation, which Davenport and Prusak (1998) identify as key outcomes due to the considerable time, effort, and scarce resources involved. Reputation is particularly influential in motivating individuals to engage in and share knowledge as it helps individuals acquire and maintain their social status and can also serve to identify underperforming team members.

The outcome of the application of knowledge in professional social work practice is multifaceted, encompassing awareness, prediction, alertness, comparison, generalisation, guidance of practice behaviour, promotion of attitudes or ethical stances, education, rapport-

building, and problem-solving (Liljegren, 2011; Payne, 2007) . Practitioners' inability to clearly articulate the foundation of their practice behaviours is a significant issue. Addressing this challenge could reveal substantial gaps and weaknesses in their *tacit* understanding of complex and critical situations.

2.7.2. Knowledge Outcomes at the Mezzo Level of Social Work

Applying knowledge at the mezzo level of social work produces a range of significant outcomes that strengthen groups, enhance organisational functioning, and support community wellbeing (Knight & Gitterman, 2018). Mezzo practice bridges the micro work with individuals and the macro work of systems and policy, making it a crucial level for achieving sustainable and collective change. Effective management and leadership are crucial knowledge outcomes, achievable through the application and sharing of knowledge. This is supported by research (Poul et al., 2016) showing that empowering leadership significantly influences knowledge behaviours.

One of the most significant outcomes of effective mezzo-level practice is the strengthening of group cohesion and overall group functioning. At this level of practice, social workers frequently facilitate a range of group-based interventions—including support groups, educational programmes, whānau meetings, and therapeutic groups—where specialised knowledge of group dynamics, communication processes, and conflict resolution is critical (Knight & Gitterman, 2018). When this knowledge is applied effectively, it fosters practice environments in which group members experience psychological safety, mutual respect, and a sense of empowerment to engage meaningfully. Groups thus operate not merely as sites of support, but as generative spaces for shared learning, collective problem-solving, and reciprocal growth, contributing to enhanced resilience, improved relational functioning, and the strengthening of social networks among participants.

Another outcome of applying knowledge at the mezzo level is the development of culturally grounded and inclusive practices within organisations and communities. For example, in Aotearoa New Zealand, understanding bicultural practice, Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations, and kaupapa Māori approaches supports more equitable engagement with whānau and communities (Eketone & Walker, 2015; Ruwhiu, 2003). When social workers embed this knowledge into programmes or group work, they help create spaces where cultural identities are affirmed, power imbalances are reduced, and marginalised voices are respected.

Achieving these outcomes, however, is contingent upon organisational contexts that enable rather than constrain the application of professional knowledge. Organisational structure plays a pivotal role in shaping whether knowledge is mobilised effectively within practice settings. Rutter and Fisher (2013) assert that organisational structures should be deliberately designed to promote collaboration and knowledge sharing both within organisations and across organisational boundaries, emphasising that knowledge outcomes are best understood as ongoing, dynamic processes rather than fixed end points. They further caution that overly centralised systems of rules and control can inhibit knowledge creation and exchange. In contrast, organisational arrangements that support balanced participation by supervisors, managers, and frontline staff in information processing, decision-making, problem-solving, and policy development are more likely to facilitate meaningful knowledge use and innovation in mezzo-level social work practice.

A robust organisational culture is essential for promoting the outcome of the application, development, and sharing of knowledge. Poul et al. (2016) identify key cultural elements related to knowledge outcomes, including a clear organisational vision and goals, enhanced trust, and expanded social networks.

Knowledge outcomes pertain to the results derived from the application and sharing of knowledge within an organisation. These outcomes reflect how an organisation's performance is influenced by these activities. Essentially, organisational performance represents the organisation's capability to meet its objectives, which include delivering services effectively, ensuring sustainability, maintaining competitive relevance securing funding, and achieving long-term viability by applying suitable strategies.

2.7.3. Knowledge Outcomes at the Macro Level of Social Work

At the macro level, the application of data and evidence as knowledge outcomes is a prevalent theme in research on knowledge (Knight & Gitterman, 2018). While knowledge is often studied at the individual level, it can also be acquired, stored, and applied at a macro level. This broader application of knowledge supports collaborative work, research, policy development, and knowledge sharing within social work.

The knowledge outcome of social care research is its impact on practice through the translation of research findings into practical applications (Rutter & Fisher, 2013). Engaging policymakers and researchers is an effective way to achieve this, as integrating research evidence into policies and service agreements may promote its adoption across the sector.

The conceptual use of research knowledge occurs when practitioners gain new insights and understanding from research, regardless of whether these insights lead to observable changes in practice. In contrast, the instrumental use of research knowledge involves directly applying research findings to inform policy and practice.

Given the variety of evidence available, the transition from understanding research evidence conceptually to applying it in practice may be gradual and tentative (Drisko & Grady, 2012' Gilgun, 2005). Scholars in this field often prefer the term evidence-informed over evidence-

based practice, as it acknowledges the selective use of research evidence (Dodd & Savage, 2016; Gambrill, 2010; O'Donoghue et al., 2018).

The review highlights that while knowledge outcomes can include both enablers and barriers to knowledge use, existing literature has predominantly focused on factors that promote knowledge use often overlooking the barriers (Poul et al., 2016). For example, knowledge use can be influenced by political factors (Foucault, 1972). Addressing this gap is crucial, as advancing knowledge use theory requires a comprehensive understanding of both enablers and barriers to effectively mitigate obstacles. An intriguing area for exploration is the role of knowledge outcomes within various government bodies, particularly the legislative branch (Maidment & Beddoe, 2016). Knowledge outcomes are crucial in this context as they provide social workers with insights into how social work knowledge is utilised in parliamentary proceedings, policy formulation, rule-making, discourse, the governmental system, and decision-making processes. Moreover, it would be particularly interesting to investigate how political dynamics, such as the whip system designed to advance party interests, influence knowledge outcomes, and contribute to effective parliamentary proceedings, especially in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.8. Knowledge Gaps in Social Work

A substantial body of literature affirms that social workers draw on multiple forms of knowledge to guide practice and that the selection and application of knowledge are shaped by a range of contextual, organisational, and professional factors (Beddoe & Maidment, 2009; Hudson, 1997; Hyslop, 2013; Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019; Payne, 2021; Rosen, 1994; Trevithick, 2012). Across this scholarship, sufficient and appropriate knowledge is consistently identified as central to ethical and effective professional decision-making. However, despite

this consensus, significant gaps remain between the expectation that social workers practise as knowledgeable professionals and the realities of workforce capability and preparedness.

A key gap is highlighted in the Annual Social Worker Workforce Report 2024, which notes ongoing concerns about workforce capability among newly qualified social workers (SWRB, 2024b). Educators are confident graduates have strong foundational knowledge, yet students and employers report limited confidence and preparedness in complex organisational and high-risk practice contexts (SWRB, 2024b). However, lack of confidence does not necessarily indicate a knowledge gap; it may reflect a normal stage in professional development. Nevertheless, this issue warrants further exploration in future research and practice contexts going forward analysis. The issue is compounded by broader workforce trends identified in the same report, including an ageing workforce, declining student enrolments, and ongoing retention challenges. These structural pressures restrict access to sustained mentoring, supervision, and professional development, further limiting opportunities for emerging practitioners to consolidate and apply knowledge effectively in complex practice situations.

A related and enduring gap concerns the limited integration of research-based knowledge into everyday social work decision-making. Rosen's (1994) study found that values-based reasoning, personal experience, and consultation with colleagues were the most frequently used sources of knowledge, while empirical research played a comparatively minor role. Although values and experiential knowledge are integral to social work, reliance on these forms alone raises concerns about the sufficiency of the knowledge base underpinning professional decisions. Rosen (1994) further identified a lack of systematic research engagement and called for replication of the study across broader samples, including diverse practice fields and service users, highlighting an ongoing gap in empirical understanding of how social workers actually use knowledge in practice. This gap remains evident in more recent sector analyses. The Health

Workforce Plan similarly identifies significant deficiencies in data, evaluation, and evidence related to social work practice within health and community contexts, noting a limited understanding of social workers' contributions to evolving models of care (Health New Zealand, 2024). Collectively, these findings point to a persistent gap in the production, dissemination, and utilisation of research-based knowledge in social work.

Further gaps are evident at the professional and structural levels. Gilgun (2005) argues that social work practice would benefit from greater research activity, improved access to research reviews and online resources, and expanded training opportunities. Rosen (1994) similarly contends that if expectations for research-informed practice are to be meaningful, responsibility must extend beyond individual practitioners to include professional bodies and educational institutions, particularly through curriculum design and the establishment of research-based knowledge as a clear standard of practice. The absence of such systemic reinforcement continues to limit the normalisation of research engagement across the profession.

Cross-cutting gaps also emerge in relation to workforce conditions and professional infrastructure. High workloads, burnout, workforce shortages, and insecure funding environments constrain opportunities for reflective practice, collaboration, and intergenerational knowledge transfer (SWRB, 2024b). These pressures undermine both individual capability development and the sustainability of collective professional knowledge. Concerns about supervision quality further compound this issue. A critical review of social work competencies in Aotearoa New Zealand identified inconsistent and often insufficient supervision, an over-reliance on supervision as the primary mechanism for assessing competence, and a lack of structured pathways for developing advanced or postgraduate practice skills (Lowe, 2023). This absence of coherent professional development frameworks represents a significant gap in supporting ongoing competence across the social work career

lifespan. Harms and Connolly (2023) emphasise the need to strengthen practitioners' capacity to integrate both technical and practical knowledge, arguing that this can be enhanced through high-quality supervision and sustained critical reflection.

Historical and contemporary research also points to gaps in reflective and theoretically informed practice. Hudson's (1997) study identified infrequent use of theoretical and empirical knowledge in social work practice, raising concerns about professional accountability and effectiveness. Hudson argued that if the profession is to uphold standards of accountable practice, greater emphasis must be placed on the application of explicit knowledge, with shared responsibility across educators, agencies, and professional bodies. Despite subsequent recommendations, evidence suggests that this gap remains insufficiently addressed.

At the same time, literature highlights tensions between explicit and implicit forms of knowledge. While some scholars advocate for greater use of theory and empirical research, others emphasise gaps in recognising and legitimising implicit knowledge, including emotions, values, and personal experience. Ingram (2013) identifies emotional intelligence as a critical yet under-acknowledged dimension of social work knowledge, encompassing self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation. The limited institutional recognition of emotional intelligence constitutes a further gap, particularly given its relevance to relational and ethically complex practice. Similarly, Kwan and Reupert (2019) demonstrate a strong association between practitioners' personal experiences and their use of knowledge in practice, with implications for intervention goals. They identify a gap in structured opportunities for critical reflection on how personal histories shape professional decision-making and call on supervisors, educators, and researchers to address this oversight more systematically.

Closely linked to workforce preparedness is a significant gap in culturally grounded practice competence. Despite the centrality of bicultural practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, workforce

reports consistently identify uneven understanding and application of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, te ao Māori frameworks, and culturally safe practice (Lowe, 2023; SWRB, 2024b). While social workers express strong motivation to strengthen their capability in working with Māori and diverse communities, access to consistent, high-quality, and culturally grounded training pathways remains limited. This gap is particularly concerning in high-demand settings such as health, community, and statutory services, where culturally responsive practice is essential.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that gaps in social work knowledge are not isolated deficiencies but are embedded within broader systemic, educational, and organisational contexts. Inconsistencies in how different forms of knowledge are valued and applied, alongside structural constraints on learning and reflection, continue to shape practice. Addressing these gaps requires coordinated investment in culturally grounded education, robust supervision and professional development systems, strengthened research and data infrastructure, and organisational environments that support reflective, ethical, and evidence-informed practice (Lowe, 2023). This study seeks to contribute to this agenda by addressing existing gaps in understanding how knowledge is interpreted, constructed, and applied in social work practice, and the outcomes of its application, within the specific context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.9. Conclusion

Within CGT, the role of the literature review is both theoretically informed and methodologically deliberate. The structured strategy guiding this review was designed to engage critically with the complexities of social constructionism, while remaining consistent with CGT principles. Conducting the review in a systematic and organised manner was a considered methodological choice; however, it is also acknowledged that the theoretical issues addressed—particularly those concerning knowledge and meaning-making—remain the subject of ongoing scholarly debate within CGT. Central to this review was a detailed

examination of the current state of social work knowledge, encompassing professional, personal, and contextual dimensions, alongside a critical consideration of why the application of knowledge is essential to effective social work practice.

The literature review examined both general and discipline-specific understandings of social work knowledge, with particular attention to the Aotearoa New Zealand context. This included an exploration of bicultural practice and knowledge relating to Indigenous Māori, Pākehā, Pacific peoples, migrants, and former refugees. These bodies of knowledge were analysed in relation to their practical application in social work, recognising that social work in Aotearoa New Zealand is situated within a bicultural framework that acknowledges tangata whenua and tauiwi. Historical and political contexts were treated as inseparable from social work knowledge, as they continue to shape practice, professional responsibilities, and ethical obligations.

Across the literature, multiple perspectives on knowledge were identified. While these perspectives varied in emphasis, they shared common features, including processes of interpretation, construction, and application, and an understanding of outcomes as emergent and ongoing rather than fixed end points. However, the literature did not provide clear guidance on which forms of knowledge are most effective in developing the competencies required for specific areas of social work practice. Although foundational social work principles—such as promoting human wellbeing, engaging in preventative and intervention strategies across micro, mezzo, and macro levels, and adhering to ethical and critical practice—were well articulated, there was limited attention to how social workers actively navigate and enact these knowledge systems in practice. In particular, the processes through which social workers engage with, integrate, and mobilise knowledge within social work systems were largely absent.

Significant gaps were also identified in the practical use and operationalisation of social work knowledge, highlighting the specific issues this thesis seeks to address. Despite the existence of numerous reviews aimed at enhancing understandings of knowledge, there has been no comprehensive examination that brings together social work's core research concerns, contextual influences, and insights from leading social work journals. This review therefore consolidated and synthesised literature from diverse domains to deepen understanding of knowledge both in general and within the social work discipline.

These identified gaps present an opportunity to examine not only how knowledge is interpreted, constructed, and applied, but also how barriers to effective knowledge use may be addressed and its full potential realised in practice. Consequently, this review underpins the development of the study's research questions, which aim to explore social workers' experiences of interpreting, constructing, and applying knowledge in practice, and to examine how these processes influence practitioner behaviour and practice outcomes with clients within the specific context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in this study. It is devoted specifically to the methodological framework guiding the research, while the methods of data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations are presented in Chapter Four. The chapter begins by articulating the rationale for adopting a qualitative research approach and for selecting Grounded Theory (GT) as the guiding methodology. It then examines the research paradigm underpinning the study, with particular attention to ontological and epistemological perspectives that inform the development of theory grounded in social constructionism.

The chapter proceeds to explore the key variants of GT, providing a justification for the adoption of the constructivist approach. In doing so, it explains why CGT was considered the most appropriate methodology for addressing the research aims of this study. A critical evaluation of narrative research techniques, including the use of memos and reflective journals, is also presented, highlighting their relevance and contribution within this methodological framework.

Methodology encompasses both the core concepts and principles that guide the research process (Holstein & Gubrium, 2007) and the techniques used to conduct the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2024). The selection of an appropriate methodology is shaped by factors such as the research question, the researcher's philosophical positioning, methodological expertise, and available resources. As such, methodology functions as a guiding framework for identifying methods that align with the study's objectives. Given the aim of this study to develop an in-depth understanding of knowledge within the context of social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, a CGT approach was selected (Charmaz, 2014). The sections that follow provide a

detailed account of the methodological decisions made and the rationale underpinning each stage of the research process.

3.1. Qualitative Research

A qualitative research approach was adopted because it enables in-depth exploration of participants' thoughts and emotions, offering insight into how they attribute meaning to knowledge creation in social work. Qualitative inquiry elucidates underlying reasons for participants' feelings and thoughts (Miles & Sadana, 2013), which shape how knowledge is interpreted and applied. While this approach can be applied in various fields, this study focuses specifically on social work practice and the behaviours of individuals in relation to knowledge interpretation, construction and application. This includes understanding why participants choose certain knowledge and how they develop it. By using qualitative methods, this study sought to uncover participants' internal reflections and cognitive processes, offering a foundation for subsequent qualitative inquiry or informing the development of survey instruments for future quantitative studies.

Selecting the appropriate approach for the study's central inquiry influenced the decisions on data collection and analysis, as detailed in Chapter Four. Developing two articulated research questions specific to social work knowledge was essential to ensuring that the study design and data collection strategies were appropriately aligned to capture data of direct relevance to the profession. In responding to these questions, the study sought to examine participants' experiences of knowledge development by attending to the what, how, and why of these processes, thereby addressing a comparatively under-explored dimension of social work's knowledge system. In addition, the research aimed to investigate the outcomes of these knowledge processes for social work practice. Given the exploratory focus of the inquiry and

its emphasis on participants' lived experiences and meaning-making, qualitative methods were the most appropriate methodological choice (Hardwick & Worsley, 2011).

Qualitative research allows for close engagement with human subjects within their natural environments, facilitating an understanding of their perspectives and the meanings they attach to their experiences (Hardwick & Worsley, 2011). Methodological flexibility is a central characteristic of qualitative inquiry, allowing researchers to remain responsive to emergent meanings, relational processes, and shifting contextual conditions throughout the research process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Rather than signalling an absence of rigour, this flexibility represents a deliberate and systematic openness that enhances the credibility, depth, and contextual relevance of qualitative findings (Hardwick & Worsley, 2011). In this study, directly engaging with social workers' perspectives was essential to developing a nuanced understanding of how knowledge is experienced, interpreted, and enacted within professional practice.

This flexibility is further operationalised through the iterative nature of qualitative research design. In contrast to linear and predetermined quantitative approaches, qualitative studies involve a recursive movement between data generation, analysis, and interpretation (Elliott, 2005). As patterns and themes become apparent, researchers are able to refine interview questions, reorient analytical focus, and pursue emergent lines of inquiry in greater depth (Birks et al., 2008). This iterative process also supports theory development, enabling the construction of a conceptual framework grounded in participants' accounts rather than the testing of pre-existing hypotheses (Hammond & Wellington, 2020; Miles et al., 2013). This flexibility allowed me to interpret complex real-life situations, uncover new perspectives, identify themes, and develop theories.

Moreover, qualitative research shifts the focus to human beings in their sociocultural contexts by valuing the perspectives and voices of participants, exploring how their identities, relationships, and environments shape their perceptions and behaviours, moving away from a focus on clinical symptoms or the biomedical model (Miles et al., 2013). Merriam and Tisdell (2024) emphasise that qualitative methods are particularly effective for understanding dynamic, multi-contextual phenomena, helping researchers manage complex data without losing its depth and context.

Qualitative research was the optimal choice for this study because it allows for the exploration of phenomena whose significance may not have been apparent before the research began. It also offers the flexibility to explore questions about meaning that cannot be easily quantified, laying the groundwork for future research using other methods. Overall, qualitative inquiry provides a rich, detailed picture of participants' experiences, capturing the context, emotions, and social interactions that shape their perspectives (Richards & Morse, 2012).

Furthermore, the literature suggests that social workers' experiences of knowledge are shaped by complex sociocultural factors (Keenan, 2004), necessitating a thorough examination of these contexts. The qualitative approach helps capture the complexities of human behaviour and enables an interpretive understanding of social workers' lived experiences. By looking at how social workers navigate their environments, interact with clients, and tackle challenges, qualitative research uncovers the factors that shape their viewpoints, decisions, and practices. This detailed exploration provides a more comprehensive understanding of social workers' perspectives, grounded in the interpretation of the real-life contexts in which they work. The interpretive nature of qualitative research also allowed me to recognise and integrate my own knowledge and experiences into the research process, rather than viewing them as biases. Corbin and Strauss (2015) argue that researchers cannot separate their personal and professional

experiences from their work and suggest using this pre-existing knowledge to enhance awareness of the meanings in the data, rather than imposing preconceived interpretations.

Given the study's engagement with human subjects and the complex nature of the issues being explored, qualitative research provided a flexible framework that could adapt to evolving circumstances. This adaptability was crucial for addressing unforeseen challenges throughout the research process.

3.1.1. The Decision in Selecting Grounded Theory Methodology

The selection of GT as the methodology for this study and the execution of the research process are explained in this section. This methodology emerged as a coherent and systematic strategy to address the research problem. In this context, I elaborate on my approach, aiming to secure dependable and valid outcomes that effectively align with the study's intended objectives.

GT stands out as the most appropriate methodology for this study because it is preferred when the subject area lacks comprehensive knowledge, and existing theories prove inadequate in explaining the observed phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), thereby necessitating the formulation of substantive theory. This approach helped me: 1) capture the perspectives of others and amplify the participants' voices, 2) explore social processes within specific contexts, 3) recognise my influence on the research process, and ultimately 4) formulate a theory rooted in the studied environment. When discussing GT, it is essential to clarify the meanings of both the systematic process of data analysis and the production of theory.

3.1.2. The Systematic Process in Grounded Theory

Grounded theory (GT) is characterised by a rigorous and systematic analytic process consisting of interrelated stages, including data collection, coding, constant comparison, memo writing, theoretical sampling, and theory generation (Birks & Mills, 2015; Glaser, 1992; Morse et al.,

2021; Stern & Porr, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). These stages operate in an integrated and iterative manner, ensuring that the resulting theory remains firmly rooted in participants' accounts and the real-world contexts in which they are situated (Belgrave & Seide, 2019). Central to GT is the absence of predetermined hypotheses; instead, the direction of inquiry is shaped inductively by the data as it is generated and analysed (Birks & Mills, 2015).

Analysis begins alongside data collection, allowing early analytic insights to inform subsequent lines of inquiry. The initial phase of analysis involves open coding, in which data are examined line by line to identify significant actions, meanings, and concepts (Bryant, 2017). Codes are intentionally kept close to the data, frequently drawing on participants' own language through the use of in vivo codes, to maintain conceptual accuracy and analytic sensitivity (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). This approach facilitates the identification of patterns and processes that might otherwise remain obscured.

A defining feature of GT is the constant comparative method, whereby each incident in the data is systematically compared with previously coded material to refine conceptual understanding and category development (Charmichael & Cunningham, 2017). As analysis progresses, axial coding is used to elaborate and organise emerging categories by examining the relationships between categories and their subcategories, with particular attention to conditions, contexts, interactions, and consequences (Corbin, 1986). Throughout this process, researchers engage in analytic memo writing to document evolving interpretations, interrogate conceptual linkages, and develop theoretical explanations (Birks et al., 2008). These memos function as an essential analytical bridge between raw data and theory development, capturing the researcher's reasoning as it unfolds (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

As categories become more conceptually robust, theoretical sampling is employed to guide further data collection. This purposive strategy directs the researcher to seek participants,

settings, or events that can elaborate, challenge, or saturate emerging concepts, rather than aiming for demographic representativeness (Glaser, 1978; Morse & Clark, 2019). Once core categories are sufficiently developed through ongoing comparison and theoretical sampling, selective coding is undertaken to integrate all major categories around a central or core category that encapsulates the primary process under investigation (Corbin, 1986; Flick, 2018). This integrative phase results in a coherent explanatory framework that articulates the relationships among categories and their connection to the core phenomenon (Glaser, 1992). Through this systematic and iterative process, grounded theory produces a substantive theory that is empirically grounded and analytically robust (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Moreover, Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) characterise GT as a way of producing a theory that emerges from data, systematically amassed and scrutinised throughout the research journey. In a similar vein, Charmaz (2000, 2012, 2014) advances the perspective that GT constitutes a method of conducting qualitative research, emphasising the creation of theories through the progressive construction of inductive and deductive analysis from the amassed data. Furthermore, Birks and Mills (2015) allude to GT as an iterative process through which theory emerges from the meticulous analysis of data. Orton (1997) argues that when GT is used to guide researchers from an inductive and deductive approach to an iterative one, it involves a continuous back-and-forth between process theory and process data to generate process knowledge. In this section, I provide a comprehensive knowledge of GT, starting with Glaser and Strauss (1967), outlining their foundational contributions and explaining why they claim it as a systematic process. Glaser and Strauss (1967) sought to challenge the belief that all valuable theories had already been established, and that research should primarily focus on testing these theories using quantitative methods. Glaser (1978), with his background in rigorous positivist quantitative research, sought to apply his training to qualitative methods.

Strauss (1978), on the other hand, came from a symbolic interactionist perspective and had a background in qualitative research methods, such as observation and in-depth interviews. Together, the researchers developed grounded theory while studying the experiences of chronically ill patients.

Central to Glaser and Strauss' (1967) GT is the idea that the adequacy of the developed theory relies on the research process used to create it. This process involves deriving concepts from the data and developing them through concurrent data collection, coding, and analysis. This approach ensures that the resulting theory is closely aligned with the phenomenon under study, distinguishing it from more traditional logical-deductive methods, which generate hypotheses from existing theories and then test them empirically.

In relation to the systematic social process, Charmaz (2014) explains that processes consist of unfolding sequences with clear markers of initiation, completion, and key moments in between. These sequences are interconnected, leading to change and creating distinct phases within the process. Glaser (1994) highlights the importance of identifying and examining basic social processes in a GT study. To understand a fundamental social process, it is suggested to treat it as a core category, which will be further discussed in Chapter Four.

While every GT study involves core categories, not all core categories represent basic social processes. Basic social processes, unlike core categories, provide explanations for changes over time. In this study, I employed specific GT methods, including systematic approaches, procedures, and tools for data collection and analysis. Like many GT studies, this research began with purposive sampling, followed by the simultaneous generation, collection, and analysis of data (Charmaz, 2014).

Regarding the systematic process of data analysis in GT, Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe the process of data analysis in GT as a rigorous, step-by-step approach where data is collected,

coded, and analysed in a way that allows theory to emerge grounded in data. They emphasise the importance of constant comparison, where data is compared with other data, categories, and codes throughout the research process. This iterative process refines concepts and ensures that the theory remains closely tied to the data. The goal is to develop a theory that is firmly grounded in the data rather than being influenced by prior theoretical frameworks. The process includes stages such as coding, categorising, conceptualising, ongoing comparative analysis, theoretical sampling, and memo writing (Corbin, 1986), continuing until theoretical saturation is reached (Birks & Mills, 2015). These methods form an iterative and dynamic sequence, which is evolving and flexible, rather than linear (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). A detailed discussion of these methods is provided in Chapter Four. In essence, the systematic process of GT combines inductive and deductive approaches through coding and constant comparison, continuing until theoretical saturation is reached, enabling the development of a theory grounded in the data.

3.1.3. The Theory in Grounded Theory

In 1967, Glaser and Strauss introduced GT as a method of theory development that emerges from data. In their seminal work, the term discovery implies that the researcher uncovers something that is already inherent in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This perspective assumes that phenomena naturally generate their own representations, which are directly perceived by the observer. However, this idea of theory categories emerging from the data may downplay the researcher's active role in shaping the research process. Bryant (2003) argues that such a perspective, which suggests that categories and theories simply arise from data without the researcher imposing meaning, aligns with a positivist view and conflicts with the principles of qualitative research. In this study, I align with Charmaz's (1990, 2006, 2014) constructivist interpretation of GT, which views theory not as something that emerges from the data but as

something constructed by the researcher through active engagement with the data. According to this view, the researcher actively organises, interprets, and presents the data to form theories, rather than uncovering an inherent order within the data. The theory discovery in this sense is a co-construction between the researcher and participants (Charmaz, 2014), involving the researcher recognising and developing ideas from the data through ongoing interaction with it (Bryant, 2003; Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Keane & Thornberg, 2024).

In this study, the constructivist variant of GT acknowledges that my decisions as a researcher, such as the questions I posed, my choice of methodology, and my personal, philosophical, and theoretical background, shaped the research process and its outcomes. As a result, the theory that emerged represents a particular interpretation of the data, rather than an objective truth.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) also distinguish between substantive and formal/grand theories. Substantive theories are rooted in specific sociological domains, derived from the study of particular populations, settings, or contexts (e.g., social work practices in Aotearoa New Zealand). In contrast, formal theories address broader concepts relevant across various settings (e.g., power dynamics, social behaviour). The transition from substantive to formal theory occurs by examining the same phenomena in diverse contexts. Additionally, Bryant (2009) argues that theories developed from GT research do not need to have universal explanatory power. Instead, they are context-specific and may require further development before becoming formal theories. Charmaz (2014) also differentiates between grand theories and middle-range theories. Grand theories are broad, abstract, and complex frameworks that attempt to explain large, overarching aspects of human behaviour and social systems. They often lack specific, testable hypotheses and are not easily applied to particular settings, whereas middle-range theories provide abstract explanations for specific social phenomena based on empirical data. Charmaz (2014) notes that most GT studies produce substantive theories due to their focus on

specific, contextual issues, while emphasising interpretive theorising that entails developing abstract interpretations grounded in individuals' interactions with the world. This study, for example, focuses on the interpretations, practices, and experiences of Aotearoa New Zealand social workers concerning social work knowledge. The GT approach allows researchers to uncover complex and hidden social processes that are significant within the context of the study. GT studies provide the opportunity to explore inequalities at both structural and interactional levels, addressing aspects such as age, race, class, and gender. The flexibility of GT, supported by constant comparison and theoretical sampling (discussed in Chapter Four), enables me to adjust my research plans to explore different aspects of the topic.

Given the limited research on this subject within the Aotearoa New Zealand context, I chose a GT approach to investigate the social processes influencing social workers' engagement with knowledge. The rationale for selecting the methodology will be further explained in section 3.4. This decision was guided by my philosophical assumptions, which form the basis of my research paradigm.

3.2. Research Paradigm

The research paradigm applied in this study enabled me to present the assumptions and perceptual viewpoints that shaped my perspective of the phenomena, the participants, and the appropriate research methods for investigating them (Charmaz, 2016). Furthermore, Hammond and Wellington (2020) suggest that articulating and examining the study's paradigm is important as it shapes researchers' personal comportment, professional practices, and the stance they adopt towards their research, ultimately influencing their research findings. It encompasses the theoretical beliefs and principles that dictate the researchers' perceptions of the world, their interpretation of it, and their conduct within its sphere (Holstein & Gubrium, 2007). This lens through which researchers view the world is shaped by their personal life stories, influenced by

factors such as their background, social class, ethnicity, and gender (Blumer, 1969; Reynolds & Herman, 2003).

Here, I wish to explicate the constituents of a paradigm, encompassing ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods. In the context of this research study, my understanding of ontology pertains to the nature of existence, focusing on what knowledge is present and available. In contrast, epistemology is concerned with the essence, limitations, and validation of that knowledge. The role of epistemology in this study was to examine the forms and essence of knowledge, exploring how knowledge is generated, acquired, and communicated, essentially, the nature of the knowing process itself. The inquiry into epistemology sought to interpret the relationship between the aspiring knower and what can be known.

3.2.1. Ontological Position: Critical Realism

This study is grounded in critical realism (CR) as its ontological stance. CR offers a robust middle position between positivism and interpretivism by affirming the existence of a reality independent of human cognition, while simultaneously recognising that our access to that reality is always partial, mediated, and socially situated (Bhaskar, 1975, 1979, 1987, 1989, 1990, 2002). Central to the appeal of CR for this research is its explicit recognition of the coexistence of objective and subjective realities (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2010), a position well suited to investigating complex social phenomena such as knowledge systems and their outcomes within social work practice.

CR advances a stratified ontology comprising three interrelated domains - the real, the actual, and the empirical (Bhaskar, 1989). The real refers to the underlying structures, systems, and causal mechanisms that exist regardless of whether they are observed or recognised, such as colonisation, historical legacies, political agendas, and dominant social norms. The actual consists of the events and practices generated by these mechanisms. These include unequal

access to knowledge, disparities in access to technologies such as artificial intelligence, overrepresentation of certain groups in negative outcomes, and the marginalisation of particular voices in knowledge production. The empirical encompasses what is experienced or observed, including participants' accounts and the researcher's field observations. This layered view of reality enables the analysis to move beyond surface-level descriptions of experience to examine the deeper generative mechanisms shaping those experiences.

The coexistence of objective and subjective realities within CR opens analytical space to explore participants' subjective interpretations of knowledge while simultaneously interrogating the tangible operation of causal mechanisms, including historical, political, and cultural influences. A further rationale for adopting CR lies in its understanding of knowledge as cumulative, emergent, and generated. CR accommodates forms of understanding that may resist direct measurement, without abandoning a commitment to ontological realism.

Bhaskar (1979) further argues in *The Possibility of Naturalism*, philosophers of science are "at perfect liberty to criticise the practice of any science" (p. 16), while not claiming that philosophy can replace empirical inquiry. Rather, CR insists that empirical investigation must be informed by an appreciation of the layered nature of reality (Bhaskar, 1975). From this perspective, equating knowledge solely with direct experience is inadequate, just as the notion of knowledge arising from nowhere is unintelligible. Instead, knowledge emerges through an ongoing, iterative process in which new insights are generated through the transformation of existing understandings, a process shaped by social construction (Houston, 2001).

This ontological positioning is particularly appropriate for this study that investigates processes within knowledge systems and the outcomes arising from those processes. CR cannot be meaningfully separated from social constructionism, which informs the epistemological stance adopted in this research and is discussed in the following section. In common with social

constructionism, CR rejects the notion of reality as a fixed entity awaiting discovery. Rather, reality is understood as being actively produced through human engagement with the social world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Individuals are born into an objective material world, yet they continually reproduce and transform it through subjective meaning-making in social interaction (Blumer, 1969). Meanings become socially real when they are collectively recognised and sustained, extending to language, symbols, professional concepts, and identities.

In social work practice, for example, a practitioner's interpretation of "support" may be shaped by cultural norms or institutional relationships, while understandings of "risk" may be informed by organisational policies or professional training. Such constructions are often taken for granted and experienced as natural or self-evident (Bhaskar, 1987). Moreover, reality is not static; it is contingent upon perspective, historical moment, and social context. Social work knowledge itself has evolved over time, reshaping both the profession and the expectations placed upon practitioners (Payne, 2007). Accordingly, reality is shaped not only by culture and history but also by the political conditions operating within a society at a given time.

Within the context of this study, each participant constructs their own understanding of their experiences, influenced by shifting contexts and the emergence of particular issues at specific points in time. The adoption of a critical realist ontological stance therefore aligns closely with the type of knowledge sought by the research questions, which aim to illuminate both experiential meanings and the underlying mechanisms shaping knowledge processes (Charmaz, 2014). The following section outlines the epistemological stance of social constructionism that complements and extends this ontological foundation.

3.2.2. Epistemological Stance: Social Constructionism

My understanding of epistemology aligns with Crotty's (1998) definition, which defines it as the theory of knowledge that outlines the acceptable and legitimate forms of understanding,

distinguishing among three distinct epistemological perspectives: objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism. While Crotty's framework for understanding knowledge appears to establish clear and separate boundaries between these three epistemological positions, it is crucial to acknowledge that within each position, there exist variations of interpretations. Therefore, it is imperative to grasp that each epistemological standpoint encompasses a spectrum of comparable approaches rather than being confined to distinct and uniform categories.

In social constructionism, knowledge is formed not only from observable occurrences but also from subjective values, beliefs, and interpretations (Von Glaserfeld, 2008). This approach highlights the participants' interactive construction of knowledge is developed through engagement with their social environment. It accentuates exploring participants' worldviews, focusing on their meanings and interpretations within a specific context. In applying social constructionism, researchers acknowledge their inseparability from knowledge, recognising their influence on understanding themselves, others, and the worlds. In this disposition, researchers actively collaborate with participants, co-creating meanings and interpretations grounded in prior knowledge and experiences. Charmaz (2014) applies the term constructionist to acknowledge subjectivity and the active researcher role in co-constructing and interpreting data.

I adopt a social constructivist epistemology because the concept of social constructionism harmonises with my viewpoints, and I recognise that my epistemological stance predominantly aligns with this research paradigm. Moreover, I concur with Charmaz's (2014) perspective that truth is an ongoing process of revision rather than a static discovery. Therefore, I maintain that social phenomena and their attributed meanings are continually shaped by interactions among social agents. Additionally, individuals might ascribe varying meanings to the same phenomena based on their unique perceptions. Social constructionists also uphold the notion that

comprehending a participant's perspective entirely is unattainable, and interpretation remains the means of engagement.

My emphasis lies on analysing participant experiences and perceptions of phenomena within their contextual framework, with attention to my role as a researcher. Given that my study involves diverse background social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand, opting for social constructionism reflects a broader continuum. Furthermore, considering the nature of Aotearoa New Zealand's social workers in this study, I hold that participants' knowledge formation experiences extend beyond individual or technical confines. Factors such as structural influences, historical, and political backgrounds shape the social workers' perspectives, beliefs, and practices regarding knowledge.

Social constructionism is linked to the theoretical tradition of symbolic interactionism (SI), particularly in its emphasis on meaning-making through social interaction (Charmaz, 2014). Given that this study adopts social constructionism as its epistemological stance, SI provides a critical conceptual foundation for understanding how knowledge is constructed, interpreted, and applied by social workers in practice. Accordingly, SI is regarded as a significant and complementary framework within this research.

Within SI, social life is understood as a dynamic landscape of action and interaction, where human action emerges from ongoing social interaction rather than from fixed structures or internal dispositions alone. Mead (1934) distinguishes between two forms of social interaction: non-symbolic and symbolic. Non-symbolic interaction involves a direct stimulus–response process in which individuals respond immediately to one another's gestures or actions without interpretation. This concept is useful for understanding how participants in this study may initially respond to familiar practices, routines, or professional cues within social work knowledge contexts (Blumer, 1969).

Interaction becomes symbolic when individuals interpret objects, actions, and situations, including their own and those of others, and then act on the basis of the meanings they attribute to them. In this sense, knowledge construction is not automatic but interpretive. Participants in this study actively interpret theoretical concepts, practice guidelines, and contextual demands, and subsequently apply knowledge in ways shaped by those interpretations. SI thus conceptualises meaning-making as an ongoing interpretive process that both guides the actions of the individual and signals to others, or to oneself, how to proceed (Blumer, 1969).

This interpretive process is inherently cyclical and dynamic. Individuals continually adjust, refine, or reorient their actions in response to the evolving actions of others. Such continual calibration reflects the central SI proposition that meaning is not static but is constantly negotiated through interaction. The core SI concepts of action and interaction were evident throughout this research, particularly in my interactions with participants, engagement with the data, and ongoing reflexivity as a researcher. These processes were central to the conduct of this CGT study (Charmaz, 2014).

Examining actions and their consequences for subsequent actions and interactions—discussed further in Chapter Nine—was critical to generating the study's theoretical concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These analytic processes illustrate the close alignment between SI and CGT methodology, both of which emphasise the iterative relationship between interaction and action. This alignment is reflected in the simultaneous processes of data generation, collection, and analysis, as well as in the use of theoretical sampling, which is discussed in Chapter Four. Initial engagement with participants and data informed subsequent decisions about what to explore next, and from whom or where additional data should be gathered. This iterative cycle of data generation, analysis, and theoretical sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved and a coherent theory was constructed.

More broadly, SI explains how individuals make meaning across the life course, with understanding shaped through social interactions and situated observations. Mead's (1934) pragmatist philosophy underpins SI, asserting that reality and knowledge emerge from socially constructed beliefs and practices, and that some constructions are more useful or enabling than others. From a pragmatist perspective, reality is considered meaningful insofar as it facilitates effective engagement with lived experience. Mead (1934) characterises pragmatism as a practical philosophy in which the meaning of an object lies not in its intrinsic properties but in its utility for achieving particular purposes.

Given the inherently practice-based nature of social work (Berringer, 2019; Lijegren, 2011), a pragmatist orientation embedded within SI is especially well suited to this study of social work knowledge development. It enables an examination of how social workers construct, interpret, and apply knowledge in ways that are meaningful and functional within specific practice contexts, thereby reinforcing the epistemological coherence of adopting social constructionism for this research.

3.3. The Different Variants of Grounded Theory Methodology

Before justifying the selection of CGT as the most appropriate methodological approach for this study, it is necessary to outline the major variants of grounded theory. Providing this methodological background clarifies the epistemological and methodological distinctions that inform the choice of CGT. Contemporary GT comprises three principal perspectives that guide its application in research: (a) classical grounded theory (GT), (b) interpretive grounded theory (IGT), and (c) constructivist grounded theory (CGT) (Birks & Mills, 2015; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Flick, 2018; Morse et al., 2021; Sebastian, 2019). A summary of the key differences among these variants is presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Differences Between Classical GT, IGT, and CGT

Key Points	**GT**	**IGT**	**CGT**
Philosophical Influence	Minimised philosophical influence	Interpretivism	Constructivism and Pragmatism
Use of Prior Knowledge	No, must remain neutral	Yes, can strengthen data collection	Yes, prior knowledge is unavoidable
Role of the Researcher	Distant and detached	Engaged, actively interprets data	Constructs rather than discovers knowledge
Literature Review	After data analysis	Allowed before and during data analysis	No fixed stage, based on the researcher's decision
Coding and Analysis	1. Substantive coding; 2. Theoretical coding; constant comparison and core category	1. Open coding; 2. Axial coding; 3. Selective coding; constant comparison and core category	1. Code everything in initial coding; 2. Group data around predominant codes in focused coding; flexible guidelines and allowed multiple categories
Theory Creation and Verification	Clear separation between theory generation (primary) and verification (secondary); theory verified by quantitative analysis	Theory creation is central; verification through multiple perspectives	Theory creation is an interpretation shaped by the researcher's view, not an exact representation
Research Questions	No pre-test questions before data analysis	Partially vague for flexibility, clarified as data emerges	Influence data collection and can change if more significant questions arise

Note. Adapted from *Distinguishing Between the Strains Grounded Theory*, by K. Sebastian, 2019, page 4.

These GT variants demonstrate substantive differences across three key dimensions: their underlying philosophical orientations, approaches to engaging with the literature (as discussed in Chapter Two), and coding procedures (as outlined in Chapter Four). While both GT and CGT

have been widely referenced in the methodological literature—albeit with inconsistencies in the application of GT—the distinctive methodological contributions of IGT remain comparatively under-articulated (Sebastian, 2019).

The genesis of GT can be traced back to the collaborative endeavour *Awareness of Dying* undertaken by Glaser and Strauss during the 1960s (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In their exploration of the dying process and the interactions between medical professional and terminally ill patients in hospice settings, they recognised the need to formulate a theory rather than testing the pre-existing ones (Andrews, 2015). This insight led to the development of the GT methodology, effectively bridging the gap between theory and empirical research (Flick, 2018), a particular salient issue in the predominance of quantitative methodologies within social research. This innovation became especially pertinent within the context of Classical GT, also referred to as Glaserian GT or Traditional GT, which adheres to the positivist or objectivist framework (Sebastian, 2019). According to Glaser (1967), reality exists independently of researchers and can only be uncovered if researchers detach themselves from their personal and professional experiences. Thus, he advocates for researchers to assume the role of distant observers, allowing the data to unfold naturally. While Glaser remained steadfast in their objectivist classical GT approach, Strauss, collaborating with Juliet Corbin, gradually diverged toward a post-positivist stance with relativist inclinations, acknowledging multiple realities and revisiting the original GT version (Strauss, 1987).

During the 1990s, Strauss collaborated with Corbin to introduce a more interpretive approach to the methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The aim of IGT was to address concerns about the rigidity and clarity within the methodology's flexible nature. Some of the main differences between GT and IGT are philosophical influence, researcher involvement, and the use of prior knowledge. GT aims to minimise philosophical influence, while IGT is guided by

interpretivism. In GT, the researcher maintains a distant and objective stance, whereas in IGT, the researcher is actively involved and interprets the data. Regarding prior knowledge, GT discourages its use to ensure neutrality, as it could bias the development of the theory. In contrast, IGT allows prior knowledge, as it can enhance the research process and support data collection (Sebastian, 2019).

Strauss and Corbin worked in tandem, continuously refining and clarifying the IGT approach, and even after Strauss' passing in 1996, Corbin continued their collaborative efforts, culminating in the 2015 4th edition of *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (2015), which reflects IGT's substantial progress and its potential for future grounded theorists. This iteration was rooted in the philosophies of pragmatism and symbolic interaction. IGT, also referred to as Straussian GT, operated on the premise that researchers cannot fully grasp reality; instead, they can attain a close approximation through an objective and practical stance. Recognising the researcher's influence, they devised a systematic approach to GT that minimised subjectivity and maximised objectivity. A significant contribution of IGT was the development of an organised, analytical coding framework that facilitates systemic theory derivation from data. While praised for aiding novice GT researchers and those requiring structured analysis, this approach also drew criticism for its prescriptive nature, constraining creative engagement.

Charmaz (2000) scrutinised Straussian GT, highlighting its intricate array of techniques. She pinpointed axial coding, noting its tendency to introduce convoluted scientific terms and unwieldy categories that deviate from participants' experiences, cluttering analysis with excessive jargon (Charmaz, 2014). The evolution of GT did not halt with Glaserian and Straussian GT. Kathy Charmaz, a former student of Glaser and Strauss, introduced a third iteration known as Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2000, 2005, 2006, 2008,

2012, 2014, 2016, 2017). Charmaz initially introduced the concept of CGT in 1990, advocating a constructivist approach to the GT research process. Her proposal advocated for the inclusion of reflexivity in GT design and re-evaluation of the researcher's relationship with the research endeavour.

Charmaz's approach to acquiring knowledge about reality diverged from that of Glaser, Strauss, and Corbin. In Charmaz's view, the researcher assumes an active role throughout the research process, deeply engaging with participants. The participants' existing knowledge and prior experiences become the foundation shaping the researcher's approach to the research field (Charmaz, 2014). Rather than maintaining a neutral stance, the researcher interprets acquired data through their personal knowledge and experiences, collaboratively constructing knowledge. This dynamic interaction gives rise to CGT, where the researcher's position, perspectives, privileges, and interactions are intrinsic components of the research's authenticity.

Charmaz (2009) asserts that knowledge is grounded in social constructions. Research processes and outcomes are products of these constructions, which emerge within existing structural contexts, unfold in evolving circumstances, and are moulded by the researcher's viewpoints, positions, interactions, and geographical context. Consequently, CGT embraces an ontologically relativist, epistemologically subjectivist, and methodologically interpretivist standpoint (Bryant, 2003; Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Holstein & Gubrium, 2007). Charmaz (2014) argues that individuals construct their unique interpretations of reality, influencing their subsequent actions. The viewpoint acknowledges the existence of multiple perspectives on reality within our intricate social worlds, revealing that social reality is multifaceted, created, and ongoing.

In CGT, successful social construction occurs when the majority of a group collectively agrees on a shared meaning (Charmichael & Cunningham, 2017). Once these meanings are

established, social constructs tend to solidify and prove resistant to change. This quality permeates social constructionism with significant influence, rendering it a potent conceptual framework. Furthermore, Charmaz (2014) asserts that within the objectivist grounded theory, researchers strive to establish generalisations by extricating the developed GT from any contingencies or conditions inherent in its data collection and analysis. As a result, this approach introduces the potential for incomplete, insufficient, or absent information that could compromise the process of constructing a robust theory. Charmaz goes on to argue that objectivity remains a contentious and elusive concept, particularly as researchers' definitions of objectivity might still reflect partial knowledge, specific priorities, and a distinct standpoint. Contrastingly, CGT pursues interpretations of studied phenomena that are deeply contextualised, rejecting oversimplified explanations and broad generalisations. Given the intrinsic reflexivity and relativity of the CGT methodology, constructivist grounded theorists can explore a more comprehensive critical analysis of both their own construction of the research process and the research participants' construction of their experiences.

Charmaz (2014) also advocated against relying solely on induction, promoting the inclusion of deduction and abduction during analysis to make sense of the gathered data. An unexpected revelation within the data triggers genuine surprise leading to the exploration of new explanations. Bryant and Charmaz (2019) interpret abduction as a form of reasoning that commences by scrutinising data, considers all conceivable explanations for the observed data, and then devises hypotheses to confirm or refute until the researcher arrives at the most plausible interpretation of the data. This abductive reasoning harmonises the principles of discovery and justification, merging them into analytical contemplations. According to Charmaz (2014), abduction catalyses exploring deeper into unexpected observations, triggering divergent paths of data collection and enabling a thorough re-evaluation of data. This process

enriches the construction of theory. She also advocated returning to participants to ensure the formulated theory resonates with their understanding.

Charmaz's version of GT elicited varied reactions, with critiques of CGT focusing primarily on researcher bias and the limited generalisability of knowledge produced within specific social contexts. One key issue is the inherent researcher bias in CGT studies (Clarke et al., 2023). As constructivism highlights the researcher's role in shaping and interpreting data, the researcher's subjective views and values inevitably influence the analysis. This reliance on personal interpretations may reduce the objectivity of the emerging theory and raise concerns about the validity of the findings. Another critique involves the limited generalisability of the knowledge produced in CGT (Glasser, 2002). Since CGT emphasises the unique, context-specific experiences of participants, the theories developed may not be easily applicable to broader populations or different settings (Barnett, 2012).

Furthermore, critiques of CGT often centre on its emphasis on context-specific meaning-making, which can limit the generalisability of resulting theories, as findings may remain highly relevant to the studied group but not easily transferable to other settings (Barnett, 2012). Glaser (2002) further challenges CGT's legitimacy, arguing that it departs from the core tenets of classic grounded theory—such as conceptual abstraction and systematic, emergent theory building—by introducing excessive researcher interpretation. In contrast, Bryant (2003, 2017) defends Charmaz's position, asserting that all grounded theory work involves interpretive co-construction rather than neutral discovery and contending that CGT offers greater methodological transparency and coherence than classic GT. These critiques can be addressed by clearly articulating the study's epistemological stance, ensuring rigorous methodological documentation, enhancing credibility through reflexivity and member

engagement, and emphasising the goal of producing transferable rather than universally generalisable insights.

3.4. Constructivist Grounded Theory as the Methodology for this Study

Charmaz (2008) emphasises that while 20th-century constructionism viewed research worlds as socially constructed, it did not extend this perspective to research practices themselves. The focus on understanding and clarifying contexts is not entirely opposed. By examining specific sites and situations at an abstract level, social constructionists can move from localised contexts to broader concepts, as seen in this study, which focuses on social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. Grounded theorists using a social constructionist approach carefully consider their research issues, forming the basis for general conclusions that can be adapted to specific social, temporal, and situational contexts.

Taking CR as my foundational perspective on reality and embracing social constructionism as my approach to knowledge, I found that the methodology aligning most aptly with this research study was CGT. Furthermore, embedded within my ontological standpoint are specific assumptions, while my epistemological position acknowledges the malleability of these assumptions within the contexts I navigate. As a result, I embraced the social constructionist framework to shape the path of this study. The constructionist perspective must be comprehended in order to effectively assess the nature and validity of the arguments related to its application. The terms constructivism and social constructionism are often used interchangeably and are frequently subsumed under the broader concept of constructivism, especially by Charmaz (Andrews, 2012). Constructivism asserts that individuals actively construct their understanding of the world through cognitive processes, while social constructionism emphasises a social rather than individual focus (Young & Collin, 2004). Social constructionism tends to give less attention, if any, to the cognitive processes involved

in knowledge formation. I operated under the assumption that my background knowledge and personal experiences hold potential value for enriching this study. These experiential insights stand poised to inform my understanding of social work knowledge, influencing the methods I applied for data collection and analysis.

Evidence-informed practice can help social work shift from relying on intuition to adopting more rational and accountable methods. I began with the assumption that my theoretical beliefs significantly shape how the methodology of this study addresses key questions about truth and evidence. However, the debate surrounding evidence-informed practice highlighted the degree to which the relationship between theory and practice remains a contentious issue in the field (Gambrill, 2010). As discussed in Chapter Two, social workers who adopt an evidence-informed approach are expected to integrate scientific knowledge with professional judgment and the preferences of service users to ensure both effective and ethical practice. Additionally, as noted in Chapter Two, given the range of available evidence, moving from a conceptual understanding of research evidence to its practical application may be a gradual and tentative process. Additionally, the concepts explored within this study drew inspiration from a diverse array of social constructionism and critical ideologies. These ideologies, which assert that all facts bear the imprint of theory, seek manifold socially constructed truths, and champion transparency regarding theoretical affiliations as a cornerstone of credibility, seamlessly aligned with the core tenets of CGT. Through the application of CGT, I achieved a harmonious fusion between the pursuit of evidence pertaining to a reality external to human consciousness and the unwavering insistence that many interpretations of said reality are products of social construction.

Moreover, CGT provided me with the latitude to recognise that these very social constructions can collectively shape what we comprehend as the reality underpinning our social world.

Hence, this approach emerges as the most fitting choice for this study. In contrast, an objectivist GT methodology would have necessitated the complete suspension of all assumptions. I was acutely conscious of the importance of transparency regarding these experiences and refraining from assuming congruence between the experiences and perspectives of the social workers participating in this study. My personal encounters functioned as sensitising tools that facilitated the comprehension and exploration of the knowledge-formation experiences of social workers.

It is important to note that I occupied an outsider position due to my limited exposure to the diverse field and cultural contexts represented by the participants. However, I also functioned as an insider researcher through shared professional affiliations, including mutual membership in the professional organisation (ANZASW) and alignment under the same regulatory authority (SWRB). These shared institutional and professional connections reflect a common professional worldview and value base. Through an ongoing process of self-reflection, I assessed my position, recognising that my experiences could potentially shape the study's outcomes. Articulating my sentiments regarding the dual roles of adopting both an insider and outsider researcher's perspectives as research tools serves to enhance the transparency of the research endeavour.

Furthermore, the concept of reflexivity, explained in the first chapter, encompasses two crucial components: firstly, examining the researcher's engagement with the subject under scrutiny, and secondly, expounding on how such involvement informs their interpretation of observed phenomena. To nurture reflexivity, I documented my contemplation as reflective journals, commencing from the inception of my observation on this subject and persisting throughout the entirety of the study. Furthermore, embracing the constructionist approach facilitated an

insider's perspective, enabling the nurturing of an interpretive comprehension of the participants' beliefs, actions, and experiences amid their intricate social environments.

In this research study, the adoption of the CGT methodology enabled a rich exploration and comprehension of social workers' experiences pertaining to knowledge within their specific local and societal frameworks. This research was conducted within an urban setting in Aotearoa New Zealand, existing within the contemporary global setting, encompassing social workers practicing in an environment where a certain level of knowledge was obligatory. This unique environment offered a distinctive array of circumstances that engendered particular findings, potentially distinct from those observed in disparate temporal, spatial, or cultural contexts. Moreover, through the application of CGT, I was able to centre my focus on social workers' construction and interpretation of knowledge grounded in their individual definitions and social circumstances. This methodology also facilitated an exploration of the implicit connotations inherent in their application of knowledge within their distinct social environments, enabling an examination of the structures that influence these connotations.

I also incorporated a narrative approach into the CGT; in doing so I explored the participants' process of weaving stories and narratives derived from their individual experiences. This entailed navigating a twofold stratum of interpretation of their own life paths through the lens of narrative, followed by my own role as the researcher in deciphering the intricate construction of these narratives. The exposition of this methodology's application is elaborated upon in the subsequent section.

3.5. Narrative Research and the Use of Memos and Journals

Narrative research endeavours to explore and conceptualise the human experience as it manifests in the form of text (Squire et al., 2014). The aim is to dive into the depths of the significance individuals attach to their experiences. Thus, narrative research is an examination

of how individuals perceive and engage with the world (Andrews et al., 2013). Moreover, narrative researchers collaborate with limited participant groups to extract extensive and unbounded discourse. The focal point lies in the area of experiential narratives. Primarily, this entails engaging individuals in interviews concerning the subject of inquiry, though it could encompass the scrutiny of written records as well. A significant component in narrative research could manifest as a narrative of story. For many individuals, storytelling represents an instinctive mechanism for recounting experiences, serving as a pragmatic means to address a fundamental challenge in life, bringing about a coherent arrangement for the array of experiences (Bold, 2012). Beyond merely generating narratives to recognise and give structure to our personal encounters, we are persistently exposed to narratives from the societal environment in which we are immersed (Cavarero, 2000). Therefore, we craft narrative portrayals of our own experiences, intended for both personal reflection and communication with others, while also fashioning narratives to interpret the conduct of those around us.

Within the scope of this research, narratives are approached through the lens of social constructionism, prompting us to acknowledge the intricate interplay between the social workers and their environment. While these social workers share their narratives, it is crucial to recognise that these accounts are not detached or autonomous from their surroundings. Quite the opposite, it is imperative to note that the depicted social workers are inherently intertwined with their social, cultural, and institutional background. Consequently, narratives serve as a conduit for encapsulating both the individual experiences and the contextual element within which they unfold (Esin et al., 2013).

Furthermore, individuals engage in the continuous act of sharing and resharing their experiential stories, both personal introspection and for communication within diverse social contexts, across various temporal stages, and varied audiences. The perspective through which

they perceive these experiences undergoes a continuous transformation as they accumulate new experiences and engage in dialogues with others. This highlights the notion that the narratives of social workers cannot be perceived in isolation as abstract structures; instead, they must be firmly anchored within the structure of society, dynamically shaped by cultural settings, and enacted by individual participants.

This dynamic interplay is rooted in the ongoing social construction and revision of their knowledge and personal identities. Similar to each individual's perception of self, the interpretation of their lived experiences constitutes an ever-evolving narrative, ceaselessly in the process of formulation and transformation. In this context, the knowledge held by social workers emerges as a collection of numerous small narratives, localised and personal, in a state of continual development. Rather than a singular, overbearing, or unchanging reality, a multitude of realities emerge from interactions and dialogues that take place. As such, their comprehension of the world remains relative, contingent upon their historical and contemporary encounters, their value systems, the intended recipients of their narratives, and the temporal and contiguous contexts in which these narratives unfold.

Additionally, Esin et al. (2013) assert that our creation or interpretation of narratives inherently hinges on our life experiences and backgrounds. While research conducted from this perspective might offer insight into reality (Elliott, 2005), it simultaneously rejects the notion of achieving an objective or absolute reality or truth. In narrative research, researchers can use memos and journals to document contextual details gathered during the research process. These tools help capture the researcher's thought process, allowing them to track their reflections and insights. They also assist in linking raw data with the research findings, supporting a clearer understanding of the data.

To comprehensively grasp the project's entirety, I heavily rely on memos and journals. Starting from the initial stages of crafting the research proposal, navigating through the ethics application, steering PhD confirmation, conducting data collection analysis, and progressing to documenting findings and their dissemination, I consistently turn to these tools for reflection. According to Birks and Mills (2015), memos and journals serve as invaluable aids, ensuring meticulous record-keeping, facilitating introspection, and upholding the rigor integral to qualitative data analysis. In this study, they served a multitude of purposes: (a) mapping research activities: I methodically documented the decision-making journey from the inception of the research concept to its eventual completion; (b) unveiling insights from data: these tools assisted me in articulating, exploring, contemplating, and even challenging my interpretations as I examined the data. Through them, I identified similarities, differences, and intricate relationships, sparking the generation of hypotheses; (c) sustaining momentum: I created a space within memos and journals to capture emerging decisions, perspectives, thoughts, and ideas, ensuring they are promptly recorded. This approach not only maintained the project's pace but also prevented analytic paralysis, which can hinder progress due to the fear of making mistakes; (d) enhancing communication: while primarily intended for my personal use, these records also functioned as bridges for sharing emerging thoughts and concepts with my supervisors, participants, and fellow PhD researchers, fostering early-stage collaboration and ideation.

I used memos in conjunction with various other data sources such as reflective journals, transcripts, and field notes to furnish essential support for this study. The distinction between a memo and a reflective journal lies in their purpose and function. Memos are primarily used to map ideas, record observations, or capture sources of inspiration, often serving as concise and practical tools to support planning or analysis (Keanne, 2022). In contrast, reflective journals

emphasize critical self-reflection, focusing on the writer's thoughts, interpretations, and learning processes in relation to experiences or concepts. Birks et al. (2008) argue that while memos can encompass transcript and field note data, the reverse is rarely feasible. Annotations on documents of this nature impose limitations on the depth to which significant ideas can be developed or abstract concepts can be reached (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I abstained from inscribing memos directly into the data gathered from participants, in line with Glaser's (1992) caution that doing so might potentially distort the distinction between a participant's original remarks and the researcher's conceptual interpretations. The writing of memos unquestionably occupied a pivotal role in the exploration of phenomena within this qualitative research. However, the most crucial contribution of the memos lies in its role as an impetus for sustained researcher productivity (Charmaz, 2006). In essence, memos serve as the catalyst that propels the researcher into writing mode from the outset, laying the groundwork for the final thesis.

3.6. Conclusion

This study used a qualitative approach to explore participants' thoughts and emotions, providing insight into how they value their experiences with knowledge creation in social work. GT was chosen as the most suitable methodology because it is ideal when existing theories are insufficient to explain a phenomenon. My ontological stance of critical realism, recognising both objective and subjective realities, and my epistemological position of social constructionism, which emphasises knowledge shaped by values, beliefs, and interpretations, guided this choice. CGT was specifically selected as it amplifies the voices of participating social workers, making it a fitting methodological approach for this study.

Chapter 4. Methods and Ethics

This chapter explicates the execution of the study and demonstrates its alignment with the methodological principles outlined in the preceding chapter. It begins by describing the research design and the strategies employed for sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Illustrative examples drawn directly from the research process—including analytic memos, coding excerpts, and conceptual diagrams, which are interwoven throughout the chapter to demonstrate how analytic decisions were enacted in practice.

The chapter then critically examines theory construction within CGT and evaluates the criteria used to establish trustworthiness. These criteria are assessed to ensure methodological rigour and credibility. The chapter concludes by examining the ethical considerations guiding the conduct of this research, with particular reference to the Massey University Ethical Conduct for Research. Specific attention is given to ethical responsibilities associated with engaging participants from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including Māori participants, within the context in which this study was undertaken. Collectively, these components elucidate the systematic techniques employed to firmly anchor the generated theory in empirical data.

4.1 Research Design

This section outlines the research design underpinning the study, with particular attention to the sampling strategies, data collection methods, and the iterative relationship between data generation and analysis. Consistent with CGT, the design was flexible and emergent, enabling the systematic development, refinement, and validation of a mid-range theory grounded in social workers' experiences of knowledge in practice.

4.1.1. Sampling Strategy: Purposive and Theoretical Sampling

In alignment with CGT, this study adopted a flexible and evolving sampling strategy that developed in response to ongoing analysis (Morse & Clark, 2019). Sampling decisions were not fixed at the outset but were refined throughout the research process to support theory construction. This approach is central to CGT, as sampling, data collection, and analysis occur concurrently and inform one another (Charmaz, 2014). The objective was to generate a mid-range theory that is abstract, transferable across contexts, and grounded in practice, while remaining open to empirical testing and real-world application (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019).

The social workers in this study were central to the production of rich, analytically robust data. Careful and deliberate sampling, combined with constant comparative analysis, enabled the clarification of the study's scope, the identification of key concepts, and the articulation of relationships between categories.

Scholars have noted that a significant challenge for novice researchers undertaking grounded theory studies is the unpredictability of sampling requirements as analysis progresses (Belgrave & Seide, 2019; Keane & Thornberg, 2024; Morse & Clark, 2019). The number and characteristics of participants required for later analytical stages cannot be fully anticipated at the proposal stage, with implications for timelines, resources, budgeting, and potential ethics amendments. In response, I planned conservatively for these contingencies and engaged in ongoing reflexive consideration of the guiding question: when is the study analytically complete?

4.1.1.1. Purposive Sampling: Participant Selection and Recruitment

Purposive sampling is a non-probability approach in which researchers deliberately recruit participants who can best inform the study because of their direct relevance to the phenomenon of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2024; Miles et al., 2013). Rather than relying on random

selection, it draws on informed judgment to identify individuals with the experience and insight needed to generate rich, targeted data, making it particularly valuable when working with specialised groups or cases in which only some people possess the necessary knowledge (Richards & Morse, 2012). While this method yields nuanced understanding, its emphasis on depth means that findings are not easily generalisable to wider populations (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019).

In this study, purposive sampling was initially adopted to intentionally recruit social workers able to offer substantive insight into social work knowledge processes (Morse & Clark, 2019). This facilitated engagement with practitioners who had experience interpreting, constructing, applying, and observing the outcomes of knowledge in practice. The sampling strategy was shaped by several considerations. The research aim required participants whose attributes aligned closely with the study's focus on knowledge interpretation, construction, application, and outcomes. Efforts were also made to ensure a degree of representativeness by including social workers with diverse yet relevant practice characteristics. Although purposive sampling carries the risk of selection bias, this was addressed through clearly defined eligibility criteria and careful alignment of participant characteristics with the study purpose. The approach further relied on the researcher's expertise, recognising that informed understanding of the population is essential for identifying participants who can meaningfully contribute to the inquiry. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are detailed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria	**Exclusion criteria**
21 years old and older.	Unable or unwilling to sign consent.
Completed a recognised Aotearoa New Zealand or overseas social work qualification.	Do not have a recognised social work qualification.
At the final stage of completing a foundational degree in social work in Aotearoa New Zealand and practising social work.	Students who are enrolled in papers that the researcher coordinates at the time of data collection.
Understand and speak English.	
Practicing social work in Aotearoa New Zealand.	Not currently practicing social work.

Ethical approval was granted by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee for a maximum of 40 participants (Appendix A: Letter of Approval, HEC: Southern B Application SOB 19/32). A multi-pronged recruitment strategy was implemented, including advertising through the ANZASW website, accessing the SWRB public register, collaborating with community organisations across Aotearoa New Zealand, utilising social media platforms, and drawing on professional networks within social work.

Purposive sampling was first used to recruit an initial group of five participants who could offer relevant and informed perspectives on social work knowledge. These participants were deliberately selected from diverse areas of practice, spanning both statutory and non-statutory settings, consistent with purposive sampling's emphasis on intentionally choosing individuals who can provide rich, conceptually useful data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2024; Morse & Clark, 2019). Personalised invitation letters were sent to potential participants, followed by an

information sheet outlining the study (see Appendix B). All participants received a $25 voucher as a gesture of appreciation, with travel costs reimbursed where required. Although 45 individuals expressed interest, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted communication and, in some cases, employment mobility, ultimately reducing the number of available participants. Recruitment later expanded to 37 practising social workers. Some were final-year students; however, all were actively engaged in practice at the time of data collection. As sampling occurred in 2019–2020, mandatory social worker registration—which took effect in 2021—was not a requirement (Ministry of Social Development [MSD], 2021). A full demographic summary appears in Chapter Five.

Following the initial purposive phase, theoretical sampling was employed in line with Charmaz's (2014) CGT methodology. Theoretical sampling is a distinctive strategy in grounded theory studies (Keane & Thornberg, 2025), arising only after preliminary categories have begun to take shape from initial data (Flick, 2018). Its purpose is not to achieve representativeness but to refine, elaborate, and saturate emerging concepts (Charmaz, 2014). As early analysis of the initial five interviews generated tentative conceptual directions, subsequent sampling decisions were guided by the need to explore these developing ideas more fully.

In this study, theoretical sampling involved recruiting additional participants whose experiences could deepen understanding of emerging categories related to the interpretation, construction, application, and outcomes of social work knowledge. This approach aligns with Morse and Clark's (2019) view that theoretical sampling requires selecting subsequent participants based on their potential to extend or challenge analytic insights. As categories developed, gaps and conceptual uncertainties were identified, in line with Orton's (1997) assertion that grounded theory relies on iteratively comparing data to theory in order to strengthen analytical robustness.

New participants were therefore sought from varied practice contexts to pursue lines of inquiry opened by earlier interviews, allowing for comparison, elaboration, and refinement of emerging theoretical constructions. This iterative approach ensured that sampling remained analytically responsive, enabling categories to be explored in depth until they became sufficiently saturated and theoretically coherent, consistent with grounded theory principles (Charmaz, 2014).

4.1.1.2. Theoretical Sampling and Theoretical Saturation

Theoretical sampling commenced once preliminary categories began to emerge from the early stages of analysis. This process involved deliberately seeking additional data to elaborate, refine, and challenge emerging categories (Charmaz, 2014). Sampling continued primarily within the existing participant pool and expanded as necessary until theoretical saturation was achieved.

Theoretical sampling is driven by analytic need rather than representational logic. Participants were selected based on their capacity to illuminate specific concepts identified during analysis. This process also informed the refinement of interview questions and data collection strategies. This iterative sampling process continued until theoretical saturation was reached, at which point further data no longer contributed new properties or insights to the developing categories, indicating conceptual density and analytic completeness (Belgrave & Seide, 2019).

This approach aligns with ethical principles in social work research, as it prioritises respect for participants, responsiveness to emerging insights, and attentiveness to the broader implications for practice and service users (Clarke et al., 2023). Theoretical sampling also enabled return engagements with participants for focused questioning and supported the integration of relevant literature to deepen and saturate categories, valuing both empirical data and existing scholarship (Charmaz, 2014).

To support theoretical sampling, I also employed snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a non-probability strategy in which existing participants refer other potential participants who meet the study criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2024). It is particularly valuable when researchers are seeking individuals who possess specific experience or insight, as referrals can efficiently lead to information-rich cases that may otherwise be difficult to access (Miles et al., 2013; Richards & Morse, 2012). Snowball sampling also reduces recruitment burden by relying on professional networks, enabling timely engagement with participants well positioned to contribute to emerging lines of inquiry (Hammond & Wellington, 2020). In this study, snowball sampling strengthened the theoretical sampling process by helping identify social workers capable of deepening concept development, resulting in the recruitment of five additional participants.

4.1.2. Data Collection: Semi-Structured One-to-One Interviews

Data were generated through one-to-one semi-structured interviews lasting between 30 and 90 minutes. Prior to each interview, informed consent was obtained from participants (see Appendix C: Consent Form). Securing consent is essential to ethical research practice, as it ensures that participants understand the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their rights throughout the research process. Hardwick and Worsley (2011) emphasise that informed consent protects participants' autonomy and promotes transparency, enabling them to make decisions free from coercion. Similarly, Miles et al. (2011) argue that consent is fundamental to responsible qualitative inquiry, as it fosters trust, clarifies expectations, and supports the ethical handling of participants' contributions.

Semi-structured interviewing was selected because it elicits rich, detailed accounts while maintaining the flexibility needed to follow emerging lines of inquiry. This method combines predetermined topics with open-ended questions and probing, allowing participants to shape

the direction of discussion while keeping the conversation aligned with the study's analytic focus (Birks & Mills, 2015; Postmus, 2013).

The interview process followed established qualitative research practices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2024). First, I clarified the study's objectives, focusing on social workers' experiences of constructing and applying knowledge in practice. Second, I developed and continuously refined open-ended interview questions that were clear, concise, and conceptually aligned. Third, the target participant group was identified through the sampling strategies described earlier. Fourth, interview logistics were collaboratively arranged with participants, with interviews conducted in quiet locations, workplaces, or online platforms in response to Covid-19 restrictions. Finally, interviews commenced with informal conversation to establish rapport, followed by more focused questioning. Active listening and attention to non-verbal cues were prioritised, and all interviews were audio-recorded with consent.

4.1.2.1. Development and Refinement of the Interview Guide

The interview guide functioned as a flexible framework rather than a rigid script. Initial questions explored broad understandings of knowledge, such as "What is your understanding of knowledge?" and "How did you acquire the knowledge you use in practice?" Participants were also invited to describe processes and experiences in their own terms.

The first five participants played a critical role in refining the interview guide. They were encouraged to provide feedback on the clarity, relevance, and completeness of the questions and to suggest additional areas for exploration. Their insights, combined with preliminary concepts derived from the interviews and my ongoing analytic reflections, informed the iterative refinement of the interview schedule. The final interview questions and probes are presented in Appendix D.

Data from the initial interviews informed the development of a preliminary codebook, which guided subsequent data collection and constant comparative analysis. Interview questions evolved in response to emerging categories, ensuring alignment with the developing theory. Throughout this process, I remained reflexively attentive to the potential influence of my own assumptions and theoretical positioning. Memos and reflective journals were used to document analytic decisions and monitor researcher influence. All interviews were transcribed verbatim to support rigorous analysis.

This qualitative study prioritised depth of meaning and participants' perspectives over breadth. The final sample of 37 participants was justified on ethical, practical, and analytic grounds. Theoretical saturation was reached after 37 interviews, with no new conceptual insights emerging. Financial, logistical, and time constraints associated with conducting in-depth, one-to-one interviews also informed the sample size, which was manageable within the project timeframe while maintaining analytic rigour.

4.1.2.2. Interviewing Approaches and Analytical Orientation

Consistent with a social constructionist epistemology, the interviews sought to access participants' interpretations, assumptions, and implicit meanings related to knowledge in practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2024). Both funnel and inverted funnel interviewing techniques were employed (Richards & Morse, 2012). The funnel approach began with broad questions and progressively narrowed focus, enabling participants to articulate experiences in their own terms. The inverted funnel approach was used when participants required more direction or minimised the significance of their experiences.

Additionally, informational and investigative interviewing techniques were integrated (Charmaz, 2014). Informational interviewing supported the collection of contextual and demographic data, while investigative interviewing enabled deeper exploration of practices,

policies, and their consequences—an approach particularly suited to social work and social justice research (Hardwick & Worsley, 2011). Sensitive practice areas, including child protection, domestic violence, and social justice, required careful ethical consideration. Some participants shared deeply personal experiences, underscoring the importance of reflexivity, safety, and confidentiality throughout the interview process.

4.1.3. Data Analysis in Constructivist Grounded Theory

It is crucial to emphasise from the outset of this study that different versions of GT entail distinct analytic processes. The procedures delineated within this study pertain specifically to CGT, and they do not inherently mirror the data analysis strategies of other iterations of GT. A fundamental step for me was to deliberately opt for a well-defined methodological trajectory prior to embarking on data analysis (Keane & Thornberg, 2024). This involved deliberately assessing the key literature associated with each version of GT. This comprehensive exploration informed my conclusive decision that CGT aligns most fittingly with the demands of my research. Subsequently, my reliance rested solely upon methodological guidance from Charmaz and authors affiliated with the CGT approach. In this study, I employed both initial and focused coding techniques that form the backbone of CGT analysis (Brown et al., 2025; Keane &Thornberg, 2024; Sebastian, 2019). These coding phases enabled me to fracture the data, make analytic comparisons, and progressively develop conceptual categories. Yet it was theoretical coding—described by Charmaz (2014) as a later-stage integrative analytic strategy—that allowed me to weave these categories into a cohesive theoretical framework.

According to Charmaz (2014), theoretical coding is the analytic phase in which the researcher begins to specify possible relationships between categories generated through focused coding. In other words, theoretical codes function as conceptual connectors: they help me explore the conditions, consequences, processes, or social interactions that tie categories together.

Importantly, Charmaz distinguishes her approach from the more prescriptive coding families of earlier GT traditions, emphasising instead a flexible, interpretive, and emergent process.

In my analysis, I found theoretical coding both challenging and generative. Having completed rounds of initial and focused coding, I reached a point where several strong categories had clearly crystallised. However, without an analytic strategy to relate them meaningfully, they remained somewhat fragmented. Theoretical coding offered a structured yet flexible way for me to interrogate how these categories interacted (Charmichael & Cunningham, 2017). For example, rather than forcing my analytic categories into predetermined coding frames, I remained attentive to how the data itself suggested particular relationships. Charmaz (2014) encourages this openness, noting that theoretical codes should emerge from the researcher's conceptual engagement with the data, not from external imposition. Theoretical coding guided me toward an integrated framework that reflected participants' meanings and actions while also allowing me to conceptualise the broader processes at play (Bryant, 2017). As Brown et al. (2025) suggest, theoretical coding in CGT is not merely a technical step but a creative, reflexive endeavour. It required me to move back and forth between data, categories, memos, and emergent conceptual insights.

The data analysis in this study was based on the transcripts from the audio recordings, the notes made during and after interviews, memos and the results from any exercises conducted. Qualitative data analysis often occurs simultaneously with data collection, in a continuous and cyclical process. I maintained flexibility in my approach, allowing for ongoing analysis to develop a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the data (Miles et al., 2013).

4.1.3.1. Initial Coding

The aim of initial coding was to remain open to analytic possibilities by closely examining the data and identifying actions, processes, and meanings without imposing preconceived

assumptions (Charmaz, 2014). Following this intention, I conducted initial coding manually rather than using software, as physically organising the codes helped me to better understand relationships within the data (Brown et al., 2025).

I undertook a detailed and systematic review of the transcribed interviews, identifying key ideas, thoughts, events, feelings, and experiences (Charmaz, 2017). This process reflected social workers' interpretations and experiences with the construction of knowledge—shaped by values, beliefs, upbringing, and formal education—and the application of that knowledge in practice (Clarke et al., 2023; Hardwick & Worsley, 2011). The initial codes generated from the first five interviews formed a preliminary codebook that served as the basis for constant comparison with subsequent interviews, enabling the identification of significant categories, major concepts, and discrepancies between codes (Birks & Mills, 2015). Through this participatory approach to co-developing the codebook with participants, supported by iterative comparison and memo writing, the initial codes were systematically clustered into categories according to their similarities and differences.

Initial coding allowed me to deeply engage with each segment of the data, guiding my exploration of meanings and actions through the ongoing comparative analysis of each new interview with earlier data (Brown et al., 2025; Birks & Mills, 2015). Consistent with Charmaz's (2014) guidance, I continually asked analytic questions concerning the emergence, construction, and consequences of key topics, as well as the thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and actions participants expressed throughout these processes. I also reflexively considered how my own past experiences influenced what I noticed in the data and how I approached coding, in line with Charmaz's (2006) emphasis on recognising and examining the researcher's interpretive role (Clarke et al., 2023).

Throughout this phase, I used gerunds to represent actions, as gerund-based coding enhanced theoretical sensitivity by shifting my attention from static concepts ("interpret," "construct," "apply") to dynamic processes ("interpreting," "constructing," "applying") (Charmichael & Cunningham, 2017; Brown et al., 2025; Keane & Thornberg, 2025). I also incorporated in-vivo codes to retain participants' own terms and crystallise their condensed or innovative meanings, as recommended by Charmaz (2014). Examples of these gerund and in-vivo codes are presented in Tables 4.2 and 4.3.

Table 4.2

Examples of Gerunds in the Initial Coding Process

Sample data	Gerund
I've done quite a lot of webinars in the past; I guess I pick and choose the ones that are relevant to my current role, more so kind of looking at it more broadly, just because that's often a time thing more than anything else.	a. Attending many webinars. b. Picking and choosing the ones that are relevant.
I always look at ANZASW and what they have on their website's upcoming events. So, it's possible to look at free events, as well as if you want to explore a little bit more about a particular area or topic of interest to you…	a. Looking at ANZASW website. b. Looking at free events. c. Exploring a particular area or topic of interest.
I would overall prioritise lived experience is because we know that with the work that we've done through social work that, many people don't have the opportunity to have formal education and yet they're incredibly resilient and wise and smart, have a lot of	a. Prioritising lived experience. b. Using knowledge to navigate the world extremely well.

knowledge. They use that knowledge to navigate the world extremely well.	

Once I had generated these codes for the first five interviews, I began the process of collating the in-vivo codes (refer to Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

Examples of In-Vivo Codes

Sampled data	In- vivo code	Interpretation
Well, knowledge is definitely power. Knowledge is very important. It's an element that helps to keep us safe. That's all-around awareness. Understanding knowledge is to do with education, information, data. It keeps us sound. It keeps us grounded. Informs us in what we're doing. Knowledge is key!	Knowledge is important Knowledge is power Knowledge is key	The participant's articulation of the significance of knowledge in their social work practice highlights its role in keeping both themselves and their clients grounded and safe.
I think it's really important because it's the keystone and it marks a professional discipline. You wouldn't go to your doctor and expect your doctor to not have kept up to date with the latest developments.	A cornerstone that defines a professional discipline	A statement that reinforces the participant's belief in the essential acquisition and continuous development of knowledge within their professional field.
…always looking for new perspectives, new ways of looking	Looking at new perspectives	A statement that supports the participant's belief in the necessity

at things. Always thinking about what am I missing out? In particular, who might be harmed by the way I am choosing to focus on some things and not others.		of knowledge to continually seek new perspectives, adopt innovative approaches, and ensure ethical practice that avoids causing harm.

In-vivo codes help inform the development of focused codes. In the next phase, the most frequent and meaningful initial codes were identified, enabling further refinement of the analysis.

4.1.3.2. Focused Coding

Focused coding represents a pivotal analytic phase in Constructivist Grounded Theory because it marks the transition from descriptive engagement with the data to more abstract, conceptual interpretation. While initial coding fractures the data into multiple provisional analytic possibilities, the aim of focused coding is to identify and elaborate the most significant and analytically powerful codes that can synthesise and integrate large segments of data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Charmaz, 2014). This phase operates at a higher conceptual level than initial coding, enabling the researcher to determine which codes best illuminate recurring patterns, underlying processes, and central concerns within participants' accounts. Focused coding is therefore not merely a procedural step; it is a strategic analytic moment that consolidates earlier interpretive work and propels the analysis toward robust category development.

In this study, I drew on Charmaz's (2014) guiding questions—such as "Which codes best explain the data?" and "What do comparisons between codes reveal?" (pp. 140–141, 144)—to interrogate the initial codes and determine which had the greatest conceptual relevance. Focused coding involved systematically comparing initial codes to one another, selecting those that demonstrated analytical strength, and constructing new, more encompassing codes where necessary (Bryant, 2017; Charmaz, 2014). This constant comparison sharpened the distinction

between codes that were merely descriptive and those that held theoretical weight. As Flick (2018) emphasises, this movement from descriptive coding to conceptual synthesis is essential for producing coherent qualitative analyses that capture the complexities of social processes. In this sense, focused coding acts as a filtering mechanism: it prioritises the most meaningful analytic leads, consolidates diffuse data, and supports the formation of categories that reflect deeper interpretive insights.

The significance of focused coding also lies in its ability to generate theoretical direction. Through its comparative and integrative functions, focused coding helps determine where the analysis needs to go next, what analytic gaps must be addressed, and which emerging conceptual patterns warrant further examination. Charmichael and Cunningham (2017) note that the strength of grounded theory lies in its iterative analytic movement, and focused coding sits at the heart of this iterative cycle by refining analytic attention and shaping theoretical sensitivity. By moving back and forth between initial codes, emerging categories, and reflexive memos, I was able to explore multiple layers of meaning, clarify the relationships between subtopics, and deepen the conceptual density of the developing categories. Focused coding therefore strengthened the analytical coherence of the study by continuously sharpening the conceptual relationships that underpin the emerging grounded theory.

Furthermore, focused coding played a critical role in managing the large volume of data generated in this research. Across the 37 interviews, I consistently applied focused coding to compare new data with existing codes and categories. This iterative engagement contributed to the identification of category properties, variations within categories, and the conditions under which particular processes unfolded (Keane & Thornberg, 2025). The analytical discipline required during focused coding ensured that categories were not treated as static containers but were continually refined through comparison, interrogation, and re-evaluation (Corbin, 1986).

This process produced categories that were theoretically robust and grounded in the nuanced experiences of participants.

The aim and significance of focused coding lie in its capacity to advance the analysis from descriptive fragments toward explanatory power. By selecting, synthesising, and elevating the most meaningful initial codes, focused coding fosters theoretical integration and analytic clarity (Keane & Thornberg, 2025). It provides the conceptual scaffolding upon which grounded theories are built, ensuring that emerging categories are both empirically grounded and conceptually rich (Birks & Mills, 2015). In this study, focused coding was essential to constructing a coherent and analytically rigorous theoretical account of the social processes embedded in participants' experiences.

4.1.3.3. Category Development

At this stage I am not doing further coding; rather, I am consolidating, interrogating, and theoretically integrating the analytic materials I have already produced. I foreground the theoretical strategy—especially constant comparison, theoretical integration, memo work (including preparatory memos), abductive reasoning, and iterative category refinement—drawing on Birks & Mills (2015), Charmaz (2014), Keane & Thornberg (2025), Bryant (2017), Charmichael & Cunningham (2017), Flick (2018), and explicitly incorporating Corbin (1986) and Keane (2022) on memoing.

Having completed initial and focused coding, my aim now is to elevate promising analytic leads into robust categories by clarifying their conceptual core, analytic scope, and relationships to other emergent concepts. In CGT, categories are not mere containers for similar codes; they are analytic explanations that account for patterned processes and meanings in the data (Charmaz, 2014). Thus, my strategy is interpretive and integrative: I move beyond describing what participants say to explaining how and why particular processes unfold, under what conditions,

through what actions/interactions, and with what consequences (Birks & Mills, 2015; Flick, 2018). This transition requires abductive reasoning—cycling between data, memos, and relevant literature to test and refine the most plausible conceptual accounts (Bryant, 2017; Charmaz, 2014). Table 4.4 provides an example of a memo prior to theoretical saturation, illustrating how social workers interpret knowledge.

Table 4.4

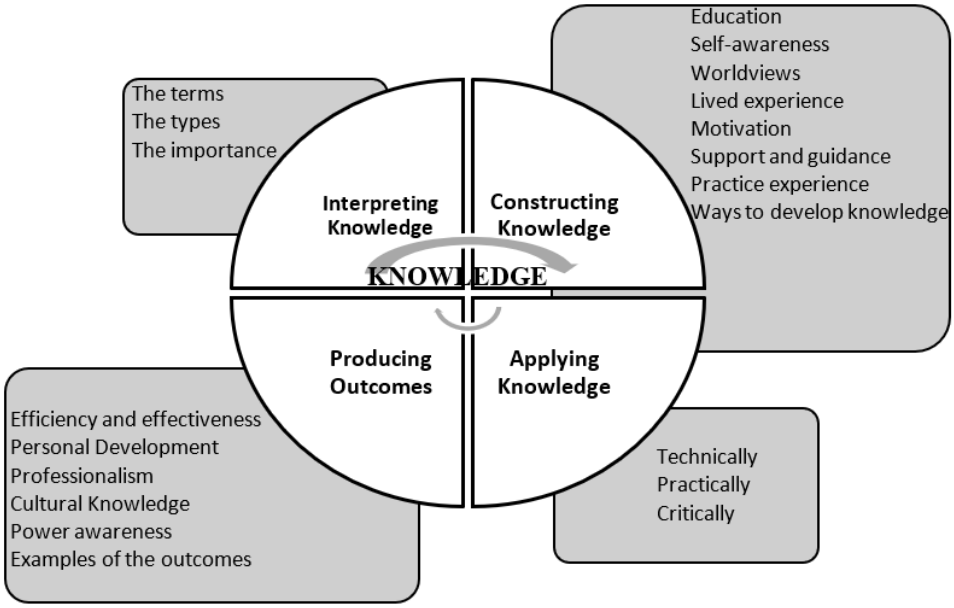
Example of a Memo of the Interpretation of Knowledge

Memo of Interpretation of Knowledge
The participants frequently discussed their interpretation of knowledge. When reflecting on the concept, they identified several key aspects that shaped their thinking and informed their decisions and actions. They emphasised theory, research, and practice wisdom, alongside their lived experiences, values, and beliefs, all of which they considered integral to their understanding of knowledge. For them, knowledge is not a fixed entity; it is something that has been shaped since birth and continues to evolve throughout their lives. I am beginning to recognise the complexity of their understanding of knowledge, which varies among participants and is not defined by a single, static interpretation. Rather, it is a dynamic, evolving concept that is influenced by historical and political contexts, significantly shaping their thought processes.

Although I am not generating new codes, I continue constant comparison to stress-test the developing categories. By the conclusion of the analytic process, four interrelated categories had been developed, encapsulating participants' interpretations, conceptualisations, and processes of: (a) interpreting knowledge, (b) constructing knowledge, (c) applying knowledge, and (d) producing outcomes. These categories are illustrated in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1

Category Development



This comparative scrutiny helps me refine category properties (attributes), dimensions (ranges or intensities), and conditions/processes/consequences that define the category's analytic power (Keane & Thornberg, 2025). It also guards against premature closure by keeping the analysis open to alternative explanations (Bryant, 2017; Flick, 2018). Throughout each stage of category development, I produced preparatory analytic memos to delineate conceptual boundaries and to explicate the defining properties of each emerging category. This memo-writing process was critical in differentiating the categories from one another, ensuring conceptual clarity, analytic coherence, and theoretical robustness (Keane & Thornberg, 2025).

Table 4.5 shows an example of a preparatory memo summarising category three, which explored how social workers apply knowledge. This memo helped clarify the next steps, particularly the need to explore how social workers apply their knowledge and how it influences their practice with clients.

Table 4.5

Example of a Preparatory Memo

Reflection on the Application of Knowledge in Social Work Practice

The participants shared their experiences regarding the application of knowledge in social work, particularly when engaging with diverse populations and scenarios. It became evident that various factors influence how knowledge is applied in practice.

One key factor is the availability of resources, with participants noting that knowledge is more easily applied when resources are readily accessible. As one participant explained:

"Now I think that knowledge is a lot more easily obtainable, and I guess that's probably because of the online presence and also I think we just have a lot more material and it's easier to find it and search it."

Another participant emphasised the importance of reflection in the application of knowledge:

"I'd be a better social worker and better person if I actually took a reflective practice approach. That is because that's where I think you can really benefit from the knowledge that you've gained to help inform your practice, rather than hoping that you've hit the nail on the head or at least got near it."

The participants also discussed the non-linear nature of the knowledge application process. For example, one participant observed:

"…it should come back to the notion that we're always building on that learning as you become more experienced."

This suggests that knowledge application is an evolving process that is shaped by ongoing experiences and continuous learning. Another participant pointed out:

"You need to keep up with the knowledge because things are changing, the challenges will change as well as theories."

Additionally, the participants recognised that the application of knowledge is often influenced by power dynamics within the field of social work. One participant noted:

"There are parts of social work that rest more and more on power and control. They seek to control parts of our communities."

This highlights the complex relationship between knowledge and power, suggesting that the way knowledge is applied can be shaped by the socio-political context in which social workers operate.

Overall, the participants' insights reveal that the application of knowledge in social work is influenced by the accessibility of resources, the continuous process of learning, and the power dynamics inherent in the profession. Reflective practice, as highlighted by the participants, is essential for social workers to apply knowledge effectively and navigate these complexities.

Memo writing here is not a clerical step; it is the site of theoretical integration. It enables reflexivity (examining how my standpoint shapes interpretation) and theoretical sensitivity (becoming alert to subtle analytic distinctions) (Charmichael & Cunningham, 2017; Flick, 2018). I track how my ideas change over time, which supports auditability and conceptual coherence (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014). Memoing simultaneously advances reflexivity and theoretical sensitivity. I examine how my standpoint shapes emphasis and interpretation, and I record decision trails for why one conceptualisation is retained over alternatives (Charmichael & Cunningham, 2017; Flick, 2018). This practice enhances analytic credibility and keeps categories responsive to multiple layers of meaning (Keane & Thornberg, 2025).

To ensure categories are conceptually robust, I subject them to explicit tests. I ask whether a category fits recurrent patterns and resonates with participants' meanings; whether it has analytic power to explain variation and specify conditions, actions, and outcomes; whether it balances breadth and parsimony; and whether it is useful in illuminating what tends to happen next (Charmaz, 2014; Birks & Mills, 2015; Bryant, 2017; Flick, 2018). I write challenge memos in which I argue against my own categories using counter-examples, forcing clarification of conceptual boundaries, pruning redundancy, and refining scope statements (Bryant, 2017; Flick, 2018). Through these tests, categories become denser and richer in properties, dimensions, and relationships.

With categories clarified, I turn to theoretical integration, articulating conditional propositions that specify how categories relate and conduct abductive checks—if a proposed relation fails to

account for outliers, I re-specify it (for example, from causal to conditional, or from necessary to contingent) (Charmaz, 2014; Keane & Thornberg, 2025). I also determine hierarchy and scope, distinguishing core categories (organising processes) from substantive or contextual categories, which ensures the emergent theory has a coherent centre of gravity (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmichael & Cunningham, 2017). Consistent with CGT's constructivist stance, I treat theory building as a co-construction. I therefore maintain reflexive memos on how my prior experiences and disciplinary position may shape what I notice, what I privilege, and where I may be blind (Charmaz, 2014; Charmichael & Cunningham, 2017). By documenting analytic pivots, competing interpretations, and the rationale for final decisions, I strengthen auditability and reinforce theoretical sensitivity—that is, my capacity to discern subtle distinctions and relationships that matter for explanation (Flick, 2018; Birks & Mills, 2015; Keane & Thornberg, 2025).

While I analysed data, I maintained memos and reflexive journals to maintain an audit trail, manage data and resources, demonstrate procedural logic (Birks & Mills, 2015), and most of all remain sensitised to my own biases and prejudices after every interview. I repeated the process until a grounded theory was established.

4.2. The Construction within Constructivist Grounded Theory

This section elaborates how the theory was constructed through the application of CGT, demonstrating alignment with its core methodological and epistemological principles.

4.2.1. Constructing the Theory

CGT is grounded in qualitative research traditions and explicitly informed by a social constructionist epistemology, wherein reality is understood as emergent, negotiated, and socially produced through interaction (Charmaz, 2014; Clarke et al., 2023). Within this methodology, knowledge is not treated as an objective entity awaiting discovery but as a

socially situated construction shaped by interpretation, relationships and context. This study is anchored in this premise, using CGT as the methodological strategy through which social work knowledge in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand was theorised.

The construction of the theory drew upon data generated from interviews, observations, and supplementary materials. These data sources were analytically integrated to develop a theoretically informed explanation of how social workers interpret, construct, and apply knowledge in practice. As outlined in the preceding section, CGT encompasses a set of interrelated and iterative processes that guide theory development. These processes are not linear; rather, they operate recursively, enabling theory to emerge through sustained engagement with participants' experiences and meanings.

Consistent with CGT assumptions, this study anchored in the idea that reality is constructed through social processes, relationships, and interactions (Blumer, 1969). This stance aligns with the view that social work knowledge develops through collective engagement, shared practice, and negotiated understanding. Throughout data collection and analysis, participants' narratives were interpreted as inseparable from their social contexts. Meaning-making was understood to arise within participants' relationships, histories, culture, and norms (Keane & Thornberg, 2025). At the same time, my position as a researcher—shaped by my identity, professional background, and interpretive commitments—influenced what was attended to, how meanings were interpreted, and how analytic decisions were made (Charmichael & Cunningham, 2017). Consequently, the knowledge co-produced through this research was necessarily situated and non-neutral (Charmaz, 2017). Rather than uncovering an objective reality, the study generated an interpretive understanding of how knowledge is produced, negotiated, and embodied within a specific social work context (Clarke et al., 2023).

In constructing the theory, data were not treated as pre-existing entities but as co-constructed through interaction between myself and the participants. Interviews functioned as dialogical spaces in which narratives were jointly produced, shaped by my questions, prompts, relational stance, and identity as a fellow social worker (Clarke et al., 2023). Reflexivity was integral to this process, as I explicitly acknowledged that my interpretations actively shaped the construction of data. Attention was also given to how power relations influenced what participants chose to disclose, and how my professional background enabled the recognition of subtle, practice-based nuances within participants' accounts (Esin et al., 2013).

The analytic construction of the theory was driven by rigorous coding practices that maintained close engagement with the data. As detailed in the previous section, coding prioritised actions, processes, and meanings rather than thematic categorisation (Holstein & Gubrium, 2007). Initial coding focused on how participants experienced, negotiated, and constructed knowledge in practice. Guided by Charmaz's (2014, 2017) CGT approach, my coding decisions reflected interpretive judgements, and theoretical development unfolded iteratively rather than sequentially. As analysis progressed, it became evident that participants' experiences of knowledge were fundamentally relational—emerging through interaction, shared practice, and collective sense-making (Houston, 2001). This understanding shaped subsequent coding, reinforcing an orientation to knowledge as socially generated.

As the analysis advanced, coding became increasingly conceptual, focusing on processes that cut across participants' accounts. Comparative analysis was central at this stage, with data compared against data, codes against codes, and emerging interpretations against participants' meanings (Birks & Mills, 2015). Through this process, patterns became visible in how participants collectively constructed knowledge, the relational conditions that facilitated knowledge exchange, and the ways emotions, identities, and cultural positioning influenced

knowledge practices (Young & Collin, 2004). These comparative moves deepened analytic insight and contributed to the consolidation of the emerging theory.

My memo writing functioned as the central mechanism through which theory construction was advanced. Memos provided an analytic space to interrogate codes, examine assumptions, articulate conceptual relationships, and trace how meanings shifted across contexts (Birks et al., 2008; Corbin, 1986; Keane, 2022). Memoing reinforced the understanding of knowledge as dynamic, relational, and socially situated, rather than fixed or individualised. Through sustained memo writing, the analysis moved beyond description toward theoretical integration, allowing complexity to be retained.

As focused codes and memos were synthesised, they coalesced into a coherent analytic narrative, marking the point at which the theory became fully visible (Keane, 2022). Participants' accounts were no longer presented as standalone descriptions but were mobilised as evidence supporting a conceptual explanation of knowledge processes. Theoretical codes integrated these processes into an explanatory theory detailing how knowledge is interpreted, constructed, applied, and translated into outcomes. This theory was explicitly framed as a co-construction rather than a neutral discovery, reflecting its grounding in participants' experiences, its shaping through my analytic interpretations, and its alignment with a social constructionist epistemology (Andrews, 2012). It also acknowledged the social, historical, and political conditions that shape social work practice (Houston, 2001). Accordingly, the theory is presented as an interpretive, contextual, and plausible account of how knowledge is experienced and enacted within participants' collective social work professional fields (Holstein & Gubrium, 2007).

The final theory, Navigating Knowledge, which is elaborated in Chapter Nine, represents a constructed shared reality consistent with a constructivist grounded theory perspective

(Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). The robustness of this theory is grounded in the systematic integration of participants' accounts, iterative analytic decision-making, relational interactions, contextual influences, reflexive engagement, and constant comparative analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2017). This analytic orientation closely aligns with the foundational premise of this study: that social work knowledge is generated through collective interaction rather than individual cognition alone. CGT provided the methodological pathway through which Navigating Knowledge could be articulated in a manner that is methodologically rigorous, analytically transparent, and theoretically defensible.

4.2.2. Challenges of Applying CGT in this Study

In applying CGT, I encountered significant challenges mainly related to time management. My limited capacity to anticipate the full scope of the data collection process required careful planning and sustained discipline. This was particularly important as I was balancing full-time employment, part-time PhD study, and active participation in multiple community groups, alongside family responsibilities. Managing these competing demands while conducting CGT research proved substantial challenges. Moreover, the data collection and analysis process in CGT was notably more time-intensive than other qualitative methods. The iterative nature of CGT, requiring continuous engagement until theoretical saturation was achieved, further amplified these demands.

A further challenge I identified within CGT pertained to its reliance on an iterative recruitment approach known as theoretical sampling (Birks & Mills, 2015). This approach required a continual cycle of participant recruitment and successive interview rounds, both for new and prior participants, all while simultaneously analysing data (Flick, 2018). Although I established initial criteria for participant inclusion and exclusion, I recognised the imperative of remaining open to the prospect of refining and adapting these criteria based on insights gleaned from

earlier participants. The dynamic of participant selection posed a challenge in consistently identifying ideal candidates for the study.

Turning to the area of data analysis, this task unfolded on an ongoing basis, characterised by the perpetual comparison of diverse data excerpts. This approach held the potential for complexity in terms of tracking comparisons and insights as they emerged, demanding a concerted effort to maintain organisation throughout the analytical process.

4.3. Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity is fundamental to rigorous qualitative research and requires careful anticipation of potential risks, alongside the implementation of multiple safeguards to protect participants, researchers, and institutions (Anastas, 2024). In this study, ethical considerations were approached comprehensively, encompassing both general research ethics and those specific to the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Particular attention was given to obligations arising from Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Treaty of Waitangi, in accordance with Massey University's Code of Ethical Conduct for Research (Massey University, 2017).

Ethical approval was obtained prior to the commencement of data collection (see Appendix E, Letter of Approval for Ethics Application SOB 19/32). Participants were initially recruited through written advertisements disseminated via the ANZASW website, social media platforms, and the publicly accessible SWRB register (see Appendix F, Advertisement for ANZASW and Social Media). In addition, written invitations incorporating the same advertisement information were distributed to social work practitioners within the researcher's professional network (see Appendix F).

To enhance participant engagement and accessibility, a short explanatory video outlining the research project was subsequently developed and disseminated via Facebook and YouTube.

This constituted a modification to the original recruitment strategy and required an amendment to the approved ethics application (see Appendix G, Revised Advertisement for ANZASW and Social Media). Approval for this amendment was granted, and the associated memorandum is included in Appendix H (Memorandum to Approve Revised Advertisement).

4.3.1. General Ethical Principles

This study was guided by the foundational ethical principles of autonomy, confidentiality, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice. These principles provided a coherent framework for ethical decision-making throughout all phases of the research (Anastas, 2024; Massey University, 2017).

4.3.1.1. Autonomy and Confidentiality

Autonomy refers to an individual's capacity to make informed and voluntary decisions based on their own values and beliefs (Hardwick & Worsley, 2011). In this study, autonomy was ensured through four interrelated components articulated by Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research (Massey University, 2017): agency, information, comprehension, and absence of pressure.

Participants were supported to exercise agency by making decisions grounded in their own professional and personal values. Comprehensive information was provided through an information sheet (Appendix B), which outlined the study's aims, participant expectations, confidentiality provisions, potential benefits, and the voluntary nature of participation. Efforts were made to ensure comprehension by allowing opportunities for clarification and discussion prior to consent. Absence of pressure was maintained by explicitly avoiding coercion or inducement, thereby ensuring that participation decisions were fully voluntary.

Respecting autonomy also entails recognising that preventing research participation may itself be ethically problematic if it denies individuals the opportunity to make informed choices (Hammond & Wellington, 2020). Once participants confirmed their understanding of the study, written informed consent was obtained via a signed consent form (Appendix C). Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty, to pause or stop interviews, to decline audio recording, or to request the exclusion of any interview segment. They were also offered the opportunity to review interview notes.

Consent forms, audio files, transcripts, and other research materials were securely stored in a locked filing cabinet at my residence and on password-protected digital devices. In accordance with Massey University policy, all research data will be retained for a minimum of six years, with access restricted to myself and my supervisors (Massey University, 2017). Participants' identities, as well as those of their organisations, were safeguarded through the use of pseudonyms and participant codes in all transcripts, analytic materials, and research outputs. Although I retained knowledge of participants' identities, strict measures were implemented to prevent disclosure beyond the research team.

All interview transcripts were coded immediately following data collection, and access to raw data was restricted to myself and my supervisors. Potentially identifying details were removed or altered when using interview excerpts in reports and publications. Research data were securely stored on a password-protected computer in accordance with institutional requirements. These measures ensured that participants' confidentiality was maintained throughout the research lifecycle, consistent with ethical research standards (Massey University, 2017).

4.3.1.2. Non-Maleficence

The principle of non-maleficence requires that researchers avoid causing physical, psychological, social, or reputational harm to participants (Islam & Abusaleh, 2024). In this study, harm was understood broadly to include threats to dignity, professional standing, relationships, and emotional wellbeing. Potential harms to communities, institutions, and the researcher were assessed as part of the ethical review process, with no foreseeable risks identified.

Given the nature of the research, the likelihood of participant distress was minimal, and no participants reported experiencing discomfort. Nonetheless, precautionary measures were established in recognition that the ethical acceptability of risk is influenced by both participant autonomy and the purpose of the research (Anastas, 2024). A clear support plan was developed prior to data collection and discussed with supervisors.

If distress had arisen, the interview would have been paused or terminated, and immediate support offered using my professional skills as a social worker. Participants had access to a mobile phone to contact a support person if required, and supervisors were available for consultation. Interview schedules were shared with supervisors in advance, and debriefing time was built into each interview. These safeguards ensured participant wellbeing remained central throughout the research process. Throughout the interviews, I remained attentive to participants' verbal and non-verbal cues and actively monitored their comfort and emotional wellbeing. Participants were reminded of their right to take breaks, withdraw from the study, or reschedule interviews without consequence. Each interview concluded with a structured debriefing period to ensure participants felt supported. While these safeguards were not ultimately required, their presence strengthened the ethical robustness of the study.

4.3.1.3. Beneficence

Beneficence was conceptualised as the promotion of benefit at both individual and collective levels, recognising that benefit, like harm, may take multiple forms (Anastas, 2024). While benefits cannot automatically offset ethical risks, intentionally promoting benefit remains a core ethical responsibility, particularly where benefits are anticipated rather than incidental (Massey University, 2017).

The intended benefits of this study include contributing new knowledge to an under-explored area of social work in Aotearoa New Zealand—specifically, the processes through which social workers engage with, construct, and apply knowledge in practice. Findings from this research have potential relevance for social work practice, supervision, education, organisational development, and future research.

At an individual level, participants were offered an opportunity for structured reflection on their knowledge acquisition, preferences, and application in professional practice. This reflective process enabled them to consider how different forms of knowledge shape their work with clients and to recognise which knowledge sources they perceived as most relevant. For participants who are members of ANZASW and/or registered with SWRB, participation also contributed to meeting ANZASW Practice Standard 8 (ANZASW, 2014) and SWRB Core Competency 5 (SWRB, 2024).

4.3.1.4. Justice

Justice in research requires that benefits are not confined to a single group but are accessible across populations, thereby promoting equity (Islam & Abusaleh, 2024). This study was designed to benefit social workers across Aotearoa New Zealand, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, religious background, or other social identities.

Participant recruitment adhered to principles of fairness and inclusivity. Discrimination in recruitment is ethically problematic unless clearly justified by the research purpose (Massey University, 2017). In this study, purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants who met clearly defined inclusion criteria related to professional practice. Recruitment was open and transparent, with invitations disseminated through ANZASW networks and social media platforms. No eligible participants were excluded on unjust grounds, thereby ensuring an equitable approach to participation (Anastas, 2024).

4.3.2. Ethical Principles in Relation to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Treaty of Waitangi

In conducting this study, ethical decision-making was guided by the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research (Massey University, 2017), the ANZASW Ngā Tikanga Matatika Code of Ethics (ANZASW, 2024), and the SWRB Code of Conduct (SWRB, 2024). These frameworks support ethical research practice by clarifying the rights, roles, and responsibilities of researchers in relation to Māori communities. Four core principles informed the study (Massey University, 2017):

Whakapapa (relationships): Meaningful consultation was undertaken with supervisors and Māori cultural advisors from Te Wānanga Māori to support culturally appropriate engagement with Māori participants and to honour relational accountability.

Tika (purposefulness): The research purpose—to explore knowledge processes in social work—was aligned with Te Tiriti o Waitangi of Tino Rangatiratanga and the Treaty of Waitangi principles of participation and protection, with potential to contribute to Māori social workers' professional capacity and the wellbeing of Māori clients.

Manaakitanga (cultural and social responsibility)**:** As a non-Māori researcher, I sought ongoing cultural guidance to ensure respectful, culturally responsive practice and to uphold participants' dignity throughout the research process.

Mana (justice and equity): Māori participants' contributions were recognised as integral to the knowledge produced, supporting the visibility, protection, and strengthening of Māori voices within social work scholarship.

Collectively, these ethical considerations reflect a deliberate and systematic approach to conducting research within the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, ensuring that both ethical principles in general and ethical principles based on Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Treaty of Waitangi were carefully and consistently upheld.

4.4. Evaluation of Quality, Rigour, and Trustworthiness

The quality of CGT research rests on several interrelated factors that must be carefully considered and systematically enacted by the researcher. These include the researcher's methodological expertise and analytic competence, the coherence between the research question and the chosen methodology, and the precision with which data collection and analytic procedures are implemented (Birks & Mills, 2015; Keane & Thornberg, 2025). Given the distinctive epistemological and methodological commitments of CGT, a sound understanding of its theoretical foundations and analytic strategies is essential (Charmaz, 2017). Methodological integrity is further strengthened when the researcher's philosophical positioning is congruent with the research question and design, ensuring that the inquiry proceeds in a theoretically and epistemologically coherent manner (Bryant, 2017).

Rigour in CGT is sustained through careful attention to data generation, iterative analysis, and conceptual development across the development of the theory. Ongoing analytic engagement—through constant comparison, theoretical sampling, and abstraction—forms the basis for generating a grounded and theoretically robust account of the phenomenon under study. Equally important is procedural transparency, achieved through systematic data management, explicit documentation of analytic decisions, and the maintenance of a comprehensive audit trail

(Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). In this study, memos were used extensively to capture emerging ideas, methodological decisions, shifts in analytic focus, and the rationale underpinning key choices. This documentation functioned as both an analytic and reflexive tool, supporting methodological rigour and enhancing the traceability of theory construction (Carmichael & Cunningham, 2017). Trustworthiness was central to this research, as it ensured that the findings meaningfully represented participants' experiences while demonstrated methodological and analytic integrity. Trustworthiness also served to address the inherent subjectivity of interpretation by making analytic processes visible and accountable, thereby reducing the risk of unchecked bias (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). In this study, trustworthiness was supported through verbatim transcripts, systematic and iterative coding, and the integration of multiple data sources, including interview transcripts, a research journal, observation notes, and analytic memos documenting theoretical development (Corbin, 1986). Reflexivity was embedded throughout the research process, enabling ongoing examination of my assumptions, positioning, and influence on interpretation, and supporting the demonstration of theoretical fit between data and emerging categories (Fook, 1996). To evaluate trustworthiness, I adopted the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility was enhanced through meaningful engagement with participants and the triangulation of data sources. Manual verbatim transcripts, iterative cycles of coding, and the extensive use of participants' verbatim quotations in the findings chapters (Chapters Five to Eight) strengthened the authenticity and transparency of the analytic process. Within the CGT framework, memoing and reflexive practice further supported interpretive accuracy by enabling close engagement with participants' meanings while maintaining analytic sensitivity.

Transferability was addressed by providing rich, contextualised descriptions of participants, settings, and analytic processes, enabling readers to assess the relevance of the findings to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participatory analytic strategies, including collaborative codebook development, supported the incorporation of participants' perspectives and captured the diversity of social workers' experiences across Aotearoa New Zealand. This contributes to the broader applicability of the theory, particularly in a field where social workers' knowledge navigation processes remain under-represented in the literature (Birks et al., 2008).

Dependability was established through a transparent and systematic analytic process, demonstrating that the research procedures were consistent, stable, and replicable over time. Analytic consistency was supported by the iterative application of inductive and deductive reasoning, alongside constant comparison between emerging theoretical constructs and empirical data (Orton, 1997). The audit trail, memos, and documented analytic decisions provided a clear account of how the findings were generated, enabling scrutiny of the research process over time.

Confirmability was upheld through sustained reflexive engagement. My insider position as a registered social worker facilitated rapport with participants and supported nuanced understanding of practice contexts; however, personal assumptions and professional preconceptions were intentionally bracketed through reflexive journaling and analytic memoing (Keane, 2022). At the same time, recognising my outsider status in certain cultural and practice contexts enhanced analytic distance and encouraged critical interrogation of interpretations. An examination of trustworthiness underpinning the rigour of this study is presented in Chapter Eleven.

4.5. Conclusion

CGT is an analytically rigorous qualitative research methodology distinguished by its social constructionism epistemological stance and its systematic, iterative approach to theory development. In this study, CGT provided a robust approach for exploring complex processes by integrating methodological coherence, analytic depth, and contextual sensitivity. The use of purposive sampling enabled focused engagement with participants who were well positioned to illuminate the phenomenon under study, thereby generating rich, in-depth insights aligned with the research aims.

CGT extends beyond conventional qualitative approaches through its structured application of analytic procedures. These included iterative cycles of initial and focused coding, followed by the abstraction and refinement of analytic categories, culminating in theoretical saturation. Theoretical sampling—a defining feature of CGT—was employed once preliminary categories began to emerge from early data analysis. This process involved purposefully seeking further data to refine, extend, and challenge emerging categories, leading to the identification of additional conceptual insights. Sampling proceeded in accordance with the purposive sampling strategy and expanded through snowball sampling, ensuring analytic depth until no new theoretical properties emerged.

The sustained use of analytic memos and reflexive journaling, while methodologically demanding, was central to deepening analytic engagement and strengthening conceptual development. These practices facilitated critical reflection, supported theoretical sensitivity, and enhanced the transparency of analytic decision-making. Ethical considerations were embedded throughout the research process, consistent with CGT's emphasis on attending to participants' social, professional, and cultural contexts. Safeguarding participants' wellbeing

and dignity at all stages of the study aligned with both qualitative research ethics and the professional standards governing social work practice.

Given that this research was conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand, ethical decision-making necessarily extended beyond general ethical principles to include obligations arising from Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Treaty of Waitangi. Attention to bicultural ethical responsibilities ensured that the research was conducted in a manner that was culturally responsive and contextually grounded. Collectively, these methodological, analytic, and ethical processes highlight the contextual significance of the study and provide a comprehensive foundation for evaluating its quality, rigour, and trustworthiness.

Chapter 5. Interpreting Knowledge

In accordance with Charmaz's (2014) CGT approach, this study seeks to develop a theory grounded in the specific context of social work knowledge in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is guided by two primary research questions: (1) What are the experiences of social workers in constructing and applying knowledge in practice? and (2) How does their knowledge influence their behaviour and practice outcomes with clients?

The theory of Navigating Knowledge conceptualises social workers' knowledge as shaped not only by empirical realities but also by values, beliefs, and interpretive processes. It emphasises that knowledge is co-constructed through relational engagement within social and environmental contexts, situated particularly within Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural landscape that recognises Māori as tangata whenua (Indigenous people) and tauiwi (non-Indigenous people).

The theory of Navigating Knowledge consists of four main categories: Interpreting Knowledge, Constructing Knowledge, Applying Knowledge, and Producing Outcomes. The findings are presented across four chapters: Chapter Five explores participants' experiences of interpreting knowledge; Chapter Six examines the processes involved in constructing knowledge; Chapter Seven focuses on how knowledge is applied in practice; and Chapter Eight discusses the outcomes of knowledge use in participants' decision-making and practice with clients. The theory of Navigating Knowledge will be discussed in Chapter Nine, where the main categories and subcategories will be examined and discussed together.

This chapter begins by providing an overview of the participants' backgrounds before exploring the concept of knowledge, which represents the category of Interpreting Knowledge. This

concept is further broken down into four subcategories that emerged from the data analysis: Interpreting Personal Knowledge, Interpreting Professional Knowledge, Interpreting Contextual Knowledge, and Weighing the Importance. These subcategories illustrate how social workers interpret and contextualise knowledge within Aotearoa New Zealand's unique bicultural practice.

5.1. Participants' Background

Table 5.1 below summarises the participants' background regarding their ethnicities, social work area, number of years of practice and gender.

Table 5.1

Participants' Background and Social Work Area

No	Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Social work area	Years of practice	Gender
1	Jenny	Pākehā / New Zealander of European descent	NGO	20+	Woman
2	Samuel	Middle Eastern	NGO	6-10	Man
3	Amber-Jane	Middle Eastern	Government	11-15	Non-binary
4	Arihi	Samoan	Academic	11-15	Woman
5	Emery	Pākehā / New Zealander of European descent	Academic	20+	Woman
6	Marama	Māori	NGO	11-15	Woman
7	Allana	Niuean	NGO	11-15	Woman
8	Ahika	Māori	Academic	11-15	Man
9	Atarangi	Māori	NGO	11-15	Woman
10	Ethan	Pākehā / New Zealander of European descent	Academic	20+	Man
11	Oliver	European	NGO	20+	Man
12	Talia	Cook Islands	NGO	20+	Woman
13	Liam	Asian	NGO	11-15	Man
14	Mila	European	NGO	11-15	Woman

15	Nigel	European	Government	16-20	Man
16	Jessica	Pākehā / New Zealander of European descent	Government	11-15	Woman
17	Oaklee	Samoan	NGO	20+	Man
18	Sophia	European	NGO	0-5	Woman
19	Scarlett	Pākehā / New Zealander of European descent	NGO	20+	Woman
20	Jasmine	Pākehā / New Zealander of European descent	NGO	16-20	Woman
21	Melody	Māori	NGO	11-15	Woman
22	Riley	European	Government	11-15	Woman
23	Thomas	Pākehā / New Zealander of European descent	NGO	0-5	Non-binary
24	Estrella	European & Latin American	NGO	0-5	Woman
25	Pania	Māori	Government	0-5	Woman
26	Ruby	Pākehā / New Zealander of European descent	Government	0-5	Woman
27	Phoebe	Pākehā / New Zealander of European descent & Niuean	NGO	0-5	Woman
28	Elsie	European	Government	0-5	Woman
29	Manaia	Māori	Government	0-5	Woman
30	Aretha	Middle Eastern	Government	0-5	Woman
31	Mahuika	Māori	NGO	0-5	Woman
32	Ciara	European	Academic	16-20	Woman
33	Morela	European	Academic	6-10	Woman
34	Heitiare	Samoan/Māori	Government	0-5	Woman
35	Yadanar	Asian	NGO	0-5	Woman
36	Tiaho	Kiribati	NGO	0-5	Woman
37	Selina	Pākehā / New Zealander of European descent	Academic	20+	Woman

All participants had completed at least a Bachelor of Social Work degree with ten of them also holding a master's degree or a PhD. Seventeen social workers practised in various non-government social services in refugee resettlement, Māori community, Pacific community, private practice, health sector, community organisation, disability sector, mental health, youth,

and women refuge. Seven participants were working as lecturers in social work. Thirteen participants were practising in government organisations specialising in child protection, social policy, corrections, defence force, mental health, and health. The participants resided in cities and towns across the North and South Islands. Overall, the participants in the group hold a variety of degrees and work in both statutory and non-statutory social work fields. Although they all live in cities, they included both the North and South Islands.

5.2. The Concept of Interpreting Knowledge

The concept of Interpreting Knowledge was formed from the participants' thoughts, ideas, and comments on knowledge, derived from verbatim transcripts. Interpreting Knowledge was conceptualised as the process through which participants became aware of, understood, and made sense of situations, topics, and experiences in relation to their personal and professional practice. This process involved critically examining personal beliefs, professional frameworks, and contextual factors to determine how knowledge applies to specific situations while also recognising the importance of both the knowledge itself and the process of interpretation.

Within the Aotearoa New Zealand social work context, knowledge is shaped by individual values, cultural backgrounds, and prior experiences, influencing how social workers perceive and respond to clients' needs. It also emphasises upholding bicultural practice by respecting both tangata whenua (Indigenous Māori people) and tauiwi (non-Indigenous people).

Before analysing the process of Interpreting Knowledge, it is important to first present the hierarchy of the term knowledge, which can itself be understood as a process. There was general agreement among participants that knowledge involves awareness or understanding of a subject. When discussing the concept of knowledge, participants often referred to related terms such as data, information, and wisdom to explain how understanding develops. However, these

terms were not considered synonymous or interchangeable. Data simply exists as raw facts, while information arises when data is given meaning, and wisdom represents a deeper connection where patterns and meanings create higher-order understanding and application (Ackoff, 1989). For example, Oliver described knowledge as evolving through multiple layers:

> It's coming from just data and numbers and then distinguished by patterns, which turns into information. Then it can turn into knowledge, which is when we've recognised the pattern and how we can use that in the world. It connects to the next level up, which is the wisdom, building that whole thing together.

At each level of this hierarchy, knowledge involves a process of making sense of information to guide action. This process is linked to neurological activity in the brain. Oliver stated, "knowledge is about bringing data into our brains, and knowledge is about that process of finding patterns and coordinating our sense of order that tells us how to act."

The term 'knowledge' was understood differently among participants, with some describing it as facts and information leading to understanding and action. Participants also acknowledged that knowledge is subjective, as it can be interpreted in various ways, "it can mean facts, information, or skills that you acquire through experience or education; education gives you the theoretical understanding, and practice gives you the practical understanding" (Ethan). While there was no shared definition of knowledge, participants generally agreed that it involves information that helps social workers make sense of the world within a cultural context, "Knowledge is the information that a person gathers to help them make sense of their world and the world around them" (Amber-Jane).

Knowledge was also described as essential for guiding social work practice, as it provides the information necessary to support effective decision-making. Nigel explained, "Knowledge is

any form of information to help us do our job. It could be internal, and it could be external. It's basically the body of information we have". These reflections highlight the key elements of knowledge as described by participants, emphasising its layered nature of interpretations and the importance of effectiveness in social work practice.

Rather than relying solely on the direct application of formal theories or technical knowledge, for the participants in this study, Interpreting Knowledge involves a reflective process grounded in personal insights and professional judgment. It requires social workers to evaluate the relevance and reliability of information, consider diverse perspectives, and adapt their understanding to fit the social and cultural contexts in which they work. In Aotearoa New Zealand, this process involves actively engaging with bicultural values, acknowledging Māori perspectives, and integrating culturally responsive practices alongside professional standards.

Participants commented that knowledge played an important role in both their daily lives and social work practice. Participants began the interpretive process with the understanding that knowledge was influenced by factors such as cultural background, childhood experiences, environment, and education.

> Knowledge is the information that a person gathers to help them make sense of their world and the world around them. It informs the way we exist in the world. It's how culture is, whether it could be Indigenous knowledge, or it might be things that you learn from others. (Amber-Jane)

The phrase Interpreting Knowledge captures a significant abstract understanding in describing how social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand conceptualise knowledge. Participants consistently sought to make sense of knowledge, emphasising that Interpreting Knowledge is integral to their decision-making processes. This overarching category emerged across all

interviews, reflecting its strong connection to the participants' desire to obtain social work knowledge through the process of interpreting knowledge.

Initially, participants interpreted knowledge within the context of their home environment, focusing on family and personal surroundings. For example, Pania explained, “It comes from within me, from having been raised and my whānau and my relationships with my family, my friends, my parents, uncles, and grandparents". This early process of interpreting knowledge within oneself appeared to be deeply felt. As Marama expressed, "I might need to position myself in my understanding." Some participants said this approach was influenced by their limited exposure to formal knowledge and lack of social work qualifications. However, as they began studying social work and engaging with external issues, their interpretation of knowledge evolved, leading them to critically reassess their previous understanding of their social work knowledge and reflect on the subjective nature of knowledge itself.

Participants emphasised that the interpretation of knowledge is inherently variable and contingent upon individual perspectives. As Ethan observed, “it’s quite a subjective word,” highlighting the non-uniformity of meaning attributed to knowledge. Similarly, Amber-Jane reflected that “it actually took me a while to come up with a bit more of an answer,” indicating the reflective and interpretive work required to articulate personal understandings. These accounts suggest that interpretations of knowledge are shaped by participants’ values and are deeply embedded within their social environments, including cultural contexts, upbringing, and personal histories.

In the process of interpreting knowledge, participants acknowledged the importance of preserving and honouring the knowledge inherited from their families and cultural heritage. Atarangi shared, "Mainly, it is from my family of origin," while Mahuika emphasised, "It was

passed down from our ancestors, our predecessors, and that builds onto knowledge." This foundation of familial and ancestral knowledge served as a cornerstone, enabling participants to develop a deeper understanding of their environment and responsibilities.

The understanding participants gained in interpreting knowledge within the domestic sphere equipped them to explore broader interpretations. Liam observed, "My understanding of knowledge is that some of the information helped me make sense of things," while Manaia reflected, "Everything that you've gone out to search for." These reflections illustrate the evolving and multi-layered nature of participants' interpretations of knowledge as they progressed in their social work studies and professional development.

While participants expressed differing views on how they interpreted knowledge, they generally agreed that interpreting knowledge was essential to both their daily lives and social work practice. They noted that their understanding of knowledge became more complex as they gained experience and developed their skills. This process encouraged critical thinking, which improved their understanding of knowledge. At times, participants redefined their perspectives on knowledge.

Furthermore, the process of Interpreting Knowledge is dynamic and non-linear, characterised by continuous movement back and forth rather than a fixed, unidirectional cycle. For example, data and numbers initially exist as raw information. When applied in real-world situations, they are transformed into knowledge by gaining meaning and relevance. When this knowledge is combined with practice experience, it evolves further into wisdom, representing a deeper understanding that guides effective decision-making and action. However, this process does not end with wisdom. Wisdom can influence how data and information are perceived and used, returning the process to its starting point. For example, insights gained through wisdom can

lead to a re-examination of data and numbers, generating new patterns and refining the interpretation process. This cyclical nature highlights how knowledge is continuously constructed, revisited, and reinterpreted based on new experiences and contexts, allowing social workers to adapt their understanding and improve their practice over time.

Interpreting knowledge was regarded by the participants as a core professional competency underpinning their professional identity and sense of responsibility. Competency was understood not merely as possession of knowledge, but as an active and reflexive disposition to engage with diverse forms of knowledge relevant to social work practice. Participants emphasised that professional competence involves an ongoing commitment to developing the skills required to articulate, integrate, and apply knowledge drawn from both internal and external sources. As Nigel explained, “It can come from within or from external sources. It’s essentially the body of information we hold, shaped by various factors, including practical knowledge from experience”. Complementing this view, Jessica noted that “knowledge involves both theoretical and practical understanding of a subject.” Collectively, these accounts underscore that professional competency in social work is constituted through the integration of multiple forms of knowledge, all of which are necessary for effective and responsible practice.

Participants also highlighted the role of intuition in shaping their understanding of knowledge. Intuition was seen as essential for autonomy and decision-making. Amber-Jane reflected, "For me, intuition is a key part of knowledge. It’s about what we pick up intuitively about people—those gut feelings when you know something isn’t right.” Through this process, participants became more skilled at understanding and using knowledge, which they saw as critical to their role as social workers. By articulating knowledge, they gained confidence and control in decision-making, enabling them to better understand situations and make informed choices.

The process of interpreting knowledge emphasised integrating diverse sources of knowledge to guide their practice and gain competency.

For many participants, interpreting knowledge was about engagement in the process of understanding and developing knowledge. Marama explained, "It's about experiencing things in different ways to form a knowledge base that allows you to grow and develop your philosophies", which was further emphasised by Ahika, "It's about bringing everything together without dismissing anything. You listen and reflect on what will guide your actions and decisions." By adopting this process, social workers aimed to become competent practitioners capable of using their knowledge to make informed decisions and take action.

Interpreting Knowledge consists of four subcategories: Interpreting Personal Knowledge, Interpreting Professional Knowledge, Interpreting Contextual Knowledge, and Weighing the Importance. The various types of knowledge, together with ongoing reflection on their importance, are essential to the process of interpreting knowledge and are interconnected. The interpretation of each type of knowledge may sometimes overlap. These aspects are discussed further below.

5.2.1. Interpreting Personal Knowledge

The participants' process of interpreting knowledge is closely linked to interpreting personal knowledge, as this knowledge shapes both their personal and professional identity, intertwining the two. To make informed decisions and take appropriate actions, it was essential for social workers to develop the ability to interpret personal knowledge effectively. Participants often conceptualised lived experience, values, beliefs, common sense, and emotional intelligence as types of knowledge when interpreting personal knowledge, with the meanings of these terms sometimes overlapping.

Initially, they focused on interpreting personal knowledge based on their immediate life experiences, including events, daily activities, and interactions with family and friends. This process was fluid and reflective, as Scarlett described, "it's a big basket where we place our lived experience. So, it’s a more fluid and organic thing." However, relying solely on these immediate surroundings was insufficient for fully interpreting personal knowledge. Social workers needed to continuously expand and refine their knowledge base. This ongoing development enabled them to become more aware of their own personal knowledge and to identify and apply other relevant knowledge to specific situations.

When many participants began interpreting personal knowledge, they did so through their internal thoughts and immediate surroundings, such as their personal values and common sense. As Jenny explained, "The knowledge I probably knew before I did my social work degree would be values and common sense." These values and personal beliefs shaped how participants approached life experiences, making their understanding of knowledge inherently value-driven. As a result, the process of interpreting personal knowledge was dynamic and interconnected. Over time, as participants' perspectives evolved, they came to recognise that knowledge in social work is subjective, what one person perceives as common sense may differ from another’s understanding, with interpretations often shaped by the values attached to them.

The process of interpreting personal knowledge was described by participants as iterative and non-linear, involving ongoing movement between reflection and re-interpretation. Participants drew upon personal knowledge grounded in immediate life experiences, including everyday activities, significant life events, and interactions with family and friends. At the same time, they engaged with knowledge shaped by broader social contexts, encompassing community engagement and societal influences. These layered reflections often prompted a reconsideration

or reconfiguration of previously held understandings, illustrating the dynamic, continuous, and evolving nature of knowledge interpretation.

This value-laden understanding also influenced how participants approached life experiences, both their own and those of others in their social work practice. For example, Scarlett noted, "Life experience tends to broaden your viewpoint and tends to expand your solution." When participants encountered situations similar to their own life experiences, this knowledge helped them understand their clients' circumstances and develop empathy.

At the stage when participants had developed their perspectives, some interpreted knowledge using common sense. Participants described common sense as a set of guidelines for socially acceptable order and reasoning, as well as the ability to apply practical judgment in everyday situations, although it was not always supported by evidence. As Oaklee noted, "When you're going on by common sense, you're going on by what you think is right, but not necessarily right," and Mahuika added, "If you don't have good resources to back up your evidence, then you're only using your common sense." Generally, amongst the participants, there seemed to be a consensus that when social workers discussed common sense, they were referring to how human beings make sense of the world consisting of values that are widely acceptable with some participants added that it should be refined by evidence and practice experience, “I think people use ‘common sense’ as a casual term, and there are some things that are common sense for a good reason because they have got a base of evidence” (Emery).

The participants' process of interpreting personal knowledge involved recognising both their own and their clients’ emotions. This was seen as a more advanced stage of interpretation, as many participants noted that it required a certain level of emotional intelligence to acknowledge, manage, and use emotions effectively. As Morela explained:

> Emotional intelligence is the ability to grasp your own emotions and other people's emotions and shape them in a way they become productive for your practice. Emotional intelligence and social work are the ability to pinpoint emotions and work alongside those emotions.

By using emotional intelligence, participants were better equipped to empathise with clients, developed positive interactions, and drove positive change. Emotional intelligence also helped them adopt a non-judgmental attitude. Jenny highlighted this connection: "It [emotional intelligence] helps them to be non-judgemental, [also] being open comes from your family background, your experience, personal experiences and who you are."

Participants emphasised that emotional intelligence, as personal knowledge, is just as important as professional knowledge, as both are essential for effectively interpreting knowledge in social work. Morela emphasised this relationship: "Emotional intelligence sits at the same level as academic intelligence, and at the same time, the academic level of knowledge is very important to frame emotional intelligence." Participants viewed emotional intelligence as an advanced form of personal knowledge. However, the process of interpreting personal knowledge could return to earlier stage of reflecting on life experiences, where new emotional experiences might emerge. These evolving emotional experiences could lead to different responses when facing similar situations, highlighting the fluid and adaptable nature of how knowledge is understood and applied.

The interpretation of personal knowledge is a key component and often a starting point, as it encompasses all available resources within personal and familial contexts. However, participants revealed that relying solely on personal knowledge was insufficient for fully interpreting knowledge. They emphasised the importance of engaging with more structured and

planned forms of knowledge, such as professional knowledge. As Jenny described, this involved "a more structured academic kind of learning." To broaden their understanding, participants pursued activities that helped them interpret professional knowledge in social work. This shift to interpreting professional knowledge is explored further in the next section.

5.2.2. Interpreting Professional Knowledge

The process of Interpreting Knowledg*e* involves the continuous interaction between interpreting personal knowledge and professional knowledge. When participants achieved a balance between these forms of knowledge, they aimed to deepen their understanding and improve their ability to interpret knowledge effectively in social work practice.

In interpreting professional knowledge, participants actively engaged in activities that strengthened their understanding, such as pursuing social work qualifications, further studies, and ongoing learning activities. Professional knowledge was described as more structured, and including research, theory, policy, and practice wisdom. Engaging with these formal sources helped participants articulate more clearly defined concepts of knowledge in social work, ultimately enhancing their ability to interpret and apply knowledge in practice.

The priority given to different forms of professional knowledge varied among participants. For some, interpreting research-based knowledge took precedence over other types of professional knowledge. As Amber-Jane explained, "Research comes before theories and policies unless you’re using research to test a policy." Interpreting research-based knowledge was especially valuable for helping participants understand the experiences of their service users, providing evidence-informed insights to inform their practice. Additionally, interpreting research played a key role in validating and synthesising theories and policies, turning them into evidence-

informed knowledge. Participants then applied these evidence-informed theories and policies to guide their practice and inform their decision-making. As Jenny stated:

> Knowledge of policies informs part of what social workers do . . . . very much informing organisational knowledge and is tied to organisational culture, policy, and type of work that needs to be done.

Once participants became proficient in interpreting professional knowledge in research, theory and policy, they were able to apply this knowledge in practice with clients.

Participants viewed theories as a set of ideas or assumptions designed to explain various situations. For instance, Samuel noted, "theory helped recognise some of the methods and ways . . . . to deal with the different clients." For these participants, interpreting knowledge within theories is a process of understanding human behaviour and social systems. It provides frameworks that guide effective practice by assisting in the analysis of client needs, the development of interventions, and the resolution of social issues. As Samuel further explained, "without theory, you kind of have a little bit of knowledge but not much." Therefore, interpreting professional knowledge in social work must inherently involve theories.

They began interpreting knowledge based on their service users' experiences and points of view, which was considered a crucial aspect of their practice. As Emery explained:

> The service users, the people I'm working with - their world views, their understandings, their voices - have to become part of the knowledge that I use to inform my practice, it's an integration of all of those things.

As participants became more skilled at interpreting various types of knowledge, they began engaging in the process of practice wisdom. A consistent pattern emerged among participants

regarding the components of practice wisdom, which involved the integration of both personal and professional knowledge, as well as connecting these forms of knowledge to prior practice experiences. This integration was crucial for developing practice wisdom, which involves critically analysing practice scenarios using both types of knowledge, "When you get integrated on a lot of different knowledge or ways of understanding . . . . it's practice wisdom as long as it's critiqued" (Emery). This integration also took place within the process of interpreting knowledge, highlighting that the processes of interpreting both personal knowledge and professional knowledge are interconnected. These processes involve a dynamic, back-and-forth relationship, where each form of knowledge informs and influences the other.

Another important step in the process was the sharing of knowledge with others. As Emery explained, "It [practice wisdom] is about passing on information, knowledge, and sometimes learning experiences to other people". This sharing of knowledge further enhanced participants' abilities to interpret knowledge in social work. Through this exchange, participants not only passed on their understanding but also had the opportunity to gain new insights. This sharing could lead to new interpretations of knowledge, prompting a re-evaluation of professional knowledge and potentially fostering fresh perspectives. Additionally, this process could contribute to the development of new research or inform policy changes.

Sharing professional knowledge enabled participants to deepen their understanding of the knowledge they shared. This process not only provided them with a sense of fulfilment but also helped enhance other practitioners' understanding, as well as their own. At this stage, participants were able to interpret knowledge in relation to their own and their clients' specific identities, ways of working, situations, and environments. They referred to this as contextual knowledge, which is discussed further below.

5.2.3. Interpreting Contextual Knowledge

The process of interpreting contextual knowledge can be understood as relating to interpreting personal knowledge, professional knowledge, or both. Participants in the study began by conceptualising contextual knowledge, which is the knowledge that emphasises the specific contexts in which their practice occurred. This includes awareness of their own identity and the experiences of individuals, groups, families, and communities with whom they worked.

In interpreting contextual knowledge, participants foregrounded the cultural dimensions of social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, explicitly recognising Māori as the Indigenous population. They also emphasised the importance of understanding knowledge in relation to Pākehā, the diversity of Pacific cultural groups, and practice contexts involving migrants and former refugees. Developing such understandings was seen as central to achieving cultural competence in practice. As Amber-Jane explained, "it's how culture is… it could be Indigenous knowledge, or… the things that you learn from others," highlighting the relational and situated nature of cultural knowledge. These perspectives situate social work practice firmly within the Aotearoa New Zealand context, which operates through a bicultural context that acknowledges Māori as tangata whenua alongside tauiwi. From this standpoint, interpreting contextual knowledge was viewed as an ongoing, reflexive process. For example, Marama, a Māori practitioner, described this process as one that is both shaped by and continually contributes to te ao Māori. Te ao Māori refers to the Māori worldview, a holistic way of understanding life grounded in tikanga and mātauranga, and emphasising the interconnectedness of people, relationships, and the environment (Pihama et al., 2004). Rather than representing a discrete cultural framework, te ao Māori constitutes a way of life that informs identity, relationality, and responsibility. This process, she explained, begins with interpreting oneself:

> I might need to position myself in my understanding of myself. So, I'm marking it to the idea that I'm a bicultural practitioner in my social work, wāhine Māori, and that I value those ideas of things Māori, so they all contribute to what determines how I look at what knowledge is.

The process of interpreting contextual knowledge for Māori participants also involved interpreting the spiritual realm, particularly in relation to the land and the knowledge passed down from ancestors. As Atarangi explained:

> It comes through the connection to the land, so there's a spiritual realm; there are many pieces that come to my values and beliefs. But mainly, it is from my family of origin, is the passing of where my values and beliefs have come from.

For Māori social workers, participants emphasised that a deep understanding of their own identity, ancestral roots, and commitment to Māori self-determination was fundamental to the promotion of Māori wellbeing. Within the context of social work knowledge in Aotearoa New Zealand, professional competence in working with Māori was understood to require an awareness of whakapapa (genealogy) for both Māori and non-Māori practitioners. This involved critical reflection on one's own whakapapa, as well as that of the individuals and communities being served—an approach that is distinctive to social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. In this way, contextual knowledge was described as inseparable from personal knowledge, as understanding the practitioner's self was integral to interpreting and enacting culturally grounded practice. As Arihi described, "I try and connect to them with all of the whakapapa . . . . I connect to them with the understanding of myself. I have an obligation to connect them back to who they are, and where they come from." While this may appear to be an interpretation of personal knowledge, it also exemplifies the contextual nature of knowledge.

Personal knowledge becomes contextual when it is situated within specific conditions or contexts, such as the cultural and social contexts of Māori identity and wellbeing. In this sense, the contextualisation of personal knowledge involves social workers engaging in critical thinking, reflecting on the social, cultural, and professional contexts in which knowledge is created and applied.

Social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand requires critical analysis and a thorough understanding of global, local, and contextual factors to effectively support both participants and their clients. Many migrant participants faced challenges related to their migration experiences, making it essential to interpret their personal histories and societal contexts within the Aotearoa New Zealand social work environment, which is marked by cultural diversity among social workers, clients, and the wider population. In addition to interpreting knowledge relevant to the needs of Pacific participants and their communities, critical analysis of cultural diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand was important. As Oaklee observed, "there's a whole lot of ethnicities. That really helped me support them to work with Pacific peoples and other ethnic groups as well." This approach required understanding both the cultural and religious backgrounds of social workers and clients, as well as language and community support networks. Reflecting on this, Oaklee added, "It has been a big part of who I am."

For participants, interpreting contextual knowledge involved understanding their own identity, the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, the impact of migration on families, and the cultural adaptations from individualistic nuclear family structures to more traditional, communitarian extended family and societal approaches. This contextual knowledge was essential for all social workers practicing in Aotearoa New Zealand. Once participants clarified their own identity and position, they were able to deepen their understanding of contextual knowledge. This process required both theoretical learning, which involves interpreting

professional knowledge, and experiential learning gained through practice, incorporating both general and specific knowledge. This highlights that the process of interpreting knowledge is dynamic and iterative, moving back and forth between different forms of interpreting knowledge. It also suggests that these processes can overlap or occur simultaneously, reflecting the complexity of knowledge interpretation in social work practice.

To develop contextual understanding, participants integrated their professional expertise, personal insights, and reflections on practical experiences to interpret situation-specific knowledge and identify strategies that supported this growth. This process deepened their appreciation of knowledge and strengthened their critical thinking regarding its significance, as elaborated further below.

5.2.4. Weighing the Importance of Knowledge

The concept of Weighing the Importance was understood by participants as an ongoing process of critically reflecting on the significance of knowledge interpretation, which in turn reinforced its value. This continuous reflection encouraged participants to reassess and refine their interpretations, deepening their understanding. While this evaluation process often brought satisfaction, it also presented both challenges and successes. Through this engagement, participants developed a greater appreciation for the interpretation process, though some noted the difficulty of prioritising one form of knowledge over another. Nonetheless, they agreed that recognising the importance of interpreting knowledge was essential for achieving positive client outcomes. As Amber-Jane stated, "I think it’s like one hundred percent important because we’re invested in other people’s lives." Key themes that emerged from these reflections included clarifying roles and responsibilities, enhancing professional competency as social workers, prioritising safety, and fostering cultural humility.

When participants emphasised the importance of interpreting knowledge to better understand their roles and responsibilities, "[social workers] need to learn responsibilities, roles, and boundaries" (Mia), there were some participants who faced challenges when their roles were unclear or misinterpreted, such as being mistaken for support workers. It also enabled participants to critically assess their professional roles, which in turn contributed to their confidence and professional identity. As Nigel explained, "We do need to be looking quite closely at some of the social workers . . . . and ask what is our role? What can we say to a client? What we will and what we won't do?" For participants, interpreting all types of knowledge was crucial to meeting professional practice standards, reinforcing their sense of competence. Emery emphasised this by stating, "It's really important because it's [SWRB competence standards] the keystone and it marks a professional discipline." By prioritising the understanding of their knowledge, participants not only strengthened their professional identity but also developed greater confidence and competence in their practice.

Weighing the relative importance of different forms of knowledge is central to ethical decision-making in social work. The profession is guided by core values, including respect for the dignity and worth of the person, a commitment to social justice, and cultural responsiveness. Upholding these values requires social workers to engage in ongoing critical reflection on what they know, what they need to know, and how their knowledge informs professional judgement and action. In practice, this is particularly evident when working with Māori or Pasifika communities in Aotearoa New Zealand, where cultural knowledge is not an optional addition but a fundamental requirement for ethical and respectful practice. As Manaia reflected:

> I've been on one particular case, she didn't want to get some help, but she actually came to me. She wants only me to help, the family went through this just from a cultural thing, helping her using a cultural perspective and a cultural lens.

Engaging with cultural knowledge specific to Aotearoa New Zealand practice broadened their perspectives and encouraged critical thinking about different ways of interpreting knowledge. They recognised that understanding knowledge is an ongoing process that must evolve to stay relevant. This continuous cycle of learning and reflexivity was described by Samuel: "When you're working with clients, you gain new experiences, and it becomes new knowledge. The most important point is to continue building our knowledge." When engaging with clients, participants considered the importance of the clients' interpretation of their situation. This led them to begin another process of interpreting knowledge from the clients' perspective to better understand their viewpoint and develop new interpretations. Participants recognised that outdated knowledge was no longer useful, as Jenny explained, "Approaches change, or what may have been something in use ten years ago is now considered an outdated approach."

Some participants compared the need to stay updated in social work to other professions. For example, Emery explained:

> You wouldn't go to your doctor and expect your doctor not to have kept up to date with the latest developments. In the same way, social work is meant to be really challenged to keep up with the latest knowledge acquisition and the latest empirical studies—the latest 'what works' stuff.

This focus on remaining current reflected participants' commitment to maintaining professional competence and relevance in their practice.

Reflecting on the significance of interpreting knowledge enabled participants to identify practice-oriented recommendations. This reflective process supported consideration of improvements aimed at enhancing the safety of agencies, clients, and practitioners themselves. For example, Mia highlighted how the absence of clear organisational protocols or guidelines

could create unsafe conditions for both social workers and clients, particularly in contexts involving violence: “When there are complex issues like violence, it’s not only a person who has problems with it. And if there was a perpetrator, I feel we are not safe and not protected.” For participants, interpreting knowledge extended beyond meaning-making to the identification of systemic gaps and areas for service improvement, as well as opportunities for professional development to better navigate complex and challenging practice situations. Collectively, this process contributed to participants’ professional growth and supported their ongoing commitment to delivering high-quality social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

5.3. Conclusion

This chapter captured participants' perspectives on interpreting knowledge in practice within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. It began with an overview of the participants' backgrounds, followed by an exploration of the concept of knowledge, which formed the core of the category Interpreting Knowledge. This concept was further divided into four subcategories that emerged from the participants' insights: Interpreting Personal Knowledge, Interpreting Professional Knowledge, Interpreting Contextual Knowledge, and Weighing the Importance. These subcategories illustrated how participants interpreted and contextualised knowledge within Aotearoa New Zealand's distinct social work practice.

The participants’ interpretation of knowledge served as a foundational understanding of how different types of knowledge were approached. Emphasis was placed on how participants continuously refined their interpretation of personal, professional, and contextual knowledge. Together, these insights contributed to the theory of Navigating Knowledge, with particular attention to Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural context, involving both tangata whenua and tauiwi. Knowledge interpretation was seen as a critical process that shaped participants' decisions and actions. Participants regarded this interpretation as a dynamic, adaptable resource

essential to ongoing professional development. They highlighted that knowledge was not static but could be learned, re-learned, and further developed, playing a key role in their evolving practice, competence, and behaviour.

The next chapter will explore the subsequent category of Constructing Knowledge as part of the theory of Navigating Knowledge.

Chapter 6. Constructing Knowledge

The aim of this chapter is to examine social workers' perspectives on the construction of social work knowledge. The chapter begins with presenting an abstract understanding of the concept of Constructing Knowledge, followed by an analysis of the processes involved in its creation. Finally, the relationships between these processes are explored. In doing so, the subjectivity inherent in theorising and the provisional nature of truth, recognising the influence of experience, standpoints, and interactions, including my own is examined (Charmaz, 2014).

Constructing Knowledge represents a category that encapsulates how knowledge in social work can be accumulated. It is conceptualised as a non-linear, dynamic, and iterative cycle. These interconnected processes contribute to the personal growth and professional competence of social workers. I begin my analysis by examining the process through which participants reflect on their existing knowledge.

6.1. Reflecting on Existing Knowledge

An integral component of participants' processes of constructing knowledge entails sustained reflection on their existing knowledge, encompassing a critical evaluation of their current understanding. It underscored the importance of self-awareness and critical self-assessment, including rigorous reflection on their interpretations of knowledge, as outlined in Chapter Five. Reflecting on knowledge possession required participants to critically examine their worldviews, lived experiences, cultural contexts, and formally acquired knowledge through education and professional training.

For Māori participants, knowledge construction was deeply grounded in their cultural worldview, te ao Māori, which shaped their understanding of the world, their sense of identity,

and their professional and personal practices. This worldview emphasises interconnectedness and highlights the relational ties between people, the natural environment, and the spiritual realm. As Pania explained, "…my knowledge is from my worldviews and then my personal journey and identity…it comes from a lot of different relationships and connections with nature and people and your wider funnel". Her account illustrates how knowledge emerges through lived experience and relational connections. Similarly, Marama described the integration of her multiple identities as "being a feminist, Indigenous, and being Māori." Together, these perspectives reflect the dynamic and multifaceted nature of te ao Māori, which accommodates diverse experiences and identities while remaining firmly grounded in collective values.

Central to te ao Māori is the primacy of relationships, grounded in tikanga (customary values) and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge). These relational practices are often centred on the marae as a site of community, ancestry, and collective identity, symbolising enduring connections to the whenua (land) and taiao (environment). Atarangi's reflection foregrounded the cultural and spiritual dimensions of this knowledge system, emphasising the integral role of land and whānau in shaping values and beliefs: "That's all intertwined, with knowledge—holistically, spiritually, and so forth—my values and beliefs have come from my connection to the land…and whānau." This account illustrates that knowledge is not discrete or static but is continually reflected through, and reaffirmed by, practitioners' values and beliefs, which remain inseparable from their relationships with the land.

Knowledge within te ao Māori was viewed by participants as a treasure passed down through generations (taonga tuku iho). This intergenerational transmission ensured the preservation of traditional knowledge while adapting to contemporary contexts. This dynamic cycle sustained Māori cultural protocols, guiding participants' personal development, community cohesion, and decision-making across social, economic, political, and environmental domains. By

adhering to these protocols, decisions were grounded in fairness and justice, ensuring well-being for both their people and the environment. For Māori participants, te ao Māori served as a framework for knowledge construction that integrated ancestral wisdom, cultural values, and contemporary experiences. It created a sense of belonging and continuity, empowering them as individuals and communities to navigate challenges while maintaining a deep connection to their cultural roots and the natural world.

Participants' reflections on their upbringing and cultural experiences significantly shaped their worldview. This awareness provided a basis for knowledge construction, as they engaged in identifying deeply held beliefs and values that informed their perceptions of significance and notions of right and wrong. Through such reflection, participants developed an understanding of how their subjective interpretations of social issues influenced their professional practice.

In the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, where Māori as tangata whenua and non-Māori as tauiwi coexist, participants' reflections on the knowledge they possessed reveal the profound influence of personal, cultural, and lived experiences. These insights offer a comparative understanding of how knowledge construction is shaped by diverse worldviews.

The participants' responses indicated that social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand, regardless of cultural background, often drew upon their worldview as a key foundation for constructing knowledge. Many Pākehā participants, as well as others, described this process as beginning with their cultural upbringing and familial influences. For instance, Jasmine stated, "my upbringing and my worldview influence me, from what I've picked up through my culture and my family," highlighting the importance of personal and cultural experiences in shaping understanding. These worldviews served as the basis for interpreting various aspects of life, including concepts of morality and spirituality. Allana reflected on the role of religion in her

development, noting, “I was born into the culture, the Christian Presbyterian faith; their teachings and by the surroundings.”

Pākehā participants expressed views that were broadly consistent with those of other groups, describing knowledge construction as a dynamic and evolving process that begins in childhood and is shaped through family experiences and wider cultural contexts. As Jenny noted, “it really starts in the family unit and builds on that as you go through life.” Similarly, Scarlett emphasised the significance of ongoing familial dialogue, stating, “I found it very useful meeting with my brothers, which I do once a week; I discovered knowledge when we’re meeting.” Collectively, participants identified the family as a foundational site for knowledge construction, with understanding continuing to develop and transform across the life course.

Similarly, Pacific participants emphasised the centrality of cultural worldviews and familial knowledge transmission in their knowledge construction. Arihi explained, “my knowledge system comes from that [Samoan] cultural worldview,” reflecting the collective nature of their knowledge. Knowledge was passed down intergenerationally, from years and years and thousands and millions of years of experiences and knowledge”. Talia shared, “I gained most of my knowledge from my parents”. This collective reflection extended beyond individual experiences, emphasising family and community as integral to knowledge possession.

Participants from immigrant and refugee backgrounds added a further layer to the analysis. Having not been born or raised in Aotearoa New Zealand, their reflections following resettlement highlighted how their worldviews and knowledge systems evolved over time, with some elements aligning with, and others conflicting with, those encountered in the new context. This evolution occurred through processes of critical reflection and adaptation to unfamiliar cultural environments. Participants’ knowledge was initially constructed within their immediate cultural settings, particularly through family upbringing, and was subsequently reshaped

through engagement with a new country and its social and cultural norms, together contributing to their developing worldviews. For example, Liam described his experience of navigating competing perspectives, stating that he was "being in between conflicting worldviews and values, because they were fairly new knowledge—about Aotearoa New Zealand culture and the values…sometimes put me in challenging situations." Despite this initial cultural dissonance, participants demonstrated resilience in negotiating and reconciling differences by actively engaging with new forms of knowledge. This ongoing process shaped their approaches to knowledge construction, requiring deliberate reflection and negotiation over whether, and how, new knowledge would be accepted or integrated.

Some participants who were not perceived as having been born in Aotearoa New Zealand, and who did not present as Pākehā or Māori—such as those perceived as Middle Eastern or Asian—reported experiencing stereotypes grounded in superficial and racialised assumptions about identity. Samuel described being judged based on his appearance, stating: "I don't look like a Pākehā or Māori, so when they speak to me, they speak slowly assuming that I just arrived in New Zealand yesterday just because I look different." This account highlights the additional challenges faced by immigrant participants, whereby implicit biases shape everyday interactions and influence how knowledge, competence, and belonging are attributed to practitioners.

Such experiences are significant for knowledge construction in social work, as they expose how dominant assumptions can marginalise alternative knowledges and lived experiences. Liam reported a similar awareness during his frontline practice as a supervisor, emphasising the importance of creating inclusive processes for knowledge development. He described knowledge construction as "giving the workers and community the opportunity to speak and encourage and also as an organisation learning how we can improve our ways listening and

through parallel processes of knowledge at the same time." This perspective illustrates how social work knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue, reflexivity, and organisational learning, rather than being imposed through hierarchical or deficit-based assumptions. Collectively, these accounts demonstrate that recognising and challenging stereotypical perceptions is central to equitable knowledge construction and culturally responsive social work practice.

The knowledge held by participants from diverse backgrounds in Aotearoa New Zealand reflects a complex interplay of cultural, familial, and lived experiences. For Māori participants, knowledge construction was grounded in te ao Māori, which shaped their ways of understanding, relating, and practicing within social and professional contexts. Among Pākehā and Pacific participants, cultural worldviews and familial influences provided foundational frameworks through which knowledge was developed and applied. Immigrants and former refugees emphasised the transformative process of adapting to new cultural contexts, illustrating the dynamic, iterative, and evolving nature of knowledge construction. Across all participant groups, ongoing reflection on lived experiences and culturally embedded worldviews played a pivotal role in shaping understanding and supporting navigation of diverse sociocultural environments.

For all groups, the process of reflecting on existing knowledge was frequently described as intuitive and embedded within everyday experiences, "Much of the time, we learn through people passing that knowledge on to us without even being aware" (Riley). This process often unfolded without conscious awareness, as informal knowledge transmission played a significant role. Arihi captured this sentiment, stating, "No one taught me; my parents didn't go through step by step like you would in a classroom. You just sort of see it, and then you do it." This highlights how cultural knowledge, values, and beliefs are often absorbed through

participation in familial and community activities rather than through explicit instruction. Ceremonies and communal practices became key avenues for transmitting cultural knowledge, emphasising the importance of experiential learning.

In addition to informal learning, participants reflected on the role of formally acquired knowledge, such as education or training, in shaping their understanding and serving as a foundation for constructing new knowledge. Jenny acknowledged the importance of "using the foundation of the academic knowledge," while Mahuika emphasised that "education definitely has a huge play in it." These reflections underscored the dual role of formal knowledge: it not only provided a basis for further exploration but also equipped participants to identify knowledge gaps.

The dynamic reflection between formal and informal knowledge created opportunities for continuous learning and adaptation. Jessica encapsulated this process, stating, "training or qualification is like a foundation and then all the other lot of areas that can be built on from that." This perspective highlights how formal education serves as a stepping stone for engaging with new ideas and knowledge systems.

Reflecting on the knowledge they possessed also enabled participants to align their understanding with the demands of professional practice. This self-awareness facilitated by reflective practices helped participants identify strengths and address areas for growth. As they navigated the complexities of social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, they emphasised the importance of maintaining a responsive approach to knowledge construction. This process of ongoing reflection not only supported their personal and professional development but also enhanced their ability to effectively support clients.

The process of reflecting on the knowledge they held revealed the complementary roles of informal learning and formal education. While informal transmission provided cultural

grounding, formal education offered a structured foundation for growth and adaptation. Engaging in reflective practices enabled participants to identify gaps in their knowledge, encouraging a dynamic approach to knowledge construction that was responsive to both cultural and professional contexts. This iterative process was central to maintaining alignment with the evolving demands of their social work practice.

6.2. Identifying Knowledge Gaps

Identifying knowledge gaps is central to participants' knowledge construction, particularly within dynamic and evolving field of social work. The participants highlight self-assessment as the foundational step, encompassing inward-focused and critical evaluation of their existing knowledge. Jenny emphasised the value of humility, asserting, "if you think that you know everything, that's a foolish place to be." This self-reflective stance encouraged participants' openness to continuous learning and growth.

Several participants also highlighted the role of personal assessment in identifying knowledge gaps within their cultural and professional knowledge. Liam explained, "my assessment [is] based on my own personal self, let's say, the knowledge about my own cultural value." This type of introspection enabled participants to pinpoint strengths, weaknesses, and biases, providing a clearer understanding of areas requiring development. Recognising these gaps positioned social workers to actively address them, thereby enhancing both personal and professional capabilities.

Emery illustrated how the process of identifying knowledge gaps could be informal, noting, "I guess I just jot down a few things." Conversely, Samuel described a more structured approach: "I have a plan to attend two workshops this year; I need to decide what areas that I need to learn or develop." These varied methods demonstrate the flexibility of the process of constructing knowledge, accommodating both casual reflection and strategic planning.

Even after completing formal qualifications, participants recognised that their foundational education represented only the beginning of an ongoing learning trajectory. Jessica reflected, "when we completed our foundational qualification as a social worker, we actually just [started] to learn to become a social worker." This acknowledgment underscores the continual nature of knowledge construction, where formal education serves as a starting point for ongoing professional development.

The identification of knowledge gaps remains a critical process even for experienced social workers in senior positions, including team managers and supervisors. Participants acknowledged that substantial gaps in knowledge may persist regardless of years of professional experience, underscoring the non-static nature of social work expertise. Oaklee emphasised the importance of ongoing self-awareness in professional learning, stating, "you need to be aware of what you need to learn more… so do you work on it. It [social work knowledge] is fluid, it's not mechanical or anything like that." This perspective highlights that identifying knowledge gaps is an ongoing, reflective practice that enables social workers to critically assess their competencies, respond to changing practice contexts, and remain responsive to the evolving demands of clients and the profession.

Identifying knowledge gaps is a dynamic and iterative process that begins with self-assessment and extends throughout a professional's career. By encouraging self-awareness and prioritising continuous learning, social workers can adapt to the demands of the field. Whether through informal reflection, structured planning, or professional development activities, this process ensures that knowledge construction is aligned with both current challenges and future needs, reinforcing the importance of lifelong knowledge construction.

6.3. Exploring Pathways for Knowledge Development

The process of exploring pathways for developing knowledge among the participants involves both informal and formal methods, reflecting the dynamic and ongoing nature of constructing knowledge. Through engaging in diverse pathways, participants adapt to professional demands while addressing identified knowledge gaps.

When participants described informal methods, they were referring to searching for knowledge through social media platforms, engaging in discussions, and gathering information from varied sources. These methods allowed them to connect with a global network of professionals, developing collaboration and shared understanding. Emery, for example, shared: "I get my knowledge from online sources and forums, and through social media. I use a Twitter account, and I follow a lot of social workers from all over the globe." This highlights the pathway for knowledge development by utilising technology to share ideas and access diverse insights.

Another informal pathway involved participating in online groups and discussions, where social workers found spaces to reflect and engage. Allana expressed: "I do notice things on Facebook… some of the conversations, and stuff that they have hits home for me, and it makes me think about things a lot." These dialogues fostered reflective thinking, allowing practitioners to examine their practices and consider new perspectives. While accessing information through informal platforms was valuable, participants emphasised the importance of verifying its credibility. Allana admitted to checking the validity of information by stating, "I then jump on Google to see if it's real." This highlights the dual role of informal pathways as tools for quick learning and as sources requiring critical evaluation. While participants valued diverse pathways to knowledge, they recognised certain limitations, particularly regarding the credibility of informal sources. Verifying information and ensuring its relevance were key aspects of their learning process. Jenny explained her approach: "I pick and choose the ones

that are relevant to my current role." Many participants, though working as social workers, transitioned across different practice over time. As a result, the knowledge they required changed depending on their current role, and their knowledge construction process was guided by the relevance to their present responsibilities.

The formal pathways for constructing knowledge were described as attending structured training programmes and pursuing qualifications. These pathways provided participants with foundational knowledge in theory, research, and policy. Nigel described this process as "attending training courses for your degree, those kinds of things. Where you are deliberately trying to learn and someone is deliberately trying to teach you." These structured approaches ensured that participants gained the theoretical grounding necessary for complex social work practices. However, participants acknowledged that foundational formal education alone was insufficient for comprehensive professional growth. Nigel reflected: "…by doing my social work training and doing post-grad papers since that, but there's more needed than that." This sentiment highlighted the complementary relationship between unstructured and structured pathways, where one builds on the other.

In exploring other pathways, participants explored the importance of engaging in continuing professional development opportunities such as seminars, workshops, and webinars. Samuel explained: "through workshops, especially when the organisation is supporting you to attend PD opportunities," emphasising how organisational support played a significant role in facilitating formal learning. Furthermore, webinars offered flexible access to expert-led discussions, enabling participants to stay current with trends and practices.

The process of constructing knowledge collaboratively was a recurring aspect in exploring pathways to developing knowledge, particularly in online communities and professional networks. Jessica likened this process to scaffolding, explaining:

> Once we have the foundations to start with and the skills to work with, it's like a builder using scaffolding… to think about how strong or what type of scaffolding do you need for a particular building?

This metaphor illustrates how practitioners relied on initial education as a base, continually reinforcing it with ongoing professional development. The combination of different pathways facilitated the process of engaging in knowledge co-construction, where practitioners collaboratively explored ideas and shared experiences. Mia stressed the significance of revisiting and confronting existing knowledge, stating, "We have to take responsibility, and the old knowledge or evidence have to be confronted." This reflects the iterative nature of learning, where practitioners dynamically revisit and refine their understanding.

Participants also identified value in exploring professional development pathways through resources offered by ANZASW and SWRB. ANZASW was highlighted as a key source of professional support, providing access to research publications, peer-reviewed journal articles, practice tools, and other sector-relevant resources. In addition, both ANZASW and the SWRB offer practice standards, competency frameworks, ethical guidelines, and continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities that support ongoing learning and professional accountability. Jessica noted, "I always look at ANZASW and what they have on their website's upcoming events," underscoring the importance of institutional resources in remaining informed about professional developments. Participants also described benefiting from workplace-based learning opportunities, such as free lectures offered by organisations including Oranga Tamariki. Collectively, these experiences demonstrate how professional bodies and employing organisations contribute to knowledge development, reinforcing the interconnected roles of individual initiative, institutional support, and sector-wide resources in strengthening social work practice.

Exploring pathways for knowledge construction is an ongoing and adaptive process for social workers. As practice environments evolve, social workers must continually update their understanding by drawing on both formal education and informal learning. This balance enables them to respond effectively to new challenges and maintain relevance in their practice.

Reflection, collaboration, and critical evaluation play a central role in this process. Through engaging with colleagues, participating in professional conversations, and examining their own experiences, practitioners learn to integrate new insights into their work. Informal pathways—such as peer networks and social media—offer accessible spaces for shared learning and practical discussion. These forms of learning provide immediacy and connection, helping social workers stay informed about emerging issues in the field.

Formal learning, meanwhile, provides the theoretical grounding, research evidence, and ethical guidance that underpin professional practice. Together, formal and informal approaches create a comprehensive learning environment that supports continuous skill development and helps practitioners identify and address gaps in their knowledge. Ultimately, knowledge construction for social workers involves continually gathering, assessing, and applying information from diverse sources.

6.4. Engaging in Collaborative Support Networks

Networking, in the context of this study, involves interactions and exchanges of ideas among professionals who share common interests or specialties. Participants in this study highlighted that networking could take various forms, from formal activities like attending social work events, joining professional organisations such as ANZASW, and participating in online communities, to more informal practices like chatting with colleagues during breaks, catching up over coffee, or engaging in casual conversations with community members. As Emery noted,

networking can be as simple as "discussing, having conversations with people, [and] using the professional associations."

The process of initiating networking can begin from diverse starting points, whether aim-oriented, such as identifying and addressing knowledge gaps, sharing client cases, or joining a professional network, or more informal, such as socialising or staying connected with other agencies. Participants emphasised the flexibility of these processes, as they can arise from personal curiosity or professional necessity. Scarlett articulated the importance of these connections, stating, "networking with other social workers is particularly important to me."

The rationale behind networking lies in its capacity to develop professional growth and innovation. Participants noted that engaging in dialogue and learning about the work of others can lead to inspiration and the adoption of new practices. As Nigel explained, "for us to develop knowledge, we really do need to have a good dialogue, a good understanding of the clients and the communities that we work with." This process is not unidirectional; networking involves both sharing and receiving knowledge, which helps build trust and relationships. Riley described a specific instance of offering expertise through networking: "I do a lot of training for staff informally and formally around neurodevelopmental disorders." In this case, Riley shared her knowledge with colleagues, who then gained new insights that supported their own knowledge construction and strengthened their networking relationships.

The process of engaging in collaborative support networks is ongoing and multifaceted rather than linear. It might begin with identifying a topic of interest or purpose for networking, followed by finding appropriate networks, using critical thinking to explore the topic, and gradually building trust and connections within the network. Nigel highlighted the importance of understanding broader systemic contexts within these networks, stating, "to have an understanding of the political context that we work in as well, it's that macro-political context."

Supervision emerged as a vital and collaborative mechanism for constructing knowledge. Defined as a reflective and interactive relationship by participants, supervision enables social workers to examine their practice critically, explore new perspectives, and receive guidance. Ruby stressed its significance: "supervision definitely helps! She gives me pointers on where to go, what to do, what to look for. It's definitely essential in the line of work that we do." The reflective nature of supervision helps deepen understanding of complex issues and refine approaches to practice. Riley shared the impact of supervision on her professional development: "definitely, my supervision plays a big part in my reflection, and my supervisor encourages me to keep a journal of certain things."

Effective supervision often incorporates a strengths-based approach, as described by Jenny:

> It’s bringing that strengths-based sort of kind of aspect to the supervision to unpack what might be happening and see what the worker would be, how they would find solutions; encouraging them to use their own strengths and skills to work through something to open up discussion and then to figure out solutions that they themselves come to.

Discussions within supervision not only facilitate critical thinking and problem-solving but also reinforce a social worker's connection to their professional values and responsibilities. Oaklee reflected on the benefits of this collaborative process, stating, "I'd like to have discussion and consultation. I'm talking and doing. It helps keep me grounded in the social work interaction and engagement with the people that I work with on all sides, which is important."

Participants recognised supervision as essential for maintaining professional competence, preventing burnout, and fostering collegial support. Atarangi highlighted its reflective nature: "sharing about our work situation and looking at that reflective model of practice." However, not all participants had access to supervision and its absence posed challenges. Mahuika

recounted, "I think supervision is extremely important, and I found that out in my latest work. I was without supervision for the longest time, and I struggled a lot." For some participants, the absence of supervision resulted in a less effective process of constructing knowledge. Without the support of a supervisor in a mentoring role, they experienced gaps in knowledge construction, lacked opportunities for reflection, struggled with case management, and had less effective practice overall.

The insights shared by participants underscore the dynamic and ongoing nature of engaging in collaborative support networks. Whether through networking with other people or supervision, these processes enable social workers to share and construct knowledge, improve practice, and maintain professional standards. Both forms of collaboration offer vital opportunities for reflection, learning, and growth, ensuring that social workers are equipped to provide effective services to their clients while fostering their professional development.

6.5. Conclusion

For participants, knowledge construction in social work was understood as a non-linear, dynamic, and iterative process. Within the bicultural context of practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, reflecting on knowledge was inseparable from reflexive engagement with the social worker's sense of self, their whakapapa, and the whakapapa of the people they worked alongside. Identifying gaps in knowledge required both inward and outward reflection, fostering a reflexive stance that supported openness to ongoing learning and professional growth. Pathways for developing knowledge encompassed a combination of informal and formal approaches, underscoring the continual and evolving nature of knowledge construction. This process also involved networking in diverse forms, ranging from structured professional activities to informal relational exchanges. Collectively, these elements informed the theory of Navigating Knowledge.

Chapter 7. Applying Knowledge

This chapter examines participants' perspectives on the application of knowledge in social work practice, identifying the multiple dimensions that shape meaning-making and action as knowledge is mobilised within specific practice situations. The chapter is organised around the core category of Applying Knowledge and its associated sub-categories, which were generated through the interview data. The analysis addresses Applying Technical Rationality, Applying Practical Rationality, and Applying Critical Reflection. Collectively, these sections examine how knowledge is enacted within realities shaped by participants' lived experiences, practice contexts, and broader environmental influences, while critically attending to the effects of values, power relations, historical conditions, and political contexts.

7.1. Applying Technical Rationality

Applying technical rationality involves utilising a scientific and evidence-informed perspective to address practice situations in a non-linear, iterative manner (Simon, 1965). This approach relies on knowledge derived from theories, models, research, and policy to guide well-informed decision-making, yet it is not static. Participants emphasised that social workers often utilise preferred tools, strategies, or models through which they consistently apply knowledge in practice. As Amber-Jane observed, "most social workers would have favourite tools or strategies or models that they use in their work." The selection and application of technical knowledge were recognised as being contingent upon the specific professional activity and area of practice, as Jenny noted, "there is something that can be quite specific in terms of knowledge to the one particular sector."

For participants, applying technical rationality typically begins with the identification of a case scenario, followed by the deliberate mobilisation of relevant knowledge to inform decision-

making. Samuel illustrated this process in his practice by selecting appropriate technical knowledge, analysing the case, applying theories and models, and using the resulting understanding to guide action. He reflected, “From my social work study on psychological theories and my experience, I could see signs of depression. Without my knowledge and my training on theories I wouldn’t be able to see or determine the signs.” This highlights the centrality of deliberate, structured action in operationalising technical rationality and its role in navigating complex practice situations.

Similarly, Jasmine, a social work supervisor, described applying technical rationality in the context of supervision. Her process involved analysing a specific situation, identifying relevant knowledge, and integrating theoretical frameworks with the observed behaviours of her supervisee. She explained:

> Right from the start I was watching her body language and struggling with using the right language. My knowledge in human development and behaviour theories teaches me even at that level, to really understand what she was asking me.

This example demonstrates how technical rationality informs supervisory practice, supports evidence-informed interpretation of behaviour, and guides decisions about appropriate interventions.

Several participants described a parallel process of applying knowledge, integrating reflection on existing knowledge, construction of additional knowledge as needed, and the application of evidence-informed approaches. Phoebe, working in a hospital setting, outlined her deliberate use of research to inform practice:

> I worked in the renal unit in the Pacific unit, I realised that a lot of Pacific Islanders suffered from kidney failure and diabetes. I began to read research studies on the topic

> and the social work process of assessing my clients… I had to be aware of my knowledge in the context of the disease and how to work with people who have it.

Similarly, Oliver explained how engagement with research guided his approach, "I had a guy recently who showed a lot of the traits of narcissism and possibly a sociopath. Understanding the nature of the condition, reading studies about it, and it just totally changed the approach." These examples illustrate how technical rationality enables social workers to apply current evidence to assess client needs and to select interventions that are both responsive and informed.

Participants also emphasised the critical role of technical rationality in navigating policy and legislation. Nigel described applying knowledge to interpret client behaviour within a legal context:

> We've provided legal restrictions in the input, so it was about having an awareness of the services there. I use my knowledge of my client and knowledge to interpret his behaviour. I was almost like an interpreter for his behaviour to the police.

Technical rationality thereby allows practitioners to align interventions with legal frameworks while tailoring responses to client-specific circumstances.

The application of technical rationality is inherently context-dependent and adaptive. As Samuel observed, "knowledge application depends on the clients or the situations… certain knowledge will be useful in certain situations." Deliberate application of technical rationality supports professional boundaries and reduces the influence of personal bias. Nigel noted, "we make sense of the knowledge that we have, all the information we have about the role and the client. We often fall back on that shorthand type of heuristics," while also cautioning that over-reliance can potentially cause harm.

Technical rationality also plays a vital role in mitigating assumptions, particularly concerning cultural contexts. Samuel reflected, “working with clients from the same culture, we need to stop making assumptions,” while Arihi added, “but I might’ve been raped, you might have been raped, we go through a similar thing. But we’d go through the intrinsic stuff dealing with that completely differently.” Through deliberate, evidence-informed application of technical rationality, social workers can account for diverse experiences and reduce the risk of bias in practice.

Despite its strengths, participants acknowledged limitations in the exclusive use of technical rationality. Over-reliance on theory, models, or research may overlook the complexities and uncertainties of real-world practice. Practical rationality therefore becomes essential to address issues that cannot be fully captured through technical knowledge alone, as discussed in the following section

7.2. Applying Practical Rationality

Applying practical rationality involves making decisions and taking action guided by a social worker’s belief system, which integrates personal knowledge shaped by values, worldviews, lived experience, emotions, and culture. These elements provide a framework for interpreting situations and determining appropriate courses of action. Values are central to this process, reflecting the principles that social workers uphold in both professional and personal contexts.

Participants described relying on their values to establish priorities and inform practice. For example, the value of continual learning was highlighted as a guiding principle, supporting the need for adaptive and responsive practice. As Jenny noted, practice “should come back to the notion that we’re always building on that learning,” reflecting an understanding that evolving social conditions and client needs require ongoing acquisition and application of knowledge.

Samuel similarly observed, “you need to keep up with the knowledge because things are changing, the challenges will change”.

For Māori practitioners, practical rationality is closely aligned with cultural values and relational practice. Deliberate actions, such as creating a safe space for clients to share their experiences, exemplify this approach. Heitiare explained, “holding the space so that people feel comfortable in order to open up because they are really living it.” Such practice is deeply informed by an awareness of social and cultural contexts, integrating knowledge of tikanga, emotions, and historical community practices. Arihi similarly highlighted culturally specific considerations in Pacific contexts: “the position of children in a Samoan community or Samoan family is important, but they’re not the most important as our elders, our seniors.”

The value-laden nature of practical rationality was also evident across participants, particularly in its relational and emotional dimensions. For Māori practitioners, values, emotions, and culture are inseparable in guiding engagement with clients, shaping the creation of supportive and trusting environments. Heitiare emphasised, “they have to feel comfortable in order to open up about their story,” illustrating how these processes facilitate rapport and effective practice. Pacific participants similarly highlighted the influence of community and family values in shaping decision-making and prioritising collective wellbeing. By integrating personal knowledge, cultural values, and emotional awareness, social workers make informed, deliberate, and contextually responsive decisions that address the unique needs of their clients.

7.3. Applying Critical Reflection

The process of applying critical reflection in social work involves the integration of both technical and practical rationality. In this study, all participants engaged in reflective practice, a personal process that can be understood and applied in various ways depending on individual circumstances. Some participants reflected on past experiences by describing situations,

analysing what they had learned, and considering the actions they had taken. Others sought constructive feedback and explored different perspectives. Additionally, some participants continuously evaluated their knowledge and assumptions while experimenting with new ideas and approaches. There is no single correct way to define or approach reflection, as it often depends on context. The participants engaged in reflection to consider what went wrong, explore ways to address those issues, and reinforce positive practices. Reflective practice involves thinking critically about experiences to learn and improve future practice. As Amber-Jane explained, "it gives you a chance to realise what you know and determine if the knowledge that you have is enough to make [a] decision." Similarly, Samuel noted, "Through reflection, it helps me assess my strengths and weaknesses."

A key element of critical reflection is identifying the knowledge needed for professional growth, which requires active learning. This involves challenging personal assumptions, seeking feedback, and pursuing opportunities for self-improvement. Emery emphasised the importance of engaging with diverse perspectives, such as Black and Māori academics and PhD social work students, stating that:

> Their [students'] reflections are really useful for me that I might not see necessarily because of my own privilege, the Western standpoint I hold. I'm not a perfect practitioner by any means . . . . in the process of reflection, I have to think really hard . . . . my reflection then generates knowledge in itself.

Emery's insights illustrate the relationship between knowledge application and reflective practice, involving both applying the knowledge gained from self-reflection and learning from the experiences of others. Such an approach fosters a deeper understanding and promotes professional growth.

Regarding the timing of the reflection process, two types can be identified; reflection conducted after the event, and reflection that happens concurrently with the event. For example, Amber-Jane notes:

> I tend to be more reflective after the fact and not at the time. I have pretty good instincts and that I've internalised enough knowledge that I can get away with doing no harm. But I think I'd be a better social worker and better person if I actually took a reflective practice approach.

Here, Amber-Jane's comment highlights reflection that occurs after an event, enabling a more active and forward-looking approach.

Another salient finding was the power-laden nature of knowledge application and its consequential influence on the practice of critical reflection. Social work knowledge was consistently understood as non-neutral: it is produced, legitimised, and applied within contexts structured by power, which determine whose voices are prioritised, which forms of knowledge are authorised, and which practices are endorsed or constrained. Participants emphasised that critical reflection shaped how they understood power dynamics and, ultimately, practice outcomes with clients. Examining how power operates—through professional roles, organisational structures, and community contexts—illuminates why some knowledge is privileged while other forms are marginalised. As Nigel observed:

> We're [social workers] at a bit of a junction at the moment because I think there are parts of social work that rest more and more on power and control . . . . they seek to control parts of our communities.

Participants described critical reflection as a deliberate process of examining and challenging the power relations that shape their practice, including questioning hegemonic assumptions that may appear benevolent but can, in practice, undermine client wellbeing. Social workers were recognised as possessing knowledge, expertise, resources, and institutional authority, situating them in positions of considerable power. Consequently, participants emphasised the ethical necessity of critically reflecting on their professional role and the power it carries. Nigel reinforced this point, stating, "our role is a crucial one and we need to understand the power that we have," while noting that power varies across contexts, such as between NGO and statutory settings.

Elsie and Aretha further conceptualised social work power as multifaceted, comprising statutory, expert, and relational forms. Statutory power—particularly evident in child protection, mental health, and corrections—was seen to pull practice toward legalistic and risk-oriented frameworks, often privileging procedural and compliance-based knowledge over relational, cultural, or community-based knowledge. Such a narrowing of practice can prioritise what is defensible under policy over what is meaningful to service users. Participants therefore stressed the importance of recognising power not only within professional roles but also within communities. As Aretha explained, "it's about providing the support, not about being a threat . . . . I'm also talking about putting the power back into the family's hands."

Applying critical reflection enabled participants to navigate these power dynamics more ethically and relationally. Power was recognised as embedded in everyday practice encounters, where assessments, recommendations, and documentation shape trajectories of care and influence clients' access to resources. Given that clients often interact with social workers during periods of vulnerability, participants acknowledged the substantial influence they exert over clients' choices and wellbeing. Oaklee highlighted this responsibility, noting the

importance of "get[ting] the good side of people," underscoring the need to work in partnership and centre clients in decision-making processes. Participants argued that deliberately decentring professional authority, engaging in critical reflection, and adopting co-productive approaches allowed service-user narratives and community expertise to be treated as legitimate sources of knowledge, rather than being peripheral to professional judgement.

Critical reflection was also applied to power relations within organisational and inter-professional contexts. Oaklee emphasised the centrality of power awareness in practice, stating,

> Definitely [understanding] power is very important. It's an element that helps to keep us safe. That's all around awareness. I've been in frontline, supervisory, policy and management [roles] . . . . It [power] is a key and it shapes, yeah shapes them [social workers] and molds them.

Drawing on experience across multiple organisational levels, he highlighted how power dynamics are particularly pronounced in interactions with policy analysts, trainers, supervisors, and managers, whose authority significantly shapes frontline practice and decision-making.

Amber-Jane further illustrated the role of critical reflection on power through her work supporting statutory sites to engage more effectively with Māori communities. She described intentionally recognising existing knowledge and capacity within sites prior to contributing her own expertise, ensuring that knowledge development remained collaborative and grounded in community strengths. As she explained,

> Over the last sixteen months I've been working with just Māori, I've always known about tikanga which is the protocols that are around working with Māori marae and stuff. It's a protocol that is specific to iwi and hapu and so on. In order to navigate that

> world, you have to have some knowledge about how important tikanga is. So you learn it because you live in that world, it's like you absorb it and you learn it because it's around you the whole time, but I didn't know about the other part of knowledge that is essential to operating in the Māori space and that is around kawa. I keep learning. This knowledge I share with my organisation, so we can work better.

She further explained that an understanding of organisational power enabled her to strategically use her position to advocate for the sharing of knowledge between National Office, local sites, and Iwi. This approach supported systemic change by embedding culturally grounded knowledge within organisational structures, while also reducing the disproportionate burden often placed on Māori community partners to educate statutory services.

Participants also reflected on how organisational power and reputation shape knowledge and practice. They observed that organisations are often either trusted or feared, leading both practitioners and clients to accept institutional judgements without critical scrutiny. This reputational power influences how social workers are perceived and how knowledge is received. Amber-Jane highlighted efforts to transform the legacy of statutory organisations by introducing new knowledge to shift culture, perception, and practice, emphasising that "knowledge is a real key ingredient" in this process. At the same time, participants recognised that managerialism and audit cultures—characterised by performance indicators, standardised tools, and risk management—tend to privilege technical-rational knowledge aligned with compliance and efficiency, potentially constraining more relational and culturally grounded practice. Heitiare cautioned that negative organisational images can foster scepticism and disengagement, reinforcing disenfranchisement through power.

Beyond organisational and professional domains, participants also reflected on historically and culturally embedded forms of power, particularly within Māori and Pacific communities. Leadership roles, such as those of chiefs, were described as intrinsically linked to culturally transmitted knowledge, critical thinking, and decision-making capacities developed across generations. Arihi illustrated this by observing that her father's role as a chief, "when my dad is speaking as a chief, I'm just like, that's critical thinking because when he has to battle another chief; it's battling on the spot and they don't study." She illustrated the knowledge as a form of culturally grounded critical thinking that does not rely on formal study. She contrasted this with her own formal education, noting the profound value of cultural knowledge such as weaving, which carries deep symbolic and communal significance. These reflections highlight that power within communities is symbolic, relational, and historically situated, and that such knowledge profoundly shapes how social work knowledge is understood and applied.

Overall, participants' accounts demonstrate that applying critical reflection requires sustained engagement with power at individual, organisational, community, historical, and political levels. Knowledge application was never neutral; it depended on who held power, how that power was exercised, and whose knowledge was recognised as legitimate. Where practitioners were trusted and reflexive about their power, they gained access to rich cultural narratives and community expertise that enhanced assessment and intervention. Where power was experienced primarily as control, engagement was constrained, and alternative pathways were sought. These findings underscore that critical reflection is not an optional skill but a foundational practice for ethical, responsive, and contextually grounded social work.

7.4. Conclusion

Applying Knowledge is a deliberate and reflexive action through which social workers inform professional judgement and decision-making. This process is inherently non-linear, unfolding

through continuous interpretation, adaptation, and response to practice contexts. Applying technical rationality involves drawing on scientific and evidence-informed sources—such as theories, models, research, and policy—to guide decision-making. While structured, this form of rationality remains dynamic rather than fixed, requiring ongoing evaluation in practice. Applying practical rationality, by contrast, is grounded in the social worker's belief system and integrates personal knowledge shaped by values, worldviews, lived experience, emotions, and culture. Together, these forms of knowledge and their modes of application contribute to the theory of Navigating Knowledge.

Crucially, both knowledge and its application are never neutral; they are produced and enacted within contexts shaped by values, history, and politics. Recognising these influences enables practitioners and organisations to critically reflect on bias, attend to power relations, and redistribute authority by centring community-led solutions, Indigenous knowledge, and lived experience. From this standpoint, knowledge is not merely applied to people but is generated with them, supporting more just, relational, and wellbeing-oriented social work practice.

Chapter 8. Producing Outcomes

This chapter examines the participants' perspectives on the outcomes of applying knowledge to their professional practice. The first section conceptualises the main category, Producing Outcomes. The next section focuses on the subcategory, Enhancing Effectiveness and Efficiency. This is followed by an analysis of Reinforcing Professional and Personal Development. The chapter then explores the sub-category of Improving Cultural Humility, a critical aspect within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand's social work practice. The subsequent section examines the sub-category of Strengthening the Decision-Making Process, followed by an analysis of the subcategory Identifying Gaps and Recommendations.

The participants conceptualised Producing Outcomes as the results that emerge through social workers' application of their knowledge and skills in real-world settings. These outcomes reflect the tangible effects of using professional, personal, and contextual knowledge, such as improved critical thinking and positive changes in behaviour. They demonstrate the practical impact of knowledge application and help assess whether the goals of social work practice are being effectively achieved. All participants acknowledged the significant impact of knowledge application on their practice, highlighting its importance in shaping their professional approaches and outcomes.

8.1. Enhancing Effectiveness and Efficiency

Participants consistently reported that the application of knowledge in practice shaped both the processes through which their work was enacted and the outcomes it produced. They distinguished clearly between efficiency and effectiveness. Efficiency was understood as the capacity to carry out tasks competently and purposefully, making appropriate use of time, effort,

and available resources. Effectiveness, by contrast, was defined in terms of whether practice actions meaningfully achieved their intended purposes for clients and communities.

When participants applied relevant and contextually grounded knowledge, they were better able to organise their work, minimise unnecessary obstacles, and deploy resources more judiciously. This facilitated practice that was not only more streamlined but, importantly, more responsive and outcome-focused. Rather than prioritising speed or output alone, participants emphasised that knowledge-informed practice enhanced the quality, relevance, and impact of their work, strengthening both professional judgement and practice outcomes. For instance, Mia explained:

> It [knowledge application] strengthens effectiveness. It's an investment and improves the quality of the service, in particular, the prevention part to identify cases before, or in advance, and work with those early. So they don't have to invest so much money later. Even prevent cases from getting worse.

Mia's statement demonstrates that by applying knowledge, she was able to identify opportunities for new strategies or approaches, which often resulted in improved practices and better outcomes for her clients. Additionally, Oaklee's comment emphasises that social workers equipped with thorough knowledge about their roles and its applications can lead to better practice outcomes for clients:

> Having education or knowledge balancing them [social workers] up. They were the best workers that I was able to work with and support because they knew about the knowledge and ethical principles. They knew about boundaries, self-care, their roles and responsibilities.

When applying their knowledge, the outcome also related to participants' capacity to incorporate ethical principles, such as maintaining professional boundaries, practicing self-care, and understanding their professional roles and responsibilities. Some participants perceived that

applying this knowledge resulted in practice that enhanced their reputation as reliable professionals. Furthermore, when participants applied knowledge related to guidelines and protocols, the outcome was greater consistency in their work, leading to more predictable results and more effective processes. Samuel elaborated on this:

> As a social worker you need to be aware of different policies, for example, social work policies, government policies, Work and Income [government] policies or any other sector's policies. If you have that knowledge about policies, you will be able to guide the clients, and be more effective in your work with the clients.

Samuel's observation highlights the impact of applying knowledge about relevant policies and protocols in practice, ensuring that social workers are able to allocate the right resources and achieve optimal outcomes for clients. This approach enhances both the efficiency of processes and the effectiveness of the results.

Participants described efficiency in social work practice as the way they manage their processes, aiming to maximise results while minimising resource use. This involves focusing on operations, streamlining tasks, and applying strategies that save time and costs. For instance, staying informed about current research and policies helps reduce resource waste, improve management, enhance communication between social workers and clients, encourage resource sharing across departments, and shorten staff time. Effectiveness was associated with practice performance and client outcomes. It involves a broader, long-term strategic approach focused on success and results. This includes using research and policy knowledge, setting clear goals, and ensuring decision-making processes align with desired results and performance standards.

Participants emphasised that the outcome of engaging with current knowledge—such as policy developments, research, and evolving practice wisdom—played a critical role in strengthening their capacity to respond thoughtfully to practice situations. Staying informed enabled social

workers to recognise areas where practice could be improved and to adapt their approaches in ways that supported more coherent, responsive, and sustainable ways of working, rather than narrowly focusing on performance or output measures. For example, Jenny commented:

> In terms of research, I think it develops an inquiring brain as academic study should. I think like most things, it's got to be well balanced between theoretical versus practical. Knowing what works and what does not, such as current processes, tools, and methods that could be more effective; anything in the changing world really.

The findings show that participants achieved more effective and efficient practice as a direct result of applying knowledge within their social work roles. Through ongoing reflection and a sustained commitment to learning, practitioners were able to move away from approaches that no longer produced meaningful outcomes for clients or communities. Instead, they adopted methods that were more contextually responsive, ethically sound, and aligned with core professional values—leading to clearer decision-making, more purposeful interventions, and improved use of time and resources. This continual learning process not only supported participants' ongoing professional development but also enhanced their capacity to deliver thoughtful, adaptive, and outcomes-focused social work practice.

8.2. Reinforcing Professional and Personal Development

For participants, the outcomes of applying knowledge were reflected in enhanced professional and personal development. This was evidenced through ongoing learning, engagement with current research, and increased confidence in their professional competence. The application of knowledge also contributed to the development of broader skill sets and deeper expertise, which supported more meaningful outcomes for both practitioners and the people they worked alongside.

As Mia noted, the use of knowledge extends beyond "recognition and status of our profession" and is fundamental to maintaining the "dignity of our profession." Oaklee similarly highlighted the wider significance of knowledge application, stating, "In the community, at the professional level, it is important to understand and apply knowledge on policies or legislations and the theories behind any situation that we have to deal with." He further linked knowledge application to personal growth and professional identity, explaining that it enabled greater self-understanding, strengthened his sense of safety, and reinforced his professional role: "I am a social worker and I am registered, and I think applying knowledge is one of the key things that helped with safety mechanisms and competency."

Another participant, Tiaho, articulated the developmental impact of applying knowledge in ways that extended beyond technical competence. She explained that "it [applying knowledge] helps me understand better professionally on how to do things, but equally important, it helps me understand better myself personally." Her reflection illustrates how the deliberate use of knowledge functions as a catalyst for both professional growth and personal insight. As practitioners applied new and evolving knowledge in their everyday work, they not only refined their practice capabilities—such as decision-making, assessment, and intervention—but also deepened their self-awareness, values clarity, and reflective capacity. This dual process underscores how knowledge application in social work is not merely procedural; it actively shapes practitioners' professional identity while fostering personal development, resilience, and a more grounded sense of purpose in their practice. Yadanar expressed a similar perspective, noting that "applying knowledge and seeking more knowledge really gets me do my job and grow myself." Her comment reinforces the idea that the active use of knowledge, coupled with a continued commitment to learning, strengthens both professional capability and personal development. For Yadanar, as for other participants, knowledge is not static; rather, its

application serves as a driving force for refining practice, enhancing confidence, and fostering ongoing self-growth.

Together, these accounts demonstrate that applying knowledge not only strengthens competent, reflective, and ethically grounded social work practice, but also actively reinforces practitioners' professional and personal development. As practitioners integrate new insights into their work, they deepen their understanding of their roles, refine their professional identity, and cultivate greater self-awareness. This continual process of learning and application shapes the quality of their practice while also fostering personal growth, resilience, and a more grounded sense of purpose in their social work journey.

8.3. Improving Cultural Humility

An outcome of applying knowledge was participants' recognition of cultural humility as an ongoing process of self-exploration and critical self-reflection. This involved sustained examination of their own cultural backgrounds while remaining open to learning from the cultural experiences and perspectives of others. Applying this knowledge supported participants to build respectful and trusting relationships, recognise and honour diverse beliefs, values, and customs, and engage with individuals in ways that affirmed and respected them as they are.

For many participants, the application of knowledge entailed an ongoing expansion of their cultural understanding and the deliberate use of this understanding when working with diverse populations, particularly within Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural context. Integrating contemporary cultural knowledge with evidence-informed practice enabled participants to enhance the quality and relevance of their interventions, reflecting a commitment to cultural humility. Several participants noted that actively applying cultural knowledge strengthened their capacity to engage in culturally responsive and contextually grounded social work. As

Nigel articulated, “we’re committed to the social concepts of being aware that there are other ways of knowing as well. There are other forms of knowledge outside of the mainstream”.

In alignment with the discussion of power dynamics presented in Chapter 7, cultural humility in this study also encompassed recognising existing power imbalances, actively working to mitigate them, and forming meaningful partnerships with individuals and groups engaged in advocacy. As Mia emphasised, “A high level of knowledge is necessary, to do the assessment and intervention properly and in a culturally sensible and holistic way.” Her reflection illustrates how the application of cultural knowledge supported practitioners in undertaking culturally informed assessments, which in turn facilitated more effective and contextually attuned interventions.

The process of developing cultural humility involved a lifelong personal commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique, where social workers not only seek to learn about other cultures but also examine their own beliefs and cultural identities. This ongoing learning and self-reflection were particularly significant for social workers engaging with Māori and Pacific clients. Oaklee, reflecting on his role as a supervisor, shared:

> Working with Māori . . . . how important it is having the life experience and education . . . . I can ensure that I'm able to give the best thing I possibly can when I come to work for my staff and for the clients that I work alongside.

For Oaklee the application of cultural knowledge supports social workers in critically reflecting on their lived experiences, which can improve their awareness of cultural biases, values, and assumptions. This process also helped social workers recognise how their own cultural perspectives may influence interactions with clients. Most importantly, such self-reflection was essential to ensure social workers do not impose their own cultural norms but instead approach practice with openness, valuing and learning from the cultural perspectives of their clients.

Using their understanding of empathy and compassion helped participants develop cultural humility. In the context of bicultural practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, applying this knowledge was particularly important due to the country's cultural diversity, where even within one ethnic group, there may be several distinct cultural subgroups. Amber-Jane illustrated this by sharing:

> I've been working with just Māori . . . . I don't know all the tikanga of the different Iwi but I know that it's a protocol that is specific to Māori and to Iwi, Hapū and so on. You have to have some knowledge about how important tikanga is, or my cultural knowledge growing up as a neurotic Jewish daughter. You learn it because you live in that world . . . . It's about seeking out people that have more knowledge than you and then drawing from them. You have to gain knowledge through osmosis, or you have to actively seek it out.

This perspective emphasises that cultural humility involves not only understanding one's own cultural background but also actively learning from clients and those with cultural expertise. By gaining insights into clients' cultural values and preferences, social workers deepen their cultural understanding, which guided and improved their practice.

The concept of cultural humility involves prioritising the needs, thoughts, and feelings of others. In social work, this could mean centring the needs of clients, which can lead to culturally positive outcomes. Riley highlighted this approach when working with Māori and Pacific clients, stating:

> [My supervisor] is able to put that cultural lens onto things because most of our clients here are Māori and Pasifika, and so it does mean that there are very different cultural aspects at play. For example, within Māori culture, certain mental health conditions are perceived very differently…in order to work with someone successfully with their

> mental health condition, if I went at it with a solely Western perspective it wouldn't work.

Additionally, listening with empathy and compassion, even when certain beliefs may not align with Western perspectives, is essential. Riley further explained:

> Some of our young people actually want to talk to the padre because what we perceive as psychosis, for them, it's receiving a message from their ancestors, so we need to make sure that there's that cultural understanding.

These elements highlight the importance of ongoing self-reflection, cultural knowledge development, and seeking supervision to deepen cultural understanding in practice. Effective cultural humility involves regularly engaging in these processes to improve practice outcomes. This includes acknowledging and valuing Indigenous knowledge, as emphasised by Arihi, who expressed:

> Once Indigenous knowledge is ever going to be, not necessarily at an equal level, but at a level where it can sit comfortably with Western knowledge, then . . . . I will die a happy person. I will be laid to rest and I'll be okay. Because Indigenous knowledge is always undervalued.

Indigenous knowledge can challenge stereotypes that persist in mainstream social work practices. By actively learning from Indigenous perspectives, social workers can confront preconceived notions and develop a more respectful understanding of cultural values, which can lead to a deeper understanding of social issues affecting Indigenous communities. Part of gaining cultural humility involves recognising historical differences between Western and Indigenous values in social work institutions and education. Emery reflected on this challenge, stating:

> The history of social work . . . . [is] actually the history of Western social work . . . . they've been helping traditions in every culture and every society but here in Aotearoa New Zealand anyway we don't have as much information as we do about Western traditions. One of my challenges, and I'm committed to doing this, is to try and centre more particularly Indigenous material in Te Reo Māori (Māori language) and from a Pacific worldview and also the worldview of other populations because Aotearoa New Zealand is rapidly changing.

To achieve meaningful outcomes in applying knowledge, it is essential to embrace Indigenous contexts and foster cultural inclusivity. This approach leads to the development of cultural humility, particularly concerning Indigenous cultures. Moreover, the process involves establishing relationships and engaging in conversations with clients, not merely as part of a social worker's job, but as a means of building trust and rapport, which are crucial to successful outcomes. As Marama explained:

> From my holistic Māori worldviews, we wouldn't go straight to the risk and deal with it, because we have left the whānau in a whole range of complexities. To understand that, you need to understand and have relationships to be able to extract truths from people, from their realities.

Furthermore, the acquisition of cultural humility includes seeking cultural advice from those with greater expertise in the cultures being explored. As Aretha notes, "we liaise with someone depending on the culture and learn some cultural knowledge from her." This advice process enhances the social worker's ability to effectively perform their duties, "my work becomes easier, my horizon broadens, and the family doesn't see me as a threat" (Aretha).

As social workers work towards improving their cultural humility, they also focus on enhancing their own sense of self and cultural awareness. One participant shared, "I feel that knowledge

makes a big difference because I am English and I'm very aware that my culture is very different and that can get in the way" (Riley). These efforts are further supported by experts who help guide the social workers, creating an ecological system of support. However, this process requires a willingness to reflect on oneself, as Riley emphasised:

> I have a cultural supervisor, so that is an area that I really focus on . . . . it's about all having that self-awareness and self-knowledge to be able to do all things effectively and practice in a culturally sensitive way.

Thus, the outcome of applying knowledge about clients' cultures and participants' own cultural backgrounds is the development of cultural humility. For many participants, the outcome of applying cultural knowledge in depth is increased competency in working with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, this outcome also contributes to improved professional practice overall.

8.4. Strengthening Decision-Making Process

The outcomes of applying knowledge were particularly evident in participants' strengthened decision-making processes. When social workers consistently interpreted, constructed, and applied knowledge, they developed an enhanced capacity to make informed decisions grounded in critical reflection. Through the effective utilisation of their knowledge base, practitioners were able to evaluate multiple options, consider the potential benefits and limitations of each, and determine the most appropriate course of action for the situation at hand. Participants also acknowledged that intentionally making time to reflect on their knowledge and integrate it into their practice served as an important mechanism for delivering more effective and thoughtful social work interventions. As Nigel states, "when we have an opportunity to reflect and respond thoughtfully, the outcomes are usually better." Additionally, the application of knowledge

proved helpful in presenting clients in a respectful manner, further contributing to the success of their practice. Nigel provided another example from his practice experience:

> Instead of him [client] being perceived again as an irritating person, you know if actually this person had lots of skills. He did a lot of work in the family, tree work, house work and things like that. I could then say that these things are his strengths.

Participants applied their knowledge to avoid errors in decision-making, emphasising the importance of a knowledge structure that equips social workers with the information and resources necessary for making informed decisions. This is vital in Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural practice, where diverse ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds require reliable information to ensure effective, efficient decision-making while preventing resource waste. Applying knowledge in this way also ensures decisions are based on the most current information, improving practices with clients from varied ethnic backgrounds. For example, Oaklee highlighted how cultural knowledge enhanced his work:

> It also helped me working with different cultures and ethnic groups, and particularly with the multi culture, because there's a whole lot of ethnicities. That really helped me support them to work with Pacific people and other ethnic groups as well.

Similarly, Yadanar and Tiaho emphasised that developing and applying cultural knowledge significantly supported practice within their Burmese and Kiribati communities. Emery further stressed the importance of cultural knowledge in preparing practitioners for diverse settings, stating, "Totally, because they're going to be practicing with groups and we aren't necessarily working with a Western world view."

The process of building and applying knowledge tailored to clients' needs was seen as a defining feature of the social work profession, ensuring clients receive care from well-informed professionals. Oaklee illustrated this with a construction analogy:

> The analogy about a master builder, and when you have a cowboy, you know, those guys who just go along and just put things together. But when you're under a governing board, you visit safety mechanisms and accountability to somebody.

The benefits of applying knowledge were evident not only among frontline practitioners and their clients but also across supervisory and management levels, who observed notable improvements in the quality of decision-making within their teams. As participants described, the consistent use of knowledge—combined with critical reflection—enhanced practitioners' ability to analyse complex situations, interpret ethical considerations, and determine appropriate courses of action. Applying knowledge allowed social workers to draw on theoretical frameworks, professional standards, and cultural understanding, resulting in more deliberate and defensible decisions that aligned with social work values. Oaklee highlighted the significant difference that formal social work education made to decision-making capabilities. He explained:

> I've had qualified and unqualified staff, so the qualified staff had the context when they come to the profession, regarding professionalism they've got qualifications, they are also registered. But then I've also got staff who are community workers or support workers who are only qualified by experience. They were good but in terms of any ethical values or principles of conduct they had no idea, unlike the qualified ones.

This difference in knowledge levels had varying impacts on practice delivery, particularly in areas related to ethics and professional conduct when working with clients.

For participants, the process of interpreting, constructing, and applying Indigenous knowledge informed their social work practice and decision-making process. For example, Jenny described how she applied a specific Māori model, Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1998), when delivering services to clients: “I apply Te Whare Tapa Whā . . . . where you’re looking at social work practice holistically at each pillar . . . . It helps make decisions in a more holistic way." This approach illustrates how cultural frameworks can contribute to more comprehensive decision-making processes in practice.

Another key influence on participants’ decision-making was their awareness and application of knowledge about power dynamics within client–practitioner relationships. Participants also emphasised the importance of understanding the roles, expertise, and perspectives of other practitioners, recognising that such awareness enhances service delivery and strengthens decision-making processes. Applying this knowledge prompted critical reflection on professional authority and responsibility, encouraging practitioners to seek input from others and to engage in more collaborative and ethically grounded decision-making.

Amber-Jane explicitly articulated the gravity of social workers’ decision-making power, stating:

> Social work is a little bit of ‘play god’ with people’s lives sometimes. We make decisions all the time. I think acting with a good toolkit of knowledge, or knowing when you don’t know something, you need to ask someone else, otherwise it’s a very dangerous place to be in… Especially when you need to be effective in your decision-making [process].

This reflection highlights how awareness of power compels practitioners to critically assess their knowledge limits and to draw on collective expertise, thereby strengthening the quality and safety of decisions made in practice.

Within the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, participants further recognised that applying cultural knowledge was essential to effective and ethical decision-making, particularly when working with rangatahi (youth, younger generation, or young person). Arihi emphasised the importance of culturally responsive engagement, noting:

> If you're going to work with rangatahi or youth and you want to interview them, don't rock in with your big black suit and your laptop. You need to get on their level and be conscious. Come with your casual gear, come and hang out and then, yeah, definitely smile! These kids are smart. They can make decisions for themselves if you know how to work with them.

This account demonstrates how culturally informed practice strengthens shared decision-making by recognising young people's agency and adapting professional approaches to align with their social and cultural realities. Arihi's example also underscores the significance of non-verbal communication and symbolic interaction, illustrating that effective communication extends beyond spoken language.

A further example of culturally grounded decision-making was offered by Allana, who described practice from a Niuean cultural perspective:

> I walk into someone's home, sit on the mattress like they do… they sit on the floor, they open their mat, they put all their weaving stuff, their sewing onto the sheet [on the floor], and they fold their legs, or they lean against the wall and that's what we do with our clients… be respectful to them. All these things help us make the right decisions.

Participants' reflections indicate that applying both general knowledge and culturally specific knowledge—alongside an awareness of power and professional authority—enhanced their understanding of how decisions are shaped in practice. Attention to cultural norms, non-verbal

cues, and relational positioning enabled more respectful communication, reduced power imbalances, and supported more informed, contextually responsive decision-making in diverse practice settings.

8.5. Identifying Gaps and Recommendations

By applying existing knowledge, social workers can identify gaps between knowledge and practice, and propose recommendations for improvement. Many participants highlighted areas for enhancement in social work knowledge, focusing on social work education and social work practice.

8.5.1 Identifying Gaps and Recommendations in Social Work Education

In examining the outcomes of applying knowledge, participants also identified several gaps within social work education and offered recommendations for strengthening the preparation of future practitioners. While many participants affirmed the value of their foundational training, they simultaneously highlighted areas in which educational content, delivery, and support could be improved to better align with the complex realities of contemporary social work practice. Many participants acknowledged the strengths of social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly in its integration of social policy and applied learning. Jenny reflected positively on this balance, noting:

> I personally found the degree was good for me, the formal qualification is good because it's a mix of social policy and practical social work it provides both sides of the coin really. I thought I really enjoyed that.

Such accounts emphasise that social work programmes are perceived as offering solid foundations. However, participants also identified unevenness in the extent to which these strengths translated consistently into practice readiness.

Self-reflection was widely recognised as a critical component of social work practice, yet participants noted inconsistencies in how it is taught and prioritised. Oaklee stated that "one of my greatest learnings was around self-reflection. That should be the first and foremost," underscoring its centrality to ethical and emotionally grounded practice. Despite this, participants identified gaps in training, particularly regarding the emotional dimensions of social work. They noted that students often needed further development in compassion, empathy, and skills in reading body language—competencies essential for effective cross-cultural engagement and trauma-informed communication. As Estrella explained: "Social work students need to improve their compassion and empathy… to learn more about body language… social workers are working with non-native English speakers and from other cultures."

Social work education needs to more intentionally develop students' emotional literacy and self-regulation, as these skills strengthen reflective capacity and improve practice with clients. Participants also stressed that self-reflection should draw on students' own lived experiences, which remain an underused learning resource. As Oaklee noted, "within your culture or customs, or you as an individual, lay the self-reflections. I reckon the current students need more of this." Emery echoed this, emphasising the value of affirming personal histories in the classroom: "I'd like to see a lot of emphasis on the validating of students, and what people bring and to use that in the teaching."

The integration of lived experience was identified as a pathway not only to strengthening reflective practice but also to addressing disparities in academic literacy. Drawing on familiar concepts helped students engage more effectively with readings and written tasks. Emery highlighted persistent literacy challenges, noting that *"*their level of literacy generally wasn't high, or consistent," creating "a real mismatch between what they can actually read and

understand and the readings they were expected to digest." These gaps demonstrate the need for embedded literacy support and pedagogical approaches that scaffold learning from students' own backgrounds.

Participants also highlighted a lack of knowledge regarding professional supervision. New graduates were often described as unprepared for supervision processes and unclear about the respective roles of supervisors and supervisees. Nigel commented:

> They're not always that particularly prepared for practice and their lack of understanding of what supervision is about. They haven't got a good understanding of what will be the 'basic' in your own supervision.

To address this gap, participants recommended strengthening education about supervision through explicit classroom teaching combined with supervised practical experience during field placements. Riley explained, "it's really helpful having that extra practical learning and that support through supervision to apply that knowledge in reality." Allana emphasised the need for clearer integration of theoretical and experiential learning to ensure students enter the workforce with a functional and professional understanding of supervision. She stated, "Students need to learn supervision and put that knowledge in practice. That was something that we didn't do well, practice vs theory learnt over the years."

Within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural and increasingly diverse society, participants identified significant gaps in educational content related to Māori, Pacific, immigrant, and refugee communities. Courses were often perceived as insufficiently aligned with demographic realities and future population projections. Arihi, a social work academic, stressed the urgency of addressing this gap:

> I would be focusing a lot on Māori, Pacific, Indigenous peoples, immigrants, refugees – in the knowledge around their ends, because that is the future of this country. When you just look purely at stats, at the moment, [for example] tertiary for Pacific is one in 10 students, by 2026 it's going to be one in five. So, we know the numbers, are we really prepared for someone who's non-Pacific to teach Pacific content?

Her observation underscores the need for education programmes to ensure cultural knowledge is not only included but delivered in culturally grounded and demographically relevant ways. This requires intentional curriculum design, appropriate staffing, and robust student support systems.

Participants also identified the absence of content relevant to specific practice areas. Riley stated, “I must admit I found that a bit scary that people did just two such short placements and then off they went into the world and I’m like no no not yet! You’re still a baby!”. Ruby emphasised the need for more specialised learning, highlighting areas such as “disability social work, education, and drugs and addiction.” Likewise, Pheobe underscored the importance of strengthening theoretical and behavioural science foundations, stating that it is essential to “add learning about human development theories and psychology in social work education because in social work you're always dealing with human behaviours.” These comments reflect a broader call for a more comprehensive and applied curriculum that equips students for the varied and specialised contexts in which social workers operate.

Participants identified several key gaps in social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand, noting that while current programmes offer a solid foundation, further improvement is needed to prepare graduates for contemporary practice. They emphasised the importance of strengthening students’ self-reflection and emotional intelligence, particularly through teaching

methods that draw on lived experience. Participants also highlighted the need for greater academic literacy support to help students meet the demands of social work study.

A further gap involved limited understanding of professional supervision, with graduates often entering the workforce unsure of supervisory roles and expectations; participants recommended more explicit teaching and practical exposure in this area. Participants also pointed to insufficient bicultural and cross-cultural content, noting that curricula must better reflect the realities of Māori, Pacific, immigrant, and refugee communities. Finally, they called for broader technical and practice-specific knowledge in areas such as disability, addiction, and behavioural sciences.

Collectively, these insights suggest that social work education requires more robust reflective training, strengthened literacy support, clearer preparation for supervision, enhanced cultural content, and a more applied curriculum to meet the diverse demands of practice.

8.5.2. Identifying Gaps and Recommendations in Social Work Practice

For participants, another key outcome of applying knowledge in practice was the capacity to identify gaps and develop recommendations to strengthen social work practice. Through critical reflection on their experiences of applying knowledge, participants highlighted areas requiring further attention, particularly the centrality of values and ethics in professional decision-making. Nigel underscored this point, stating, “in any situation that involves a human being, we need to involve the application of values and ethics and our own values, professional values . . . . that’s the key part of developing social work knowledge.” These reflections suggest that deeper and more sustained engagement with values and ethics would further enhance social work practice.

In the context of bicultural practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, participants identified a significant gap in the application of cultural knowledge, noting that inadequate understanding

of diverse cultural worldviews can directly compromise decision-making in practice. Samuel articulated this concern, stating, “we have a lack of cultural knowledge for social workers, because of that, social workers are making very poor decisions based on particular cultures.” Such gaps often became visible during real case scenarios in the field, where practitioners recognised the consequences of insufficient cultural insight and identified areas requiring improvement. Samuel illustrated this with an example of a common practice error: “assuming that extra support is needed for clients in a particular cultural background. They work based on the appearance of the client . . . . It’s like stereotyping.”

Stereotyping—particularly when based on physical appearance, perceived ethnicity, or superficial markers of cultural identity—was described as a recurrent issue. To address this gap, participants recommended a shift towards more robust approaches to knowledge construction that prioritise curiosity, questioning, and the avoidance of assumptions. Allana highlighted the importance of interrogating presumptions, explaining, “We should never assume that we know everything . . . . It’s like Niue in Aotearoa New Zealand born vs Niue Island born…. I had been judged that I’m too fair to be Niuean.” Her account underscores the need for social workers to actively challenge their assumptions and to seek deeper understanding of clients’ identities, rather than relying on appearance-based cues. Once practitioners develop this understanding, they must continue refining, applying, and updating their cultural knowledge as part of an ongoing learning process.

Participants also identified a gap in continual learning across cultural contexts, particularly within Aotearoa New Zealand’s bicultural framework, where social workers regularly engage with clients from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Aretha pointed to this need, noting, “I work with people from Muslim culture and sometimes with Asian culture. In any culture you’re gonna work differently… you need to always improve your knowledge.” This

observation reinforces the recommendation that programmes and workplaces prioritise culturally specific learning and ongoing knowledge development to strengthen practitioners' responsiveness.

Participants identified a clear gap in the application of emotional knowledge within social work practice, particularly relating to empathy, presence, and the ability to respond appropriately to clients' emotional worlds. While social workers accumulate professional knowledge over time, participants stressed that this knowledge can become limiting if not complemented by emotional awareness. As Amber-Jane explained, "we build this library of knowledge and information so that we are making good and informed decisions. But the library can become a *box."* This box metaphor highlights a key gap: practitioners may rely heavily on accumulated knowledge yet struggle to apply it flexibly or relationally when working with clients whose experiences require more nuanced emotional attunement.

Participants emphasised that emotional capacities—such as understanding others' feelings, active listening, and being fully present—are not supplementary but central to effective practice. Amber-Jane reinforced this point, noting, "our ability to have empathy, and to actively build our capacity to have empathy, also to be responsive to where somebody is at… It's all connected." Her reflection illustrates that empathy is a form of knowledge in itself, requiring ongoing cultivation and intentional practice. The gap, therefore, lies not only in emotional skills being underdeveloped but also in them being undervalued relative to technical knowledge.

A further gap was identified in practitioners' emotional responses when they lacked the cultural or contextual knowledge needed to understand a client's worldview. Amber-Jane described the discomfort that arises in such situations: "The reason I don't feel good about this is because from this person's worldview, what's happening is this. And all the knowledge that I have isn't enough, and I can't respond to this person's needs." This acknowledgment of discomfort is

significant because it signals an awareness of a knowledge deficit. Participants recommended that instead of suppressing or avoiding these feelings, practitioners should use them as indicators prompting further learning. Recognising one's emotional responses, they argued, is a necessary step in identifying gaps, constructing new knowledge, and applying it more effectively. Morela similarly highlighted the need for greater emotional awareness, stating, "social workers need to have the ability to pinpoint emotions and work alongside those. Not all of us have this [ability]." Her observation points to a broader recommendation: social work education and professional development must prioritise emotional literacy as a core competency rather than treating it as an optional interpersonal skill.

Collectively, these accounts show that all forms of knowledge in social work—technical, cultural, experiential, and emotional—are interconnected. Participants emphasised that applying knowledge is not a static or linear process but a dynamic and continuous one. Through their field experience, they identified emotional and cultural knowledge gaps that, if left unaddressed, hinder practitioners' capacity to deliver effective services. The recommendation emerging from these reflections is clear: strengthening emotional knowledge, challenging the limits of one's existing library of knowledge and responding constructively to discomfort must become central components of professional learning. Doing so is essential for improving practice quality and ensuring that clients receive responsive, empathetic, and culturally attuned support.

8.6. Conclusion

This chapter explores five key findings related to the outcomes of social workers applying knowledge in the field. These include enhancing effectiveness and efficiency in practice, reinforcing professional and personal development, improving cultural humility, strengthening the decision-making process, and identifying gaps and recommendations in social work

education and practice. Overall, participants' extensive knowledge and reflections offer a strong foundation for understanding how knowledge application influences their practice outcomes with clients. Participants' experiences of critically reflecting on their use of knowledge were both positive and insightful. The findings suggest that, while there are areas for improvement in how social work knowledge is applied, participants also identified beneficial experiences and outcomes, particularly in the development of knowledge that continues to shape their decision-making and practice outcomes.

Chapter 9. Discussion

The participants' narratives were collected and analysed to form the foundation of the Navigating Knowledge theory. This chapter examines how the theory captures the processes and conditions of Interpreting Knowledge, Constructing Knowledge, Applying Knowledge, and Producing Outcomes, which collectively constitute the theory of Navigating Knowledge. The purpose of this chapter is to present the storyline of the research findings, interpret their significance within the existing literature, and articulate the study's contribution to the field of social work in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Building on Charmaz's (2014) CGT approach, which advocates for a reflexive stance toward both the research process and its outcomes, the present analysis situates these processes within existing theoretical frameworks to deepen our understanding of the findings. In developing the theory of Navigating Knowledge, I draw from pertinent literature and position the theory of Navigating Knowledge within Fook's (2022) model of critical reflection, Foucault's theory of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1982), and Payne's modern social work theory (Payne, 2020). Additionally, the discussion examines the relationships between knowledge and power dynamics, as they manifest in social work practice, and in relation to the Navigating Knowledge theory.

The primary research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the experiences of social workers in constructing and applying knowledge in practice?
2. How does social workers' knowledge influence their behaviour and practice outcomes with clients?

This chapter critically engages with these questions, grounding the findings in existing literature and relevant theoretical perspectives to advance a more comprehensive understanding of knowledge use in social work. Table 9.1 below provides an overview of the components derived from the research findings, highlighting elements frequently discussed by participants.

Table 9.1

Summary of Findings

Main concept	**Key elements**	**Remarks**
Interpreting Knowledge, detailed in Chapter 5	Subcategories: Interpreting Personal Knowledge Interpreting Professional Knowledge Interpreting Contextual Knowledge Weighing the Importance of Knowledge	● Participants frequently viewed lived experience, values, beliefs, common sense, and emotional intelligence as forms of knowledge when interpreting personal knowledge. ● Professional knowledge was described as more structured, including theory, research, policy, and practice wisdom. ● Contextual knowledge refers to the understanding that highlights the specific contexts in which practice occurs. ● Participants understood the concept of Weighing the Importance of Knowledge as an ongoing process of critically reflecting on the significance of knowledge interpretation, which reinforced its value.
Constructing Knowledge, elaborated in Chapter 6	Subcategories: Reflecting on Existing Knowledge Identifying Knowledge Gaps Exploring Pathways for Knowledge Development Engaging in Collaborative Support Networks	● Reflecting on existing knowledge involved critically evaluating their worldview, personal experiences, cultural contexts, and formal education or training. ● Professional and personal assessments help identify gaps within existing knowledge. ● Developing knowledge among social workers includes both informal and formal methods, emphasising the ongoing process of knowledge construction. ● Networking in social work involves exchanging ideas and collaborating with professionals who share similar interests or specialties.
Applying Knowledge, presented in Chapter 7	Subcategories: Applying Technical Rationality Applying Practical Rationality Applying Critical Reflection	● Applying technical rationality involves using a scientific approach to solve problems. ● Applying practical rationality relies on personal knowledge shaped by values, emotions, and culture. ● Critical reflection in social work integrates both technical and practical reasoning.

		● Critical reflection requires examining power dynamics in practice and questioning assumptions that may seem beneficial but could be harmful.
Producing Outcomes, elaborated in Chapter 8	Subcategories: Enhancing Effectiveness and Efficiency Reinforcing Professional and Personal Development Improving Cultural Humility Strengthening Decision-Making Process Identifying Gaps and Recommendations	● Social workers who applied relevant knowledge improved effectiveness and optimised resources to support long-term and meaningful outcomes. ● This process promotes continuous learning, keeps social workers informed of the latest research, and boosts their confidence. ● Using cultural knowledge strengthened their ability to practice with cultural sensitivity. ● By applying their knowledge, social workers could assess options, weigh pros and cons, and make informed decisions.

The information in the table demonstrates substantial variation in how participants interpreted and constructed knowledge (see Chapters Five and Six). Their accounts also reflected differing views on the role of reflection and the influence of power dynamics in knowledge application (see Chapter Seven). In addition, the application of knowledge yielded several significant outcomes (see Chapter Eight). The following sections discuss these findings in detail and situate them within the existing literature.

9.1. The Theory of Navigating Knowledge

The theory of Navigating Knowledge is an explanatory theory that describes how social workers engage with knowledge within the bicultural practice context of Aotearoa New Zealand. It comprises four interrelated and non-linear processes: Interpreting Knowledge, Constructing Knowledge, Applying Knowledge, and Producing Outcomes. These processes are inherently value-laden, shaped by power relations, and contextually contingent, with knowledge understood as historical and politically situated. The following provides the storyline of the theory.

Interpreting Knowledge describes how participants recognised, understood, and made sense of situations, experiences, and practice demands. This process involved critically examining personal beliefs, professional knowledge, and contextual conditions to assess the relevance of knowledge for specific practice settings. Narratives from participants highlighted the significance not only of the knowledge itself but of the interpretive work through which knowledge gains meaning.

Constructing Knowledge captures how participants expanded their knowledge through a dynamic, iterative, and non-linear process. This included reflecting on existing knowledge; identifying gaps requiring additional insight or skill; seeking pathways to develop new knowledge; and engaging in collaborative networks that fostered shared learning. Participants emphasised that knowledge construction is ongoing and often collective, shaped by practice demands and the support available within professional networks.

Applying Knowledge emerged as a multifaceted and iterative process shaped by structural and organisational conditions, including values, expectations, and power dynamics. Participants reported that applying knowledge was rarely straightforward; it required navigating the interplay of technical rationality, practical rationality, and critical reflection within broader sociopolitical and organisational contexts. Across accounts, critical reflection was central, integrating both technical and practical rationalities.

Producing Outcomes refers to the results generated through the application of knowledge in practice. These outcomes include enhanced effectiveness and efficiency; strengthened professional and personal development; improved cultural humility; more robust decision-making processes; and the identification of practice gaps and corresponding recommendations. Collectively, these outcomes informed assessments of whether practice goals were being

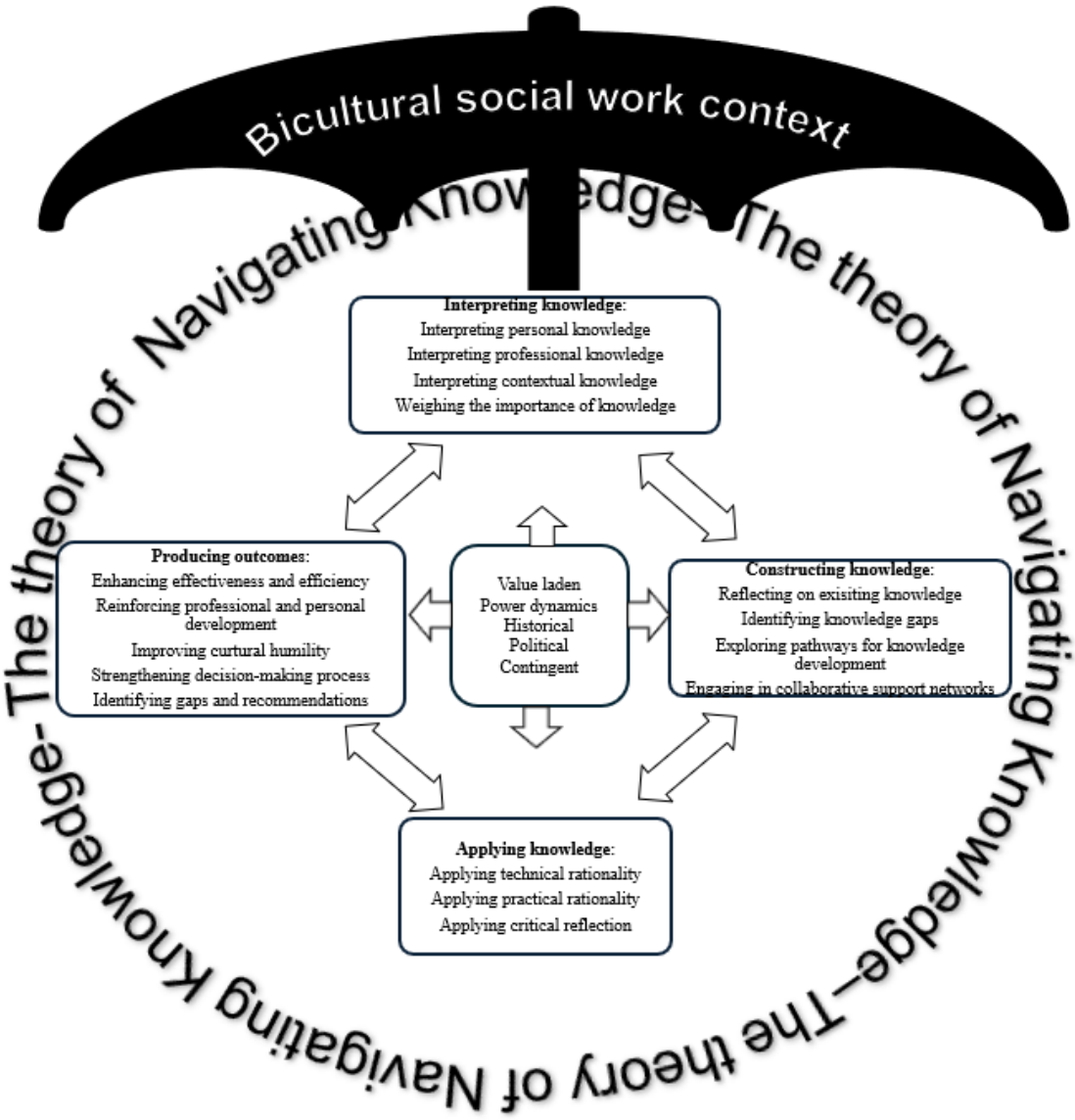
achieved and underscored the central role of reflective and informed knowledge use in effective social work practice. Such effectiveness is understood not only in terms of individual practice outcomes, but also as contributing to progress toward challenging and transforming oppressive social structures. Within this framework, efficiency involved the strategic use of resources to sustain meaningful, long-term relationships with clients and communities. enhanced critical thinking, improved decision-making, and positive behavioural change for practitioners and clients.

Together, these four concepts form the storyline of the theory of Navigating Knowledge, illustrating how social workers continuously engage with, adapt, and operationalise knowledge within their practice environments.

In accordance with Charmaz (2014), in CGT, research processes and outcomes are co-constructed by researchers and participants. These constructions are shaped by pre-existing structural conditions, emergent circumstances, and the researcher's perspectives, privileges, positionalities, interactions, and geographical contexts. This section introduces a visual model of the Navigating Knowledge theory, designed to address the research questions. Figure 9.1 below presents the key ideas, demonstrating the core elements and their interrelationships. This visual representation facilitates an interpretation of the theory and provides a foundation for the subsequent discussion.

Figure 9.1

The Theory of Navigating Knowledge



The theory of Navigating Knowledge is situated within the broader context of bicultural social work in Aotearoa New Zealand, where all forms of knowledge are shaped by the relationship between tangata whenua and tauiwi. Social work knowledge in this context is inherently value-laden, historically and politically informed, influenced by power dynamics, and contextually

contingent. These characteristics underpin and influence the processes of Interpreting Knowledge, Constructing Knowledge, Applying Knowledge, and Producing Outcomes.

9.1.1. Interpreting Knowledge

In this discussion section, I present the analysis through my voice as the researcher in dialogue with the voices of the participants, consistent with Charmaz's (2014) CGT approach. Previous studies indicate that social workers interpret knowledge through distinctive socio-cultural lenses (e.g., Lee, 2017; Lewis et al., 2009; Rutter & Fisher, 2013). The findings presented in Chapter Five support this conceptualisation of Interpreting Knowledge, illuminating how social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive and make sense of knowledge within their practice contexts. The process of interpreting knowledge explores the multifaceted aspects of 'data', 'information', 'knowledge' and 'wisdom' within their contextual understanding. Moreover, this interpretation extends to encompass subjective experiences of comprehending knowledge from both ideological and cultural standpoints.

Data, as the most foundational layer, comprise raw numbers and words that hold no inherent meaning in the absence of organisation and contextualisation. Recognised as the basic material from which information is derived and as a foundational building block for knowledge creation (Ackoff, 1989), data are central to this study's examination of knowledge development. I, as the researcher, together with the participants, highlight the pivotal role of social workers in transforming raw data into meaningful information through ideological, cultural, and practice-based lenses. This interpretive transformation is identified as a critical step in the development of knowledge. Through interpretation, data are endowed with meaning, enabling comprehension and the generation of insights into specific phenomena (Pritchard, 2023). Through careful analysis and contextualisation, data are rendered meaningful, allowing the identification of patterns and relationships that constitute the foundation of information. When

such information is situated within contextual and practice realities, it is further developed into knowledge.

We consider the deepest layer of the hierarchy as wisdom. Wisdom represents the synthesis, distillation, and integration of information and knowledge into a coherent, practice-informed understanding of the world (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2017). Unlike data or information, wisdom extends beyond interpretation; it reflects discernment, critical judgment, and the ethical capacity to make sound decisions grounded in accumulated knowledge. Importantly, the movement from data to wisdom is iterative rather than sequential. As we encounter new experiences and insights, we continually refine our ability to convert data and information into knowledge, and subsequently into wisdom. This ongoing process shape—and reshape—our understanding of practice realities and the world around them.

Interpreting Knowledge in social work requires an appreciation of its layered, dynamic, and multifaceted character. Rather than viewing knowledge as a singular or static entity, we recognise it as comprising multiple interwoven domains—personal, professional, and contextual—each contributing distinct yet interdependent insights that inform practice (Allan et al., 2021; Börjesson & Ulmestik, 2022; Beddoe & Maidment, 2009; Hudson, 1997; McDermott et al., 2017; Smeby & Heggen, 2012). These domains encompass lived and practice experience, common sense, theory, research, and policy, creating a complex mosaic of ways of knowing that social workers must navigate and interpret in their everyday decision-making.

We emphasise that lived and practice experience provide direct, embodied, and situated knowledge—insights that formal education alone cannot supply. This form of knowledge arises through direct participation in particular interactions, services, or events and is often deeply connected to emotional, relational, and ethical dimensions of practice (Imre, 1984). Similarly,

common sense is understood as an aspect of personal knowledge that supports intuitive judgement and pragmatic reasoning, particularly in fluid or unpredictable practice contexts (Rozen & Zeira, 2000). Importantly, we frame these personal modes of knowing not as inferior to formal knowledge, but as crucial interpretive resources that help social workers understand the nuances of clients' experiences, recognise patterns, and respond sensitively to unfolding situations.

At the same time, we affirm that personal knowledge is insufficient when operating in isolation. Instead, it must be integrated with professional forms of knowledge—especially theory, research, and policy—to enable ethically grounded, evidence-informed practice (Hudson, 1997). We describe theory as a conceptual scaffolding that assists social workers in organising information, interpreting complexity, and situating individual experiences within broader social structures and processes (Healy, 2022; Trevithick, 2012). In this way, theory acts not only as a body of abstract ideas but as an active tool for sense-making, helping practitioners avoid overly individualised or simplistic explanations for social issues.

We also highlight research as a critical component of professional knowledge, offering systematic and empirically grounded insights that inform sound decision-making and strengthen the credibility of practice (Smeby & Heggen, 2012). However, we stress that research must be engaged with critically. Drawing on Fook (2022), we note that research is not inherently neutral nor automatically beneficial to practice; its relevance depends on its methodological rigour, ethical grounding, contextual fit, and openness to diverse epistemologies. We question the appropriateness of Western research within Indigenous contexts, observing that Western traditions often prioritise generalisability and universal claims, while Indigenous research is embedded in relational, localised, and culturally specific ways of knowing (Munford & Sanders, 2011). This critique underscores the inherently

contextual nature of knowledge and the need for social workers to recognise how cultural, historical, and structural conditions shape what is known, how it is known, and whose knowledge is valued (Fook & Gardner, 2012).

We interpret policy as another crucial dimension of professional knowledge, defining the parameters within which social workers operate. We recognise policy as delineating practice responsibilities, ethical expectations, and organisational obligations, thereby functioning as a safeguard for clients, communities, and practitioners themselves (Maidment & Beddoe, 2016). Yet our interpretation of policy extended beyond compliance. We consider ourselves as active contributors to policy development through our frontline insights. Our practice encounters allow us to identify emerging issues, advocate for systemic change, and shape future legislative directions that promote equity and social justice. This view positions policy engagement as an essential aspect of professional identity, highlighting the socio-political responsibilities embedded in social work knowledge.

Across these domains, we recognise the importance of drawing on both generalised and contextual knowledge to support deeper critical reflection in practice (Fook, 2022). Interpreting knowledge, therefore, involves not only accessing diverse forms of evidence, but integrating them in ways that illuminate the complexity of clients' lives. By weaving together what is visible—such as formal assessments, research findings, or legislative requirements—with what may be less immediately apparent—such as cultural knowledge, experiential insight, or structural inequalities—we seek to construct more holistic understandings of the challenges clients face and the social forces shaping those challenges (Allan et al., 2021). For us, this interpretive process is central to effective, ethical, and culturally responsive practice, underscoring the profession's commitment to critically informed and contextually grounded ways of knowing.

We integrate the discussion of personal and professional knowledge as forms of contextualised knowing, situated within the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand social work; a context we identify as critically important. Understanding these intersecting forms of knowledge is essential, as the critical integration of personal, professional, and contextual knowledge enables social workers to generate meaningful interactions that support transformative practice (Finn & Molly, 2020; Healy, 2022). Personal knowledge, including lived and practice experience, constitutes an irreplaceable source of contextual insight. Accumulated over time, it offers deeper understandings of cultural, relational, and situational dynamics that may be overlooked within traditional research or theoretical models (Dominelli, 2004, 2017; McNabb, 2019; Ravulo et al., 2019). We assert that incorporating such knowledge allow us to develop more robust understandings of complex circumstances.

At the same time, we emphasise the need for reflection when applying personal knowledge in practice (Kwan & Reupert, 2019). We recognise both its usefulness, particularly when working with clients from similar backgrounds, and its limitations, acknowledging that client experiences are diverse and cannot be assumed to mirror one's own. Accordingly, we recognise personal knowledge as shaping our approaches to practice (Polanyi, 1958, 1969), influencing communication styles, rapport-building, and relational engagement. We also acknowledge that our personal knowledge informs how we interpret knowledge more broadly, and correspondingly, how we analyse our interpretations. This aligns with Charmaz's (2014) assertion that the theory of Navigating Knowledge is socially constructed, shaped by the values, experiences, and allegiances of those who produce them. Through reflexively examining our value systems, we are able to interpret knowledge in ways consistent with our moral and ethical orientations, thereby strengthening the ethical and cultural dimensions of social work knowledge. Such ongoing reflexivity and practice experience further contributed to the

development of practice wisdom, conceptualised as the ability to make sound judgments amid complexity and uncertainty (Hyslop, 2013).

However, reliance on personal knowledge alone is insufficient for competent professional practice (Börjesson & Ulmestik, 2022; Lowe, 2023). Social work knowledge extends beyond individual experience (Maidment & Egan, 2015; Miller, 2010) and requires the integration of professional knowledge that is situated within the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand (Munford & Sanders, 2011).

As a learned profession rather than an instinctive practice (Fook & Gardner, 2012), social work necessitates professional knowledge and skills to build effective, supportive relationships with individuals, families, and communities (Garrett, 2024). Combining practical knowledge with professional knowledge that is contextually relevant to Aotearoa New Zealand therefore produces a more balanced and robust foundation for knowledge interpretation, enhancing both its relevance and applicability.

Professional knowledge, such as theoretical frameworks, can guide and strengthen practice (Healy, 2022), yet we caution against treating any theory as an absolute truth. Similarly, policy functions as a critical component of professional knowledge, shaping practice and community responses by offering structural guidance and supporting ethical and moral decision-making (Maidment & Beddoe, 2016). Importantly, the interpretation and weighting of both personal and professional knowledge must remain attuned to the contextual dynamics of Aotearoa New Zealand. Social work knowledge is deeply embedded in personal, cultural, familial, and systemic environments, and context reveals the underlying conditions shaping social determinants. Attending to context prevents the application of generic solutions that overlook individual histories, sociopolitical influences, and cultural specificities.

9.1.2. Constructing Knowledge

We maintain that Constructing Knowledge in social work is best understood as an iterative, dialogical praxis rather than a linear pipeline of inputs and outputs. In our collective experience, knowledge does not simply accumulate; it is continually assembled, tested, revised, and translated in and through practice settings. This construction occurs through critical reflection on existing knowledge, identification of gaps, exploration of development avenues, and participation in collaborative support networks, and it is inseparable from the ongoing work of Interpreting Knowledge and Applying Knowledge, which co-occur and shape one another in real time to produce meaningful outcomes (Fook, 2022; Gray & Schubert, 2012).

Our key point in Constructing Knowledge is reflexive engagement with the personal, professional, and contextual resources we already hold. We draw on embodied practice histories, tacit judgment, and accessible frameworks to surface what is informing our decision-making and where it is limited (Fook, 2022; Cha et al., 2006). This is not mere recollection; it is an evaluative process—scrutinising the adequacy, provenance, and situatedness of the knowledge in hand. Through introspection and engagement with everyday practice experiences, we recognise specific gaps and tensions, which then become the problem-space that oriented further inquiry (Cha et al., 2006). In this sense, reflection function as an epistemic engine, animating the next cycle of construction rather than closing it.

Beyond internal reflection, we recognise knowledge construction as a fundamentally social and contextual process. We emphasise that new understandings emerge through interaction with others in both formal and informal settings, under conditions shaped by organisational realities, community dynamics, and socio-cultural norms (Gray & Schubert, 2012). These dialogic exchanges do more than share information; they enable us to test interpretations, negotiate differences, and synthesise diverse contributions into collectively generated knowledge. Put

differently, knowledge move through conversation—its quality contingent upon trust, inclusion, and the relational conditions of the spaces in which we meet (Andrews, 2012; Hair & O'Donoghue, 2009; Young & Collin, 2004).

When exploring avenues for knowledge development, we identify educational institutions, professional training, peer and supervisory support, employer guidance, and practical field experiences as key scaffolds. Formal programmes provide conceptual foundations and analytical habits that support our professional identity and practice judgements (Knight & Gitterman, 2018; Ballantyne et al., 2019). Crucially, we observe that classroom-based critical and analytical thinking gains value only when translated into practice, where it is iteratively adapted to specific contexts and client realities. In this translation, macro-level competencies (policy literacy, systemic analysis) and micro-level competencies (relational skills, empathy, and self-care for stress management) were jointly necessary, shaping our capacity to apply and thereby further construct knowledge (Ballantyne et al., 2019; Lowe, 2023).

Our discussions foregrounded social work field education in Aotearoa New Zealand as a uniquely generative site of knowledge construction. Learning occurs through integrating prior understandings with practice encounters involving field educators, clients, staff, and peers (Hay et al., 2019). This situated learning reveals contextual challenges and place bicultural commitments at the centre of our analysis—recognising both tangata whenua and tauiwi, and the implications of these relationships for culturally safe practice (Eketone & Walker, 2015). In this setting, we acknolwedge cultural knowledge not as a static repertoire but as an evolving, negotiated set of understandings shaped by interactions and broader environmental influences (Bogo & Vayda, 1998; Hay et al., 2019). The process is dynamic and iterative, requiring ongoing engagement with new information and continuous adaptation to changing conditions—an exemplar of Constructing Knowledge as a collaborative cycle in place.

We also consider the psychosocial conditions under which construction occurs. Personal, familial, group, and community contexts—and the surrounding support systems—shape our motivation to engage, our opportunities for social worker–client interaction, and the environments where collective meaning-making unfold (Gray & Schubert, 2012). These conditions can enable or constrain the integration of new insights with existing understandings. The quality of interactions between social workers and clients proven particularly consequential; the depth and richness of these exchanges affected what could be known, how it could be interpreted, and how confidently it could be applied (Gray & Schubert, 2012).

Psychologically, our motivation, mindset, and emotional intelligence influence our willingness to construct and share knowledge; socially, we affirm that knowledge is not created in isolation but emerges from sustained dialogue within specific relational and institutional contexts (Andrews, 2012; Hair & O'Donoghue, 2009; Young & Collin, 2004).

We assert peer dialogue and supervision as structured spaces where knowledge can be co-produced with safety, accountability, and attentiveness. Peer conversations in collegial environments allow us to explore multiple approaches to complex issues, expose implicit assumptions, and sharpen our interpretations through constructive disagreement. Supervision function as a crucible for reflective analysis and transformative practice—bringing organisational, personal, and professional goals into conversation and holding us to account for how we reason and act (Beddoe & Davys, 2016; O'Donoghue & Engelbrecht, 2021). The supervisory stance—through guided questioning and feedback—encourage us to pause, evaluate decisions, and examine how our values, biases, and emotional responses shape professional judgements (Wonnacott, 2012; O'Donoghue & Engelbrecht, 2021). In these moments, we see construction and interpretation as inseparable: reflection reconfigure our

understandings, which then informed application, which in turn generate fresh data for renewed reflection.

Taken together, these processes of interaction, reflective dialogue, and collaborative support foster self-awareness and critical thinking, strengthening the adequacy and ethicality of our interventions (O'Donoghue & Engelbrecht, 2021). Our contention is that Constructing Knowledge, Interpreting Knowledge, and Applying Knowledge are co-constitutive: each process both depends on and alters the others. Construction furnishes new possibilities for interpretation; interpretation selects and shapes what gets built; application tests and transforms what we thought we knew. This cyclical movement is the living heart of social work knowledge-making—contextual, relational, and continually in motion.

9.1.3. Applying Knowledge

In this study, both participants and I conceptualise Applying Knowledge not as a mechanical or procedural act, but as a deeply interpretive and context-responsive process that integrates multiple forms of knowing into practice. We recognise knowledge application as occurring through the interplay of technical rationality, practical rationality, and critical reflection, each of which brings different expectations and demands to practice contexts. Technical rationality supports the use of formal procedures, assessment tools, and policy frameworks, whereas practical rationality allows social workers to adapt, improvise, and respond sensitively to client realities. Critical reflection, drawing on Fook (2022), mediates between these forms of rationality, enabling practitioners to examine not simply what knowledge they apply but how and why they apply it in particular ways.

Participants and I acknowledge that the application of knowledge cannot be separated from the values and power relations that structure social work practice. As Chu and Tsui (2008) postulate, both values and power significantly shape how knowledge is mobilised and whose

knowledge is legitimised in practice. The process of applying knowledge therefore requires continuous examination of how practitioners' assumptions, organisational expectations, cultural norms, and societal hierarchies influence decision-making. In our reflections, we found that recognising these influences was essential to understanding the broader process of Navigating Knowledge, as the application phase is often where tensions between different knowledge sources become most visible.

We emphasise that reflective practice is central to the meaningful application of knowledge. Reflection requires that practitioners attend carefully to their own experiences and to those of clients, while also interrogating how their interventions are shaped by value-laden and power-infused dynamics (Pawar & Anscombe, 2015). Through this reflective stance, we are able to analyse how our values and positionalities influence our interpretations of clients' situations and the subsequent choices we make. We must demonstrate a willingness to question whether our actions reinforce dominant knowledge structures or disrupt us (Munford & Sanders, 2011). This form of critical reflexivity strengthens feelings of professional responsibility and contributes to more ethical and effective practice.

In our discussions, the application of knowledge was framed not only as a technical task but also as an ethical and political activity. We interpret effectiveness and ethicality in expansive terms, extending beyond the immediate outcomes for individuals to encompass contributions toward challenging oppressive structures and promoting collective well-being (Garrett, 2020). Applying knowledge, therefore, involves navigating tensions between organisational expectations, client needs, cultural obligations, and broader social justice commitments. It requires an awareness that every application of knowledge either maintains or contests existing arrangements of power.

Our reflections revealed that power dynamics manifest at multiple levels—within organisations, in professional relationships, and across wider social structures. Drawing on Foucault (1973, 1988), we recognise that power operates capillary-like throughout practice settings, shaping what knowledge is taken seriously, who is authorised to speak, and which interpretations are deemed credible. We note that individuals with greater authority—whether managers, senior practitioners, or policy-makers—often determine how knowledge is applied and whose perspectives are prioritised. These dynamics could constrain practitioners' autonomy and limit the space available for alternative or culturally grounded approaches.

Yet, despite these constraints, we express optimism about the transformative potential of applying knowledge. We recognise moments where we use knowledge strategically to advocate for clients, disrupt inequitable practices, and negotiate more culturally responsive or socially just interventions. These experiences illustrate that even within power-saturated environments, practitioners can exercise agency and influence.

Across the study, Applying Knowledge emerge as a practice of empowerment—for ourselves as practitioners and for the clients and communities we work alongside. We are able to identify instances where the thoughtful application of knowledge enables us to challenge organisational decisions, advocates for access to resources, or reframes client narratives in ways that position clients as capable and resilient rather than deficient. In these moments, the process of applying knowledge becomes synonymous with reshaping power relations, supporting clients to participate more actively in decision-making processes, and holding organisations accountable for equitable practice.

Overall, we affirm that Applying Knowledge is a dynamic process characterised by constant navigation: between forms of rationality, between personal and professional values, and

between individual needs and systemic constraints. It is in the application phase that the tensions and possibilities of Navigating Knowledge become most pronounced. For both participants and me, the application of knowledge required attentiveness, courage, reflexivity, and a commitment to critically informed and socially just practice. Through this lens, Applying Knowledge is both a site of professional action and a space for ethical engagement, where knowledge is not merely used but actively shaped, contested, and transformed.

9.1.4. Producing Outcomes

We interpret Producing Outcomes as an active and reflective process through which the application of knowledge generates tangible, relational, and systemic impacts. Rather than viewing outcomes as the end point of practice, we regard them as part of a continual cycle in which reflection on the consequences of our actions reshapes how knowledge is interpreted and applied in future contexts. In our discussions, we recognised that producing outcomes requires deliberate engagement with the effects—intended and unintended—of our knowledge application, as well as consideration of how these effects contribute to individual, collective, and societal well-being.

We assert that producing outcomes involves more than achieving efficient service delivery; it involves generating shifts that extend into collective and wider social domains. As Ballantyne et al. (2019) and Hyslop (2013) note, the outcomes produced through knowledge application support not only professional competence but also ongoing personal development, particularly as social workers learn to navigate increasingly complex demands. In our accounts, producing outcomes fostered cultural humility by requiring us to critically engage with cultural contexts, challenge our assumptions, and recognise the limits of our own perspectives (Ide & Beddoe, 2022). At the same time, the outcome of applying knowledge strengthens our decision-making

capacities, enabling us to navigate uncertainty and make judgements that are defensible, reflective, and grounded in context (McCafferty, 2022; McDermott et al., 2017; Munro, 2018).

The process of Producing Outcomes also enables us to identify gaps in current practice environments, organisational systems, and knowledge bases. These gaps become catalysts for informed recommendations and innovation, echoing the ideas made by Börjesson and Ulmestik (2022) and Payne (2000) that outcomes can serve as analytic tools for advancing practice and informing wider systemic change.

We highlight that producing outcomes requires a heightened relational awareness, especially when working in diverse, culturally complex, or contested practice settings. Producing meaningful outcomes is not simply a matter of applying knowledge correctly—it requires navigating interpersonal dynamics, organisational pressures, cultural expectations, and broader social inequities. We therefore recognise outcome production as a relational achievement, reflecting our capacity to work ethically and responsively with clients, communities, and colleagues.

This awareness reinforces our view that outcome production is inseparable from the broader process of Navigating Knowledge. As we apply knowledge, we encounter new situations that test our assumptions, reveal contextual nuances, and challenge previously held beliefs (Smeby & Heggen, 2012). These encounters compel us to revisit, refine, and reconfigure our understandings, illustrating how application feeds directly back into knowledge construction and interpretation.

We also emphasise that innovation plays a central role in producing outcomes. As practice environments shift—whether due to policy changes, cultural needs, or emerging social issues—we recognise the importance of adopting creative and contextually responsive approaches to

applying knowledge (Gray & Schubert, 2012; Munford & Sanders, 2011). Our reflections on social work education reinforce the necessity of deeper, more critical learning to prepare practitioners to respond adaptively to dynamic situations. This emphasis aligns with our findings on Constructing Knowledge, as deeper learning supports experimentation, collaborative problem-solving, and the development of new ways of knowing.

Our discussions point to a key conceptual shift: Producing Outcomes should not be framed as the final step in a linear process but as an ongoing, iterative cycle embedded within the wider process of Navigating Knowledge. Each application of knowledge generates new outcomes; each outcome provides new insights; and each insight prompts renewed reflection, construction, and interpretation. This cyclical movement ensures that outcome production remains responsive to emerging complexities, encourages professional growth, and strengthens our capacity to contribute to transformative, socially just practice.

9.2. Linking Navigating Knowledge to Extant Literature

Internationally, a substantial body of literature explores social work knowledge (e.g. Connolly et al., 2018; Dominelli, 2004; Fook, 2002; Garrett, 2024; Harms & Connolly, 2023; Healy, 2022; Howe, 2008; Imre, 1984; Maidment & Egan, 2009; McNabb, 2019; Nash et al., 2005; Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019; Pawar & Anscombe, 2015; Payne, 2014; Smeby & Heggen, 2012; Trevithick, 2012). Additionally, social work knowledge has been examined locally in Aotearoa New Zealand (e.g., Bishop, 2003; Ballantyne et al., 2019; Beddoe & Maidment, 2009; Connolly et al., 2018; Durie, 1998; Eketone & Walker, 2015; Hyslop, 2013; Lowe, 2023; Munford & Sanders, 2011; Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019; Ravulo et al., 2019; Ruwhiu, 1995, 2003).

In this thesis, it is proposed that effective social work practice necessitates a sophisticated integration of knowledge, skills, and an empathetic disposition. The theory of Navigating

Knowledge echoed these sentiments, emphasising that these competencies are crucial for establishing authentic and meaningful relationships, particularly within the bicultural context and diverse demographic landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand (Eketone & Walker, 2015; Ide & Beddoe, 2022; Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019). Furthermore, the theory of Navigating Knowledge underscores the criticality of maintaining professional boundaries, addressing personal biases, and engaging in client advocacy, while highlighting the imperative for practitioners to continuously expand their knowledge base to maintain professional relevance.

9.2.1. Balancing Professional Boundaries and Relational Care in Aotearoa New Zealand

Within the theory of Navigating Knowledge, we recognise a central tension that social workers must continuously negotiate: the balance between maintaining professional boundaries and providing relational, culturally grounded care. This tension is neither accidental nor easily resolved; rather, it reflects competing yet interdependent ethical commitments that shape practice in Aotearoa New Zealand's diverse social landscape (Munford & Sanders, 2011).

Cha et al. (2006) postulate that compassion must be moderated by clear professional boundaries in order to avoid the risks associated with dual relationships, particularly within Western practice models that prioritise objectivity, role clarity, and individual accountability. From this perspective, professional boundaries are understood as a safeguard—protecting clients from potential harm, practitioners from role confusion, and organisations from ethical breaches. However, this position has been critiqued for its universalising assumptions. Eketone and Walker (2015), drawing from Māori social work practice, challenge rigid boundary approaches by highlighting contexts in which practitioners and clients naturally occupy overlapping relational spaces. In many Māori communities, social workers are part of wider whānau, hapū, and iwi networks, and trust is fostered not through distance but through meaningful connection, collective responsibility, and shared cultural identity (Ruwhiu, 2013). The extended family

model recognises that relational closeness, rather than undermining professionalism, can strengthen legitimacy, accountability, and the effectiveness of support.

Lowe (2023) emphasises that cultural knowledge is not an optional supplement but a foundational component of ethical practice in Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural environment. Cultural norms, obligations, and relational expectations shape how boundaries are understood, negotiated, and enacted. Through this lens, strict adherence to Western boundary models may inadvertently disrupt relationships, undermine trust, and position practitioners as outsiders rather than collaborators (Ruwhiu, 2003).

In our theorising, Navigating Knowledge requires social workers to hold multiple perspectives in productive tension rather than selecting one set of practices or values at the expense of another (Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019). We assert that effective social work emerges through a deliberate and dynamic balancing of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, where each domain informs, constrains, and strengthens the others. Professional boundaries, when applied without relational care, risk producing practice that is mechanistic, detached, and misaligned with clients' lived realities. Conversely, relational care that is not grounded in ethical principles and professional responsibilities can become unsafe, unaccountable, or unsustainable (Liljegren, 2011). Competent, critically informed, and culturally responsive practice therefore depends on sustaining an equilibrium between these dimensions (Lowe, 2023).

From a Navigating Knowledge perspective, this balancing is itself a form of complex knowledge work. It demands ongoing critical interpretation of the cultural, relational, and organisational contexts within which practice encounters unfold (Beddoe & Maidment, 2009). Social workers must be able to assess the unique circumstances surrounding each interaction, recognising that no two practice environments carry the same histories, power dynamics, or cultural expectations (Allan et al., 2021). This interpretive labour is accompanied by reflective

judgement: practitioners must continually evaluate when relational closeness fosters trust, connection, and authenticity, and when it risks crossing ethical boundaries or compromising professional integrity (Dominelli, 2017). Such judgements cannot be made through universal rules but require sensitivity to the specificities of each encounter.

Central to this process is cultural humility, which reminds practitioners that concepts such as boundaries, professionalism, and appropriate relational distance are culturally situated rather than universally fixed (Ide & Beddoe, 2022; Keenan, 2004; Mafile'o et al., 2022). Cultural humility enables social workers to question normative assumptions embedded in Western practice models and to recognise the legitimacy of relationship-centred approaches that arise in other cultural traditions. In Aotearoa New Zealand, for example, Māori frameworks often position relationality, reciprocity, and collective responsibility as integral to practice, challenging narrow interpretations of professional boundaries (Eketone & walker, 2015). The theory of Navigating Knowledge therefore suggests practitioners draw on cultural knowledge in order to apply boundaries in ways that honour both ethical standards and cultural realities.

The application of knowledge in these contexts must also be adaptive. Rather than relying on rigid procedures, social workers need to adjust their approach so that it simultaneously respects clients' cultural worlds and meets the ethical and organisational expectations of the profession (Lowe, 2023; McNabb, 2019; Mafile'o et al., 2022). In this way, boundary negotiation becomes an ongoing, context-attuned process rather than a static or predetermined rule. We suggest that social workers must continually ask not only: what is the right boundary? but also why this boundary, at this particular moment, in this specific relationship, and within this cultural context? This broader, more reflexive questioning reframes boundary-setting as an ethical and epistemic practice rather than a mere procedural requirement.

Ultimately, our theory of Navigating Knowledge affirms that social work practice cannot be ethically sound, culturally grounded, or professionally robust without balancing knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a relational and dynamic way. Removing or diminishing any one of these elements destabilises practice: an overemphasis on technical knowledge risks producing rigid or reductionist interventions; excessive reliance on relational care risks boundary slippage or inconsistent practice; and privileging attitude or intuition alone can lead to unexamined biases or uneven decision-making. The balance between these elements forms the foundation of thoughtful, responsible, and context-sensitive social work.

Thus, we contend that professional boundaries and relational care must be understood as complementary rather than oppositional forces. Their interplay reflects the complexity of practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, where bicultural obligations, diverse worldviews, and organisational structures coexist and sometimes exert competing pressures. The theory of Navigating Knowledge is therefore not simply a matter of acquiring information or applying predetermined standards. It is an ongoing commitment to balancing competing demands, making judgements that are culturally responsive and ethically grounded, and remaining attuned to the relational and contextual nuances that shape practice.

9.2.2. Integrating Personal, Professional, and Contextual Ways of Knowing

As elaborated in Chapter Five, Interpreting Knowledge supports the idea that social workers perceive personal, professional, and contextual knowledge as complex, given the diversity of practice fields (Trevithick, 2012). For example, Keen and O'Donoghue's (2005) analysis of integrated mental health social work demonstrates how the development of Western knowledge toward more culturally responsive approaches, when integrated with Indigenous perspectives, has contributed to an ecological understanding of trauma. This ecological approach synthesises

scientific facts with integrative skills that serves as a cornerstone for bicultural social work in Aotearoa New Zealand (Ruwhiu, 2003).

The theory of Navigating Knowledge aligns with the observations of Gray and Schubert (2012), who argue that social workers draw upon diverse forms of knowledge to inform a wide array of professional practice. While the field shares some common foundations, ongoing theoretical shifts move beyond historical conflicts, leading to a more complex segmentation of practice theories based on their origins and applications. The theory also aligns with Berringer's (2019) claims who argues that discussions on knowledge and methodology in social work should recognise diverse forms and interpretations of knowledge. Berringer (2019) challenges the oversimplification of scientific knowledge as separate from other knowledge types. The theory of Navigating Knowledge asserts that a comprehensive understanding of knowledge in social work and its link to practice requires careful consideration of its diverse forms and a critical examination of the political factors influencing what is considered valid knowledge, who has access to it, and how it gains legitimacy.

The theory of Navigating Knowledge posits that the interpretation of personal, professional, and contextual knowledge enhances social workers' capacity to comprehend the complexities of human behaviour, social systems, and societal structures within the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, thereby strengthening advocacy for social justice. The findings in Chapter Five highlight the theory of Navigating Knowledge aligns with Hudson's (1997) assertion that, although different forms of knowledge overlap, they serve distinct functions. We assert that strengthening decision-making and enhancing the quality of social work practice requires a deliberate and intentional integration of both professional and personal knowledge, particularly within the bicultural landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand. This integration is

neither incidental nor automatic; rather, it demands conscious engagement with the interplay between formal theory, contextual understanding, lived experience, and cultural knowledge.

In our theorising, Navigating Knowledge is most effective when these forms of knowing are treated as interdependent and mutually informing, rather than as discrete domains. Our interpretation aligns with Harms and Connolly (2023), who argue that the refinement of practice emerges when professional knowledge and its practical application are continually brought into dialogue. Such refinement involves questioning how formal frameworks operate in specific contexts, how personal insights shape practice decisions, and how reflective engagement can transform both understanding and action. Within Aotearoa New Zealand, this reflective process acquires additional significance because the interpretation of contextual knowledge necessarily reflects a bicultural orientation. As Ruwhiu (2003) emphasises, bicultural practice requires integrating general social work knowledge with Māori-specific cultural, historical, and relational contexts. This integration is not optional but foundational to ethical and effective work.

This perspective is deeply embedded in the cultural backgrounds of participants and their authentic engagement with Māori concepts through both attitude and skill (Ide & Beddoe, 2022). Such understanding transcends superficial engagement, demonstrating a genuine competency that avoids tokenism and aligns with the work of Eketone and Walker (2015). Furthermore, the process of interpreting contextual knowledge supports the SWRB core competence standard one (2024a), which mandates that social workers are proficient in practicing with Māori people and respect their status as tangata whenua.

From our perspective, the expressions of contextual knowledge demonstrate not only cultural understanding but also authentic engagement with Māori concepts, enacted through attitude, practice skill, and relational commitment (Ide & Beddoe, 2022). Such engagement moves

beyond superficial acknowledgement or symbolic gestures; it reflects a depth of competency that resists tokenism and aligns with the culturally embedded approaches described by Eketone and Walker (2015). Their work underscores that Māori knowledge practices and relational models challenge universalist assumptions and require practitioners to integrate ways of knowing that are culturally grounded, collective, and context responsive.

Furthermore, the process of interpreting contextual knowledge supports and actualises the SWRB Core Competence Standard One (2024a), which requires social workers to demonstrate competence in working with Māori and to uphold their status as tangata whenua. This standard reinforces that bicultural practice is not merely an ethical preference but a regulatory, professional, and cultural expectation (ANZASW, 2014). Our analysis shows that participants' navigation of knowledge is deeply connected to this commitment, illustrating how professional identity and cultural responsibility intertwine in practice.

Within our theory of Navigating Knowledge, we maintain that these elements are inseparable. The integration of personal, professional, and contextual knowledge; the bicultural obligations of practice; the critical interpretation of cultural and relational dynamics; and the ethical imperatives articulated by the SWRB all operate together as part of a coherent, interlinked system of knowing. To separate one component from the others would be to undermine the holistic and culturally grounded nature of social work in Aotearoa New Zealand.

9.2.3. Collaborative Networks, Constraints, and Practice Wisdom

The theory of Navigating Knowledge asserts that the construction of knowledge is not merely an individual endeavour, but a collaborative process facilitated through support networks involving colleagues, community members, and interdisciplinary professionals. This communal approach to knowledge construction is well-documented in the literature on communities of practice (Farnsworth et al., 2016; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger-Trayner et

al., 2002), which defines such groups as individuals who share common concerns or interests and collaborate to achieve both individual and collective goals. Within these communities, social workers focus on sharing interpretations of social work practices and generating new knowledge through ongoing interaction and communication. In contemporary professional environments, these communities function through both face-to-face and online collaborative platforms to connect social work and interdisciplinary teams. The resulting benefits of interdisciplinary teamwork emphasise the necessity of effective communication and shared decision-making. Ultimately, professional bodies such as the ANZASW and the SWRB play a vital role in shaping how social workers construct knowledge and in facilitating access to the resources essential for effective practice (Beddoe et al., 2019).

Although collaborative support networks are central to the construction of knowledge within communities of practice, this process is consistently challenged by a range of systemic constraints that shape what learning is possible and how knowledge is mobilised. Börjeson and Ulmestig (2002) highlight that while collaborative environments have the potential to enhance professional growth, they often operate within organisational systems that are not designed to prioritise sustained knowledge development. These systemic pressures can be bureaucratic in nature, characterised by complex administrative requirements, procedural demands, and competing organisational priorities that divert time and energy away from reflective practice and collaboration (Payne, 2000). In many agencies, managerial directives determine how social workers allocate their time, narrowing opportunities for peer exchange, supervision, and professional inquiry. This managerial framing of practice not only influences workflow but also shapes the types of knowledge that are valued, legitimised, or sidelined within everyday practice environments.

Compounding these structural pressures is the growing complexity of social work caseloads. Munford and O'Donoghue (2019) note a marked increase in high-complexity cases that require practitioners to expand their expertise across multiple specialised domains, including mental health, legal processes, cultural competency, and advanced therapeutic modalities. As the scope and intensity of practice broaden, practitioners must invest considerable cognitive, emotional, and temporal resources into developing and sustaining this specialised knowledge. Denvall and Skillmark (2021) contend that such ongoing professional learning demands time, deliberate reflection, and organisational support—resources that are often constrained by systemic pressures.

When viewed through the lens of the theory of Navigating Knowledge, these challenges reveal a structural mismatch: the profession requires continual, collaborative knowledge development, yet the systems within which social workers operate rarely provide the conditions to support it. Navigating Knowledge therefore positions collaborative networks not as optional enhancements but as essential infrastructures for enabling practitioners to integrate new learning, critically reflect on practice experiences, and sustain ethical and culturally responsive decision-making (Drisko, 2017; Rautenbach & Black-Hughes, 2012).

To address these competing demands, the theory of Navigating Knowledge proposes a more integrated and coordinated approach to professional support. Specifically, it calls for enhanced collaboration between service providers, tertiary education institutions, and professional regulatory bodies. Beddoe and Maidment (2009) maintain that such cross-sector relationships can strengthen pathways for ongoing learning by aligning academic research, professional standards, and practice realities. Similarly, Gray and Schubert (2012) emphasise that collaborative structures create environments where knowledge can circulate more effectively between frontline practitioners, supervisors, educators, and policymakers. This interconnected

support system would provide social workers with access to up-to-date research, culturally grounded frameworks, and specialised expertise, thereby bridging the gap between theoretical learning and practice application (Farnsworth et al., 2016).

We affirm that in this expanded context, collaborative networks function not merely as peer-support mechanisms but as knowledge systems capable of sustaining a profession that is continually responding to emerging social issues, cultural complexities, and legislative changes. Strengthening these systems is not simply an organisational enhancement—it is a necessity for ensuring that social workers are equipped with the intellectual, relational, and cultural resources required to navigate the evolving demands of contemporary practice in Aotearoa New Zealand (Beddoe & Maidment, 2009).

We assert that the process of Constructing Knowledge is a dynamic, iterative, and contextually embedded endeavour shaped by the complex interplay of social, cultural, historical, political, and individual factors. This interpretation aligns with Dominelli's (2004) recognition of knowledge as socially situated and with Harms and Connolly's (2023) assertion that contemporary social work requires engagement with multiple paradigms to respond effectively to diverse and evolving practice contexts. These broader conditions intensify the complexity of Navigating Knowledge, as social workers must navigate, integrate, and critically examine different theoretical orientations to address both individual and structural issues.

We observe that we construct knowledge through experiential learning, particularly through direct engagement with clients. Such engagement provided opportunities to encounter the lived realities, aspirations, and challenges of individuals and communities (Drisko, 2017). These practice encounters acted as critical texts from which participants learned to interpret patterns, contextual indicators, and the broader social forces shaping client experiences. We maintain

that this process fostered not only deeper understanding but also a strengthened capacity for empathy and context-responsive decision-making.

Knowledge construction is also supported through engagement within professional networks, including peers, supervisors, and interdisciplinary colleagues. These networks broadened participants' openness to alternative perspectives and created spaces for dialogic learning. Through conversation, disagreement, and collective problem-solving, we encounter diverse theoretical lenses and practice approaches that expanded our interpretive repertoire. This collaborative dimension underscores that constructing knowledge is not solely an individual endeavour but also a communal one (Payne et al., 2009).

This process was especially evident in bicultural practice settings, where working with Māori clients and communities required deliberate engagement with mātauranga Māori—including Māori epistemologies, values, relational principles, and cultural practices (Ide & Beddoe, 2022). We emphasise that effective knowledge construction in these contexts required humility, consultation, and a willingness to learn from Māori worldviews and community-based expertise (Ruwhiu, 2019). At the same time, engagement with tauiwi (non-Māori) clients demanded the application of culturally relevant knowledge specific to those groups, illustrating that contextual responsiveness in Aotearoa New Zealand entails navigating multiple cultural frameworks simultaneously (Ide & Beddoe, 2022; McNabb, 2019; SWRB, 2024a).

Central to this process is our reflexive understanding of self. This involves our consistent engagement in critical self-reflection to examine our own cultural positioning, assumptions, and biases (Dominelli, 2017). This reflexive stance enables us to recognise how our identities and experiences influence our interpretations and interactions. Pawar and Anscombe (2015) maintain that such reflexivity is essential for fostering culturally responsive practice, as it supports practitioners to move beyond surface-level cultural awareness toward deeper

engagement with the complexities of identity, power, and relational ethics. Our findings align with this perspective: we describe reflexivity as integral to our ability to learn from diverse communities and to construct knowledge that is respectful, grounded, and ethically attuned.

The theory of Navigating Knowledge foregrounds the centrality of context in social work practice. It emphasises that effective cultural understanding extends beyond the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, as social workers' direct engagement with culture and sustained, meaningful relationships with communities often generate deeper and more nuanced insights than those derived solely from formal education and training. Furthermore, effective social work practice requires an ongoing commitment to social justice and human rights, critical reflection and self-reflection, and the continual updating of knowledge (Connolly & Harms, 2018). Furthermore, this perspective aligns with Ide and Beddoe's (2022) critique of cultural competence models within academic programmes, which contend that awareness-raising and knowledge development alone are insufficient for creating meaningful competence.

Ide and Beddoe (2022) and Ravulo et al. (2019) advocate for an approach grounded in cultural humility, recognising culture as a dynamic product of social interactions and shared worldviews, shaped by societal opportunities and constraints. Thus, knowledge constructed through direct experience is crucial for fostering a deeper, more nuanced understanding of cultural contexts (Rosen & Zeira, 2000), addressing the limitations of traditional models that may not adequately prepare social workers for the complexities of real-world interactions.

The findings in Chapter Seven concerning Applying Knowledge align with established social work literature, which recognises that the act of applying knowledge in practice is shaped by social, cultural, historical, and political contexts (Allan et al., 2009; Connolly et al., 2017; Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019; Nash et al., 2005; Pawar & Anscombe, 2015). From this study, we report a strong grounding in core social work principles, which enable the effective

application of knowledge in delivering contextually responsive services within Aotearoa New Zealand. However, we also emphasise that values and power relations significantly shape how knowledge is applied, reflecting the understanding that social work knowledge is inherently historical and political. Knowledge is therefore best understood as contingent rather than fixed or neutral. This awareness strengthens social workers' professional interactions and contributed to public trust and confidence. Moreover, our capacity to apply knowledge with sensitivity to the multiple and intersecting dimensions of people's lives enhanced the relevance and effectiveness of the support provided. This finding is particularly salient in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, where the SWRB's core competence six, requires practitioners to demonstrate proficiency in understanding and articulating social work theories, Indigenous practice knowledge, and other relevant models and methods (SWRB, 2024a).

The theory of Navigating Knowledge asserts that professional and personal knowledge are actively mobilised to analyse social issues, identify underlying causes, engage in critical self-reflection, and design effective intervention strategies. This idea is consistent with existing literature (Allan et al., 2021; Knight & Gitterman, 2018; Pawar & Anscombe, 2015), which emphasises the centrality of these forms of knowledge to critical analysis, intervention planning, and informed decision-making in social work practice. The findings of this study, alongside prior research, underscore the importance of social workers developing the capacity to integrate knowledge with practical experience.

The application of knowledge through repeated exposure to practice contexts facilitates the development of practice wisdom. It is through the integration of the "why" derived from theoretical and professional knowledge with the "how" acquired through direct experience that social workers are able to apply knowledge reflectively, effectively, and judiciously in practice. Furthermore, the findings of this study resonate with Higgs (2019) and Pitchard (2023), who

emphasised the role of practice wisdom in helping social workers recognise and respond to the unique complexities of each case. Tsang (2008) extends this perspective by linking practice wisdom to virtuous action, suggesting it is shaped by practitioners' intent and attentiveness to local circumstances, specifics, and contingencies, rather than being merely scientific or artistic.

Within the Theory of Navigating Knowledge, the process of Applying Knowledge is grounded in cultural humility, understood as the contextually and culturally responsive enactment of knowledge, and is central to the demonstration of professional competence. Cultural humility requires social workers to apply cultural knowledge in ways that shape professional attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours (Ide & Beddoe, 2022; Ravulo, 2016; Ravulo et al., 2019). The findings align with Beddoe and Maidment (2009), Walker (2012), and Mooney (2016), who affirm that the integration of cultural humility, social work knowledge, and ongoing skill development in multicultural practice leads to more ethical and effective practice. Accordingly, the continual development of knowledge is essential to sustaining professional competence. For example, when working with Māori, participants applied mātauranga Māori to build trust and strengthen relationships with clients and their wider communities, consistent with Mooney's (2016) findings that rapport-building is grounded in Māori values and worldview. During our discussion, we also engaged in reflective practice to maintain ethical standards and professional growth, a practice identified as critical in Māori social work (Ruwhiu, 2003). More broadly, we emphasise the need for ongoing application of knowledge and sustained exposure to diverse populations to address systemic barriers and deliver culturally responsive interventions within Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural context, including when working with immigrants and former refugees (Kim & Cooper, 2021; Kim & Hocking, 2016; Marlow, et al., 2023).

Chapter Eight demonstrates that the integration of participants' processes of interpreting, constructing, and applying knowledge substantially shaped the production of outcomes that

promoted client wellbeing (O'Donoghue, 2019; Rutter & Fisher, 2013; Saks, 2012). Furthermore, applying knowledge in practice enhanced effectiveness and efficiency in ways that were not merely transactional or economic, but meaningful, transformative, and responsive to the specific needs of clients, communities, and structural systems (Munford, 2023; Munford & Sanders, 2021). Knowledge application also supported ongoing evidence-informed practice, strengthening professional and personal development across micro, mezzo, and macro levels (Beddoe, 2018; Maidment & Egan, 2015; O'Donoghue, 2019).

These findings align with Kim's (2011) research, which highlights the importance of producing outcomes that integrate cultural knowledge to enhance cultural humility within bicultural practice. Within the Aotearoa New Zealand context, we are most effective in producing outcomes when working with clients, their extended family and wider communities, thereby improving access and engagement. Consistent with existing literature (Eketone & Walker, 2015; McNabb, 2019; Mooney, 2016), cultural humility, openness to learning, and the continual application of knowledge are central to effective decision-making and positive outcomes. Effective social work emerged as a value-laden, collaborative process that situates practice within clients' broader support systems, fostering trust and producing outcomes that are both meaningful and sustainable.

Moreover, the theory of Navigating Knowledge asserts that critical self-reflection on knowledge of self and others strengthens practice and enables practitioners to identify gaps in knowledge and service provision, thereby informing recommendations for improvement. This is particularly salient in Aotearoa New Zealand, where social work practice is required to align with the SWRB's ten core competencies, which are grounded in the bicultural context (SWRB, 2024a).

9.3. Linking Navigating Knowledge to the Extant Theories

In developing my CGT, I engaged in sustained and deliberate critical reflection on emerging ideas, continuously interrogating my analytic decisions and interpretive assumptions. This approach directly aligns with Charmaz's (2014, 2017) emphasis on reflexivity as a methodological and ethical imperative—a safeguard against allowing preconceptions, disciplinary expectations, or personal biases to shape the data prematurely. Charmaz maintains that grounded theorists must remain critically aware of how their positionality influences the research process, particularly in how they construct meaning from participants' accounts. In this sense, reflexivity is not an optional enhancement but a constitutive feature of CGT, ensuring that theory is co-constructed with participants rather than imposed upon them.

Memo-writing constituted a central mechanism for operationalising this reflexive stance. Throughout the study, I used memos to document my interpretive journey, capturing conceptual hunches, methodological uncertainties, emotional responses, and shifting analytical understandings. Birks et al. (2008) identify memo-writing as a core pillar of grounded theory development, and my application of this technique reflects its value in facilitating conceptual clarity and analytic depth. These memos also enabled ongoing dialogue with the data, as described by Keane (2022), particularly during moments where emerging ideas diverged from my initial assumptions or required deeper interrogation.

In Chapter Two, I discussed how Fook's (2022) model of critical reflection informed both my social work practice and my research stance. Integrating this reflective lens into memo-writing allowed me to surface my thoughts, emotions, and intuitive reactions, in line with Charmaz's (2014) recognition that researchers must attend to their inner responses to avoid unintentionally shaping participants' meanings. This process was crucial for safeguarding the integrity of the data: by making my assumptions visible and subject to scrutiny, I reduced the risk of forcing

the data into pre-existing interpretive frames (Belgrave & Seide, 2019). Reflexive memo-writing thus strengthened the transparency and trustworthiness of my analytic decisions.

Charmaz (2014) further asserts that while grounded theorists inevitably enter research with prior knowledge, theoretical sensitivity should function as a resource, not a template. Sensitising concepts—including social work theories, practice frameworks, or insights from previous literature—can orient the researcher to areas of potential significance. However, Charmaz cautions that such concepts must remain provisional and flexible, serving only as "points of departure" (p. 30) rather than predetermined explanatory categories. In this study, I engaged with existing theory and literature in this manner, drawing on them to enhance my sensitivity to patterns in the data without allowing them to dictate the analytic direction. As elaborated in Chapter Three, this approach enabled me to remain open to unexpected findings and to honour the co-constructed nature of meaning within CGT.

Importantly, remaining reflexive about the use of prior theory also required an awareness of the power dynamics inherent in knowledge production. Charmaz (2017) reminds researchers that theories are not neutral; they are culturally and historically situated. Accordingly, I reflected critically on how dominant Western frameworks might shape—or potentially constrain—the interpretation of participants' experiences, particularly within the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand. This reflexive stance ensured that the emerging theory was grounded in participants' voices, culturally responsive, and attentive to the social work values underpinning the field. These practices illustrate that the development of my CGT was not merely a technical procedure but a reflexive, iterative, and relational process, consistent with Charmaz's (2014, 2017) constructivist epistemology. Through sustained memo-writing, critical engagement with sensitising concepts, and ongoing examination of my positionality, I sought to construct a

theory that remains analytically rigorous, ethically grounded, and authentically reflective of the participants' experiences.

Chapter Two introduced three theoretical concepts, which I now draw upon to strengthen the theory of Navigating Knowledge; Fook's model of critical reflection (Fook, 2022), Foucault's knowledge/power theory (Foucault, 1988), and Payne's modern social work theory (Payne, 2021). Fook's model is particularly relevant, as the study highlights how practitioners apply reflection in decision-making processes and the various elements shaping this process (Fook, 2002, 2016, 2018, 2022). Foucault's theory of knowledge/power is highlighted (Foucault, 1972, 1973, 1988) and Payne's modern social work theory (Payne, 1997, 2014, 2021) further inform the analysis. Each of these theoretical concepts is subsequently linked to the findings of this study to demonstrate their contribution to theory development.

9.3.1. Jan Fook's Critical Reflection Theory

Chapter Two established the foundational principles of Fook's (2002, 2016, 2022) theory of critical reflection, in which what renders reflection "critical" is its explicit focus on power. Fook argues that critical reflection extends beyond self-awareness to interrogate the assumptions that shape the relationship between the self and broader social, cultural, and structural contexts (Fook, 2022). By making these assumptions visible, critical reflection creates the conditions for transformative action (Fook & Gardner, 2012). This section builds on that foundation by examining the alignment between Fook's critical reflection theory and the theory of Navigating Knowledge, particularly in relation to exposing practitioners' assumptions, reconstructing knowledge, and linking personal experience to broader structures.

The exposure of social workers' assumptions is a central feature of critical reflection. Fook (1996, 2022) emphasises that practitioners must recognise how their assumptions, identities, experiences, and social locations shape the ways they interpret, construct, and apply knowledge.

Similarly, the theory of Navigating Knowledge recognises that knowledge processes are mediated by subjectivity; participants' experiences, positionality, and ways of being influenced both what they interpreted as knowledge and how they navigated it. Our engagement with knowledge affirms that interpreting knowledge was not a neutral process, but one shaped by personal knowledge, professional knowledge, and the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand. As discussed in Chapter Seven, reflective practice extended beyond identifying assumptions to exploring the emotional, relational, and experiential dimensions of knowledge use.

Fook's (2016, 2022) idea places particular emphasis on the construction of knowledge through experience, often initiated by uncovering taken-for-granted assumptions. This aligns closely with the theory of Navigating Knowledge, in which interpreting knowledge prompted us to reassess personal, professional, and contextual understandings. Our reflections demonstrated how assumptions embedded in dominant discourses, professional norms, and organisational expectations shaped their thinking and practice. Consistent with Hyslop (2013) and Berringer (2019), the findings confirmed that assumptions significantly influence how knowledge is perceived, constructed, and legitimised. Chapter Seven further reflected Maidment and Egan's (2015) work, illustrating how examining our assumptions helped to critically reflected the application of knowledge while recognising the value-laden and power-infused nature of practice decisions.

The theory of Navigating Knowledge also incorporates Fook's (2016) emphasis on questioning dominant discourses and recognising privileged forms of knowledge as socially constructed, rather than as universal truths. From this perspective, social work knowledge is understood as contingent, historical, and political, requiring practitioners to critically reflect not only on their own assumptions but also on those embedded within clients, organisations, and wider social

systems. Our accounts of power dynamics, associated with our professional roles, organisational authority, and community positioning, echo Fook's (2002) observation that practice narratives often exaggerate the power of others while minimising their own agency. Critical reflection, therefore, function as a mechanism for reframing power, enabling practitioners to recognise alternative forms of influence and to act more strategically and ethically within constrained contexts.

In relation to constructing knowledge, Fook's (1996, 2022) integration of deconstruction and reconstruction was evident throughout our Navigating Knowledge processes. Deconstruction involved unsettling taken-for-granted beliefs about practice, power, and identity, while reconstruction enabled the development of more conscious, inclusive, and socially just ways of understanding practice (Fook et al., 2016). The non-linear and contingent nature of the theory of Navigating Knowledge support this process by rejecting fixed trajectories and embracing contradiction, multiplicity, and transformation. Our reflections highlight how values, language, and social positioning shape knowledge legitimacy and reinforce particular power relations. This recognition is especially significant in the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, where both tangata whenua and tauiwi knowledge systems must be acknowledged and engaged (Eketone & walker, 2015; Ruwhiu, 2019).

Fook and Gardner (2012) further postulate that critical reflection can reconstruct practitioners' identities as knowledgeable and powerful actors. This was reflected in the study's findings in Chapter Five and Six, as we increasingly viewed ourselves as active interpreters and constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients. Such reconceptualisation is particularly enabling for social workers who had previously perceived themselves as lacking power within organisational or statutory systems (Ruwhiu, 2019). By recognising power as

relational and multifaceted, social workers can expand their capacity to engage in ethical and transformative practice (Fook, 2002).

The final linkage concerns the connection between personal experience and broader social structures. Fook (2022) emphasises that critical reflection is not merely introspective but involves situating personal experiences within wider structural conditions such as inequality, institutional constraints, cultural norms, and historical forces. The theory of Navigating Knowledge similarly foregrounds the interplay between personal, professional, and contextual knowledge, all of which are shaped by values, power, history, and politics. Our accounts demonstrate that knowledge construction and application are embodied and relational processes, mediated through social interactions and community engagement. For example, participants working with Pacific communities constructed knowledge primarily through relationships with families and community networks, drawing on culturally embedded ways of knowing shaped by upbringing and social standing.

Critical reflection within the theory of Navigating Knowledge also encompassed both technical and practical rationality. We reflect on the tools and processes we use to generate knowledge, such as observation, dialogue, supervision, and professional networks, recognising that different methods produce different forms of understanding. Engagement with supervisors, multidisciplinary teams, and community networks deepens critical reflection and strengthens knowledge integration, consistent with Fook's (2022) emphasis on dialogical and relational learning. This also aligns with research highlighting the importance of collaboration and integrated practice in Aotearoa New Zealand social work (Pawar & Anscombe, 2015).

Overall, critical reflection functions as a core mechanism within the theory of Navigating Knowledge, enabling practitioners to examine their assumptions, reconstruct knowledge, and connect personal experience to broader social and structural contexts. Through this process, we

enhance our capacity to apply knowledge ethically, navigate power relations, and contribute to meaningful and socially just outcomes.

9.3.2. Michel Foucault's Power/Knowledge Theory

In Chapter Two, Foucault's theory on power/knowledge was reviewed, with particular emphasis on his concept of power/knowledge as central to his work. Foucault challenges conventional views that position power as a political force distinct from knowledge as the pursuit of truth. He argues that power and knowledge are inseparable and mutually reinforcing, making it impossible to consider one without the other (Foucault, 1972, 1973, 1978, 1988). Knowledge is simultaneously a product of power relations and a mechanism through which power operates. This conceptualisation provides a critical theoretical foundation for the theory of Navigating Knowledge, which understands knowledge as value-laden, historically situated, politically charged, and contingent.

First, knowledge is inherently value-laden because power determines what is recognised, affirmed, or dismissed as legitimate truth. In developing the theory of Navigating Knowledge, our interpretations and uses of knowledge were mediated through multiple, often competing, discourses, each shaped by distinct power relations. As we noted in Chapter Five, our understandings of knowledge were influenced by our own values, the values of the communities we serve, and wider societal value systems—each reflecting particular positionalities and interests. Following Foucault's (1988) insight, truth claims operate as both the product and instrument of power, gaining authority not through neutrality but through the social and political relations that sustain them. This dynamic is especially salient in Aotearoa New Zealand, where tangata whenua and tauiwi knowledge systems coexist within unequal historical and structural conditions. In such contexts, power regulates which forms of knowledge are legitimised and

which are marginalised, reinforcing Chambon et al.'s (1999) argument that knowledge cannot be disentangled from the power structures that produce and privilege it.

Applying Foucault's power/knowledge principles to the theory of Navigating Knowledge further illuminates the relational and collaborative dimensions of knowledge processes. Our approaches to Interpreting Knowledge are deeply embedded in interpersonal relationships and institutional contexts, shaping our understandings of personal and professional responsibility. From a Foucauldian perspective, individual practices are always situated within broader systems of authority, where strategies for knowledge application are linked to structural power relations (Foucault, 1988). The findings underscore that social work knowledge is both individually and socially constructed, with the processes of Interpreting, Constructing, Applying Knowledge, and Producing Outcomes being experienced differently according to practitioners' positionality. Power shapes the values that inform knowledge, while knowledge simultaneously shapes the values and practices of those who apply it. Consistent with Ungar et al. (1986), we recognise that demographic, experiential, and sociopolitical factors influence how we constructed and reshaped knowledge in alignment with our ethical commitments.

Second, knowledge is historically situated. Foucault (1972, 1975) contends that what counts as truth emerges within specific historical conditions and institutional arrangements and shifts as power relations change. This insight enables an examination of our encounters with power as productive rather than merely restrictive, generating particular rationalities and truth claims that shape practice, organisations, and communities. Importantly, this perspective opens a space for valuing marginalised knowledges within the theory of Navigating Knowledge, particularly those central to Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural context. For example, the protection of mātauranga Māori illustrates the inseparability of power and knowledge, where historical, political, and cultural authority intersect to support tino rangatiratanga over intellectual and

spiritual knowledge. As discussed in Chapter Seven, we also became increasingly aware of the historical power embedded in their professional roles, organisational affiliations, social standing, and embodied presence. This awareness informed our critical reflection during the Applying Knowledge process, prompting conscious negotiation of power differentials in practice.

Third, knowledge is political in that truth functions as a regulatory force that governs individuals and populations (Foucault, 1972). This was evident in our reflections during the Applying Knowledge process, where power was understood as relational and dynamic rather than residing solely in individual authority. We recognise that power in social work practice is often exercised through interpretation, for example, in assessment processes that categorise risk, vulnerability, and need. Such practices illustrate how knowledge systems participate in governing social life by defining norms and legitimising intervention (Foucault, 1973). Through critical reflection, we selectively engage with the power associated with our roles and positions, adapting our practice to support more equitable knowledge use and recognition.

Finally, knowledge is contingent, as it is produced within shifting configurations of power, practice, and historical context (Foucault, 1973). Accordingly, the theory of Navigating Knowledge asserts that ongoing critical reflection is essential for mediating power relations between practitioners, clients, and communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. We prioritise relationship-building as central to Producing Outcomes that extend beyond short-term or transactional goals, focusing instead on sustainable, community-centred change. Recognising knowledge as contingent, we actively seek new knowledge, share knowledge with clients and support networks, and engage in supervision and professional collaboration to navigate complex power dynamics. This collaborative approach enhances our capacity to integrate diverse forms of knowledge and responds ethically to practice challenges.

Professional networking further expands our awareness of power and knowledge plurality, supporting decision-making processes grounded in cultural and social complexity (Lee, 2017; Lewis et al., 2009). Chapter Seven demonstrated that we critically examined the power associated with our professional roles and organisational contexts, assessing whether our practices facilitated power-sharing or required further adjustment to support client empowerment. In doing so, we drew on multiple theoretical perspectives (Nash et al., 2006), including modern social work theory (Payne, 2007), which is explored in the following section.

9.3.3. Malcom Payne's Ideas of Modern Social Work Theory

Payne's theory of social work knowledge (1997, 2000, 2002, 2007, 2014, 2021), reviewed in detail in Chapter Two, conceptualises knowledge not as a fixed body of rules but as a pluralistic and diverse range of theoretical perspectives used flexibly to understand people, systems, and social justice. This knowledge is grounded in shared professional values, including caring, autonomy, and human rights. Building on these foundations, this section articulates the links between Payne's conception of contemporary social work theory and the theory of Navigating Knowledge. Specifically, it demonstrates how both theories understand social work knowledge as pluralistic and theoretically diverse, a set of tools for making sense of people, systems, and social justice, and value-based, grounded in caring, autonomy, and human rights.

Consistent with Payne's postulation that social work knowledge is socially constructed, knowledge remains dynamic and continuously reshaped by social institutions and individual practice. No single theory or form of knowledge can capture the full complexity of social work practice (Payne, 2021). Instead, knowledge is organised around selected elements that form conceptual frameworks, functioning as narratives that reflect the interconnected and complex nature of practice and resist rigid categorisation (Payne& Reith-Hall, 2019). This fluidity is

evident in our engagement with critical perspectives, where different theoretical lenses generate distinct interpretations of concepts.

In Chapter Five, the development of the theory of Navigating Knowledge aligns closely with Payne's view of contemporary social work theory, particularly in the way participants interpreted knowledge through pluralistic narratives (Payne et al., 2009). Chapter Six further illustrates this alignment in our processes of Constructing Knowledge, where social networks and relationships played a central role (Payne & Dominelli, 2009). These processes reflected principles of positive psychology and social constructionism, alongside solution-focused approaches that emphasised strengths and positive change. Within critical theoretical frameworks, we examine underlying assumptions and adopted both micro and macro perspectives, linking individual, group and social interventions to broader structural systems (Finn & Molloy, 2020; Houston, 2001). This was particularly salient within the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, where practice drew on both Indigenous and Western knowledge traditions, as well as culturally embedded narratives that may not be formally documented but nonetheless inform practice (Ide & Beddoe, 2022; Ruwhiu, 2003).

From the analysis, we engage in the process of Applying Knowledge drawn from multiple knowledge types to conceptualise case scenarios and guide decision-making, a process further evidenced in Chapter Eight on Producing Outcomes. Despite variation in fields of practice and professional backgrounds, common patterns emerged. For example, Interpreting Knowledge consistently occurred within the interplay of personal knowledge (including lived experience, values, beliefs, common sense, and emotional intelligence), professional knowledge (research, theory, policy, and practice wisdom), and contextual knowledge (field-specific understandings).

Regarding knowledge as a tool for understanding people, systems, and social justice, the theory of Navigating Knowledge affirms that social work practice is inherently knowledge-based. Payne and Reith-Hall (2019) emphasise the role of narratives as tools that illuminate how different forms of knowledge are interconnected and understood. In this study, Payne's theoretical perspectives informed both the development of the theory of Navigating Knowledge and the tool used to explore how we interpreted and integrated multiple forms of knowledge in practice. We demonstrate this integration in our practice through the use of theoretical and practical frameworks, research, and policy, alongside strategies such as empowerment, anti-discriminatory practice, and advocacy (Hyslop, 2013; Imre, 1984). These approaches enabled us to address power relations, dismantle social barriers, and support client agency (Payne, 2021).

The diversity of social work knowledge, as noted by Payne et al. (2009), enriches both practice and scholarship by providing a broad repertoire of tools. This diversity is central to the ongoing processes captured within the theory of Navigating Knowledge. Given the importance of informed decision-making in social work, we identify Applying Knowledge across different knowledge types as a key feature of effective practice and a critical contributor to Producing Outcomes.

According to Payne (1997, 2014, 2021) multiple methods exist for linking theory and practice and that the use of diverse approaches is both feasible and beneficial. Chapter Seven illustrates this through our accounts of applying multiple knowledge types in practice. For example, one participant described working with a client experiencing mental health challenges alongside systemic barriers. Behavioural theories were used to explain reactive symptoms, psychodynamic theories informed understanding of inwardly directed anger, and sociocultural models highlighted the influence of culture and family dynamics. Another participant described

supporting a former refugee client whose depressive symptoms, informed by the participant's knowledge of psychological theories, were understood to be linked to the loss of emotional support during the resettlement process. These examples demonstrate that, within the theory of Navigating Knowledge, knowledge functions as a set of tools for understanding complex situations and that effective social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand necessarily draws on multiple forms of knowledge.

In relation to shared values, the theory of Navigating Knowledge strongly aligns with Payne's (2000, 2007) emphasis on caring, autonomy, and human rights across micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice, particularly within the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand (Eketone & Walker, 2015). For instance, Chapter Seven presents an example from supervision practice, where a supervisor applied diverse theories in a supportive and caring manner to assist an inexperienced social worker (O'Donoghue, 2019). Behaviourist approaches informed observations of the supervisee's body language, human development theories contributed insight into the case, and learning theories guided constructive feedback, all framed by concern for the supervisee's wellbeing (Hair & O'Donoghue, 2009: O'Donoghue & Engelbrecht, 2021; O'Donoghue et al., 2018).

We have a clear awareness of the longstanding tension between theory and practice, particularly when theoretical models failed to capture the complexities of real-world contexts. This tension becomes visible in the ways we engage implicitly with multiple theoretical narratives even when we do not explicitly name them. Our emphasis on autonomy, human rights, and relational accountability illustrates how practice often draws on values-based theoretical traditions—sometimes in ways that expose gaps between formal theory and the lived realities of frontline work (Payne, 2007). In this respect, our accounts reflect Payne and Dominelli's (2009) point

that social work continually negotiates the contradictions between supporting individual autonomy and responding to broader social conditions that shape clients' lives.

This tension is not experienced as a deficit but as an inherent feature of social work practice. We navigate situations in which the principles embedded in theory—such as empowerment, choice, and social justice—are sometimes complicated by organisational constraints, resource limitations, and the complex needs of clients. Such experiences underscore how theories rarely map neatly onto practice, and how practitioners must exercise judgement to reconcile competing demands (Dominelli, 2017). By moving between different narratives, we apply adaptive use of theory, tailoring abstract concepts to context-specific situations and integrating them with experiential knowledge.

The theory of Navigating Knowledge illuminates this dynamic by emphasising the necessity of applying diverse forms of knowledge—professional, personal, contextual, and cultural—to address challenges faced by individuals, groups, and communities. This aligns with Payne's (2021) contention that effective practice requires explicit awareness of the ideas shaping professional action and an understanding of how social workers, clients, organisations, and broader social structures interact. Such clarity does not eliminate the tension between theory and practice; rather, it equips practitioners to engage with this tension productively by recognising when theories illuminate situations and when they obscure or constrain responsiveness.

Furthermore, our attention to multiple and intersecting narratives reflects Payne and Reith-Hall's (2019) postulation that contemporary practice requires flexible, interpretive approaches rather than rigid adherence to any single theoretical model. Our accounts highlight the value of theories as guiding frameworks rather than prescriptive rules, illustrating how practice

necessitates constant movement between theoretical possibilities and practical realities. Thus, our reflections not only reveal the persistent gap between theory and practice but also demonstrate how this gap can become a site of creativity, critical engagement, and professional growth. The theory of Navigating Knowledge supports this view by positioning the tension itself as generative—an essential condition for reflective, responsive, and ethically grounded social work practice.

9.4. Conclusion

This chapter presented the narrative of the theory of Navigating Knowledge, while detailing the processes of Interpreting Knowledge, Constructing Knowledge, Applying Knowledge, and Producing Outcomes within the bicultural context of social work in Aotearoa New Zealand. The theory of Navigating Knowledge captured social workers' experiences of how knowledge is constructed, negotiated, and enacted in practice, demonstrating that these processes do not occur sequentially but are dynamically interconnected.

By situating the theory of Navigating Knowledge within the existing literature and explicitly linking it to Fook's conceptualisation of critical reflection, Foucault's theory of power/knowledge, and Payne's contemporary social work theory, the analysis showed that knowledge practices are inherently value-laden and shaped by power relations, as well as by historical, political, and contextual conditions. Knowledge was shown to inform social work practice across micro, mezzo, and macro levels through pluralistic narratives that reflect diverse theoretical, cultural, and experiential perspectives. While these interpretations are subjectively shaped by my position as the researcher and are grounded in the specific context of Aotearoa New Zealand, they nonetheless provide a coherent account of how knowledge is mobilised in practice.

Overall, the theory of Navigating Knowledge highlights the centrality of critical reflection, the inseparability of knowledge and power, and the necessity of integrating multiple perspectives in social work practice. These insights highlight the requirements placed on social workers to navigate complexity thoughtfully and reflexively, particularly within the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, where ethical practice requires ongoing engagement with diverse forms of knowledge and value commitments.

Chapter 10. Implications

This chapter critically examines the implications of the theory of Navigating Knowledge as situated within the context of social work in Aotearoa New Zealand. The implications are informed by participants' perspectives and my interpretive analysis as the researcher, with the aim of demonstrating the significance of the theory for social work knowledge and its relevance to real-world practice.

The theory of Navigating Knowledge comprises four interdependent and inseparable processes: Interpreting Knowledge, Constructing Knowledge, Applying Knowledge, and Producing Outcomes. These processes are non-linear and dynamically interconnected. A failure to engage in this ongoing and reflexive interplay among knowledge processes has significant consequences for the quality, relevance, and ethical integrity of social work practice. As social work knowledge increasingly engages with complex and interrelated social issues, the theory of Navigating Knowledge underscores the need for reflective and participatory approaches to knowledge generation and application (Clarke et al., 2023; Crotty, 1998).

The utilisation of these non-linear knowledge processes ultimately supports the delivery of responsive and effective services that are attuned to clients' needs and capable of influencing broader social and structural conditions. The specific implications for social work practice are elaborated in the sections that follow, which are structured to address the relevance of the theory of Navigating Knowledge for frontline social workers, supervisors, educators, agencies, and researchers.

10.1. The Implications for Social Workers

This section outlines the implications of the theory of Navigating Knowledge for social work practitioners, focusing on the importance of increasing awareness about the value-laden, contextual, and contingent nature of social work knowledge. It highlights the challenges involved in knowledge development, underscores the need for collaboration, and advocates for the use of evidence-informed practices.

10.1.1. Values, Context, and Contingent Nature of Social Work Knowledge

The theory of Navigating Knowledge implies that social workers must fundamentally conceptualise knowledge as value-laden, contextually situated, and contingent, rather than neutral or universally applicable. Knowledge in social work is constructed through interpretation and action within specific social, cultural, organisational, and political conditions. As a result, professional judgement is inseparable from the values, assumptions, and positionalities of the practitioner and the contextual forces shaping practice. This understanding obliges social workers to engage critically with how knowledge is produced and mobilised in practice, recognising that decisions are provisional and must remain responsive to changing circumstances rather than grounded in fixed or absolute claims. The incorporation of a reflexive tool, presented later in this section, therefore represents a necessary methodological response, providing a structured means of sustaining critical engagement with these dynamics and strengthening ethically grounded decision-making.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the implications of this theory are particularly pronounced, as knowledge construction is situated within a bicultural context shaped by both Western and Indigenous epistemologies. Social work knowledge is influenced by historical, political, and cultural forces, requiring practitioners to maintain ongoing reflexive awareness of how personal and professional values interact with practice settings and situational demands. Effective

practice thus requires sustained reflexive engagement with the self, clients, and the wider social system, including critical attention to cultural positioning and its implications for professional authority and responsibility (Payne, 2007). Values are not static reference points but are contextually embedded and continually reshaped through intersecting social, cultural, and structural influences (Higgs, 2019).

The theory of Navigating Knowledge further implies that ethical practice requires more than situational awareness; it demands critical examination of how values and context actively shape professional judgement and contingent decision-making. Social workers must assess how their actions align with ethical commitments, client needs, and broader societal priorities, while remaining alert to the influence of bias, privilege, and power. This is especially significant in relation to Māori worldviews, where values such as kaupapa, tikanga, and marae kawa differ from dominant Western frameworks and require deliberate, informed, and respectful engagement to ensure culturally responsive practice (Eketone & Walker., 2015; Pihama et al., 2004; Ruwhiu, 2003; Tolich, 2002). Attending to these epistemological differences enables the construction of knowledge that is responsive not only to individuals, but also to whānau, communities, and collective wellbeing.

In everyday practice, the implications of this theory extend to how social workers enact roles such as advocacy, mediation, and brokerage, particularly in work with marginalised populations (Allan et al., 2021). Reflexivity becomes essential for recognising how power relations and structural inequalities are reproduced within knowledge use and decision-making. Choices about which knowledge to privilege, and how it is applied, are guided by ethical principles that affirm human dignity and social justice, yet these principles are always interpreted and enacted within specific contexts (Fook, 2022; Payne et al., 2009).

Ultimately, the theory of Navigating Knowledge positions continuous, recursive reflection as a core professional obligation, requiring social workers to remain critically attentive to how their values shape interpretation, action, and outcomes, while embracing the uncertainty and fluidity inherent in practice contexts. This reflexive stance extends beyond the selection of appropriate interventions to interrogate how knowledge itself is constituted and enacted within shifting relationships and conditions. By doing so, practitioners are better equipped to navigate complexity with ethical integrity, cultural responsiveness, and professional rigour.

Table 10.1 below offers a practical tool to support reflexive consideration of values and context in social work practice. While developed within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, it may also be adapted for application in other national contexts.

Table 10.1

Checklist for Assessing Values and Context in Social Work Practice

1. Identify personal values and context: ● What are the core values contextual to my practice? ● How do these values impact my interactions with clients and colleagues?
2. Explore the origins of values and context: ● Where do my values within the context of the situation stem from (e.g., family, culture, personal experience, religion)? ● How are these influences shaped my worldview and approach to social work?
3. Understand clients' values and context: ● What values do my clients hold contextual to their situation? ● How do these values influence their goals, preferences, and decision-making processes? ● How can I respect and integrate my clients' values into the intervention process?
4. Ensure ethical and harm-free collaboration: ● How can I collaborate with clients in a way that respects their values and minimises harm? ● What strategies can be applied to ensure that interventions align with both the clients' and social work values contextual to the situation? ● Are there potential conflicts between my values and those of my clients, and how can they be addressed without compromising ethical practice?
5. Consider organisational values: ● What are the values and principles upheld by my organisation? ● How do these organisational values influence my practice and decision-making process, contextual to a particular situation? ● Are there conflicts between my values and those of the organisation, and how can they be navigated while maintaining professional integrity?

By systematically addressing these questions, social workers can gain a deeper understanding of the values at play within the context of their practice and develop strategies to ensure interventions align with both personal and professional values. As Houston and Montgomery (2018) suggest, understanding human behaviours, thoughts, and emotions in social work is closely connected to how values shape social work knowledge. This principle is crucial because social work inherently involves interactions with individuals, and these interactions are always shaped by values, context, and contingency. Therefore, any attempts to dissociate social work from values and context is counterproductive, undermining both the profession's integrity and its effectiveness.

10.1.2. Time, Specialised Knowledge, and Sustainable Workloads

The theory of Navigating Knowledge has far-reaching implications for how social workers' time, knowledge, and workload are managed. It implies that effective social work practice requires intentional prioritisation of time for knowledge construction, the ongoing development of specialised and contextually relevant knowledge, and engagement with sustainable workload practices. These are not optional enhancements to practice, but necessary conditions for maintaining ethical, responsive, and competent social work.

A key implication of the theory is that social workers must actively prioritise time for knowledge construction, which necessitates dedicated periods for critical reflection, learning, and the integration of diverse forms of knowledge. However, social workers often operate within organisational environments shaped by managerial power dynamics that privilege efficiency, productivity, and output. Excessive efficiency expectations, frequently driven by management priorities, can result in increased workloads without adequate support. While these pressures may be structurally imposed, the theory of Navigating Knowledge implies that social workers must remain critically aware of such dynamics and consider strategies to mitigate their impact. When time for reflection and learning is constrained, practice risks becoming heuristic, relying on routine or partial understandings rather than critically informed judgement. Allocating time for knowledge construction enables social workers to identify their knowledge needs, engage in reflective practice, and make more considered decisions that enhance practice outcomes.

The theory further implies that social workers must balance competing demands between workload and knowledge construction, recognising that control over time and resources is often influenced by hierarchical power relations. Despite these constraints, social workers retain professional responsibility to apply diverse forms of knowledge and to continue constructing

knowledge in response to complex and changing practice contexts. This approach shifts practice away from narrow notions of efficiency towards strategies that emphasise effectiveness. Importantly, effectiveness in this context extends beyond economic considerations to include meaningful outcomes for clients, communities, and the wider social system. Table 10.2 outlines a reflective tool that can be used by social workers in prioritising time for professional development:

Table 10.2

Tool for Prioritising Time for Knowledge Construction

1. Identify knowledge needs: ● What specific areas of knowledge or skills do I need to enhance my practice? ● Are there emerging trends, techniques, or research findings relevant to my field of practice that I should be aware of?
2. Schedule information gathering time: ● When during my work week can I allocate time to gather information and acquire knowledge? ● Can I block out specific time slots in my schedule dedicated solely to learning and professional development?
3. Select optimal learning methods: ● How do I learn best – through reading, attending workshops or conferences, online resources, or peer discussions? ● What resources and platforms are available to me for acquiring knowledge in a way that aligns with my preferred learning style?
4. Assess the impact on work performance: ● How will the knowledge and skills acquired contribute to improving my effectiveness as a social worker? ● Can I identify specific ways in which applying this knowledge will enhance the quality of my interventions and interactions with clients? ● Can I negotiate with my supervisors or colleagues to allocate dedicated time for learning during work hours?
5. Consider the risks or limitations of not updating knowledge: ● What are the potential consequences of not staying updated with relevant knowledge and developments in my field? ● How might a lack of ongoing learning impact my ability to provide effective support and interventions to clients? ● What are the risks to my professional regulatory requirements concerning CPD or ethical obligations associated with remaining stagnant in my knowledge and skills?

A tool that supports prioritisation of time for knowledge construction is particularly useful, as organisational policies often lack explicit guidance on how knowledge construction and reflective practice should be integrated into daily workloads, despite widespread recognition of their importance in social work education and practice (Ballantyne et al., 2019). The theory of

Navigating Knowledge implies that social workers must intentionally embed time for learning and reflection into their schedules and make deliberate choices to apply diverse knowledge in everyday practice. This commitment shapes professional identity, strengthens practice outcomes, and fosters public trust. In Aotearoa New Zealand, it also fulfils regulatory requirements for professional development and practising certificate renewal, reinforcing accountability within a bicultural context.

Another implication is the necessity for social workers to develop specialised knowledge to remain current and relevant. Practice situations are often characterised by complexity and specificity, and a lack of contextual knowledge can limit practitioners' awareness of their own learning needs. The theory highlights the importance of recognising power relations embedded within social work knowledge, particularly where practice is influenced by political, cultural, and historical forces. In the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, this includes understanding kaupapa Māori approaches, diverse cultural knowledge, historical contexts, and evolving policy and legislative frameworks, all of which shape responses to marginalised populations (Maidment & Beddoe, 2016). The construction of specialised knowledge—defined as in-depth, practice-specific expertise developed within particular fields such as mental health and child protection—enables social workers to tailor interventions to specific populations and practice contexts, thereby enhancing professional competence and practice relevance. Below is a practical tool for developing specialised knowledge to stay current and relevant:

Table 10.3

Tool for Developing Specialised Knowledge

1. Identify specific practice or population: ● What specific practice areas or populations do I frequently work or intend to work with? ● How do I effectively engage with these practices or populations, and what strategies have proven successful in the past?
2. Reflect on knowledge usage: ● To what extent do I reflect on and utilise various types of knowledge (e.g., research, theories, contextual knowledge, cultural knowledge, practice experiences)? ● How do I assess the effectiveness of my current knowledge base in addressing the needs of the populations I serve?
3. Assess knowledge needs: ● What areas of knowledge I need in providing effective support to the identified practice areas or populations? ● Are there specific skills, theoretical frameworks, or cultural knowledge that I need to develop further?
4. Explore peer and organisational knowledge: ● What knowledge do other social workers or organisations possess in relation to the identified practice areas or populations? ● How can I leverage the expertise and experiences of colleagues or professional networks to fill knowledge gaps?
5. Consider additional knowledge sources: ● Aside from traditional sources (e.g., published journal articles, and training programmes), what other avenues can I explore to gather relevant knowledge? ● Are there community resources, cultural mentors, or interdisciplinary collaborations that can provide valuable insights?
6. Evaluate power dynamics: ● How do power dynamics influence the availability and accessibility of specific knowledge in social work practice? ● Are there systemic barriers or inequalities that contribute to the lack of certain knowledge in addressing the needs of the identified, marginalised, or underrepresented populations?

This tool may support the identification of knowledge needs, whether through self-assessment or supervision, facilitate ongoing learning, and strengthen professional accountability.

A further implication of the theory of Navigating Knowledge is the necessity of sustainable workloads as a condition for ethical and effective practice. Manageable workloads are essential for maintaining professional boundaries and supporting the ongoing construction of knowledge (Quinn et al., 2019). The theory implies that workload allocation must take into account case complexity, severity, and additional responsibilities such as research, training, and community development work, including whānau-, hapū-, and iwi-centred practice informed by kaupapa Māori approaches. Adequate knowledge and reflective capacity are critical to professional competence and effectiveness (Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019; Payne, 2020; Rogers, 2017). Table 10.4 below is designed to assess workload distribution and so assist social workers to maintain sustainable workloads.

Table 10.4

Tool for Maintaining Sustainable Workloads

1. Optimal caseload assessment: ● How does an ideal caseload balance look like for me, considering the varying needs of cases and/or community development responsibilities? ● What factors influence my perception of an achievable workload, including time constraints, available resources, and personal capacity?
2. Evaluation of case handling experience: ● How confident and experienced am I in managing cases with diverse needs and complexities? ● Are there specific types of cases or situations where I feel more competent or challenged?
3. Equitable caseload allocation: ● How does equity manifest in the distribution of cases and/or workload among staff within our team or organisation? ● Are there transparent processes in place for assigning workload, considering factors such as workload capacity, expertise, and individual strengths?
4. Support structures for workload management: ● What support systems are available to me in effectively managing my workload? ● Do I have access to supervision, peer support, training, or resources that facilitate effective case management and mitigate feeling overwhelmed?
5. Establishing work boundaries: ● How confident am I in setting and enforcing boundaries regarding my workload? ● Do I feel empowered to communicate my capacity and negotiate caseload adjustments, when necessary, to maintain a manageable workload and prevent burnout?

Importantly, the theory of Navigating Knowledge also highlights that responsibility for addressing workload pressures and knowledge constraints extends beyond individual practitioners. Power dynamics and value tensions may require action at organisational, educational, governmental, and regulatory levels. Social workers must therefore remain critically engaged with these issues, as failure to effectively construct and apply knowledge can undermine service delivery, contribute to practitioner overwhelm, and limit the development of

expertise within the workforce. Strengthening knowledge construction has been shown to reduce work-related stress (Allen et al., 2006; Heaton & Whitaker, 2013), enhance practitioner confidence, and support a growth-oriented professional culture (Poul et al., 2016). Most significantly, it enables social work practice to remain contextual, responsive and relevant, supporting both personal and professional development and ensuring that practitioners can apply the most appropriate knowledge to specific practice situations.

The theory of Navigating Knowledge implies that social workers must actively engage in reshaping their practice to prioritise time, specialisation, and sustainability. By doing so, they are better positioned to navigate complexity, uphold ethical standards, and deliver meaningful outcomes for the individuals and communities they serve.

10.1.3. Collaborative Knowledge Construction and Application

An implication of the theory of Navigating Knowledge is the requirement for social workers to engage in collaborative practice across professional, community, and systemic networks. Knowledge interpretation and application are neither purely individual nor static processes; rather, they are socially situated and continuously shaped through interaction. Consequently, the construction of practice knowledge is both an individual and collective endeavour, evolving through dialogue, reflection, and engagement with others. Social workers therefore cannot operate in isolation if their practice is to remain responsive, ethical, and effective.

Collaborative initiatives create critical spaces for the co-construction of knowledge, allowing diverse perspectives to inform decision-making. These collaborations may be informal or formal and involve clients, colleagues, communities, and broader professional systems. Through such processes, social workers strengthen their capacity to recognise cultural contexts, enhance professional judgement, and build meaningful relationships. This is particularly significant within Aotearoa New Zealand, where bicultural obligations and culturally

responsive practice require engagement with Māori whānau, hapū, iwi, and community partners. For collaborative work to be effective, clarity is needed regarding its purpose, methods, and value, alongside the intentional allocation of time and organisational support.

Informal collaboration plays a crucial role in interpreting and constructing knowledge. Learning often occurs through direct exposure to people, communities, and lived experiences, where knowledge is mutually produced through interaction rather than simply acquired from texts or formal training. For example, a social worker supporting Syrian former refugees under Aotearoa New Zealand's quota programme may initially have limited experience with this population. While written resources on Syrian cultural contexts are valuable, equally important insights emerge through respectful engagement with individuals, families, and community practices. Such interactions enable the social worker to develop nuanced, practice-based knowledge that can subsequently be shared with colleagues, contributing to collective learning and improved practice across teams and agencies.

Informal reflection, including open conversations and trust-based exchanges with colleagues, further supports this process. Although these interactions are less structured, they are purposeful and require deliberate professional judgement. To maximise positive outcomes, social workers must place significant value on their relational engagements with clients, families, peers, and communities. As Imre (1984) emphasises, social work is grounded in the belief in the value of human relationships. However, the responsibility for sustaining these relationships and whanaungatanga does not rest solely with individual practitioners. Managers, employers, and agencies also have a responsibility to create organisational conditions that support strong, respectful, and enduring relationships, including those with kaimahi at marae, whānau networks, and hapū involved in interventions.

In addition to informal collaboration, the theory of Navigating Knowledge highlights the importance of formal collaborative engagements. These are structured processes with defined roles, shared goals, and collective accountability, often involving interdisciplinary, interagency, and community- or iwi-based partnerships. For instance, a social worker in an NGO supporting a family affected by domestic violence may learn that the mother has also been diagnosed with cancer. Participation in multidisciplinary meetings with medical professionals and oncology social workers enables the construction of integrated knowledge about treatment implications, family support needs, and service coordination. In this way, knowledge development extends beyond the social work profession and draws meaningfully on insights from other disciplines.

Formal mechanisms such as peer supervision, case consultations, network meetings, and multidisciplinary forums further strengthen collaborative knowledge construction. Together, informal and formal processes support the integration of diverse forms of knowledge, enhancing professional judgement and decision-making. Central to this approach is the recognition that clients are experts in their own lives, and their knowledge must be actively incorporated into all stages of practice. Effective knowledge application therefore depends on practitioners' ability to engage with clients in mutually determined ways, rather than privileging empirical or professional knowledge alone.

The application of knowledge is a deliberate and reflective act, requiring social workers to critically assess what they know, how that knowledge was constructed, and its relevance and limitations in specific contexts. This reflective stance involves acknowledging uncertainty as an indicator of professional integrity and intellectual strength, rather than deficiency. Ongoing dialogue at micro, mezzo, and macro levels contributes to more robust knowledge development. At the micro level, collaborative knowledge application enables practitioners, clients, and professionals to jointly identify needs and design responses. At the macro level, it supports

partnerships among policymakers, government agencies, and organisations to address structural and systemic barriers. Table 10.5 presents a collaborative reflection tool that supports continuous self-assessment and dialogue, fostering a respectful and cooperative working relationship for effective practice outcomes.

Table 10.5

Tool to Facilitate Ongoing Self-assessment and Dialogues

Biases check	**Client's preferences**	**Respectful engagement**	**Prioritising positive outcomes**	**Reflective dialogue**
Reflect on our own biases, assumptions, and preconceptions. How would they influence our interactions with other people?	Check on the client's individual preferences, values, and goals. How do we check if our approach aligns with how our client prefers to work? For example, methods of communication and decision-making processes.	Reflect on our tone, behaviour, and communication style. Have we considered cultural sensitivity, empathy, active listening, and validation of the client's experiences and perspectives?	Maintain the client's wellbeing and desired outcomes at the forefront of collaborative efforts. Have we focused on empowering the client, fostering self-determination, and implementing interventions that promote positive change and growth?	Engage in open and honest dialogue with the client about the collaborative process. Have we consistently encouraged the client to share their concerns, feedback, and suggestions?

Engaging with diverse forms of knowledge through critical reflection enables social workers to navigate complexity, avoid rigid decision-making, and remain contextually responsive. Such an approach ensures that practice is guided by professional values, situational awareness, and adaptability. Collaborative reflection tools further support continuous dialogue, self-assessment, and respectful engagement, fostering effective practice outcomes (Drisko, 2017).

This process requires practitioners to reflect on their own assumptions and biases while participating in shared learning with clients and professional networks.

Ultimately, the application of knowledge through interactive and collaborative processes mitigates power imbalances and reinforces client agency (Drisko & Grady, 2012). By positioning social workers as facilitators rather than sole experts, this approach aligns practice with the relational and ethical foundations of social work, ensuring that both practitioners and clients contribute meaningfully to knowledge construction and decision-making.

10.1.4. Evidence-Informed Social Work Practice

Another significant implication of the theory of Navigating Knowledge is the requirement for social workers to engage with evidence through a broad and inclusive interpretation, rather than relying narrowly on empirical research alone. Evidence-informed practice, from this perspective, involves the synthesis of personal, professional, and contextual knowledge, recognising that knowledge construction is an interpretive and integrative process. Social workers construct practice knowledge by bringing together theoretical insights, empirical findings, service user perspectives, and their own professional expertise in ways that are responsive to the complexities of practice.

When applying evidence-informed knowledge, the theory emphasises the centrality of professional judgement. Social workers are required to interpret and adapt evidence in relation to the specific circumstances, values, and needs of clients, rather than adhering to rigid or uncritical decision-making processes. Ongoing debates within the literature highlight persistent tensions surrounding the validity and application of evidence-informed approaches in social work (Bingham et al., 2015; Davies & Gray, 2017; Spensberger et al., 2020). Concerns have been raised that narrow, scientifically reductionist views of evidence risk undermining the relevance and acceptability of evidence-informed knowledge within the profession (Davies &

Gray, 2017). Addressing these concerns requires renewed attention to how evidence is interpreted and applied in practice.

Within the theory of Navigating Knowledge, evidence is understood as multifaceted and dynamic, therefore, social workers must recognise the limitations of narrow interpretations of evidence, particularly when responding to the complex, contextual, and often unpredictable realities of clients' lives. Figure 10.1 illustrates an example of a broader interpretation of evidence, demonstrating how multiple forms of knowledge interact in the process of constructing practice knowledge.

Figure 10.1

Types of Knowledge in Evidence-Informed Practice

The figure shows the integration of diverse knowledge types as evidence in social work practice, highlighting how social workers move between knowledge sources rather than applying them in a linear or hierarchical manner.

The theory of Navigating Knowledge implies that social workers must consider a wide range of knowledge sources. These include organisational knowledge, social work expertise, client knowledge, research evidence, policy knowledge, and community contextual knowledge. Integrating these forms of knowledge supports the development of more evidence-informed practice.

Organisational knowledge involves understanding and applying organisational policies, procedures, and resources, as well as drawing on the practical knowledge generated and shared among colleagues. Social work expertise refers to practitioners' skills, experiences, and professional perspectives, which enable critical judgement and ethical decision-making. Client knowledge centres the values, preferences, lived experiences, and broader life contexts of service users, including cultural knowledge and social networks (Harms & Connolly, 2023). Research evidence contributes empirical findings derived from rigorous scientific methods and supports informed decision-making when integrated with practitioner expertise and client and community values (Drisko & Grady, 2012). The application of research evidence involves identifying, appraising, and using the best available research to support effective practice outcomes.

Applying policy knowledge requires social workers to understand and apply relevant legislation and policy frameworks, guiding lawful practice while also advocating for social justice and equity beyond partisan or ideological positions. Community contextual knowledge involves applying an understanding of the specific social, cultural, economic, and environmental conditions within the communities in which social workers operate. This form of knowledge is strengthened through collaboration with community stakeholders and attentiveness to local norms and resources.

Furthermore, the application of theories and frameworks enables social workers to interpret evidence through social work lenses that shape understanding and action. A lens functions as a framework or worldview through which situations are interpreted. For example, a te ao Māori lens grounds practice in values such as whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, kotahitanga, and rangatiratanga (Pihama et al., 2004); a strengths-based lens emphasises abilities, resilience, and cultural and community resources (Saleebey, 1996); and a systems lens focuses on the

interactions between individuals, families, institutions, and broader social and policy contexts (Munford & O'Donoghue, 2019).

This interpretive approach aligns with broader conceptualisations of social work as both a practical and systematic endeavour (Connolly et al., 2018) and as a blend of artistic and scientific knowledge (Ingram, 2013). The theory of Navigating Knowledge similarly highlighted the importance of combining technical expertise with creativity, deep reasoning, and moral judgement, underscoring the practical-moral dimensions of evidence in social work practice.

10.2. The Implications for Supervisors

The theory of Navigating Knowledge suggests that social work supervisors hold a significant role in the interpretation, construction, and application of knowledge within the field. Participants in the study consistently highlighted the benefits of supervision, while simultaneously acknowledging the inherent values and power dynamics involved. Accordingly, supervision that provides critical reflection and ensures safe practices is regarded as essential for producing positive outcomes.

10.2.1. Reflective Supervision: Navigating Values and Power

An implication of the theory of Navigating Knowledge is that supervisors must recognise the central role of supervision in shaping how supervisees interpret, construct, and apply knowledge in practice. Supervisors exert significant influence over these processes and, consequently, over practice outcomes. Given social work knowledge is inherently value-laden, supervision must be critically reflective and explicitly attentive to power relations. This requires supervision to function as a collaborative partnership rather than a purely hierarchical process, while also serving as a space that promotes safe and ethical practice.

The theory of Navigating Knowledge suggests that effective supervision involves critical reflection by both supervisor and supervisee, drawing on personal, professional, and contextual knowledge through the application of technical rationality, practical rationality, and critical reflection. Supervision is therefore not a unidirectional transfer of expertise but a dynamic, reciprocal process in which both parties actively engage in knowledge construction. Within this collaborative relationship, supervisors are committed to fostering the supervisee's knowledge construction, while supervisees are encouraged to critically examine their practice, explore alternative perspectives, and integrate feedback and guidance into their work. Over time, this ongoing reflective engagement enhances the competence of both supervisor and supervisee and contributes to improved practice outcomes.

The theory of Navigating Knowledge conceptualises values and power dynamics as intrinsic to supervisory relationships. Organisational hierarchies, differences in experience, and professional authority shape how knowledge is interpreted and applied in supervision. If these power relations remain unexamined, supervision risks reinforcing dominant assumptions and limiting critical engagement, potentially resulting in ineffective or unsafe practice, as highlighted by Lewis et al. (2019). The theory further acknowledges that supervisees may find it difficult to raise concerns about power directly, reinforcing the responsibility of supervisors to actively create space for dialogue and reflexivity around these dynamics. Furthermore, reflective supervision enables social workers to navigate competing values, power relations and contextual demands in practice. Therefore, supervision must operate as a reflective and interactive process that supports social workers to critically examine their values, interrogate their practice, and integrate diverse forms of knowledge (O'Donoghue & Tsui, 2012).

Knowledge construction within supervision includes the critical examination of casework, community projects, research activities, and interventions, alongside reflection on strengths,

limitations, and emerging evidence-informed approaches (Gilgun, 2005; O'Donoghue, 2021). Recognising and ethically navigating power differentials is integral to this process. Both supervisors and supervisees share responsibility for fostering an environment in which assumptions can be challenged, concerns voiced, and perspectives openly exchanged. Addressing power dynamics in this way strengthens trust, enhances supervisory effectiveness, and supports positive outcomes for clients, practitioners, organisations, and the social work profession (Wonnacott, 2012).

10.2.2. Supervision as a Safe Space: Promoting Ethical, Political, and Culturally Responsive Practice.

A further implication of the theory of Navigating Knowledge is that supervisors must establish supervision as an avenue for safe practice. This requirement extends beyond awareness of values and power relations to include recognition that social work knowledge is historically and politically situated. Supervisors therefore play a critical role in ensuring that supervision supports safety for social workers, organisations, and clients.

The theory of Navigating Knowledge emphasises that safe practice is closely linked to the quality of supervision. As social workers navigate complex and uncertain practice contexts, they require a protected space in which to interpret experiences, construct knowledge, and critically reflect on their work. Supervision provides this space when it is grounded in trust, transparency, and mutual respect. Importantly, supervision is never neutral; it is shaped by histories of colonisation, social policy, organisational culture, and professional norms (Beddoe & Davys, 2016). Consequently, supervision must be understood as both relational and politically informed.

The absence of a safe supervisory space heightens the risk of unsafe practice, particularly for newly qualified social workers. The theory of Navigating Knowledge affirms that supervision

enhances safe practice by enabling reflective and critical thinking about positionality, values, cultural identity, and emotional wellbeing (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; O'Donoghue et al., 2018). This is especially significant given that social work knowledge has historically privileged Western paradigms, often marginalising Indigenous, community-based, and lived-experience knowledges (Beddoe & Davys, 2016; Ruwhiu et al., 2008). Supervision that explicitly engages with these realities supports practitioners to critique dominant discourses, recognise systemic injustices, and understand how political and historical forces shape practice contexts.

Safe supervision also contributes to organisational safety by supporting quality assurance, transparent decision-making, and culturally safe practice (O'Donoghue, 2021). Ultimately, this benefits clients and communities by guiding practitioners toward ethically sound decisions that are responsive to complex social, historical, and political environments (Wonacott, 2012). The application of the theory of Navigating Knowledge to safe practice is outlined in Table 10.6, a practical reflective tool for using supervision to enhance safety through the integration of diverse knowledge sources.

Table 10.6

Reflective Tool for Safe Supervision

Opportunity for knowledge construction	**Ensuring supervisor receives supervision**	**Critical reflection framework**	**Feedback mechanism**	**Problem-solving strategies**
Both supervisor and supervisee must have the opportunity for knowledge construction. Lack of supervision impacts development opportunities by depriving both parties of reflective space necessary for learning and growth.	Implement a structured system where supervisors are also supervised. This ensures that they have the opportunity to reflect on their knowledge sources, construction, and application. Without this, supervisors may become stagnant in their supervisory practices.	Utilise a model(s), such as Gibb Reflective Cycle or Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (Pawar & Anscombe, 2015; Modderman et al., 2023). Establish a frequency for supervision sessions, for example, by considering monthly or bi-monthly meetings. Topics to be reflected on should include challenging cases, ethical dilemmas, personal values or biases, and development goals.	Create a safe space for open dialogue and feedback. Encourage honesty and transparency from both parties. Acknowledge power dynamics and values inherent in the relationship. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the feedback process to ensure it meets the needs of both supervisor and supervisee.	Implement a structured approach to problem-solving within supervision sessions. Consider the types of problems that can be brought into supervision, including professional, community-related, case management, and personal issues. Encourage brainstorming and collaborative problem-solving techniques.

The theory further highlights the importance of cohesive and flexible supervision systems, including one-to-one, group, and peer supervision arrangements. These varied forms of supervision strengthen reflective capacity and peer support.

Research in Aotearoa New Zealand indicates that inconsistencies in supervision provision have significant impact on social worker wellbeing and retention, particularly among new graduates (Beddoe & Davys, 2016), underscoring the necessity of structured and supportive supervisory

systems. The theory of Navigating Knowledge also points to the need for specialised training and expertise for both supervisors and supervisees. Effective supervision requires supervisors who are skilled, well-trained, and knowledgeable in theory, research, and contextual practice (Beddoe & Davys, 2016). The reflective questions in Table 10.7 exemplify how supervision can facilitate critical reflection for a safe practice.

Table 10.7

A Practical Guide for Supervisors and Supervisees

1. Have we identified and unpacked case scenarios that are evidence-informed? ● Have we thoroughly explored the case scenarios we have encountered, ensuring they are grounded in evidence-informed practice? ● How can we ensure that our approach to case scenarios remains aligned with the latest evidence and practices?
2. **Have we constructively assessed strengths and areas of improvement?** ● In what ways have we effectively identified areas where improvement or growth is needed? ● How can we ensure that feedback is delivered constructively and with a growth-oriented mindset?
3. Have we developed knowledge from the supervisory relationship? ● Reflecting on our interactions, what new insights or knowledge have we gained through this supervisory relationship? ● What steps can we take to continue fostering a learning environment within our supervisory dynamic?
4. How do we understand power dynamics and feel safe in our supervisory relationship? ● How do we perceive the power dynamics within our supervisory relationship, and how do they influence our interactions? ● What strategies can we implement to ensure that both supervisor and supervisee feel safe, respected, and valued within the supervisory relationship?

Supervision alone is insufficient unless both parties possess a shared understanding of safe practice. Applying knowledge in this way enables critical reflection on values and power relations, which is essential for achieving effective supervisory outcomes.

10.3. The Implications for Social Work Educators

The theory of Navigating Knowledge highlights two important implications for social work educators, particularly in relation to how knowledge is understood, constructed, and applied within educational settings. First, educators must respond to the contingent nature of knowledge, accommodating the complexities of 21st-century information, and recognise that students enter social work programmes with diverse starting points shaped by uneven academic preparation and varied life circumstances. Second, educators must emphasise that social work knowledge is inseparable from its historical and political contexts, requiring teaching approaches that cultivate critical awareness, reflexivity, and a growth-mindset oriented of knowledge construction.

10.3.1. Contingent Knowledge in 21st Century Social Work Education

An important implication of the theory of Navigating Knowledge is that educators must recognise and respond to the contingent nature of both social work knowledge and student's knowledge. Students enter programmes with varying levels of literacy and academic readiness, leaving some inadequately prepared for the demands of higher education (Foster, 2015). Academic capability is further shaped by personal and structural factors, including dissatisfaction with learning experiences, difficulty managing academic demands, inappropriate course selection, and challenges such as financial hardship, illness, and family responsibilities (Van der Meer et al., 2011).

Educators have a critical responsibility to guide students in constructing knowledge attuned to contemporary social realities, such as increased diversity, rising inequality and social exclusion, while fostering ethical practice with diverse populations and competent use of technology. This responsibility is grounded in the profound social, demographic, and cultural transformations that Aotearoa New Zealand has undergone between the 20th and 21st centuries, which

necessarily reshape the foundations of 21st century social work knowledge. For much of the 20th century, immigration to Aotearoa New Zealand was predominantly from Britain and Europe, reflecting an explicitly Anglo-centric policy framework. This trajectory shifted decisively following the Immigration Act 1987, which dismantled racial and national preferences and opened pathways for immigrants from across the globe. As a result, by 2023, Aotearoa New Zealand was home to people from more than 200 birthplaces, with over 150 languages spoken nationwide (Statistics New Zealand, 2023). Parallel changes are evident in refugee and humanitarian policy. Whereas the annual refugee quota stood at 750 places in 1997, the government expanded its humanitarian intake to 1,500 places from 2020 and introduced additional settlement locations, significantly diversifying communities across the country (Immigration New Zealand, 2020).

Transformations are also evident in the recognition of gender and sexual diversity. Throughout much of the 20th century, diverse gender identities and sexualities were marginalised, rendered largely invisible in policy, and subject to systemic discrimination. In contrast, the adoption of a new national statistical standard in 2021 marked a significant shift towards recognising gender diversity, including transgender and intersex populations, within official data and policy frameworks (Statistics New Zealand, 2021). Collectively, these shifts in ethnicity, language, refugee flows, and gender diversity underscore that social work knowledge cannot be static or historically bounded. Instead, educators must equip students with the capacity to critically navigate evolving social contexts, ethical complexities, and technological developments, ensuring that professional knowledge remains responsive, inclusive, and fit for practice in a rapidly changing Aotearoa New Zealand.

Educators must therefore support students to construct knowledge that is relevant to contemporary practice and inclusive of Indigenous knowledge systems. This requires guiding

students to integrate competencies such as ethical practice with diverse populations and the appropriate use of technology. The growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in social work practice illustrates this challenge. While AI can enhance decision-making and resource allocation (Ahn et al., 2025), it also raises concerns related to bias, inequality, ethics, and the erosion of human dignity and relational practice (Diez, 2023; Reamer, 2023). In Aotearoa New Zealand, the absence of unified regulatory guidance from the SWRB places increased responsibility on educators to embed AI literacy within curricula, including critical digital literacy, analysis of algorithmic bias, and consideration of Te Tiriti o Waitangi implications.

The application of the theory of Navigating Knowledge in education requires proactive strategies to enhance student preparedness and adaptability. Table 10.8 presents a tool that supports pre-programme assessment and targeted support mechanisms, enabling educators to identify potential academic challenges early.

Table 10.8

Tool for Social Work Educators to Enhance Student Success

1. Literacy support assessment: ● Identify students who exhibit limited or inconsistent literacy skills through an initial assessment. ● Develop tailored support strategies, such as additional tutoring or specialised resources to address these literacy challenges. ● Regularly monitor progress and adjust support as needed to ensure students are effectively improving literacy skills.
2. Higher education preparedness assessment: ● Conduct interviews with prospective students to understand their awareness of the challenges they may face in higher education. ● Provide information and resources to help students navigate these challenges, such as time management techniques, study skills workshops, or access to academic support services. ● Foster a supportive environment where students feel comfortable seeking help and guidance as they transition into higher education.
3. Lived experience integration: ● Before the start of the programme, engage in discussions with students to understand the diverse range of knowledge and experiences they bring into the social work programme. ● Incorporate opportunities for students to draw on their lived experiences as valuable resources in their learning, such as through case studies, group discussions, or reflective assignments.
4. Personal factors assessment: ● Conduct pre-programme interviews to assess students' self-management skills, confidence levels, and understanding of expected standards and work quality. ● Provide targeted support and resources to help students develop and strengthen their personal factors, such as goal-setting workshops, self-care strategies, or mentoring opportunities.

Embedding this tool within interview and selection processes, and implementing its components across different stages of the qualifying programme, contributes to the development of students who are academically capable, critically reflective, and well prepared for the complexities of contemporary social work practice.

10.3.2. Historical and Political Consciousness in Knowledge Construction

Educators need to emphasise that social work knowledge cannot be separated from its historical and political contexts. Personal, professional, and contextual knowledge are all shaped by historical conditions and power relations, rendering social work knowledge inherently non-neutral. Historically, knowledge reflects the cultural and temporal contexts in which it is produced (Börjesson & Ulmestik, 2022; Cha et al., 2006), while politically it is embedded within power structures that influence social organisation and resistance (Foucault, 1972).

Applying knowledge is therefore a deliberate and ethical act. Knowledge may legitimise existing power structures, function as a catalyst for social change, or become a site of political struggle. Developing students' capacity to critically apply knowledge enhances their critical thinking skills and enables them to recognise how social issues are interpreted differntly across times and cultures (Trevithick, 2012). This critical awareness supports the development of a growth mindset in which students understand knowledge as evolving, contested, and shaped by context (Matthews, 2021; van deer Meer et al., 2011).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, this implication is particularly significant within a bicultural and post-colonial context. Social work education must engage with the history of colonisation, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, assimilation, immigration trends, and legislative frameworks that determine visibility, inclusion, and access to resources. Educators are therefore required to integrate historically and politically informed contextual knowledge relating to Māori, Pacific peoples, immigrants, refugees, addiction, child protection, violence, and disability. While critical and analytical skills are central expectations of degree-level education (Beddoe, 2018), variation in pedagogical approaches (Ballantyne et al., 2019; Hay et al., 2019) highlights the importance of explicitly embedding historical and political analysis in teaching practice. The application of the theory of Navigating Knowledge in this area is supported by Table 10.9, which offers

reflective questions to assist educators in examining how students' interpretations and future knowledge construction are shaped by historical and political influences.

Table 10.9

Educators' Tools for Reflecting Students' Historically and Politically Informed Knowledge

Highlight students' knowledge possession	**Assess knowledge construction**	**Honing critical thinking**	**Emphasising growth mindset**
Educators must emphasise the significance of the diverse knowledge possessed by students, including lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, previous work experiences, community knowledge, and local insights. How do students' current knowledge bases reflect their historical and political contexts? What are the potential biases or assumptions they bring to the classroom based on their lived experiences?	Educators should critically assess students' knowledge construction journey, highlighting their progress and development as future practitioners. Provide opportunities for students to reflect on their learning experiences and how these contribute to their readiness for practice. How do teaching methods apply to facilitate the development of a more nuanced understanding of knowledge over time?	Plant the seed of critical thinking skills in students' minds by fostering confidence in questioning, thinking outside the box, and advocating for themselves and their clients. Encourage students to challenge assumptions, explore alternative perspectives, and be aware of their biases and limitations. What is the outcome of teaching methods designed to enhance students' ability to critically analyse the historical and political influences on knowledge?	Educators should emphasise the importance of nurturing growth mindset among students, encouraging them to view challenges as opportunities for growth and learning. Challenge the notion that high grades equate to superior competence, emphasising the value of resilience, perseverance, and adaptability in the field of social work. How does the application of contextual knowledge contribute to a growth mindset in students, encouraging them to challenge their own assumptions?

This approach extends beyond the transmission of theory and skills to prioritise the ongoing development of resilience, adaptability, and critical consciousness. Through engagement with diverse theories, reflective practice, work-integrated learning, and practical exposure, educators can foster a growth mindset that supports students to navigate the complexity of social work knowledge throughout their professional development (Matthews, 2021). The outcome of applying this implication is the preparation of competent social workers who are critically

aware, historically informed, politically conscious, and resilient—capable of responding effectively to the evolving demands of contemporary social work practice.

10.4. The Implications for Social Work Agencies

The implication of the theory of Navigating Knowledge is that social work agencies must have clear guidelines and policies for the construction and application of knowledge in practice. This is crucial because it demonstrates how these processes affect the daily work of frontline social workers and is an integral part of their professional development. Furthermore, the theory of Navigating Knowledge posits that effective social work practice depends on a collaborative professional culture built on shared understanding, mutual respect, and collective learning.

10.4.1. Organisational Guidelines and Policies

Organisational support is essential for social workers to construct knowledge that informs their evidence-informed practice. When an organisation chooses to apply knowledge for evidence-informed practice, it must establish clear guidelines and policies to support the continuous knowledge construction of its staff. This includes providing resources and supporting managers, supervisors, and social workers as they construct and apply knowledge. The ultimate outcome is a practice that promotes an evidence-informed approach.

While there is a strong push for evidence-informed interventions in social work (Dodd & Savage, 2016; Gambrill, 2010), it is often unclear how these practices apply to the daily work of frontline practitioners (Drisko & Grady, 2019). The literature on implementing evidence-informed social work often assumes that key actors, from researchers to policy makers, clearly understands policy recommendations and guidelines, but this is not always the case for frontline social workers (Gray & Schubert, 2012). Therefore, clear guidelines and policies are essential to help social workers meet their organisation's expectations for applying evidence-informed practice. Table 10.10 below is an example of a checklist that social work agencies can apply:

Table 10.10

Checklist for Organisation Guidelines in Evidence-Informed Practices

Resources for evidence-informed practices	**Nurturing evidence-informed practices**	**Simplification without job creation**	**Supporting managers and supervisors**
Research studies: the organisation maintains access to a comprehensive database of relevant research studies in social work and related disciplines. Books and journal articles: staff members have access to a library of books and journal articles that cover various aspects of evidence-informed practices in social work. Interdisciplinary knowledge: the organisation encourages the integration of knowledge from other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and health to inform evidence-informed practices. Previous cases and projects: past cases and projects are documented and accessible to staff as valuable sources of evidence and learning.	Embedded attitude: the organisation fosters a culture that values evidence-informed practices, emphasising their importance in decision-making processes. Regular workshops: continuous professional development includes regular workshops and training sessions focused on enhancing skills in identifying, critically appraising, and applying evidence-informed practices. Allocated time: staff are provided with dedicated time to conduct literature searches, critically evaluate evidence, and integrate findings into their practice.	Streamlined processes: the organisation implements streamlined procedures for accessing and utilising evidence, avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy or additional job roles. Integration into existing workflows: evidence-informed practices are integrated into existing job responsibilities, ensuring they enhance rather than burden the workload.	Training and resources: managers and supervisors receive specialised training and access resources to support their role in facilitating evidence-informed practices among social workers. Flexible approaches: recognising the nuance of evidence-informed practice, managers are encouraged to adopt flexible approaches that accommodate the complex and sometimes ambiguous nature of social work scenarios. Peer support networks: peer support networks are established to encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing among managers and supervisors, fostering a community of practice around evidence-informed approaches. Ongoing evaluation: the organisation continuously evaluates and adapts its support mechanisms for managers and supervisors to ensure they effectively facilitate the development of social workers' capabilities in evidence-informed practices.

To ensure evidence-informed practice, organisations must provide resources for social workers to construct knowledge. These resources, which may include research studies, books, journal articles, and past and current case scenarios, broaden the scope of knowledge construction. The knowledge constructed from these diverse sources informs the decision-making process. For an organisation to successfully apply this knowledge, it must embed a culture of evidence-informed practice into its operations, integrating it into the responsibilities of all staff, including managers, supervisors, and social workers, without introducing unnecessary bureaucracy. The outcome of this approach is effective client services that meet specific needs, competent social workers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and an accountable organisation that provides credible and efficient services.

10.4.2. Professional Knowledge Culture

The theory of Navigating Knowledge suggests that applying knowledge in decision-making requires a sustained effort to strengthen professional knowledge culture. Professional knowledge culture refers to the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that support collaborative knowledge use. It positions the maintenance and development of social workers' knowledge and professionalism as a shared responsibility between employers and practitioners to promote positive practice outcomes.

Table 10.11 outlines social service agencies employing social workers can enhance their processes of constructing knowledge to inform practice as part of their professional knowledge culture. This involves active participation in discussions, peer conversations, networking, engaging with professional associations, attending relevant seminars, and fostering knowledge across diverse cultural contexts. These activities are not only engaging but also play a significant role in improving social work practice.

Table 10.11

Ideas for Enhancing Professional Knowledge Culture

Active participation in discussions	**Peer conversations**	**Networking with multi-disciplines**	**Leveraging professional association and development**	**Cultivating knowledge across diverse cultures**
Ensure that all staff members, including managers, supervisors, and frontline workers, actively participate in discussions. Create a culture where everyone feels safe and respected to voice their ideas and concerns.	Encourage staff to engage in peer conversations for sharing concerns, ideas, and possible solutions in problem-solving. Foster an environment where collaboration and open communication among peers are valued.	Nurture networking opportunities with professionals from diverse fields such as healthcare, legal, education, local city councils. Encourage staff to build relationships and collaborate with professionals outside the social service agency to gain broader perspectives and resources.	Encourage staff to participate in and leverage professional associations related to social work and relevant studies. Support staff in accessing professional development opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge.	Foster a culture of cultural competence by encouraging staff to cultivate knowledge about diverse cultures, both within and outside the organisation. Provide training and resources to help staff understand and respect the cultural backgrounds of clients and colleagues.

Social service agencies must provide opportunities for social workers to collaboratively construct knowledge through interactions with colleagues and professional development initiatives. In Aotearoa New Zealand, this commitment to professional development is a key part of demonstrating professional standards for employers of registered social workers (SWRB, 2024a).

For social work agencies, applying knowledge means recognising their vital role in the knowledge construction process and taking deliberate steps to ensure staff can apply diverse knowledge to their assessments and interventions. Collaborative efforts between agencies and social workers in constructing and applying knowledge can significantly improve the quality of both the social workers' practice and the well-being of their clients.

The theory of Navigating Knowledge suggests that the processes of knowledge construction can be achieved through various channels, such as peer support and expanded professional networks. This collaborative approach equips social workers with essential resources, emotional support, and advocacy. The positive outcome of this is the empowerment of social workers, enabling them to deliver effective services, advance professionally, and maintain their well-being. Agencies must actively support these knowledge construction channels, investing in both the development and well-being of their staff.

10.5. The Implications for Social Work Research

The theory of Navigating Knowledge implies that a professional knowledge culture includes using research to construct knowledge that informs practice and subsequently applies this knowledge throughout the social work process. It posits that research is both a primary source for interpreting knowledge in the 21st century and a key method for constructing knowledge within social work practice. The application of knowledge gained through research enhances evidence-informed practices, however, it requires critical interpretation of the power dynamics inherent in the research itself.

10.5.1. Strengthening Research-Practice Integration

An implication of the theory of Navigating Knowledge is that social work researchers must respond to the rapid and complex social changes of the 21st century, including globalisation, increasing inequality, ethical use of technology, and, critically, the preservation of Indigenous and local contextual knowledge. These conditions require researchers to engage in continuous knowledge construction to meet evolving professional and practice demands. While technological advances enhance efficiency and access to evidence-informed knowledge, researchers must ensure that such developments do not marginalise Indigenous and locally

grounded knowledges that are central to culturally responsive practice and positive outcomes for clients and communities.

The theory further emphasises that research should not be confined to an exclusive academic community but must be developed collaboratively with practitioners to enhance its relevance and impact in everyday social work practice. Research functions both as a source of new knowledge and as a method for constructing knowledge that complements practice-based expertise. However, research remains underutilised in social work, with studies highlighting practitioners' limited engagement with research and varying levels of awareness regarding its application in practice (Börjesson & Ulmestik, 2022; McCafferty, 2020; McDermott et al., 2017).

Table 10.12 provides a practical checklist for strengthening the impact of research in social work to meet the demands of contemporary practice. Strengthening this process supports the development of a more robust, responsive, and evidence-informed professional practice.

Table 10.12

Checklist for Strengthening the Impact of Research in Social Work

Dissemination strategies	**Targeting multiple layers of social work**	**Simplify dissemination**	**Promote collaborative work**
Implement strategies to disseminate research findings effectively. This may include: ● Online publications. ● Workshops or seminars to present key findings. ● Visit professional networks and agencies to share findings. ● Deliver quick presentations at relevant events.	Ensure research findings reach various levels within the social work field, including: ● Specific populations targeted by the research. ● Social service agencies and organisations. ● Social workers in frontline practice.	Present findings in a simple and accessible manner to facilitate understanding. This can be achieved through: ● Summarised bullet points highlighting findings. ● Fact sheets or infographics conveying essential information. ● Poster, visual aids or short videos to communicate findings. ● One-page information sheets providing a concise overview of the research.	Encourage collaborative efforts rather than isolated work to maximise the impact of research findings. This involves: ● Engaging in collaborative projects with colleagues an stakeholders. ● Being actively involved in real-world settings to ensure research is applicable. ● Networking and building relationships within the social work community to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Findings from this study demonstrate a strong connection between research and knowledge construction, with participants underscoring the importance of decision-making informed by diverse forms of knowledge, including research. This challenges the narrow conception of research as knowledge produced solely by academics and communicated in highly technical language. Instead, it implies that researchers must disseminate findings in clear and accessible ways to bridge the research–practice gap, a divide well documented in the literature (Denvall & Skillmark, 2021; Holosko, 2009).

Epstein's (2022) concept of a "virtue friendship" between research and practice provides a useful lens for understanding the type of relationship required—one grounded in mutual respect, collaboration, and a shared commitment to professional excellence (p. 6). Within the theory of Navigating Knowledge, constructing knowledge through research requires ongoing

and adaptive relationships between researchers and practitioners, acknowledging that these connections may evolve or dissolve over time. Without such collaboration, discord persists due to unresolved debates about the nature of social work science, an overemphasis on academic knowledge exchange, and strained relationships between agencies and the research community (Denvall & Skillmark, 2021). The consequences of this gap are evident in suboptimal client outcomes, as failing to integrate relevant knowledge limits intervention effectiveness and undermines the quality of care provided (Börjesson & Ulmestik, 2023; Payne, 2015).

10.5.2. Values and Power Dynamics in Social Work Research

A further implication of the theory of Navigating Knowledge is that social work researchers must critically examine the values and power relations embedded in the production, interpretation, and application of research. Dominelli (2017) highlights the significant power researchers hold in determining which narratives are prioritised, whose knowledge is legitimised, and which groups are subject to research scrutiny. These decisions directly influence how practitioners interpret and apply research-informed knowledge in their practice, shaping interventions and, ultimately, client outcomes. Table 10.13 outlines prompts for reflecting on knowledge significance, values, and power relations in social work research.

Table 10.13

Prompts for Determining Knowledge Significance, Values and Power Relations

Check existing knowledge	Construction of knowledge	Application of knowledge	Impacts of application
Assess existing knowledge: what constitutes knowledge? Whose knowledge is considered valid and relevant?	Examine the construction of knowledge: where does it originate? How is it shaped? Who determines its validity and relevance?	Evaluate the applicability of knowledge: how is it applied? To whom is it applicable? Who stands to benefit from its application?	Consider the impacts of knowledge application: How can the application be ensured to have tangible impacts? How to prevent it from being merely theoretical or self-serving for the researcher or funder?

Engaging critically with these dimensions requires researchers to ask fundamental questions about whose knowledge counts, who is represented or excluded, who benefits from the research, and who controls resources such as funding. This aligns with Dominelli's (2009) analysis of how historical, structural, and political forces shape research agendas and priorities.

The theory of Navigating Knowledge affirms that power operates across academic institutions, government departments, and research communities, influencing methodological choices, funding decisions, and the authority of knowledge claims. These processes are inherently value-laden and shape the outcomes of knowledge construction and application in social work. Consequently, researchers must adopt a reflexive and critical stance to ensure that research contributes to equitable, ethical, and effective practice. Strengthening critical engagement with values and power not only enhances the integrity of research but also supports more meaningful and socially just outcomes for practitioners, clients, and communities.

10.6. Conclusion

The theory of Navigating Knowledge has wide-ranging implications across social work. For practitioners, it reframes knowledge application as an interpretive and context-dependent process that requires deliberate reflection, collaborative sense-making, and sustainable organisational conditions that recognise knowledge work as core practice. For supervisors, it

positions supervision as a critical reflective space where values, power relations, and contested knowledge claims are examined to support safe and ethical practice. For educators, it highlights the need for pedagogies that foster active knowledge construction and critical engagement with contemporary social, political, and cultural realities, particularly those shaped by power and positionality. For agencies, the theory underscores that evidence-informed practice depends on organisational commitment to developing a strong professional knowledge culture through supportive policies, manageable workloads, and robust supervision structures. For researchers, it calls for reflexive, contextually grounded inquiry that foregrounds Indigenous and local knowledges while challenging traditional hierarchies between research and practice.

Overall, Navigating Knowledge provides a unifying framework that connects practice, supervision, education, organisational culture, and research. By illuminating knowledge as dynamic, relational, and ethically situated, the theory reframes knowledge construction as a collective professional responsibility and strengthens the foundation for reflective, equitable, and responsive social work in complex contemporary environments.

Chapter 11. Concluding Remarks

The key outcome of this PhD thesis is the theory of Navigating Knowledge, an original theoretical contribution that explains how social workers interpret, construct, and apply knowledge in practice within the Aotearoa New Zealand context. This concluding chapter synthesises the thesis by revisiting the research aim and methodological approach, summarising the key theoretical findings, reflecting on the doctoral journey, and addressing trustworthiness and limitations. It concludes by outlining recommendations for social work practice, supervision, education, agencies, and future research, both nationally and internationally.

11.1 Revisiting the Research Aim

Despite the centrality of knowledge to social work practice, there remains limited empirical research—within Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally—examining how social workers interpret, generate, and apply knowledge in practice. To address this gap, this study aimed to develop an explanatory theory that accounts for how social work practitioners, including frontline workers, supervisors, educators, and researchers, navigate knowledge within complex and changing practice environments.

Guided by a CGT approach (Charmaz, 2014), this research systematically examined practitioners' experiences of knowledge meaning and use. Drawing on data analysis, an extensive literature review, prior empirical studies, and my professional experience as a practitioner, supervisor, and academic, the study achieved its aim through the generation of the theory of Navigating Knowledge, which explains the interconnected and non-linear processes through which knowledge is interpreted, constructed, applied, and translated into practice outcomes in Aotearoa New Zealand.

11.2. Methodological Approach

The methodology of this study was grounded in a social constructionist epistemology, which shaped the research design, analytic process, and theory development (Charmaz, 2014). Consistent with Birks et al. (2019) and Clarke et al. (2023), theoretical sensitivity was central to the analysis, requiring reflexive engagement with both my positionality and participants' narratives.

Purposive and snowball sampling strategies were employed to recruit participants with relevant social work experience, including final-year students employed in the social work field (Morse & Clark, 2019). The sample expanded through theoretical sampling until saturation was achieved, resulting in 37 participants. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and analysed using transcripts, field notes, memos, and analytic exercises.

Initial and focused coding supported by constant comparison, enabled the refinement of categories and the development of a coherent theoretical framework (Brown et al., 2025). Theoretical coding informed the theory development (Keane & Thornberg, 2025; Sebastian, 2019). Memo writing, gerunds, and in vivo coding preserved participants' meanings and supported analytic depth. Following Charmaz's (2006) analytic sequence, the final theoretical storyline presented in Chapter Nine demonstrates the construction of the theory of Navigating Knowledge.

11.3. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was foundational to this study, as it ensured that the findings authentically represented participants' experiences while demonstrating that the research was carried out with methodological rigour and ethical integrity. Trustworthiness was guided by Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four established criteria—credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability—each of which underpinned the robustness of the study's qualitative design. These processes are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement with the research context, triangulation across data sources, the use of verbatim transcripts, iterative cycles of coding, and the extensive integration of participant quotations to ground interpretations in lived experience. Transferability was supported by providing thick, context-rich descriptions that enable readers to assess the applicability of findings to other settings. Dependability was ensured through transparent and systematic analytic procedures, including careful documentation of decisions, coding frameworks, and shifts in analytical direction. Confirmability was promoted through reflexive journaling, analytic memoing, and external scrutiny, including the dissemination of preliminary findings at conference presentations, which allowed for critical feedback from academic peers.

Throughout the study, rigorous supervisory oversight played a key role in enhancing trustworthiness. Regular supervision meetings ensured continuous monitoring and verification of data collection, analysis, interpretation, and the overall coherence of the thesis. This included careful checking of methodological decisions, analytic processes, and the use of literature and other scholarly resources. Member-checking was also undertaken to enhance the authenticity of the findings. Although transcripts were returned to all participants, only two responded with confirmation that the transcripts accurately reflected their contributions. Many participants had left their workplaces by the time the transcripts were sent, which limited the response rate; however, the confirmations received, alongside the detailed and transparent transcription processes, still contributed to enhanced credibility.

Overall, these strategies strengthened the research by ensuring that the findings were not only well-substantiated and ethically grounded but also demonstrably aligned with recognised

standards of qualitative rigour. By systematically addressing each aspect of trustworthiness, the study produced findings that are credible, contextually meaningful, methodologically consistent, and grounded in the participants' voices—ultimately enhancing the scholarly robustness and practical value of the research.

11.4. Key Findings

The theory of Navigating Knowledge identifies four interrelated and non-linear processes—interpreting knowledge, constructing knowledge, applying knowledge, and producing outcomes—which together illustrate the dynamic nature of professional reasoning. Interpreting knowledge involves drawing on personal, professional, and contextual sources, while constructing knowledge reflects an ongoing cycle of reflection, identifying gaps, expanding understanding, and engaging with professional networks to refine insight. Applying knowledge requires integrating technical rationality, practical reasoning, and reflective practice to respond thoughtfully to complex situations. Producing outcomes, meanwhile, extends beyond economic measures of efficiency or effectiveness to encompass socially embedded contributions that benefit families and communities, along with fostering practitioners' professional growth, cultural humility, strengthened decision-making capacity, and overall improvement in practice. Collectively, these dimensions support evidence-informed recommendations and advance more effective, ethical, and context-responsive social work practice.

Crucially, the theory foregrounds the understanding that all processes of knowledge production are inherently value-laden, shaped by power relations, and embedded within specific historical, political, and socio-cultural contexts. Although the theory has broad international relevance, its application in Aotearoa New Zealand is situated within the country's bicultural context. It recognises the centrality of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the ongoing impacts of colonisation. Such

positioning requires an explicit commitment to kaupapa Māori principles, the validation of Māori ways of knowing, and a critical examination of Western knowledge systems.

The way social workers navigate these processes directly influences the quality of practice and outcomes for clients and communities. This theoretical contribution advances understanding of social work knowledge as dynamic, relational, and contingent rather than neutral or static.

11.5. Reflexive Reflections on the PhD Journey

This PhD journey fostered significant academic, professional, and personal growth. Academically, engaging deeply with grounded theory scholarship (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) strengthened my analytical capacity and theoretical confidence. This development was reflected in peer-reviewed publications (Fitzgerald, 2021; Matthews, 2021, 2022) and presentations at national and international conferences.

Professionally, the theory of Navigating Knowledge sharpened my understanding of how values and power shape social work knowledge systems in Aotearoa New Zealand, reinforcing the importance of critical reflection in contemporary practice. This contribution was recognised through my promotion to Senior Academic Staff Member in 2024 and recognition for exceptional performance in 2025.

Personally, completing this PhD while working full-time, studying in my third language, and navigating significant personal challenges required sustained resilience. The theory itself reaffirmed the importance of values, responsibility, and power in shaping not only social work knowledge but also my commitment to influencing how the profession understands and applies knowledge.

11.6. Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations that warrant consideration when interpreting the findings. First, participant recruitment was confined to urban centres in Aotearoa New Zealand, as outlined in Chapter Five. This resulted in the under-representation of rural social work contexts and may have limited the diversity of knowledge practices and outcomes captured in the analysis.

Second, the sample lacked gender balance, with fewer male participants represented. This imbalance may have influenced the findings by privileging certain perspectives on knowledge construction and use, thereby constraining the breadth of social workers' knowledge experiences reflected in the study.

Third, data collection occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, which significantly affected participant engagement. Increased workloads across social service sectors led several initially interested participants to withdraw, potentially shaping the composition of the sample. Fourth, public health restrictions necessitated the use of online interviews during Level 4 lockdowns. While this approach enabled continuity of data collection, it limited access to non-verbal communication and relational cues typically present in kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face or in person) interactions, which may have influenced the depth and richness of the data.

Fifth, the online interview format may raise concerns regarding privacy and confidentiality. Some participants joined interviews from home or workplace environments where family members or colleagues were present, which may have constrained openness, introduced distractions, or limited participants' willingness to share sensitive information, thereby potentially restricting teh depth of insights gained.

Sixth, researcher subjectivity constitutes a further limitation. My positionality, interpretations, and inherent biases shaped the selection of the research focus, methods of data generation, and

analytical processes. Although this subjectivity facilitated a deeper and more nuanced understanding of participants' experiences—consistent with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014)—it remains an unavoidable feature of qualitative inquiry. While reflexive strategies were employed to mitigate bias, these measures cannot wholly eliminate its influence.

Finally, my status as an insider researcher may have affected recruitment, with some potential participants expressing concerns about confidentiality within the relatively close-knit social work community. Acknowledging these limitations is essential to situating the findings appropriately and to ensuring a balanced and transparent interpretation of the study's contributions.

11.7. Recommendations

Within Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural and increasingly multicultural context, this study offers recommendations for the social work profession. It highlights the need for reflexive, and sustainable approaches to knowledge system development. Accordingly, this section outlines recommendations for social work practice, supervision, education, agencies, and future research. While grounded in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, these recommendations are also relevant to international social work settings.

11.7.1. Recommendations for Social Work Practice

I recommend social work practitioners strengthen their integration of multiple knowledge sources, including personal, professional, and contextual knowledge. Consistent with the theory of Navigating Knowledge, social workers must continue to construct knowledge through the combined use of technical rationality, practical reasoning, and critical reflection. Developing such integrative knowledge is essential for effective and ethical practice; without it, practitioners risk biased interpretations, premature decision-making, and over-reliance on heuristic reasoning.

Collaborative approaches to knowledge construction are also essential. Engaging with professional, community, and interdisciplinary networks enhances practitioners' capacity to draw on a comprehensive and contextually evidence-informed practice. While local networks provide valuable support, there is considerable potential to expand international collaboration to develop a global reservoir of practice-informed knowledge. Professional associations (e.g., ANZASW), regulatory bodies (e.g., SWRB), and social service agencies are therefore encouraged to form strategic partnerships that support international knowledge exchange. Such initiatives could include practitioner-led forums that extend beyond academia, providing spaces to revisit theoretical foundations and critically engage with contemporary and contextual practice issues.

11.7.2. Recommendations for Supervision Practices

Supervisors play a critical role in supporting knowledge construction and ethical practice. It is recommended that supervision be structured as a reflective and relational space that acknowledges the value-laden and power-infused nature of social work knowledge. Supervision should function as a collaborative partnership rather than a purely hierarchical process, enabling critical dialogue and shared knowledge construction.

By foregrounding reflection on values, power, and context, I recommend that supervision be positioned as a central mechanism for promoting safe and accountable practice. The adoption of structured, reflective supervision approaches—such as regular, agenda-driven sessions that incorporate critical reflection, risk appraisal, and cultural humility—should be established as a standard requirement for professional supervision. Embedding these structures ensures that supervision moves beyond administrative monitoring and becomes a process for strengthening professional judgement, enhancing practitioner accountability, and, most importantly, safeguarding the wellbeing of both clients and social workers. Furthermore, the use of

systematic documentation, clearly articulated expectations, and protected time for supervision promotes greater consistency, transparency, and safety across practice settings.

Such an approach supports not only practitioner wellbeing and professional development but also organisational and client safety, reinforcing supervision as a central site for navigating complexity and uncertainty in practice.

11.7.3. Recommendations for Educational Approaches

Social work education providers are encouraged to pursue greater curriculum coherence across Aotearoa New Zealand's social work programmes to support the development of a complex 21st-century knowledge base. Educators must recognise and respond to the contingent nature of social work knowledge, particularly in relation to shifts in ethnicity, language, refugee flows, gender diversity, and technological change.

The theory of Navigating Knowledge highlights that social work knowledge cannot be static or historically bounded. Instead, educators must equip students with the capacity to critically navigate evolving social contexts, ethical complexities, and technology developments, while ensuring that professional knowledge remains inclusive, culturally responsive, and fit for contemporary practice. Sustained efforts to preserve and integrate Indigenous and local contextual knowledge are particularly recommended within Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural context.

Strengthening the connection between social work education and frontline practice is also recommended. The current disconnection limits opportunities for collaborative knowledge construction. Creating reciprocal pathways for practitioners to engage with academic institutions, and for educators to remain connected to practice environments, would foster a continuous cycle of learning and enhance the relevance and application of new knowledge.

11.7.4. Recommendations for Social Work Agencies

Agencies employing social workers have a crucial role in enabling evidence-informed practice. It is recommended that organisations establish explicit policies and clear protocols that support systematic knowledge construction. Participants in this study consistently identified insufficient time and the absence of organisational guidance as significant barriers to effective knowledge use.

Allocating dedicated time for reflection, learning, and collaborative knowledge construction would support the establishment of a strong professional knowledge culture. Such organisational investment is likely to enhance practice effectiveness, strengthen decision-making, and improve outcomes for clients and communities.

11.7.5. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research in the social work field should continue to respond to the rapid and complex social changes shaping 21st-century social work, including globalisation, widening inequality, ethical challenges associated with technology, and the preservation of Indigenous and local contextual knowledge. Expanding research into rural and regional settings is also recommended to address the urban focus of this study and to capture a wider range of practice experiences.

Given the significant influence of values and power in knowledge production, future studies need to critically examine how these dynamics shape research agendas, methodologies, and the application of findings. Research that includes greater diversity in cultural backgrounds, gender, and perspectives across micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice would provide richer insights into culturally appropriate and contextually grounded knowledge systems.

Finally, while professional associations and regulatory bodies in Aotearoa New Zealand support research, they are not currently major sources of research funding. It is recommended that these organisations allocate dedicated funding streams to encourage community and

practitioner-led research. Such investment would promote a culture of knowledge construction and application within the profession, strengthening professional credibility and enhancing social work practice outcomes.

11.8. Conclusion

This chapter concludes by reaffirming the key research aim and synthesising the core theoretical contributions of this study. Employing a CGT methodology, this research generated the theory of Navigating Knowledge, which explains how social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand engage with knowledge through dynamic, non-linear processes in practice. These processes—Interpreting Knowledge, Constructing Knowledge, Applying Knowledge, and Producing Outcomes—are analytically distinct yet deeply interconnected. Collectively, they are grounded in a social constructionist epistemology that recognises social work knowledge as inherently value-laden and shaped by power relations, historical and political conditions, and contextual contingencies.

This thesis makes a significant contribution by illuminating how social workers navigate these knowledge processes in increasingly complex practice environments. Its relevance is heightened in the context of the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence and digital technologies, which demand heightened reflexivity and rigorous scrutiny of information sources. The theory of Navigating Knowledge underscores the imperative for social workers to critically interpret, construct, and apply knowledge in ways that are responsive to 21st-century demographic shifts, emerging social issues, and technological change, while ensuring ethical and equitable practice outcomes. Central to this contribution is the affirmation of Indigenous knowledge and the continued importance of local, contextual knowledge within the social work knowledge system.

The research journey also contributed to substantial intellectual, professional, and personal development. While acknowledging key limitations—including an urban-focused sample, gender imbalance, reliance on online data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the inherent subjectivity of qualitative inquiry—this thesis advances clear and actionable recommendations. These emphasise the necessity of strengthening critical reflection, collaborative knowledge construction, and professional support structures across the social work field.

Finally, the study highlights enduring challenges in knowledge construction at individual, organisational, societal, and systemic levels. It demonstrates that meaningful application of knowledge in social work requires broad, collaborative, and reflexive strategies that extend beyond individual practitioners. Ultimately, this research affirms that values and power are central to how knowledge is understood and enacted in social work practice, signalling a critical area for continued scholarly attention and future research.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Human Ethics Application

Human Ethics Application

Application ID : [redacted](student ID)

Application Title : **The social workers' are at the centre: A grounded theory analysis of the process from acquiring to applying knowledge into practice.**

Date of Submission :

Primary Investigator : Hawa Fitzgerald

Other Investigators : N/A

Application Title

The social workers' are at the centre: A grounded theory analysis of the process from acquiring to applying knowledge into practice

Campus of Chief Applicant

- (•) Manawatu
- ( ) Wellington
- ( ) Albany

Recruitment / Data collection start date: 01 October 2019

Projected end of the project: 31 December 2025

1

Project Type

Academic Staff Research
General Staff Research
✓ **Postgraduate Student Research**
Undergraduate Student Research
Evaluation
Teaching
Other

A: Full Application

A 1 **Do you wish the protocol to be heard in a closed meeting (Part II)?***

No

A 2 Select any MUHEC or HDEC application numbers already applicable to this application and their relationship.

N/A

A 3 **Are you recruiting participants?***

Yes

C: Project Details

C 1 **Aim of the project ***

C 2 1. To make a significant contribution to social work theory and practice through studying the application of knowledge into social work practice; and 2. To produce a thesis that satisfies the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

C3 **Outline research/teaching/evaluation procedures including approach / procedures for collecting data.**
*If flowchart required, add to Documents section later.**

The researcher will purposively recruit 5 initial participants through letters of invitation to known social workers, for the first round of interviewing. The data gathered from the 5 initial participants will be used to develop a codebook for the subsequent interviews as basis of constant comparisons. A further 35 participants will be recruited by advertising on Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) website, social media, and drawing from Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) publicly available register and sending invitations to participate to social work practitioners. Comparative data analysis from the interviews will be conducted until a grounded theory is established.

The researcher will be using a qualitative method with a constructive grounded theory design to explicitly understand and capture the participants' perspectives and experiences of knowledge. The desired outcome would be the development of a theory with specific components of the process, causal conditions, strategies, context and consequences. The theory would be created by establishing categories from the data collected from the interviews and linking the evidence through the process of comparative analysis. As a result of the constant comparative analysis, a theory will emerge and will be grounded in the data as they will be systematically collected and analysed. Qualitative constructive grounded theory design has the ability to track and modify an emerging theory as new data appear and helps theory maintain its relevance.

Procedures flowchart attached.

C4 **Describe the experience of the researcher and / or supervisor to undertake this type of project. ***

The primary supervisor has edited and contributed to books on Social Work Theory and Practice and is an internationally recognised scholar. The co-supervisor has published on the connection between theory and practice for students on placement and new graduates and is a member of a research team exploring Newly Qualified Social Workers Readiness for Practice which includes how they reflect and use knowledge in practice.

The researcher's two previous bachelor's degrees (in agriculture and social work) had exposed her to foundational knowledge in research and part of the requirement to complete her master's degree in development studies was an approximately 40,000 words thesis. The researcher is currently employed as a full-time social work tutor teaching research paper for the Bachelor of Social Work degree. Recently, in November 2018, the researcher produced several published academic contributions at the Whitireia, Weltec and Open Polytechnic (WWOP) research symposium

C5 **Where will the project be conducted?**
Include information about the physical location / setting *

The project will take place in Aotearoa New Zealand. The locations of the interviews will be discussed with potential participants to ensure they are comfortable with the location and setting. The researcher will also ensure that the physical setting of the interview is appropriate to accommodate the participants' privacy and able to prevent disruptions.

C6 **Is the location overseas?***

No

D: Participants

D1 **Describe the intended participants***

The intended participants will be social workers, who are 21 years old or older, speak and understand English, have either completed or at the final stage of completing a foundational social work qualification and currently practicing social work. The researcher will provide information sheet and informed consent document for their review, approval and signature. Participants will be offered a $25.00 voucher plus any travel expenses that may occur, for fully participating in the study.

D2 **How many participants will be involved?***

There will be a maximum of 40 participants involved in this research.

D3 **Provide the reason for selecting this number or the statistical justification (if relevant).***

The researcher will recruit up to 40 participants of various ethnic groups, age and length of experience from different social work field and agencies. The reason for the inclusion of various backgrounds is to give good descriptive and diverse representation of social worker's experience in obtaining and applying knowledge into practice. This qualitative study emphasises the depth of meaning and perspectives of the evidence rather than measuring the breadth of the study and therefore 40 participants is sufficient for the scope of a grounded theory doctoral thesis. Further to the reasons of selecting up to 40 participants are:

- Ethical considerations: it is unethical to conduct a research study from data collected from a very small number of participants and it is unnecessary to include a greater number of participants than that effectively required;
- Financial limitations: in this study, the high costs of one-on-one interviews limits its use as a strategy to interview more participants for the study;
- Logistics: one-on-one interviews often impose challenges in terms of transportation, venue and equipment to conduct the study;
- Timeframe for the project: the amount of time needed to plan and conduct interviews may be excessive. The number of participants to be interviewed will need to be manageable within the timeframe of the study.

D4 **How will potential participants be identified?***

The 5 initial social workers will be purposively selected, they are known social workers from the researcher's professional network. The reason for the initial interviews with the 5 participants is to help the researcher finalise interview questions and to develop a code book for data analysis. The subsequent 35 participants will be identified through their response to ANZASW advertisement, social media, invitations to social workers identified from the SWRB publicly available register and known social workers from the researcher's network.

D5 **How will potential participants be recruited?***

By advertising it on ANZASW website, social media and sending invitations to participate to social work practitioners from SWRB publicly available register and to known social workers. ANZASW and social media advertisement attached.

D6 **Who will make the initial approach to potential participants?***

The researcher herself.

D7 **Does the project include recruitment through advertising?***

Yes

D 8 **Does the project require permission of an organisation to access participants or information?***

No

D 8.a **List the organisations***

N/A

D 9 **Describe any specific inclusion / exclusion criteria to select participants***

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
21 years old and older.	Unable or unwilling to sign consent.
Completed a recognised New Zealand or overseas social work qualification.	Not currently practicing social work.
Or at the final stage of completing a foundational degree in social work in New Zealand.	Students who are enrolled in papers that the researcher coordinates at the time of data collection.
Understand and speak English.	
Practicing social work in New Zealand.	

D 10 **Will you be using a screening tool?***

No

D 11 **How much time will the participants give to the project?***

The participants will spend about 15 minutes preliminary conversation to arrange interview and check that the participants meets the inclusion criteria, 45 to 90 minutes for the semi-structured interviews and approximately 30 minutes to review the transcripts.

D 12 **Does this match the time provided to the participants on the information sheet?***

Yes

Application Detail

E: Data Collection

E 1 **Select the type of data collection.***

Questionnaire

Observation

Focus Group

✓ **Interview**

Other

E 2 **Describe how the questionnaire will be distributed and collected***

N/A

E 2.a **Are you distributing electronically through Massey ITS?***

N/A

E 5 **Describe the location and anticipated duration of the interview, including whether it will be in work time. (If in work time, have you asked permission for this from the employer?)***

The location and time of the interviews will be discussed with potential participants. Data will be collected from participants in one-time, semi-structured interviews by face-to-face or by conferencing technology/online (Skype, Facetime, Google Hangout). The anticipated duration of interview will be 45 to 90 minutes. The interviews will occur at a time and place agreed to the participants and the researcher.

E 7 **Does your project involve sound or image recording?***

Yes, it involves digital recording.

E 8 **Does the project require permission to access databases?***

No

F: Recording

F 1 **Does your project involve a non-researcher transcribing the recording***

Yes

F 2 **Will you be providing participants with transcripts of interviews for editing?***

Yes

F 4 **If your project involves sound or image recording, describe how this will be undertaken and how consent will be given by the participant.***

The researcher will include the information about the use of digital recording in the information sheet and consent form. The researcher will also inform the participants prior to the interview that with the participants' agreement, the conversations will be digitally recorded and that they can ask the researcher to turn off the recording at any time during the interview. The purpose of digital recording the interviews is to help the researcher get accuracy of the conversations. The participants will give their consent by signing the consent form.

G: Benefits and Risks

G 1 **What are the possible benefits (if any) of the project to individual participants, groups, communities or organisations?***

The participants of this research study will have the opportunity to reflect on their understanding about knowledge acquisition, knowledge preferences, the application of it in their social work profession and how it impacts on their social work practice with their clients. They will gain benefit in recognising that particular knowledge may have been more relevant to their social work practice than the other.

For participants who are members of ANZASW and/or registered with SWRB, participating in this study will meet the ANZASW Practice Standard 8 and SWRB Core Competency 5.

There is no risk to participate in this study and their participation is voluntary.

G 2 **Are participants likely to experience discomfort (physical, psychological, social), incapacity or other risk of harm?***

No

It is unlikely that participants would experience any discomfort from this study.

In the highly unlikely possibility that participants experience some discomfort, these are the following steps the researcher will make:

1. The researcher will stop the interview to provide support for the participants. The researcher will use her skills as a social worker to support the participants. She will also discuss a plan with her supervisors on how to best support participants prior to the interviews.
2. The researcher will have a cell-phone available should the participants need to contact a support person or should she needs to contact her supervisor(s).
3. The researcher will send a copy of her interview schedule to her supervisors and remind them closer to the times of the interviews.

G4 **Is discomfort (physical, psychological, social), incapacity or other risk of harm likely to be experienced by groups/communities or institutions as a result of this research?***

No

G5 **Is ethnicity data being collected as part of this project?***

Yes

The data collected will be used to ensure that the findings can represent the diversity of participants in the project. The data will be qualitatively analysed. In qualitative research, the researched and researcher backgrounds are important for understanding the context and limits of the study.

According to the global definition of social work "respect of diversities are central to social work" and the International Federation of Social Workers policy to support the rights of indigenous peoples, this research study emphasises the need for inclusiveness and equitable opportunity to participate as partners in the overall project of this study.

G6 **If participants are children / students in a pre-school / school / tertiary setting, describe arrangements you will make for children / students who are present but not taking part in the research.***

Part of the inclusion criteria to participate in this study is a minimum age of 21 years old, and therefore, no children will be involved or present in this research.

H: Consent

H1 **Who will give information about the research to potential participants?***

The researcher.

H 2 **How will the information be given to potential participants***

The researcher will ensure that every potential participant receives a copy of the information sheet outlining the details of the project and will be given opportunities to ask any questions regarding the project. She will be advertising for potential participants through ANZASW and social media. The advertisement will have some brief but clear information about the study. She will also put her contact details on the advertisement so potential participants can contact her directly.

There will be some information about the research study in the advertisement. More detailed information will be given to participants when the researcher provides them with information sheet. The researcher will also make contact with participants in the process of arranging the interviews and clarify with them their understanding of the information in the information sheet.

H 3 **How will consent be obtained?***

A written consent form will be obtained from participants.

H 5 **Are any participants under the age of 16?***

No

H 6 **If participants include persons whose capacity to give informed consent may be compromised, describe the consent process that will be used.**

N/A

H 7 **Will the participants be proficient in English?***

Yes

I: Privacy/Confidentiality Issues

I 1 **List any information that will be obtained from any sources other than the participant.**

N/A

I 2 **Identify any information that may be given to any person outside the research team that may describe participants.**

N/A

I 3 **Will participant's identities' be known to the researchers?***

Yes

l 3.a **How will the identities be confidentially maintained in the treatment and use of data?***

The identity of participants will be known to the researcher and possibly her supervisors. To keep their confidentiality, the researcher will be using pseudonyms throughout this project. The researcher will not be using any data that may have the potential to reveal their identity in any way. She will not identify their organisations and will generalise the participants' area of practice to a sector or field of practice such as child and family social work, health social work, mental health, youth, etc. The participants' location will be described as New Zealand city, town or rural centre.

l 4 **If an institution (e.g. school) to which participants belong is able to be identified, explain how you have made the institution aware of this.**

N/A

l 5 **Outline how and where data will be stored, particularly identifiable data.***

All digital recording and hard-copy of the collected information will be securely stored in a lockable filing cabinet and all electronic data will be password protected in accordance with the Massey University Policy on Research Practice, the data will then be destroyed at the researcher's office.

l 6 **Outline how and where consent forms will be stored**

The consent forms will be stored in a separate folder from the data in a lockable filing cabinet.

l 7 **Outline who has access to data and consent forms.***

The researcher and her supervisors.

l 8 **How will the data / consent forms be protected from unauthorised access?***

The electronic data will be protected from unauthorised access through specific username and password, the password will regularly be changed at least every three months. The hard-copy data will be protected through a lockable filing cabinet in my home and office, which both have lockable doors.

l 9 **How long will the data be kept?***

The data will be kept until the examination process has been completed, for approximately five years.

l 10 **Who will be responsible for its safekeeping and eventual disposal?***

The researcher will be responsible for keeping it safe and eventual disposal and will consult and advise her supervisors of the plans for and the completion of the disposal .

I 11 **Will the data be transferred to an official archive?***

No

K: Conflict of Role / Interest

K 1 **Is the project to be funded or supported in any way?***

The researcher's employer, Whitireia New Zealand, is financially supporting the researcher's study by funding her tuition and fees for the first year of her study.

K 1.a **Identify any potential conflict of interest due to the source of funding and explain how this will be managed.**

The researcher chose her research topic independently. However, there are expectations from Whitireia New Zealand for the researcher to produce three research outputs in 2019:

1. Knowledge based presentation/workshop for the Postgraduate Mental Health and Addictions in Nursing at Whitireia New Zealand.
2. Conference contribution at a New Zealand conference (this can include the 2019 WWOP Research Symposium).
3. Submission of a journal article to a peer-reviewed journal regarding an aspect of the research.

To manage any potential conflict of interest, the researcher will adhere to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee guidelines, have regular supervisions with her supervisors and work with the highest integrity to produce a reliable and valid report.

K 1.b **Select source of funding***

The researcher's employer: Whitireia New Zealand

K 2 **Do any of the researchers have a financial interest in the outcome of the project?***

No

K 3 **Describe any professional or other relationships between researchers and the participants? Indicate how any resulting conflict of role will be dealt with.**

Some practitioners who are also final year students at Whitireia New Zealand, where the researcher is currently employed, may decide to participate in this study. In this case, there will be a lecturer-student relationship with some participants. In order to prevent any potential conflict of interest, the researcher proposes the following steps:

- She will clearly explain her two different roles as a lecturer and a researcher undertaking a PhD project.
- She will not select as participants any students who are enrolled in papers that she coordinates.

M: Treaty of Waitangi

M 1 **Does your research have a primary focus on Maori participants?***

No

M 1.f **If your research involves the general population, outline how the involvement of Māori participants will be managed.***

If Māori social workers choose to participate in this study, the researcher will follow the guidelines from MUHEC in relation to Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations and principles. There are four aspects that the researcher will follow in accordance with Massey University ethics guidelines:

- Whakapapa (relationships); the researcher will ensure that during her research project she will have meaningful consultations with her supervisors and Māori cultural advisors at Te Wānanga Māori on working with Māori and actively engaging Māori participants to capture their experiences in applying knowledge into social work practice.
- Tika (purposefulness); the purpose of this research, which is to explore knowledge in social work may contribute to building Māori social workers' capacity and the welfare of Māori clients, this links to te Tiriti o Waitangi principles of participation and protection of the rights and interest of Māori.
- Manäkitanga (cultural and social responsibility); as a non- Māori researcher, she will continuously seek cultural guidance and consultation from her supervisors and Māori cultural advisors when engaging with Māori participants to ensure her practice is culturally sensitive and her participants' respect and dignity is upheld.
- Mana (justice and equity); if Māori social workers choose to participate, the researcher will ensure Māori social workers' participation in the knowledge contribution of this research project and consequently strengthen and protect Māori voice in the social work arena.

N: Cultural Issues

N 1 **Does your research focus on any ethnic or social groups (Other than Maori)?***

No

O: Sharing Research Findings

O 1 **Describe how information resulting from the project will be shared with participants and disseminated in other forums.**
Note that receipt of a summary is one of the participants rights *

Participants will be advised that they can request a summary of the research findings and how the findings will be disseminated. The information collected will be used for the production of the doctoral thesis and for any academic publications arising from it, for example, symposium contribution and journal articles.

P: Invasive Procedures / Physiological Tests

P 1 **Will you be conducting any physiological tests or procedures? ***

No

P 2 **Will participants be given a health-screening test prior to participation?***

No

P 3 **Does the project involve the collection of tissue, blood, other body fluids; physiological tests or the use of hazardous substances, procedures or equipment?***

No

P 4 **Does the project involve the use of radiation?**
*x-ray, CT scan or bone densitometry (DEXA)**

No

3.0 Documentation

R: Documents

- Information sheet
- Interview schedule
- Consent form
- Confidentiality agreement
- Authority for release of tape transcript
- ANZASW and social media advertisement
- Research procedures flowchart

4.0 Submission

Academic Staff

As Chief Applicant I have read the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluation involving Human Participants. If there are co-researchers I have confirmed that they have read the Code and I have obtained their approval for the content of this application.
I/We understand my/our obligations and the rights of the participants.
I/We agree to undertake the research as set out in the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluation involving Human Participants. My/Our Head of Departments / School / Institute knows that I/we am/are undertaking this research. The information contained in this application is to the very best of my / our knowledge accurate and not misleading.*

☑ I agree

Supervision

Supervisors

Associate Professor Kieran O'Donoghue

Phone: (06) 356 9099 ext. 83517 / Email: K.B.ODonoghue@massey.ac.nz

Dr Kathryn Hay

Phone: (06) 356 9099 ext. 83518 / Email: K.S.Hay@massey.ac.nz

Appendix B: Information Sheet

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

The social workers' are at the centre: A grounded theory analysis of the process from acquiring to applying knowledge into practice

INFORMATION SHEET

Kia ora,

I would like to invite you to participate in this research study about social work knowledge. Please find the following information about myself, my supervisors, the study and your rights as a research participant.

Researcher(s) Introduction
My name is Hawa Fitzgerald and I am enrolled as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Massey University. I am currently employed at the School of Social Services at Whitireia, New Zealand as a full-time tutor for the Bachelor of Social Work degree. I am also a registered social worker with Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB), registration number 5148, and a member of the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW).

My supervisors are Associate Professor Kieran O'Donoghue and Dr Kathryn Hay from the School of Social Work, Massey University in Palmerston North.

Project Description and Invitation
This study seeks to explore how social workers build and apply knowledge in practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. It also seeks to study social workers' reflection of process when using knowledge in practice together with the influence this has on the interactions, behaviour and practice outcomes with clients.

The purpose of the study is to make a significant contribution to social work theory and practice through studying the application of knowledge into social work practice, and to produce a thesis that satisfies the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

Participant Identification and Recruitment
You have received this information sheet because I have known you through the SWRB registration list or through your response to an advertisement placed with ANZASW and social media. The eligibility criteria to participate in this research are: social workers, 21 years old or older, speak and understand English, have completed or at the final stage of completing a foundational social work qualification.

There will be a small koha of $25 voucher and any transport expenses, as an appreciation of your valuable time, the koha will be given to you at the end of the interviews. The risks in participating in this study are likely to be minimal, should any discomfort feeling occur during the interview, I will stop the interview and provide support for you. I will also have a cell-phone available should you need to contact a support person.

Project Procedures
If you agree to participate, information will be collected through one-time individual semi-structured interviews by face-to-face or by conferencing technology/online (Skype or Facetime). At the interview, you will be asked questions regarding your conceptualisation, development, use, reflection upon and evaluation of your application of social work knowledge in practice and its influence upon client outcomes. Prior to the interview, we will have an approximately 15 minutes conversation to arrange the interview and whether you meet the criteria.

Each interview will take between 45 to 90 minutes approximately. The interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed by myself as the researcher or a transcriber who will sign a confidentiality agreement. You will be asked to review your interview transcript, which will take about 30 minutes.

Data Management
The information collected will be used for the production of the doctoral thesis and for any academic publications arising from it. If numbers are small, individual responses may become identifiable in final reporting. I will keep your identity confidential by using fictitious names in the thesis. All digital recording and hard-copy of the collected information will be securely stored in a lockable filing cabinet and all electronic data will be password protected in accordance with the Massey University Policy on Research Practice, the data will then be destroyed.

You will be advised that you have the right to ask for the digital recording to be turned off at any time during the interview. You will also be advised that you have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage prior to the approval of the transcript. You can request a summary of research findings and how the findings will be disseminated.

If your interview is by technology-based conferencing (Skype or Facetime), I have created accounts specifically for this research study, at the termination of this study, the accounts will be closed and subsequently your online details and data will be removed. You will be advised on the choice of appropriate locations from which you will have your interview to ensure that you are aware of what is visible and audible within the range of your camera and speaker, with reference to issues of privacy and confidentiality.

Participant's Rights
You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time up until you have reviewed and approved the transcript;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Project Contacts
Researcher: Hawa Fitzgerald
Phone: (04) 8305490 / [redacted] / Email: Hawa.fitzgerald@whitireia.ac.nz

Supervisor: Associate Professor Kieran O'Donoghue
Phone: (06) 356 9099 ext. 83517 / Email: K.B.ODonoghue@massey.ac.nz

Supervisor: Dr Kathryn Hay
Phone: (06) 356 9099 ext. 83518 / Email: K.S.Hay@massey.ac.nz

Thank you for considering to participate in this research study, please don't hesitate to contact myself as the researcher or my supervisors if you have any questions.

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

Compulsory Statements

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 19/32. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83657, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Ngā mihi nui,
Hawa Fitzgerald

Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa

School of Social Work
Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, New Zealand T +64 6 356 9099 www.massey.ac.nz

Appendix C: Consent Form

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

The social workers are at the centre: A grounded theory analysis of the process from acquiring to applying knowledge into practice

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time up until the approval of my transcript.

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being digitally recorded.
2. I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.
3. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ [print full name]
hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa

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Appendix D: Interview Questions

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

The social workers' are at the centre: A grounded theory analysis of the process from acquiring to applying knowledge into practice

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INTRODUCTION

Greetings,

Thank you for agreeing to share your experience of knowledge in social work. My name is Hawa Fitzgerald, I am a PhD student in Social Work at Massey University in Palmerston North.

The interview today will help me gather information to understand your interpretation of knowledge and your experience in applying it into practice. I am very keen to hear about how knowledge influences your interactions with clients, behaviour and outcomes in social work practice. The information you provide could help me determine what social work knowledge is applicable and provide insights into the pattern of knowledge preferences of social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. With your help, I am aiming to produce a thesis that satisfies the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy degree and academic publications arising from it

Have you read the information sheet and signed the consent form? Is there anything that is not clear or need more information?

The interview will last between 45 and 90 minutes. Please feel free to take a break or help yourself with drink and snacks.

Do you have any questions?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your understanding of knowledge?

Probe:

- What information do you consider as knowledge?
- What do you know about knowledge?
- What are your thoughts on theories, research, social policy, legislation, cultural knowledge and practice wisdom?

2. How did you obtain the knowledge you have?

Probe:

- What actions did you take to gain knowledge?
- From where did you obtain knowledge?
- When did you start obtaining knowledge?
- How did you develop your values and beliefs?

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- What does life experience mean to you?
- How does education influence your knowledge?

3. With reference to a recent practice situation, can you please discuss your experiences of the using knowledge in your social work practice?

Probe:

- What are your experiences in using your beliefs, values, ethics, theories, policies and research evidence in your social work practice?
- How do you use life experience to inform your practice?
- How does culture and/or tradition influence your social work practice?
- What are your thoughts on using common sense in social work?
- Which knowledge is most useful in the assessment process of your social work practice?
- What knowledge is most useful in developing a plan for your clients?
- How does knowledge influence your intervention process?
- How does knowledge help you reflect in the review/evaluation process?
- Can you please reiterate further about your thoughts on the use of your lived experience knowledge and knowledge from ethics, theory and research?
- Why are they important?
- How do you decide which knowledge is more important than the others?

4. What contributes to the development of your knowledge?

Probe:

- What do you know about the current trends in social work arena?
- How do you know about the current trends in social work arena?
- How much social media do you use to inform your practice?
- What do you know about using the scientific method (the researcher will elaborate on the term scientific method) in obtaining information?
- How often do you use research evidence to make a decision?
- How confident are you in using theories, practice models, social policy and research in social work?
- Which one do you think is the most applicable to your current practice, from the different types of knowledge you obtained?

5. As a social worker, how important do you think it is to be active in developing knowledge?

Probe:

- To what extent do you think is important for social workers to develop their knowledge?
- What actions do you take to improve your knowledge?
- Why did you decide to take those actions?

- What are the most useful resources to develop your knowledge? And why?
- How accessible are those resources to you?
- Who do you talk to when you are not sure about something?
- Do you attend seminars or workshops as part of your professional development? If yes, how often and how useful do you find them? If not, why not?

6. How do you apply knowledge into practice?

Probe:

- How do you decide what knowledge is useful for a particular situation?
- What might be a recent example of your decision making in practice?
- How often do you reflect whether the knowledge you use was useful?

7. How does your application and reflection in practice influence your interactions, behaviour and practice outcomes with clients?

Probe:

- How useful do you think your knowledge is to interact with your colleagues and clients?
- How does your knowledge influence your behaviour?
- What are the impacts of knowledge to your practice outcomes?

8. If anything, what would you change in terms of knowledge for social workers?

Probe:

- What is your knowledge of the current social work curriculum in New Zealand?
- How relevant is the social work curriculum in New Zealand?
- How happy are you with the level of knowledge social workers bring into their profession?
- Why you are happy/not happy with the level of knowledge social workers bring into their profession?
- Are there any suggestions on events or resources for social workers to be up-to-date with their knowledge?

CLOSE

Thank you very much for your participation today, your contribution to the development of social work field is very much appreciated. I would like to remind you that your name will not be used and you will not be identified by anything you said. I will send you a copy of the summary of what we have discussed today, I would appreciate if you can please review the summary to make sure that I have captured our conversation correctly. If there is anything from this interview that you found upsetting, please don't hesitate to talk to me.

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

Please accept this $25 voucher as my thank you for your time and participation in this interview.

Kind regards,

Hawa Fitzgerald

Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa

School of Social Work
Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, New Zealand T +64 6 356 9099 www.massey.ac.nz

Appendix E: Letter of Approval

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

27/08/2019

Dear: Hawa Fitzgerald

Re: Ethics Application - SOB 19/32 - The social workers' are at the centre: A grounded theory analysis of the process from acquiring to applying knowledge into practice

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee:

Ohu Matatika 3 at their meeting held on **Thursday, 15 August 2019**

On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Professor Craig Johnson
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise
Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand T 06 951 6841; 06 95106840
E humanethics@massey.ac.nz; animalethics@massey.ac.nz; gtc@massey.ac.nz

Appendix F: Advertisement for ANZASW and Social Media

ANZASW Advertisement

The social workers' are at the centre: A grounded theory analysis of the process from acquiring to applying knowledge into practice

Kia ora,

My name is Hawa Fitzgerald and I am enrolled as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Massey University. I am currently employed at the School of Social Services at Whitireia New Zealand as a full-time tutor for the Bachelor of Social Work degree. I would like to invite you to participate in this research study about social work knowledge. Taking part in this study involves one interview.

The aim of the project

This study seeks to explore how social workers build knowledge, such as theories, research, policies, cultural knowledge and practice wisdom. It also aims to explore how social workers apply knowledge into practice and the influence of their application on the interactions, behaviour and practice outcomes with clients.

Invitation to participate

If you are a social worker aged 21 years old or older, speak and understand English, and have completed or are in the final stage of completing a foundational social work qualification and currently practicing social work, you are invited to contact me regarding participation in this study.

There will be a small koha of a $25 voucher, as an appreciation of your valuable time, and any transport expenses that may occur. If you are interested or know someone who might be interested please contact me:

Principal researcher

Hawa Fitzgerald: Hawa.Fitzgerald@whitireia.ac.nz / 04 8305490 / [redacted]

Supervisors

Associate Professor Kieran O'Donoghue. Phone: (06) 356 9099 ext. 83517 / Email: K.B.ODonoghue@massey.ac.nz

Dr Kathryn Hay. Phone: (06) 356 9099 ext. 83518 / Email: K.S.Hay@massey.ac.nz

Ngā mihi nui,

Hawa Fitzgerald

Appendix G: Revised Advertisement for ANZASW and Social Media

ANZASW Advertisement

The social workers' are at the centre: A grounded theory analysis of the process from acquiring to applying knowledge into practice

Kia ora,

My name is Hawa Fitzgerald and I am enrolled as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Massey University. I am currently employed at the School of Social Services at Whitireia Aotearoa New Zealand as a full-time tutor for the Bachelor of Social Work degree. I would like to invite you to participate in this research study about social work knowledge. Taking part in this study involves one interview.

The aim of the project

This study seeks to explore how social workers build knowledge, such as theories, research, policies, cultural knowledge and practice wisdom. It also aims to explore how social workers apply knowledge into practice and the influence of their application on the interactions, behaviour and practice outcomes with clients.

Invitation to participate

If you are a social worker aged 21 years old or older, speak and understand English, and have completed or are in the final stage of completing a foundational social work qualification and currently practicing social work, you are invited to contact me regarding participation in this study.

There will be a small koha of a $25 voucher, as an appreciation of your valuable time, and any transport expenses that may occur. If you are interested or know someone who might be interested please contact me:

Principal researcher

Hawa Fitzgerald: Hawa.Fitzgerald@whitireia.ac.nz / 04 8305490 / [redacted]

Supervisors

Associate Professor Kieran O'Donoghue. Phone: (06) 356 9099 ext. 83517 / Email: K.B.ODonoghue@massey.ac.nz

Dr Kathryn Hay. Phone: (06) 356 9099 ext. 83518 / Email: K.S.Hay@massey.ac.nz

Ngā mihi nui,

Hawa Fitzgerald

Social media advertisement

Invitation to participate in a research study

Kia ora everyone, if you are a social worker aged 21 years old or older, speak and understand English, and have completed or are in the final stage of completing a foundational social work qualification and currently practicing social work, you are invited to participate in this research study about social work knowledge. Taking part in this study involves one interview.

There will be a small koha of a $25 voucher, as an appreciation of your valuable time, and any transport expenses that may occur. If you are interested or know someone who might be interested please contact me on Hawa.Fitzgerald@whitireia.ac.nz / 04 8305490 / [redacted]

A little bit about myself

I am a PhD candidate at Massey University majoring in social work and currently employed at the School of Social Services at Whitireia Aotearoa New Zealand as a lecturer for the Bachelor of Social Work degree.

The aim of the project

This study seeks to explore how social workers build knowledge, such as theories, research, policies, cultural knowledge and practice wisdom. It also aims to explore how social workers apply knowledge into practice and the influence of their application on the interactions, behaviour and practice outcomes with clients.

Supervisors

Associate Professor Kieran O'Donoghue. Phone: (06) 356 9099 ext. 83517 / Email: K.B.ODonoghue@massey.ac.nz

Dr Kathryn Hay. Phone: (06) 356 9099 ext. 83518 / Email: K.S.Hay@massey.ac.nz

Ngā mihi nui,

Hawa Fitzgerald

Appendix H: Memorandum to Approve Revised Advertisement

From: Broad, Patsy
To: Hawa Fitzgerald
Cc: O'Donoghue, Kieran; Hay, Kathryn
Subject: HEC: Southern B Application SOB 19/32 - Amendment One
Date: Monday, 23 September 2019 12:36:05 PM
Importance: High

SOB 19/32 **The social workers' are at the centre: A grounded theory analysis of the process from acquiring to applying knowledge into practice**
Hawa Fitzgerald (HEC: Southern B Application SOB 19/32)
Department: School of Social Work
Supervisor: A/Prof Kieran O'Donoghue; Dr Kathryn Hay

Thank you for your email dated 19 September 2019 outlining the change you wish to make to the above application.

The change, to use a short video for recruitment, has been approved and noted.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee. If over time, more than one request to change the application is received, the Chair may request a new application.

Regards
Patsy Broad
On behalf of the Chair, HEC: Southern B

Patsy Broad | Team Leader, Research Ethics | Research and Enterprise
Massey University | Private Bag 11 222 | Palmerston North 4442 | New Zealand | 06 951 6840
Web: http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/research/research-ethics/research-ethics_home.cfm

Appendix I: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

The social workers' are at the centre: A grounded theory analysis of the process from acquiring to applying knowledge into practice

TRANSCRIBER'S CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I ..... (Full Name - printed) agree to transcribe the recordings provided to me.

I agree to keep confidential all the information provided to me.

I will not make any copies of the transcripts or keep any record of them, other than those required for the project.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa

School of Social Work
Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, New Zealand T +64 6 356 9099 www.massey.ac.nz

Appendix J: Pre Test Questions

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

The social workers are at the centre: A grounded theory analysis of the process from acquiring to applying knowledge into practice

Brief Pre-Test Interview Questions

1. What is your understanding of knowledge?
2. How did you obtain the knowledge you have?
3. How does your knowledge influence your decision-making process?
4. With reference to a recent practice situation/case scenario, can you please discuss your experiences of using knowledge in your social work practice?
5. What contributes to the development of your knowledge?
6. As a social worker, how important do you think it is to be active in developing knowledge?
7. How does your application and reflection in practice influence your interactions, behaviour and practice outcomes with clients?
8. If anything, what would you change in terms of knowledge for social workers?

Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa

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Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, New Zealand T +64 6 356 9099 www.massey.ac.nz