Ready to Practice?
Graduates' Experiences of Competency-Based
Social Work Education

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy
At Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Martin Vere-Jones
2005

Abstract

This research examines the extent to which graduates of competency-based social work education (the National Diploma in Social Work) are ready to practice in their first six months of post-course employment.

The study is exploratory and outlines the experiences of seven graduates. In particular it focuses on perceptions of their education and its role in preparing them for social work practice. Analysis was undertaken using a grounded theory approach, which highlighted a number of themes from their experiences. These themes illustrated that the graduates generally enjoyed their training and perceived themselves to be adequately prepared for practice. Graduates also considered that their courses needed greater focus on the social work field of practice related to their chosen employment.

Further analysis utilised Secker's (1993) three-stage typology of the integration of theory. Application of this model showed that graduates' level of theoretical integration was lower than that considered to be educationally desirable. In addition, graduates' comments regarding the social justice aspects of social work reflected a poor level of interest, understanding and application.

These results suggest that competency-based educational approaches may reduce the tension or gap typically experienced by graduates between finishing courses and beginning practice. The results also support criticism that competency approaches may result in a focus on skills and techniques as opposed to underlying theoretical knowledge. The lack of theoretical knowledge particularly relates to social service practice theory, critical analysis and social justice concepts. Based on the research a number of recommendations are made for further research and for competency-based social work educators.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation to a number of people and organisations that have supported and encouraged me through this project.

To the participants in this research. Thank you all for your willingness to take part and be candid and honest in your responses. Thank you also for your patience regarding the amount of time it took me to complete.

To my supervisors Mary Nash and Michelle Lunn. Thank you both for your ongoing support, encouragement and wisdom. A special thanks to you Mary for your in-depth understanding of the subject area and willingness to provoke and challenge me where required.

To my various colleagues, thank you all for your support and encouragement. Rory, a special thanks for your generosity and flexibility in allowing me study time during work hours, and your ongoing support of staff professional development. To TWOA, thanks for assistance with the fees.

To my friends, family and various partners. Your patience with my moaning, procrastination and boringness during this project is noted and appreciated.

Lastly and not least, a big thank you to Larry, for being outstanding in the field!

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter 1
Introduction

Introduction

The quality of social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand is an ongoing issue both in the national media and in social work circles. In the recent past there have been numerous reports of failures in social work systems or individual practice, particularly within the mental health and child protection areas. The Brown Report of 2001, a Ministerial Review, is one notable example.

Concerns about adequate practice levels have also contributed to the recent legislation regarding registration of social workers for particular, especially statutory, fields of practice. Amongst other factors, registration will require social workers to have successfully completed a recognised social work qualification. These events have focused attention on the education and training social workers receive for their work in the field.

Social work education has been available in Aotearoa New Zealand since 1950. During this time, a number of different courses have evolved at a variety of institutions around the country. One of the most recent additions to the register of qualifying courses is the National Diploma in Social Work (level 6), a two-year qualification based on a competency approach. Whilst this qualification initially meets the programme requirements for social work registration, the Registration Board has stated that from December 2005, a degree level three-year qualification will be the minimum standard (ANZASW, 2004). Currently there are no competency-based three-year qualifications, however Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi the Industry Training Organisation for the Social Services (TKA) may develop one.

Whilst all forms of social work education and training are under the public spotlight as a result of registration and poor publicity in the media, this study focuses solely on competency-based education and training (CBET). In CBET, a defined standard of knowledge, skills or attributes are provided to students, who must produce sufficient evidence that they have attained them. The focus is therefore on the outcomes of the education (assessment of student ability) rather than on the content of courses[1].

As a relative newcomer, CBET approaches are highly contested. Many people are critical both of their efficacy and contribution to education (Adams, 1998; Dominelli, 1996). This research asks the central question of whether CBET social work education adequately prepares graduates for practice.

In this first chapter I outline the ground covered in this study. This involves clarifying the objectives of the research and providing a brief outline of the research method. I also explore and define readiness to practice, a central concept in the study, and provide some background to the context of social work. In addition, I include a brief discussion of previous related studies and their results, to locate the present research in context. Finally I locate myself within the research topic being investigated and present an overview of the thesis.

Research Objectives and Outline

Due to the lack of previous research evaluating CBET education, especially in social work, this study is to a large extent exploratory. Therefore a primary objective is to obtain a broad amount of data regarding a range of graduates' experiences from competency-based social work education and training.

In particular, I focus on the following four areas;
   o   What are graduates' perceptions of their own readiness to practice?

---

[1] A detailed definition of CBET is provided in chapter 4, in which I explore perspectives on CBET more fully.

- o How effective is their education and training in preparing them for practice and the requirements of the profession?
- o What part do other variables such as graduates' personal characteristics and agency orientation play on practice readiness?
- o What is the place of theory in their practice?

The discussion analyses graduate self-reports and considers them in relation to the literature. Additionally, data gathered from interviews are considered in relation to models of the integration of theory into practice. The latter are used as a measure of the efficacy of social work education.

In summary, the research presented here analyses CBET social work courses from the perspective of graduates who have been in social work employment for at least six months since graduation. It is exploratory, qualitative and interpretive.

The research method uses a grounded theory approach, which generates theory from data and is a particular form of qualitative research (Glaser, 1998). Qualitative research involves collecting open ended, free responses from participants and is interested in their perceptions and experiences. It also allows research to be done without being 'constrained by predetermined categories of analysis', permitting depth, openness and detailed inquiry (Patton, 1990 p10). Grounded theory is highly consistent with the exploratory and qualitative approach to this study. Use of this method requires me, as the researcher, to be 'as free and as open as possible to discovery and to emergence of concepts, problems and interpretations from the data' (ibid p67).

Background

In this next section, I commence by providing some considerations and definitions of readiness to practice. I then outline some of the background surrounding the social work practice context, which influences readiness to practice. The section ends with a brief summary of previous research findings in this area.

Defining Readiness to Practice

As a central concept to this study, it is important to define what is meant by readiness to practice. Readiness to practice examines the extent to which a new graduate is able to practice effectively within their initial employment environment, most commonly within the first year of employment. It is the 'fit between the training programmes and the practice undertaken by the new professionals after them' (Marsh & Triseliotis, 1996 p2). By contrast, Harre-Hindmarsh (1992 p189) describes it as the 'disparity between that which was taught on a course and that required of graduates in agency situations'.

Whilst the concept of readiness to practice seems to cause few concerns, it opens the debate about what a social worker should be able to do and know and is therefore closely related to the definition of social work.

The transition from ending study to beginning practice is widely acknowledged as a difficult time for new social workers. The use of terms such as 'oppositions', 'gaps', 'tensions', 'dilemmas', 'problems' and 'difficulties' to describe this transition period illustrates some of the difficulties within this area (Cox, 1982; Elliott, 1995; Harre-Hindmarsh, 1992; Hearn, 1982; Marsh and Triseliotis, 1996; Pilalis, 1986; Ryan, Fook and Hawkins, 1995; Secker, 1993; Waterhouse, 1981). These terms suggest that graduates do not generally move smoothly between ending their courses and beginning practice.

Transitional difficulties between finishing courses and first workplace experiences may be caused by a range of factors. These factors include inadequacies in courses and poor support by first workplaces. Each is briefly described below.

A number of studies have shown that graduates tend to consider their training and education inadequate preparation for the rigors and complexities of practice (Ryan, Fook and Hawkins, 1994). This is supported by O'Connor and Dalgliesh (1986 p444), who concluded that social work education did not prepare graduates for the 'organisational context of practice'. Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) categorised student concerns about practice readiness into different classifications. Of note was a perceived lack of relevance of class teaching to placement, theory and practice tasks. Students also stated they would like more psychology, social work skills, and law.

Agency practice and support for new social workers has to a lesser extent been seen as a cause of poor practice readiness. Harre-Hindmarsh (1992) found that new social workers struggled with agency policies, procedures, decision-making processes and the sheer pressures of work. Ryan, Fook and Hawkins (1995) claim many of the graduates in their study felt unprepared for the difficulties of working within a bureaucracy or setting where others did not share their interest. They also experienced difficulties in defining the social work role in their workplace. Inadequate orientation, in-service training and supervision were contributors to these findings (March & Triseliotis, 1996).

Pockett (1987 p39) also endorses the concept of a tension between finishing social work courses and early practice. She states that the

> *learning processes and goals of undergraduate field work education do not and cannot fully encompass the practicalities of being employed as [a] social worker.*

She suggests that students require time to transfer learning between the course and practice. What may be necessary to foster this transition is a clear orientation programme for the first twelve months of employment, with supervision having an important place.

Experiences of a disjunction between the end of courses and beginning practice are not restricted to graduates of social work however. Outcome studies of nursing have shown broad similarities. Graduate nurses describe being poorly prepared for a number of tasks they were expected to undertake (Moorhouse, 1992). Medical graduates also expressed similar opinions and felt unprepared for 'several aspects of medical practice' (Kaufman et al, 2001 p2667). However due to the breadth of medical training, this was less consistent a feature (Blumenthal et al, 2001; Cantor et al, 2001; Stubbe, 2002) than in social work.

Rather than citing agencies or educators for the disjunction between the end of courses and beginning practice, Harre-Hindmarsh (1992) instead proposes a theory of oppositions. Whilst graduates experienced various levels of difficulty in entering practice after their education, which could be interpreted as a lack of preparedness for practice, this she argues may actually be a result of different ideas between the agency, the graduates, colleagues and educators about 'good' practice. Thus it begs the question to ask whether the students were adequately prepared for practice as it assumes that there is one particular level or method of practice that they are striving to attain. Instead this may be subject to different definitions by different people and bodies (i.e. agencies, students, colleagues and academics). In her own words,

> *rather than continue to be locked in debates about whether the difficulties experienced by new graduates are courses at fault for not "preparing their students for how it is"…[or] agencies for "subverting professional [or radical] ideals" (Hugman, 1987, p.76), the major players in the field of social work education should more explicitly confront the actuality of competing ideologies and modes of discourse, their socio-historical and political contexts, and*

modes of discourse [sic], which have, to date, sustained certain ways of formulating graduates' difficulties (Harre-Hindmarsh, 1992 p257).

In other words, rather than remedy a 'problem', Harre-Hindmarsh (1992) proposes that social work students should instead be made aware that some 'lack of fit' is likely in early workplace experiences. They can then learn strategies to deal with this disjunction appropriately.

In this section I have shown that there is general agreement within the literature that the transition between the end of courses and beginning social work practice is not smooth. Some writers consider this an inevitability for which students should be prepared, whereas others perceive it as a problem to be rectified. Where it is considered a problem, the focus has variously been on educators and practice agencies. The following section briefly considers the practice context of social work.

Competing Stakeholders and Their Impact on Social Work Readiness to Practice
Readiness to practice is influenced by the context of social work, which is in turn influenced by the needs of a variety of stakeholders, including the state, employers, academics, professional associations and services users. Understanding the tensions between these different stakeholders is important in order to appreciate the context of readiness to practice. To provide understanding, this section briefly introduces the social work practice context and considers the competing needs of a variety of stakeholders. More in-depth discussion of the context of practice readiness continues in the following chapter.

As noted above, part of the complexity of the social work situation results from considerable tensions between the state, employers, professional associations and academics/education and training institutions with regard to what constitutes readiness to practice. It is an area of great importance as

[u]nless educators and employers share a similar view of social work, gaps may develop between employer expectations and the type of social worker who graduates (Nash & Munford, 2001 p28).

The tension between different bodies comprising the social work industry has existed since the earliest days of social work education and is central to social work. Primarily it has existed around the 'balance of social change and social control elements in practice' (Nash, 1998 p14). There is tension around the degree to which social work should be oriented towards changing the organisational and societal status quo and the extent to which it should be enforcing it.

Social Work is inextricably linked with the state. This is an international theme in the professionalisation of social work, as social work develops alongside state policies in many western countries (Lyons, 1999). Thus the needs of the state are often reflected in the training of social workers. The state has achieved this through two mechanisms. The first is by being the major employer of social workers. The second arises through the implementation of social policies, particularly those relating to health, education, housing, income support and community development.

Nash (1998) posits that social work evolves in tandem with state welfare systems. As the state's needs change, social work also tends to change and adapt. This is strongly evident in Aotearoa New Zealand. Welfare systems here have changed greatly from the turn of the century culminating in the welfare state of the 1940's – 1970's. The neo-liberal period of the 1980's and 1990's saw an erosion of policy directed towards public good and the prioritisation of economic prosperity.

More recently, the advent of third way politics with an emphasis on equal opportunity, and personal responsibility may well see social work continue within this evolutionary trend (Giddens, 2000). The result is that

social work is challenged with regard to its social justice stance and the more pressure may be placed on social work educators to concentrate on teaching technical skills rather than critical and theoretical material (Nash, 1998 p94).

The relationship between the state and social work is explored further in the next chapter.

The voluntary sector, as the second largest employer of social workers, is a further important stakeholder. The needs of the voluntary sector have historically been quite different to the state. The state requires social workers trained in the statutory functions required by their agencies. This type of social work, which can involve enforcing social legislation such as the Children, Young Person and their Families Act (1989), may be considered a form of social control. On the other hand, the voluntary sector may be more concerned with social justice.

Christian social service agencies have been active in a practical manner throughout their history in the voluntary sector. They have also had a strong role of speaking out in relation to government policies. This role changed as the Christian congregation base diminished and agencies grew in size and became increasingly dependent on government funds. Agency focus narrowed to match funding contracts and expected standards of practice (Nash, 1998).

A primary concern for social work employers within both statutory and voluntary sectors is to hire graduates that are able to effectively undertake the tasks required by the agency. As a result, what academics or the professional association perceive as essential considerations in social work education may not be regarded as having such importance by employers. Social justice factors are a case in point.

Another influence on the context of readiness to practice is professional associations. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the New Zealand Association of Social Workers[2] was

---

[2] Initially known as NZASW, now called the Aotearoa Association of Social Workers (ANZASW).

formed in 1964 from an amalgamation of regional associations (Mc Donald, 1998). Since then it has been a major player in defining social work education and training in this country. The influence of the Association is seen through the range of publications produced, including a regular newsletter and journal. The Association is also an important lobby group to government. The role of the Association is explored in more detail in the following chapter.

Academics and education/training institutions also play an important part in shaping the output of social work education. They provide much-needed research into social work. Social work educators tend also to be the writers of industry relevant texts and courses. In addition, they influence the shape of the curriculum through input into standard setting bodies such as the NZSWTC, NZCETSS and TKA.

Since the closure of NZCETSS however, the situation regarding social work course standards in Aotearoa New Zealand has become divided. The bulk of New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) accredited social work courses are required to meet the standards required by TKA. There is no compulsory social work standard setting body to which other institutions are responsible. However, new university courses must go through the Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP), a committee of the Vice Chancellors' Committee, which sets academic standards.

The views of social work educators may now be split between those working within competency and curriculum-based courses. Whilst readiness to practice is undoubtedly still a desired outcome for both, the definition attributed by each of the above groups may not be the same. It can be argued that CBET courses aim to produce graduates that are immediately able to undertake specific social service agency functions. Curriculum-based courses on the other hand may be more focused towards graduating students with a generic level of practice readiness and incorporating a strong theoretical background. The final transition to the workplace from curriculum-based courses may also be seen as an agency responsibility.

In this section I have identified that social work practice and readiness to practice are at the intersection of the complex needs of a variety of stakeholders. I also identified the difficulty and complexity associated with investigations in this area. Despite the potentially disparate views between stakeholders, they provide parameters within which readiness to practice can be discussed. Discussion about the context of social work practice is taken up in more detail in chapters two and three.

The Need for this Research

There are two reasons for the current research, which I discuss in this section. These are the relative lack of outcome studies into social work education and the complete lack of outcome studies regarding CBET social work education. I explore each of these briefly in turn below.

Relative Lack of Outcome Studies into Social Work Education

There are only a small number of studies that examine the outcomes of social work education and training. These are especially prevalent between the mid 1980's to mid 1990's (Gibbs & Cigno (1986), Marsh & Triseliotis (1996), O'Connor & Dalgliesh (1986).

Of the outcome studies I located, there are four of reasonable currency and depth that are useful in forming a picture of the area. These studies are by Jennie Harre-Hindmarsh (1992) who investigated a cohort of 23 graduates from one class in 1983, in New Zealand; Jenny Secker (1993) who investigated two cohorts of students, both from the same course in Britain; Ryan, Fook and Hawkins (1994) who undertook a five year longitudinal study in Australia of one group of social work students from their entry into training until they had completed three-years practice in the field (1990-1994); and Marsh & Triseliotis (1996) whose comprehensive study covered 714 students on two different courses in 1992 and 1993, examining their experiences shortly after completion of the course and again after nine months. Also important in

11

the Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) study is their inclusion of research information sourced from supervisors and senior social workers. Theirs is the only research in the area to have such a broad range of information sources.

According to Gambrill (2001), effective evaluation of readiness to practice involves follow up studies of students from social work educational institutions, ideally incorporating data from clients, supervisors, significant others and case records. However such projects are extremely complex, both logistically and ethically, which is probably the reason why little research of this kind has been conducted.

Allied professions also show a comparable lack of follow-up studies (ibid). In addition to the logistical and ethical issues mentioned above, this may be because assessing practice effectiveness in health related professions is a more 'complex and daunting task than in professions where outcomes are more concrete' (Bisno et al, 1997 p3). Measuring whether an intervention or series of such has halted a child's delinquency or resolved conflict in a family situation is much more difficult than measuring whether a mechanic has made a car engine work or not.

Regardless of the complexity involved in attaining good research, knowledge about the effectiveness of social work education is imperative for those of us in the field. To illustrate this, Gambrill makes an important point in asking the following questions.

> *Shouldn't we do more than "educate and hope"? Shouldn't we evaluate the extent to which graduates use competencies shown to be of value in helping clients, honor ethical guidelines, and take effective steps to alter dysfunctional agency practices and policies?* (Gambrill, 2001 p2).

She also claims that it is not enough just to know that graduates are able to perform tasks. It is imperative to know that they actually do. A graduate can be competent to offer a service but for a variety of reasons not do it. These reasons could include stress, anxiety, or poor judgment about the necessity of offering the particular

service. Thus effective evaluations must be undertaken. Ideally evaluations will involve more than just self-report data, as both subjective and objective measures are important to 'gain an accurate picture of outcome' (ibid p2).

Furthermore, Gambrill states that the profession is bound by its Code of Ethics to explore services graduates provide, through requirements to protect clients from harm. Despite writing within a North American context, the argument applies locally as well. Section 1.9 of the ANZASW Code of Ethics states that

> *Social workers have a responsibility to be conscious of the limits of their own competence, to offer only those services that come within their abilities, and to refer matters outside their competence to appropriately qualified people* (NZASW, 1993 p10).

Complete Lack of Outcome Studies on CBET Social Work Education

In the previous section I discussed outcome studies that have been conducted regarding social work education. Investigation into the outcomes of CBET graduates from social work education appears to be a new area of research. No studies investigating the outcomes of CBET social work education were located despite rigorous database searches. Furthermore, no studies were found comparing graduates from courses taught within curriculum-based education paradigms with those from a competency approach[3]. Indeed, few studies appear to have researched students' experiences of readiness to practice across any range of social work courses.

Despite the lack of research, I argue that experiences of graduates are likely to be different between courses with different educational approaches[4]. To address the identified gap, research is necessary to compare both CBET and curriculum-based

---

[3] I use the concept of traditional curriculum-based educational paradigms here to describe non-CBET approaches, where the focus of education retains the traditional focus on inputs (curriculum) rather than on outputs (competency). See chapter 4 for more detail.

[4] For instance CBET and curriculum. Discussion about the background and nature of CBET courses is taken up in chapter 4.

approaches. Due to the research time frames and the size and resources devoted to a Master's thesis, it is beyond the scope of the current study to undertake a comparative analysis of the two approaches. It is possible however, to make some comparisons between the findings of this study and studies of students in curriculum-based courses. The limited nature of the material on which such comparative evaluations can be made must be borne in mind.

My Location in the Research Context

In keeping with the methodology of a qualitative study, I believe it is important to outline my own interests in the subject area and some of my personal motivations for undertaking this research. These are described in the section below.

There are two main experiences that motivated me to undertake research in this area. The first involves personal experiences of practice readiness, or lack thereof. The second relates to my current role within a provider of CBET social work courses.

My social work education and training was undertaken at a traditional curriculum-based course within a New Zealand university. On entering the workforce after completing my course however, I felt under-prepared for the practice situations I was asked to manage. I was employed as a social worker within a community mental health setting. My role was to provide social work services within a multi-disciplinary case management team. I also attended to social work referrals made to the community team.

The first referral that came to me I remember very clearly. I was allocated a new client and requested to undertake a social work assessment. Whilst I had looked at the theory of assessments at university, I had little practice in simulated or real settings and thus was under-prepared for this. Being required to undertake tasks for

which I felt under-prepared were not isolated incidents. For several months I felt somewhat overwhelmed by similar experiences.

As previously noted, the second experience motivating this research is my current employment position of five years, working as an educator within a CBET social work education provider. I am involved in planning courses, development of curriculum and assessments and teaching students. These experiences give me good insight into the application of CBET principles in the field, and interest in the evaluation of this educational approach.

Overview of the Thesis

In the final section of this chapter I discuss the layout of the thesis, which is written in eight chapters. The current chapter is introductory. Chapters two and three set the scene regarding the broader context of readiness to practice. Chapter two investigates the macro-level context, looking at structures and processes that shape readiness to practice. Chapter three examines the micro perspective of readiness to practice and explores variables such as the attributes of students, the practice environment and aspects of the educational environment.

Chapter four outlines the theories, themes and concepts necessary for consideration of the data gathered in this research. In particular, chapter four details relevant theories involved in the transfer of learning. This incorporates investigation into the process of development of expertise and adult education theories. Discussion about competency-based education and training within both these frameworks is also provided.

The methodological process applied in this research, including the rationale for the research design, selection of participants and data analysis methods provides the content for chapter five. Chapters six and seven present and discuss the results of

the research. Finally, chapter eight provides a summary of the project, conclusions made from the integration of theory, literature and research, and discusses the limitations and recommendations arising from the study.

Summary

This chapter set out the initial context and structure of the thesis, which is taken up in the following chapters. I showed that social work readiness to practice is situated in a highly complex and difficult to measure area, affected by a rapidly changing society and the needs of many vocal stakeholders. Additionally I showed that past outcome studies of social work demonstrate that there is a gap or tension between ending a social work course and beginning practice.

One response to the lack of practice readiness (though some may argue it is a contributor) is competency-based education and training. CBET is an approach with the potential to influence social work education greatly, and in theory, could enhance the fit between education/training and practice experiences. This research discusses the experiences of graduates from CBET social work courses and provides exploratory information in a relatively under-researched area.

The following two chapters further set the scene, illustrating additional complexities in the context of social work practice.

Chapter 2
Readiness to Practice: A Macro View

Introduction

There is an essentially interactive relationship between the nature of social work education and the organisation and practice of social work: education for the social professions has an important function both in preparing people for the realities of practice, and in helping them to question and shape those realities. Social work education plays an important role in the processes of defining and progressing the development of the profession, through research and knowledge creation, and of establishing and maintaining professional standards and credibility (Lyons, 1999 p15).

The quote from Lyons above eloquently illustrates the connection between social work education and social work practice. Readiness to practice forms an important link between these two areas and is to a large extent a by-product of them both. Fully understanding readiness to practice and its influences therefore involves being conversant with some of the issues, tensions and features of social work education, social work practice and the industry as a whole.

The purpose of this chapter is to set out some of the issues, tensions and features that affect the social work industry at an international and national level, highlighting their relevance to practice readiness. This builds on the discussion of the context of and stakeholders in social work practice begun in the previous chapter. At an international level the chapter looks particularly at the impacts of globalisation, the professionalisation of social work and the diversification and fragmentation of the social work role. At a national level it explores factors such as the effects of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the community work movement.

Globalisation and Readiness to Practice

Whilst traditionally social work has been seen as a 'local, culture bound activity, specific to a given time and place' (Lyons, 1999 p2), it is also clear that social work practice is affected strongly by the needs and requirements of the society in which the social work is occurring. In turn these societies have been increasingly influenced in the latter part of the 20th and early 21st century by external, international economic and political forces that have often created rapid social change.

These economic and political forces challenged social policy and the provision of welfare services. Challenges occurred through the growth of multinational corporations and their increasing influence on governments, the increasing pressure on governments to be economically competitive in a global marketplace, increasing political interdependence through global bodies such as the United Nations, the World Bank, The World Trade Organisation and international treaties such as the Kyoto Protocol and General Agreement on Tariffs and Services (GATS) (Giddens, 2001).

Resultant changes have included increased unemployment[5], and deterioration in wages and working conditions in wealthy countries. Increasing gaps between the "have's" and the "have not's" are another feature. This is particularly relevant in Aotearoa New Zealand, as we have one of the widest gaps between rich and poor amongst OECD nations (Statistics NZ, 2004). Rapid technological developments, particularly in communications, transport, electronics and information technology, have further increased the social division between those able to partake in society and those outside of it. This division increasingly occurs based on whether an individual is within or outside of the workforce (Giddens, 2001).

---

[5] This appears to have reversed recently in the New Zealand situation.

An essential area of practice for social work is the 'fit' between the individual and the environment. This means that changes to the structure of society also affect social work practice and the context in which a new graduate is immediately involved. Moreover, as the adverse effects from the changes described above have increased some social problems, this has in turn increased pressure on social work agencies.

Globalisation also impacts upon social work practice through the type of work that practitioners may be exposed to. Increasingly this involves dealing with a greater variety of cultures as the movement of populations through immigration and refugee resettlement in a global context increase. In Aotearoa New Zealand, immigration has always been of vital importance. This is especially so at present, with declining domestic population numbers. The current government is active in its attempts to attract immigrants from a variety of different nations, and flows have been particularly strong from Asia (Spoonley, 2003).

The existence of and allegiance to international bodies such as the United Nations (UN), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) also increases the trend towards globalisation. International definitions of social work such as that put forward by the IFSW illustrate this:

> The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work (IASSW, 2004).

Furthermore, as practice theories, models and systems are increasingly designed and developed in an international context, greater expectations are placed on

students to be able to assimilate these concepts into their own environment (Healy, 2001).

This section has highlighted the relevance of the global context to social work readiness to practice. I now move on to discussion of the links between the state and social work.

Links Between State and Social Work

Understanding the relationship between the state and the social work profession is also relevant to the macro perspective of readiness to practice. As noted in the previous chapter, there is a clear relationship between the development of the state and social work.

The last two decades saw a number of significant changes involving the state at a macro-level. These changes occurred as 'new, technological, deconstructed and potentially deskilling ways of organising work are developed' (Nash, 1998 p416). Changes have also occurred internationally due to a shift in political direction towards favouring free market principles and monetarist policies, accompanied by attempts to reduce public spending (Lyons 1999). Rising poverty, crime and unemployment have increased the demand for social work services at the same time (Connolly & Rathgen, 2001)[6]. The combination of these factors has left social work in a 'state of flux' (Dominelli, 1996 p155).

A major effect of the changes touched on above, is in the way in which organisations are managed. In Britain, Dominelli (1996) describes the promotion of corporate management techniques and philosophies within social work and social service organisations. These techniques and philosophies emphasise the economic imperative of organisations as opposed to human relationships and consequences.

---

[6] See also the previous section regarding Globalisation and Readiness to Practice for more detail.

A further consequence of the changes in technique and philosophy is the move away from direct service provision. Instead of providing social work services themselves, governments have increasingly changed their status to that of a purchaser of services, by contracting out service delivery. This creates a 'contract government', a key characteristic of which is the agency relationship. An agency relationship involves 'an explicit or implicit contract in which one or more persons (the principal(s) or contractor) engage another person (the agent) to take action on behalf of the principal(s)' (Smith, 1993 in Dominelli, 1996 p165).

When agency relationships are applied to the social services, the government as the principal, contracts out services via a third party. This places employers at arms length from government and significantly changes the relationship between the state and welfare provision, from funder to provider. The arrangement is an effective way for governments to achieve a variety of ends. The ends include a decrease in the amount of money on offer for providing the same number of services, whilst still maintaining control over the providers' goals and performance targets (ibid). The government distancing itself from the provision of welfare services also allows these services to be privatised and opened up to profit making organisations.

Managerialism is a further part of the promotion of corporate management environments. Managerialism is a doctrine that labels service users as customers and consumers and defines their relationship with professionals as a commercial one, controlled by managers. Control by the state is manifest through an array of policies, procedures and standards based on the idea of quality assurance (Adams, 1998).

Writing from Australia, Ife (1997 p*ix*) paints a similar picture.

> *Economic rationalism, also known as neo-conservatism, the new right, Thatcherism, Reaganomics [...] has increasingly dominated the practice environment of social workers.* [This]....*attacks and undermines the structures*

within which social work has located itself, by its attempts to dismantle the welfare state as a significant location for the meeting of human need.

Similar mechanisms can be discerned in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The changes described above have had multiple effects on the social services and social work (Adams, 1998). Governments have restructured the size of social service organisations, leading to a greater number of smaller service providers in the private and voluntary sectors and larger, more complex organisations run by government. This caused the fragmentation of services and separation of social work tasks between those requiring lower level skills, often now offered to less qualified staff, and more complicated interventions which are the domain of staff with more advanced qualifications and experience (Connolly & Rathgen, 2001). This has in turn resulted in increasing specialisation being required to work in many agencies.

Nash & Munford (2001 p28) argue that in addition to the distinction between types of staff undertaking interventions, specialisation has also resulted in

breaking the social work task into a series of discrete interventions, in which the client for example, moves from intake, to short term assessment and then, if necessary to long term care. Risk assessment and case management are part of the new vocabulary of social work and indicate a shift of emphasis away from the casework relationship end of the spectrum towards analysis and referral and risk management.

According to Culpitt (1999), shifts towards analysis, referral and risk management also represent a fundamental move away from ensuring social justice toward a new perspective in social policy, minimising risk.

Changes in social work are also represented by the development of new social work models that support managerialist management techniques (Dominelli, 1996). In

addition to risk management theories, she also cites integrated methods and contract social work as examples. The growth of these new models may represent the social work profession's willingness to accommodate and internalise the values of a fast changing relationship with government.

A further effect of the political shift toward the right is the changing nature of the workforce in government social service departments. Adams (1998) claims there are now fewer full time staff with a resultant tendency to hire people in on short term contracts to meet demand. Ife (1997) argues that a neo-liberal economic and ideological environment is 'fundamentally contradictory' to the values of social work. This can lead to social workers working in an 'unfriendly if not downright hostile, practice environment' (Ife, 1997 p1). The impacts include greatly increased stress, as social workers struggle to cope with the inherent conflicts and demands of new systems, as well as those of their increasingly high need clients.

There are a great deal of similarities between the international situation and that in Aotearoa New Zealand. Movement from a welfare state, towards a welfare society commenced under the Fourth Labour Government around 1986. A welfare state is one in which the government is both the funder and provider of services at a central level. By contrast, a welfare society involves

> *de-centralised systems responsive to local needs, community participation in service planning and provision, de-emphasis on the professional social work role, emphasis on family responsibility and, particularly in New Zealand, the rights and ability of the indigenous people to 'take care of their own'*
> (Baretta Herman, 1993 p6).

The adoption of international ideas promoting a welfare society is not a coincidence, and is promoted by overseas research. Despite regional flavours[7], the impacts are as

---

[7] See next section on The Aotearoa NZ Context.

relevant here as they are overseas (Connolly & Rathgen, 2001; Nash & Munford, 2001; Nash, 1998).

Since the implementation of these policies in the late 1980's and 1990's, Aotearoa New Zealand may have moved in a new political direction, due to the election of the current Labour government. The policies of this government fit what Giddens (2000) describes as 'Third Way' or 'new social democracy' politics. This is a new framework, 'one that avoids both the bureaucratic, top-down government favoured by the old left and the aspiration of the right to dismantle government altogether' (ibid p2).

In 2001 Steve Maharey, then minister of social welfare, described this form of politics as involving a role for collective action in order to empower individuals to 'fulfil their potential and meet their responsibilities', as well as an 'historic realignment of economic and social policy'. In practice however, these changes have not brought about reversals in the policies of the previous right wing governments. Whilst some tinkering has been done to moderate the worst effects, much of the economic and contracting environments described earlier continue to exist (Giddens, 2000).

In addition to affecting social and economic policy, political shifts toward the right have also impacted on educational policy. The introduction of competency-based education and training is a result of major changes in education policy direction within many western countries, including Aotearoa New Zealand. Moreover it is derived from the same economic imperatives as the changes to the welfare state (Gonczi, 2000). In chapter four, the case of competency education, pivotal to this thesis, is explored in more detail.

This section discussed the links between the state and social work, particularly in relation to political shifts to the right over the last two decades. I have shown how the requirements of social work practice change as the political and societal context in which practice occurs also changes. These changes create difficulties for social work due to the continuously shifting ground and potentially increased complexity of the

social work task. The changes may also heighten disjunctions between social work education and practice, challenging social work education to keep up with changes in practice. Furthermore, these changes in context again raise questions of who defines social work[8].

In relation to practice readiness, continual contextual changes are likely to impact on graduates' ability to undertake an increasingly complex social work task. Graduates may also internalise contextual changes as an experience of lack of readiness to practice.

The discussion of links between the state and social work is an essential part of scene setting in relation to readiness to practice. I now continue setting the scene in relation to the macro context of social work, by considering the professionalisation of social work.

The Professionalisation of Social Work

The professionalisation of social work involves the history of challenges to and developments within social work. Despite being a relative newcomer in terms of professions, there have been many developments, in addition to those described in the sections above. These challenges have also affected the level of practice required and the complexity of the practice situations social workers are involved in. Such changes have ramifications for the graduate, affecting the requirements for practice readiness.

Before 1880, 'matters of the human spirit', welfare and development were associated with the clerical profession and women's work, and were not regarded as completely serious (Harre-Hindmarsh, 1992 p27). After this time, governments began to intervene through the welfare state and the rise of secular professions. Social work is

---

[8] As explored in chapter 1.

25

one of these professions, alongside education, health, psychotherapy, and social welfare (ibid).

As a distinct activity, social work has developed in close relationship with state intervention and provision of services within the wider area of social welfare (i.e. health, education, housing, income support and community development). It also had independent roots in the voluntary sector (Lyons, 1999).

> *In Europe and North America, social work had its origins in the late nineteenth century in the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation, with their resultant poverty and poor health and living conditions of large numbers of people. Elsewhere it has developed during the twentieth century at varying pace, but often in response to similar processes and resultant social problems* (Lyons, 1999 p6).

However, it was the beginning of professional education that marked the 'cornerstone of the establishment of a profession' (Healy, 2001 p21). Such education commenced in Amsterdam in 1899 and by the 1930's had spread through Europe, to parts of Latin America, Asia and Africa. In addition to professional education, Smith and Sandford (1982) consider that the main characteristics of a profession are:

- A body of systematic theoretical knowledge
- Special skills and competence in the application of this knowledge
- A community service orientation
- A professional code of ethics and corporate control of members by the professional group; and
- Autonomy of work.

In terms of the organisation of social work and welfare, Lyons (1999) states that a pattern developed in Europe and North America. Service provision was initially delivered by the voluntary sector. Later it was replaced, to varying degrees in

different countries, by state funded and approved services. She adds that this trend has reversed since the 1980's, returning

to an emphasis on service provision by the voluntary or independent sector, in the face of a widespread shift to the right in political and economic policy, at national and global levels (ibid p8).

Similar trends in the professionalisation of social work have occurred in Aotearoa New Zealand. Formal social work education was a major factor in the professionalisation of the industry. This started in 1949 at Victoria University College, in the newly founded School of Social Science via a two-year post-graduate diploma (Levett, 1970). This was a good 50 years after similar training had begun in the USA or Britain. Prior to 1949, qualified social workers received their training overseas, although the overwhelming majority of those working in the social services came from other disciplines, especially teaching and nursing.

For twenty-five years, Victoria University College (latterly Victoria University of Wellington (VUW)) was the only institution providing professional education and training to prospective social workers. (Mc Donald, 1998; Nash, 1998). A period of activity in the growth of social work education then took place in 1975 and 1976 as Auckland, Massey and Canterbury Universities inaugurated their own courses. A major change was again heralded in 1990 with the establishment of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the notion of competency-based education. A wide variety of courses are now available at polytechnics, wananga, private training establishments and universities.

In addition to changes in the number and type of institutions providing social work education, there has also been a change in the type of student seeking social work education and training. This has followed similar patterns to the professionalisation of other industries. The sequence is that '[t]hose first entering the school are already

working in the field. Later, younger new recruits to the occupation enter the school' (Harre-Hindmarsh, 1992 p22).

A further pattern of professionalisation followed by Aotearoa New Zealand includes the creation of a professional association (the ANZASW), codes of ethics and standards of practice. Whilst self-regulation of members has to some extent been achieved through these mechanisms above, external controls are also being achieved by the registration of the profession and the creation of a Social Work Registration Board (SWRB). Specifics about the ANZASW and SWRB are taken up in a following section of this chapter.

Professionalisation has created major debate within the industry. Those opposed to professionalisation argue that it removes social work from the disadvantaged people it seeks to serve, distancing workers from clients and disempowering them (Barretta-Herman, 1994; Ife, 1997). It is even argued that professionalisation can lead to an over-emphasis on a variety of trappings, such as conferences, training courses, the pursuit of qualifications, and a concern with status (Ife, 1997).

Shannon argues that professions inherently internalise the values of the ruling class, acting as instruments of hegemony (Shannon, P. in Nash, 1998 p257). Criticism of professionalisation is also strong from community workers and radical social workers, who claim it results in an emphasis on

> *singular interventions based on individual pathological explanations rather than building a movement for the transformation to socialism in and through the social services* (Galper, 1980 in Barretta-Herman, 1993 p32).

On the other hand, professionalisation shows a concern for the maintenance of high ethical standards and efforts to ensure the highest possible quality of service to clients (Barretta-Herman, 1994; Ife, 1997). Subsequent to professional education and associations, practice standards are much clearer and accountability much higher.

Ehrenreich (1985 p230 cited in Nash & Munford, 2001 p31) provides a useful summary of the professionalisation debate saying

> *To the extent that professionalism represents a real effort to maintain competence and high ethical standards – a commitment to client needs even when they conflict with agency rules, a commitment to openness and collegiality, a commitment to the goal of social justice, which is at the core of social work's reason for its existence – it needs no defence. But if professionalism does not measure up to, or conflicts with, these standards, it should be discarded without regret.*

Regardless of the political debates surrounding professionalisation, it is clear that this process has had a major impact on social work practice. In particular it has raised standards of practice, expectations of most stakeholders and subsequently accountability of practitioners. All of these aspects influence the requirements for readiness to practice.

Influence of a Professional Association

Thus far this chapter has explored a number of contextual factors affecting readiness to practice in social work. As noted above, one factor was the creation of a national professional association. In this section I build on discussion from chapter one and explore the impact of the association in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) was formed in 1964, then simply the New Zealand Association of Social Workers (NZASW). In keeping with the trend set by social work education in this country, the creation of a national professional association took place later than similar developments in other countries such as America and Australia (Nash & Munford, 2001). Nonetheless, the Association has been a major feature of the social work landscape since.

The Association was instrumental in raising standards of social work practice by implementing a competency-based membership scheme, creating and enforcing a code of ethics, developing clear practice standards and more recently, a Course Approvals Board. The latter recognised tertiary qualifying social work courses with regard to the Association's practice standards. The Association also produces an academic journal, thereby promoting research and new practice initiatives. Additionally it provides a coherent voice for the profession to the government. In setting and evaluating standards of practice both for educational institutions as well as practitioners, the association has a large impact on readiness to practice.

The effects of the Social Work Registration Board are explored in the next section.

The Social Work Registration Board

A recent addition to the social work context in Aotearoa New Zealand is the Social Work Registration Board (SWRB). This was created as a requirement of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003. The role of the Board is to set the criteria required to become a Registered Social Worker. Registration will be required by most statutory social work positions.

Setting the criteria for Registration also includes nominating the level and content of qualifications (ANZASW, 2004). The Board has determined that a degree level qualification will be the minimum recognised qualification as from 31 December 2005, although a schedule of current qualifications, including undergraduate diplomas, will be recognised until that date (ibid).

This decision has immediate ramifications for readiness to practice. Registration, in the form being implemented in Aotearoa New Zealand, has the potential to create two classes of social work, one registered, the other not, with different requirements at each level. With registration set at a Bachelors degree requiring three-years study,

there is a prima facie argument that graduates of these programmes are likely to be more practice ready than those completing only two-years of study in a Diploma programme. However this is contested by Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi (TKA) (2004) in its submission to the SWRB. They argue that there is no research-based evidence to show that graduates of Bachelor degree programmes are more practice ready than those of CBET diplomas. They also suggest that the competency-based nature of National Diploma in Social Work qualifications could lead to greater practice readiness than Bachelors Degrees.

Registration is having a major effect on CBET social work qualifications. There are currently no degree level qualifications in social work using a competency system. This effectively takes CBET programmes out of the running as sufficient qualifications for Registration. Further comment about CBET will be taken up in chapter four.

The Changing Student Profile

The changing student demographic has already been mentioned in relation to the development of a profession. Whilst this change can be related to professionalisation there are also other potential effects on social work education and readiness to practice.

Traditionally, a proportion of social work students have been experienced social work practitioners, coming from the fields of health, probation and welfare. This group was assisted by the government's study award system enabling full time study on full pay (Connolly & Rathgen, 2001). Harre-Hindmarsh's study of social work graduates showed that many of those studying through this scheme were previous or existing practitioners. She found 19 of the 22 graduates had worked previously in the field (Harre-Hindmarsh, 1992).

The study awards have now been removed and

social work education, as we move into the new century presents a somewhat different picture. More schools of social work now have students coming straight from school into undergraduate programmes with little or no social work experience (Connolly & Rathgen, 2001 p14).

To illustrate this, in the institution in which I am currently working, of the 2003 social work graduating class, only two of the ten graduates have been previous practitioners and only one of them has practiced in a paid setting.

A further difference in the type of student seeking social work education and training is their age. With courses now open for school leavers in many areas, opportunities exist for younger people to enter the profession. The lack of outcome studies in this country since that of Harre-Hindmarsh (1992), makes presenting more than anecdotal evidence in this area difficult. However Ryan, Fook and Hawkins (1995) studied 39 social work students in Australia and showed the median age of respondents to be 23 years, with 53% aged between 20 and 24 years.

The significance of these changes of student profile in relation to practice readiness is well articulated by Connolly and Rathgen (2001 p13).

> *Honing the skills, and extending an experienced students' knowledge base is quite different from building the knowledge, experiences and practice strength of the social work neophyte.*

The changing student profile presents a major challenge for social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand. It raises many issues about generic qualifications and the kind of education and training necessary for different student types. The range of courses on offer at various institutions and their respective appeal to different student demographics may provide some solutions. Moreover, the advent of CBET also offers a response to these issues. The theme of CBET is taken up further in chapter four.

Thus far, this chapter has explored international contextual issues affecting the readiness to practice of graduates. Whilst these have often impacted locally too, it is equally important to examine influences that have impacted on readiness to practice solely within this country. The following section explores such issues, focusing particularly on the impact of Māori development, Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the community work movement.

The local context for Aotearoa New Zealand is inevitably influenced by the presence of the indigenous Māori population. Traditionally, racial integration and assimilation were policies encouraged by governments for many years. By 1975 however, events such as the Hikoi (Land March) from Te Hapua to Parliament in Wellington and the Bastion Point incident, showed that Māori were re-asserting their identity and tino rangatirantanga (self-determination). Māori were also claiming their rights under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

With regard to social work, a series of reports put before the Department of Social Welfare in the 1980's challenged it about internal racism and assisted the Māori cause. These reports included that from the Auckland Committee on Racism and Discrimination (ACORD) 1982, the report of the Human Rights Commission 1982, and the report of the Women Against Racism Action Group (WARAG) 1985, culminating in the groundbreaking 1986 report Puao-Te-Ata-Tu (Nash, 1998).

Puao-Te-Ata-Tu required the re-examination of social work relationships at all levels, to promote biculturalism and a 'partnership of decision making and resource sharing with the community and in particular with Māori' (Barretta-Herman, 1994 p17). A strong focus was put on the importance of whānau, hapu and iwi. The need for social workers to be able to work within Māori kaupapa when working with Māori was emphasised and the notion that Māori should ideally work with other Māori was put

forward. Furthermore, the entire casework relationship that had become central to social work was challenged as inappropriate to the needs of Māori (Nash, 1998).

Calls by Māori for services and service delivery methods better reflecting their communities, resulted in a growing sense of unease by pakeha social workers, who were struggling to work effectively with increasing numbers of Māori and Pacific Island clients. The timing for change was apt, as calls by Māori to 'take care of their own' fitted well within the emerging welfare society model.

Moves towards biculturalism and Māori self-determination may have benefited the profession and its clients in some ways, including greater control over resources. They have also had an impact on social work graduates. In a mono-cultural context, social work trainees were only educated into one (western) cultural framework of social work intervention. Whilst this disadvantaged trainees from non-western backgrounds, it made the curriculum simpler.

Now that biculturalism has become a major part of social work education and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, there have been a number of changes. At a curricular level, changes have resulted in the inclusion of Māori tikanga, te reo and practice methods in addition to western methods and informed by an increasing body of literature (Benton et al, 1990). These aspects of practice are enforced not only through teaching/assessment but also through the ANZASW in their Code of Ethics and Bicultural Code of Practice, through Acts of Parliament and agency rules and regulations.

Changes in learning requirements have also impacted on readiness to practice. Whilst non-Māori graduates are hopefully better prepared for work in more diverse cultural settings, it has also meant an increase in the range of areas in which graduate social workers must be knowledgeable and competent. For Māori social workers, it has provided recognition of their biculturalism and experiences operating within two cultural frameworks.

Community work is also an important part of the social work practice context in Aotearoa New Zealand. Community work promotes the values of social justice, social action and change work through community development. Community work emphasises 'bottom up' processes especially the participation of community groups and individuals in local community initiatives and social service provision. As such there has been a strong ideological overlap between community work and Māori tino rangatiratanga as described above.

Whilst social workers tend to think of community workers coming under their general umbrella, community workers see themselves as being 'generically different', although allied to social work (Nash, 1998 p270). A point of difference may relate to professionalisation. Some community workers see professionalisation as 'distancing workers from clients and disempowering clients by increasing their dependency on experts for problem resolution' (Baretta-Herman, 1994 p14). Community workers also advocated for the move from the centrally resourced and provided welfare state model towards one that 'recognised and assisted local community development and service provision' (ibid). Furthermore, in relation to social action, social change and social justice issues, community workers often provide a voice of opposition within social work circles.

As these ideological divides increased, a split between social work and community work developed, and a separate professional association, the Community Workers Association, was established. However, the voice and prominence of community work has developed new focuses in the last two decades since this separation, with emphasis on development of not for profit organisations. Community work may also be coming under the wider auspices of social work again, evidenced by the creation and maintenance of community work qualifications through Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi the Industry Training Organisation for the Social Services. Nonetheless, the community work legacy has been important. It has kept issues of social justice, client independence, tino rangatiratanga and community development high on the agenda for social work education.

Summary

This chapter explored links between the macro-level, socio-political context of social work and the links and impact on graduates' readiness to practice. Whilst it is easy to disregard forces at this contextual level, and outcome studies may make scant reference to them, they play an important part in the debate about readiness to practice.

At the macro-level, there are many forces operating, both globally and nationally. Globally, rapid technological developments and international economic forces are providing a context that challenges social policy and the provision of welfare services. Governments are increasingly finding themselves subordinate to the requests of multinational companies and global agreements such as GATS.

In addition to challenging the social policy stances of governments, globalisation has also resulted in some deterioration of wages and conditions of employment, and increased social divisions. These changes, along with the greater diversity of cultures living in most countries, and the internationalisation of practice theories, have increased the complexity of the social work task.

Concomitant with globalisation is the increasing professionalisation of social work. Since the turn of the 20th century, professionalisation has included the provision of education, creation of professional associations, statutory registration, development of practice theory and the increase in expectation and accountability of standards of social work practice.

These changes have also occurred within a dynamic international and national political context. In Aotearoa New Zealand this has resulted in a move from welfare state to welfare society, and the adoption of 'new right' and 'new managerialist' philosophies, albeit moderated by the current climate of the 'Third Way'.

As a consequence there are major changes in delivery of welfare services, away from government into the hands of an increasing number of diverse service providers. The social work task has become split, not just across more agencies and specialist fields of practice, but also in the level of complexity of the task. Lower level jobs are given to less qualified workers and the more complex interactions are now the domain of qualified and experienced practitioners. Moreover, there is a change in the nature of social work, away from the traditional casework relationship mode towards analysis, referral, case management and risk management.

Changes in the local context have made further impacts. In particular, the Māori renaissance and Tino Rangatiratanga movement have required social workers and agencies alike to become more bicultural. The community work movement has also continued to challenge social work to promote and work towards goals of social justice and community development, not merely casework.

Chapter one argued that there is a disjunction between leaving social work education and training and entering the field. The developments indicated in this chapter are of major significance to new practitioners with regard to this disjunction. As the organisational and societal context of the practice environment becomes more complex, and the number and complexity of cases coming before the social services increases, this impacts on what are seen as the core requirements of social work practice. As funding contracts, professional associations and latterly the SWRB demand higher levels of practice and accountability, practice requirements become more difficult. These changes provide a challenge not only to new practitioners, but also to social work educators and the funders/providers of social work services.

The macro-level context is not the only factor in the complex matrix surrounding readiness to practice however. Whilst the macro-level context tends to set the standards of practice, it does not otherwise impact on how the individual reaches these standards, although access to a range of courses and information internationally via the world-wide-web could yet change this. Instead it is currently

37

factors at a micro-level that play this role. Such micro-level factors include the education and training of the student, the student's own expectations, and the supportiveness of the agency they are first employed at. The following chapter continues to set the scene, identifying micro-level factors influencing the readiness to practice of social work graduates.

Chapter 3
Readiness to Practice: A Micro View

Introduction

In chapter one I argue that graduates often experience a gap, tension or lack of fit between ending courses and early practice. Chapter two illustrates issues that affect the social work industry at a macro-level, and also impact on graduates' readiness to practice. This chapter discusses some of the issues that impact on readiness to practice at a micro-level. By micro-level I am referring to features that have a direct impact on students/early graduates. I have categorised them into three areas; individual characteristics; the practice environment; and the educational environment.

Individual characteristics refer to age, expectations and previous social services and/or life experience. The practice environment draws on variables within the first place of employment as a social worker. This includes the quality and frequency of supervision as well as induction, orientation or in-service training programs. Regardless of whether a course is CBET or not, these factors will impact on practice readiness, and to some extent they are therefore generic to all social work education.

The educational environment however, is influenced to a great degree according to the type of course offered. One variable is whether a course is CBET or not. A central objective of this research is to explore the effects of CBET courses on practice readiness. During discussion about the educational environment I therefore outline how CBET courses fit into some of the current debates regarding the nature of social work, and how this in turn impacts on practice readiness.

Individual Characteristics

Social work is a profession that attracts a diverse range of students. They bring a rich range of ideas, beliefs, abilities, values and experiences that all contribute to their practice. This section considers individual characteristics of students and how these might impact on readiness to practice. In particular, it focuses on expectations of practice and characteristics such as age, culture and prior experience in the social services.

Expectations of Practice

What do graduate social workers expect from their first workplace experiences? What impact do these expectations have on their readiness for practice?

Students of social work expect to be able to adapt relatively easily to a practice environment upon graduation. They also expect to be able to practice effectively and competently on commencing work (Elliott, 1995; Marsh & Triseliotis, 1996). This is also true of other professions such as medicine (Jones et al, 2001) and nursing (Heslop et al, 2001). Such expectations may not be realistic however, and could contribute to the tension between finishing courses and early practice situations discussed in chapter one.

A significant difference between graduates' experiences of practice readiness may result from whether their expectations have been reasonable. In a recent study investigating job expectations of police recruits, Lithgow (2001) found recruits with unrealistic expectations of work experienced reality shock, job dissatisfaction, and poorer physical and psychological health than their counterparts. In social work, Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) found that 50% of graduates experienced practice differently to their expectations as students, which resulted in disappointment (ibid).

Clarifying expectations may have a significant impact. Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) also found that social workers undertaking training as probation officers had a much

higher match between their expectations and their initial workplace experiences. This indicates that there may be a greater match between course and work for those that had a clearer idea about their field of practice prior to starting training.

Syson and Baginsky (1981) also found clarifying expectations had a positive impact. Whilst their study focused on social work placements, the results showed that a lack of clarity prior to practice led to a 'disparate collection of expectations', from which 'it is the student, and perhaps sometimes the clients too, who suffer' (ibid p82). As a consequence they conclude that clearly establishing expectations is likely to decrease negative outcomes. In addition they suggest that documentary clarification of expectations, in their case through placement contracts and handbooks, is greatly beneficial.

One of the foci of this study is CBET. In a CBET paradigm, courses are designed to make standards of assessment clear and transparent. It can be argued that this leads to greater clarification of expectations and provides students with the ability to judge their own capacities. This in turn could improve readiness to practice. Further exploration about concepts of CBET is taken up in chapter four.

Demographics
Social work also seems to attract a diverse demographic of students, in terms of age, ethnicity, and life experiences. In their research, Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) investigated the impact of previous social work and educational experiences, age, gender and ethnicity on practice readiness.

They noticed 'only a small effect' toward previous practitioners indicating higher levels of preparedness. In relation to age, gender and ethnicity, they found that comments about readiness to practice were similar across the entire range of students. There did not appear to be a sub group of age, gender or ethnicity that had significantly different perceptions. This was also the case for previous educational experience (ibid p24).

This suggests that individual characteristics do not make a significant difference in graduates' experiences of readiness to practice. It is important to note, especially in relation to culture, that the Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) study was conducted in Britain. This finding may not transfer to a society such as Aotearoa New Zealand with an indigenous, post-colonial population.

The Practice Environment

The agency environment of a new graduate can be a critical factor in practice readiness. The support that graduates receive in their first workplaces is likely to have a major impact. Support may include a variety of features of which orientation, in-service training, and supervision are perhaps the most obvious.

Again, little research has investigated the impact of supervision, induction and/or in-service training in first workplace experiences on readiness to practice. With the exceptions of Pockett (1987) and Marsh and Triseliotis (1996), studies tend to focus on graduates' ability to integrate theory into practice or self-reports of their level of preparedness. The impact of the practice environment, drawing from conclusions in these studies is outlined below.

Orientation and In-Service Training

With the increasing specialisation of social work, the question of whether agencies or educators should be responsible for the provision of specialist training is growing (Connolly and Rathgen, 2001). Educators consider that it is not the job of educational institutions to 'teach the students procedures to be followed in particular agencies' (Parsloe, 2001 p11). To them, this specialised learning is the purpose of orientation or in-service training (ibid).

Discussion about the most appropriate place for such specialist education and training is developed later in this chapter. At this point I wish instead to explore the

impact of induction and in-service training on readiness to practice. Certainly it is clear that this is one juncture at which specialist knowledge could be learnt.

Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) found orientation tended to be poor in many agencies. 37% of graduates in their study claimed they had received no orientation. Over 50% described their orientation as poor. Those that reported better experiences were mostly in larger government agencies, such as probation.

Poor orientation may demonstrate that employers have unrealistic expectations of graduates' ability. Just as there is a mismatch between graduates and their expectations of practice readiness, there may also be a similar mismatch between employers and their expectations of graduates (Pockett, 1987). Pockett suggests that a twelve-month orientation programme, explicitly outlining reasonable expectations for both employers and graduates would address these concerns.

According to Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) in-service training was better provided for than orientation. The vast majority of their participants indicated that this 'provided input to fill gaps or strengthen their initial training' (ibid p180). Again further research on the impact of orientation and in-service training is clearly necessary.

Supervision

There is a vast body of writing regarding the importance of supervision in social work practice (Lishman, 1998). According to Parsloe and Hill (1978) the purpose of supervision is 'to establish the accountability of the worker to the organisation and to promote the worker's development as a professional person.' In addition to facilitating practice readiness, supervision also assists socialisation into the agency way of working (Pithouse, 1987). As Lishman states,

> Good supervision' should be provided on a regular and reliable basis, and should involve mutual trust and an awareness of the issues of authority and responsibility. It is supportive, allows the expression of feelings and the

analysis of problems and situations. It also addresses particular issues that workers identify as problematic such as pain, anxiety, stress and confusion (Lishman, 1998 p36).

Previous studies show that graduates' experiences of supervision were mixed. 'The newly qualified were equally split between those who found supervision at work from satisfactory to excellent and those who were dissatisfied with its frequency and quality' (Marsh & Triseliotis, 1996 p151). No other studies investigating the impact of supervision on practice readiness were found.

There is a common theme emerging from this section regarding the effect of supervision, orientation or in-service training. This involves a lack of research. More is clearly required to ascertain how these variables impact upon readiness to practice. This research is designed to provide some additional considerations in this area.

Thus far, this chapter has discussed the impact of student characteristics and the practice environment on practice readiness. I now move on to investigate the place of social work education in the preparation of graduates for the field.

The Educational Environment

The role of education and training in preparation of social workers is obviously significant. This section explores how a number of issues relating to social work education and training may impact on readiness to practice. These include the length and level of courses, the purpose and content of courses, placements and teaching styles. The relationship between these areas and CBET is also detailed.

Best practice in social work education and training is constantly evolving, and course delivery occurs via a wide range of styles and institutions. Whilst the current model of

tertiary-based education and training is predominant throughout the world, this was not always the case.

In the early years of social work in Aotearoa New Zealand as we know it, the overwhelming majority of those working in the social services came from other disciplines, especially teaching and nursing, and learnt about social work on-the-job. Those who entered the diploma courses at Victoria University also tended to be existing practitioners who had learnt social work on-the-job and wanted to upskill (Nash, 1998). This on-the-job training can be likened to an informal apprenticeship system.

Apprenticeships have been a significant part of Western education and training traditions since medieval times. They have been used as a focus for skill acquisition and learning within both trades and professions (Aldrich, 1999). Whilst apprenticeships in Aotearoa New Zealand underwent a period of decline in the 1970's and 1980's, they are enjoying a current resurgence, with the rise of the Modern Apprenticeship scheme and the introduction of work-based learning and assessment (Ainley & Rainbird, 1999). Work-based assessment is now also available to social workers through Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi, the Industry Training Organisation for the Social Services, and as such it can be argued that we are witnessing something of a return to the old.

Within tertiary education systems, questions of where and how social workers should be educated and trained have a long history. Social work is an applied subject, requiring a balance between theory and practice, and requiring teachers to be abreast of a research base as well as service delivery models (Marsh & Triseliotis, 1996). As a 'soft' discipline, social work draws on other 'universally recognised disciplines such as sociology, psychology, history, law and education for much of its curriculum' (Nash, 2003 p26). As previously noted, student populations in social work also tend to be diverse, adding to the complexity of the teaching role.

45

A variety of social work courses are available in Aotearoa New Zealand. There is quite some variation in the length and level of courses, the purpose and content of courses (the weighting given to the development of hands-on skills and theoretical capacity), the degree to which courses provide specialist training (some purport to be generic, whilst others offer specialisation such as Adventure Therapy or papers in particular fields of practice), and more recently the choice of competency or curriculum approaches. These factors may all impact on readiness to practice, as they affect the content, duration, and style of education that graduates receive. They are considered in turn below.

The Length and Level of Qualifying Courses

The length and level of a course undertaken by a student is likely to impact on the level of readiness to practice they attain. At the time of writing, there are two systems that regulate social work qualifying courses in Aotearoa New Zealand. One is the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) system that controls social work qualifications through Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi the Industry Training Organisation for the Social Services (TKA). This is a competency-based system.

The other system is a traditional curriculum system in which delivery occurs entirely within universities. This system has had no formal social work regulating body since the New Zealand Council for Education and Training in the Social Services was disbanded. Whilst some self-regulation has occurred via the Schools of Social Work and the CUAP[9], these are academic, rather than formal social work standard setting bodies.

Within the various institutions offering courses, it is possible to qualify to become a social worker from a two-year undergraduate diploma, a three-year degree, a four year degree, a post graduate diploma, or a masters level degree. However, as noted in chapter two, the variety of courses available is likely to be affected shortly,

---

[9] Committee on University Academic Programmes. This committee considers academic matters across the university system including inter-university course approval.

following the introduction of The Social Workers Registration Act (2003) and the appointment of the SWRB. One of the Board's tasks is to define the minimum-qualifying standard for social work courses. This has been set at a three-year bachelor degree (ANZASW, 2004). Both the range of courses available (Parsloe, 2001) and movement towards registration at a three-year degree level is broadly comparable with the situation in the United Kingdom

Availability of a wide variety of courses is testament to uncertainties about the most appropriate level and length of qualifying courses and in turn an uncertainty about the requirements of social work practice. Writing from the U.K., Parsloe (2001) sources the confusion to the relationship between head and heart, trade and profession. The question of trade or profession is about what makes the best social worker: A sophisticated theorist or a practical worker (Nash 1998)? Should social work education emphasise techniques rather than general principles and gather teaching material from field workers' wisdom as opposed to textbooks (Austin, 1997)?

The heart-centred view of social work stems from a church and charitable aid history, bringing a tradition of caring. This view of social work suggests that there is more importance on the type and qualities of the person entering the profession than on the training itself (Parsloe, 2001). This is in contrast with a head-centred view, which asserts that

> *social work requires an ability to deal with complexity and a capacity for rigorous analysis of complicated human situations. ...skills of the intellect... have to be developed and the most usual way is through higher education* (Parsloe, 2001 p10).

If social work is viewed as a trade, then it may be seen as a series of tasks to be carried out as defined by employing organisations. In this scenario professional values such as critical thinking, social justice, research and sociological analysis, the

things that tend to require a greater length of time in education and training, may not be highly valued by employers.

These debates are also reflected in the use of the terms 'education' and 'training' with reference to social work. Ongoing tension exists within social work circles about the balance between education and training in social work. The debate is both historic and contemporary, resulting from different notions of education and training. One definition of education views it as distinctly different to training. In this scenario, training tends to be used to describe preparing people for a job, position or function, and may be seen as relating to the idea of social work as a trade. Education, by contrast, is seen to involve preparation for life in a 'broader and more inclusive sense' (Harris et al, 1995 p35), and therefore may relate to the idea of a profession. Another definition views education and training on a continuum from 'very broad, holistic education to a very narrow and specific development of skills, with essential knowledge, called training' (ibid).

As social work has both a vocational and academic focus (Pockett, 1987), the comparative emphasis on each of these areas is often disputed. Should the focus be on education (academic), or on training (vocational)? This question also relates to whether the purpose of social work education and training is to produce graduates that are immediately ready for practice, or ones that are ready for ongoing development but require adaptation to the agency environment. It can be argued that vocational approaches achieve the former and academic approaches the latter.

It may be that social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand has split into two camps. CBET approaches may have become likened to vocational approaches, and associated with conceptualisation of social work as a trade. CBET courses tend to be two-years in length and have been criticised for having an atheoretical approach, focusing on techniques and skills[10] (Adams, 1998). In turn, curriculum approaches may have become associated with professional and academic focuses. If this is the

---

[10] See the following chapter for further debate about CBET approaches.

case, CBET courses may be producing graduates with greater practice readiness, by design. Curriculum courses by contrast, may require a greater amount of adaptation to the agency for graduates.

Despite debate regarding appropriate length and content of qualifying courses, there is a surprising lack of studies comparing outcomes of courses. Most studies are conducted within a particular institution. Two exceptions are those of Marsh and Triseliotis (1996), and Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (2000). Marsh and Triseliotis (1996 p45) compared CQSW and DipSW courses in the U.K. These are courses of a similar length but different content. Their finding was that

> *CQSW and DipSW newly qualified staff have similar judgments on the courses and the first year, and on readiness. Seniors have similar judgments on DipSW and CQSW newly qualified staff, and see very little difference between the qualifications.*

Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (2000 p168) compare a two-year and a four-year course. Their results showed that graduates from the four year course 'appear to be more advanced' than those from the two-year program.

Overall, there is insufficient evidence to draw any strong conclusions about the impact of different lengths and styles (CBET and curriculum) of courses on practice readiness. This is clearly an area that requires further investigation. The current research is designed to assist in filling this gap by providing data relevant to two-year diploma qualifications within a CBET framework.

The Purpose and Content of Social Work Education/Training

The degree of specialisation offered is a major factor in course delivery. This refers to the extent that preparation for specific fields of practice should be included in a course. Parsloe (2001) states that social work has traditionally opted for broad generic training. Inclusion of specific procedural and practice field matters, in addition to the broad level of knowledge that social workers are required to be aware of, may require too much of most social work courses. However she acknowledges that this can lead to courses seeming less relevant to the job.

Research shows that specialisation does give newly qualified workers 'confidence in some areas' (Parsloe, 2001 p13). As previously mentioned, there is also evidence that the lack of specialisation in courses was a source of anxiety for graduates when it came to first practice experiences. For many there was a 'feeling of superficiality about a number of subject areas' leaving students concerned about 'how they would respond to specific demands' (Marsh & Triseliotis, 1996 p93).

Marsh and Triseliotis (1996), as mentioned in chapter one, also identified differences between those training with a specific field of practice (probation) in mind and those that did not. Those training to be probation officers undertook the same generic course, but with some specialised education in this field. They reported much higher levels of readiness to practice than the other graduates. The results from these studies suggest that a greater transfer of learning into the workplace may occur from specialised as opposed to generic courses.

The content of social work courses is a further reason cited for a lack of graduate practice readiness. This particularly relates to perceptions of insufficient teaching (Marsh & Triseliotis, 1996; Davies, 1984). Areas of teaching deficit tend to be in highly applied subjects. Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) found that students experienced the greatest deficits of teaching in social work skills (especially practice tasks such as budgeting, using information technology etc), followed by psychology, law, social

50

work theory, sociology and lastly social policy. This finding was echoed by Gibbs & Cigno (1986) and Harre-Hindmarsh (1992).

Secker (1993) found a further area of deficit in courses. She showed that students were dissatisfied with the lack of attention paid to their values and attitude development. This is supported by Gibbs & Cigno (1986) whose study showed that students valued the importance of personal development in their education and training.

Much of the research for this section has come from studies outside of Aotearoa New Zealand. Whilst the Harre-Hindmarsh (1992) study provides some support, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which overseas findings relate to the local context. Additional research is clearly required for more accurate understanding.

Teachers and Teaching Styles

The quality or style of teaching may also impact on readiness to practice. Regardless of the discipline or level of scholarship, it is commonplace for the quality of a particular teacher to be singled out as an important contributing factor in the enjoyment and learning of a student. Social work is no exception to this.

In a highly applied and diverse profession such as social work, educators have the ability to be hugely influential in the learning process. Unfortunately this influence has not always been positive. Davies (1984) showed that 57% of graduates were concerned to improve the quality of teaching. A number of graduates even cited teaching as the 'worst thing that happened' on their course' (ibid p14).

The application of adult education principles to social work education is extremely important (Gould, 1996). Graduates experience difficulties in their practice when there is a mismatch between their learning styles and their teachers', or a mismatch between their learning style and the material to be learnt (Harre-Hindmarsh, 1992).

Competency approaches may also lead to different teaching styles. In Aotearoa New Zealand social work courses, small-group learning is a regular focus of CBET approaches, with a high degree of teacher contact time. However, CBET approaches are also accused of restricting teaching practices to 'tick box' approaches, or to narrow, reductionist, prescribed methods (Gonczi, 2000).

Philosophically, CBET structures should not influence teaching and learning styles (Harris et al, 1995). These structures are designed only to set the standards at which assessment occurs. How this pans out in practice appears to be under-investigated however. Further discussion about teaching styles in CBET courses is taken up in chapter four.

Placements

The integration of theory into practice is an essential aspect of any profession. Because of the complexity of the process however, it may well lead to tension within the profession, and education for that profession (Watson et al, 2002). Social work is no exception to this.

Placements (or fieldwork) have traditionally been a major part of the integration process, although as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the apprenticeship approach has also been utilised. In contemporary social work education, placements still play a vital role, regardless of whether courses are CBET or curriculum. The accepted industry standard in Aotearoa New Zealand requires a minimum of two placements totaling 120 days or 1000 hours (TKA, 2003).

Much has been done to develop placements within social work education and training as an educational tool. According to Parsloe (2001 p12) 'social work students probably get a more extensive and more personalised placement experience than do students of any other professional group.'

52

Ellis (1998) identifies nine different models of placement within social work. These all involve some form of partnership between an education/training provider and an agency. The different partnership forms include student units, training centres, teaching centres, internships, in-post practicums, contact-challenge models and consortium models. The most common is the field setting model[11].

Student units involve the establishment of a training unit for students offering professional qualifications, within an organisation or department. They are set up and staffed in conjunction with tertiary institutions. Teaching centres use a methodology similar to a medical model of teaching in a hospital. Here the institution 'establishes formal institutional supports for fieldwork, including the creation of a specialist position(s) to coordinate and promote student placements' (ibid p47).

The internship model separates education and training into two stages. The first stage is within an academic institution where a formal qualification is gained. On completion of the qualification, the graduate then undertakes the second stage, which is based within a social services agency and based on 'practical experience'. By contrast, in-post practicum refers to students that are able to complete one of their placements from within the social services agency of their current employment.

The contact-challenge model involves students having an ongoing relationship with a social service agency and clients throughout the academic year, or even longer. This is designed to give them real experiences to reflect on whilst developing their theoretical knowledge-base.

The consortium model requires the learning institution and social service agency to have a partnership with regard to the entire course, not just the placement aspects. In this model, agencies are involved in course content planning as well as selection of students.

---

[11] For a fuller account of these models see Ellis (1998).

As stated earlier, the field setting model is the most common in Aotearoa New Zealand. This involves a partnership between the agency and the social work course. In the partnership, the agency agrees to offer a placement within the social work course. The student's educational experience at the placement is then organised by the agency in line with their mandate and service delivery program.

A number of criticisms have been made of this model. The most significant is that systematic and structured educational programs during the placement are unlikely, as agencies 'do not recognise practice teaching as an agency responsibility' (Ellis, 1998 p45). Professional development and support of practice teachers is seen as an agency responsibility in this model, but as financial and other pressures are exerted to emphasise the accomplishment of the agency task at the expense of staff development, these essential areas are being ignored, with implications for placement quality (ibid).

Parsloe (2001) suggests that this type of placement partnership has created more problems than it has solved. This is due to the different levels of importance the placement has to the different partners. For educational and training institutions, these partnerships are essential to their purpose. The reverse may be true for agencies, as placements are a very small aspect of their business.

From a pedagogical perspective, Cooper (2000) argues that the field setting model causes separation between theory (taught in the learning institution) and practice (enacted on the placement in an agency). Schön (1983, 1987) suggests this separation treats practice as an exercise of Technical-Rationality through a positivist approach to learning[12]. This is most suited only to simple problem solving, not the complex problems of professions.

Little research appears in the literature regarding the effect of different types of placement on readiness to practice. Most studies refer to placement in a generic

---

[12] See the following chapter for further explanation of these terms.

sense, not referring to a particular type. Whilst one assumption may be that they are referring to the field-setting model, this cannot be taken for granted.

Student experiences on placement are likely to impact greatly on readiness to practice. For instance, a student that is employed at the agency of their last placement, is more likely to have higher levels of practice readiness than a graduate undertaking their first workplace experience in a completely foreign agency.

Most recent studies indicate that graduates experience a great deal of learning from their placements (Davies, 1984; Gibbs & Cigno, 1986; Marsh & Triseliotis, 1996; Secker, 1993). This also appears to be consistent with earlier outcome studies such as Dunning (1978), Pavlin (1970), Shaw and Walton (1978) (O'Connor & Dalgliesh, 1986). Placement supervision is also seen as playing a pivotal role, with positive experiences improving graduate learning (Kadushin, 1991; Slocombe, 1993).

O'Connor and Dalgliesh (1986) raise questions about placements and readiness to practice. They state that whilst much valuable learning takes place on placements 'in some major respects the practica did not prepare [students] for social work practice.' (ibid p442). Firstly, in placements students did not learn to take responsibility for their work. Instead they had a supervisor to 'run to' and who took ultimate responsibility. Secondly, students didn't have to come to terms with ongoing, longer-term work/clients, as placements were time limited. This was especially noticeable in situations of work with an individual that did not share the student's perspective or orientation. In addition, defining the social work role may be less problematic on placement. This may be because the student is sheltered by the social work mentoring relationship with his/her practice teacher.

Teaching is also important in placements and impacts on students' readiness to practice. Secker (1993) describes a number of helpful and unhelpful approaches to practice teaching. Unhelpful approaches include attributing difficulties students encountered in practice to deficiencies in their personal development; being

unsupportive, cold or aloof; being overly protective of the student; and not exposing them to sufficient practice situations or adopting a 'caseload management' approach in which supervisors solely provide work experience and monitor the results.

More helpful approaches occurred when

> *practice teachers neither attributed their students' concerns to personal deficiencies, nor attempted to provide answers based on their own approach to practice. Instead they reassured the students that their anxiety was a natural reaction and that the purpose of their placement was to learn rather than to immediately demonstrate fully fledged competency* (Secker, 1993 p126).

Secker (1993) suggests that the more helpful approaches to practice teaching may result in higher levels of readiness to practice.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to demonstrate the range of influences on social work practice readiness at a micro-level as described in the social work research literature. I have particularly focused on three main variables; students, the impact of courses and agency environments. The discussion was designed to produce two results. The first was to highlight generic influences on practice readiness. The second was to distinguish features relevant to social work courses, particularly CBET social work education.

There are a number of areas relating to practice readiness at a micro-level that are not influenced by the type of course. These particularly relate to student characteristics and impacts of agencies during students initial work experiences.

Student characteristics include expectations and previous social work experiences. Students with appropriate expectations of work on graduation, including those that trained with a particular field of practice in mind, appear to have greater practice readiness. In addition, students with previous social work experience also appear to be more ready for practice after graduation. Furthermore, despite social work attracting a diverse student population in terms of age, gender and ethnicity, these variables seemed to have little impact on practice readiness, at least within a British context.

Exploration of agency responsibilities demonstrated an area of tension between courses and agencies with regard to ensuring practice readiness. This tension centres on the extent to which education providers should produce highly practice ready graduates versus generic graduates. In the latter case, agencies would be required to take responsibility for providing graduates orientation to the particular field of practice and agency setting.

Within agency environments I showed that there are a range of variables potentially impacting on readiness to practice. Orientation, in-service training and supervision were the most significant. Provision of good agency orientation is an important task for developing practice readiness according to theorists. However, previous research shows that orientation programmes have limited value for graduates in practice. In-service training was valued more highly and had a greater impact on practice readiness. Supervision appeared to have a mixed effect on practice readiness.

With respect to social work courses, these are affected by a range of debates central to definitions of social work itself. This relates to the extent to which social work is seen as head or heart oriented and whether a trade or profession. These in turn affect the extent to which courses may be seen as academic or vocational, with provision of education or training the result. The resolution of these debates has impacted on the length and style of social work courses.

Whilst a variety of lengths and levels of social work courses exist in this country, there is little evidence available to make comparisons about their efficacy in relation to practice readiness. Research that investigated different courses in other countries found few differences in outcomes between graduates, although longer courses did have marginally higher levels of practice readiness. The degree of specialisation within a course also has an effect. In particular, courses that targeted a clear field of practice had greater practice ready graduates.

Despite academics continuing to disagree about the impact of various aspects of social work education and training, new approaches to course provision have been developed. Competency-based courses are the most significant of these developments and may provide a response to many of the discussions outlined in this chapter.

Theoretically, competency-based education and training may well have a strong impact on readiness to practice of graduates. As competency courses are developed with a strong focus on and input from employers, there is a much higher level of emphasis on the applicability of learning to the workplace. This may address concerns from graduates about an insufficient emphasis on applied areas such as social work skills. Moreover, the significant shift in pedagogical approach provides a response to issues about teaching styles.

A critical analysis of the competency movement, especially within social work is necessary to explore these arguments further. This is taken up in the following chapter.

Chapter 4
Theories, Themes and Concepts

Introduction

The previous chapters outlined the context of social work practice readiness and began setting the scene for the research. This chapter focuses on the theories, themes and concepts relevant to a critique of practice readiness for social work graduates.

Exploration of theories, themes and concepts are relevant to two main arenas. These are competency-based education and training (CBET) and the transfer of learning. CBET is relevant because this study is looking at graduates' experiences of competency-based courses. This chapter therefore explores a number of factors relating to CBET. In particular, I focus on definitions of CBET, briefly explore the historical context, and provide a critique of the philosophy and implementation of this form of education, particularly relating to social work.

Transfer of learning is a process that involves both teaching and learning. I therefore explore relevant theoretical concepts in relation to each area. Considering the teaching aspect of transfer of learning, I outline a range of adult learning theories. Particular emphasis is given to experiential, reflective, critical theory and Technical-Rational approaches to teaching. The purpose here is to reflect on how these adult learning theories fit within the competency paradigm, in order to provide further critique of the efficacy of CBET.

Within the final part of the chapter I focus on learning, and in particular on the integration of theory into practice and development of expertise. Here I explore the model of expertise development conceived by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) in addition to Secker's (1993) model of integration of theory into practice. My intention is to provide a context from which the results of the research can be analysed.

Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET)

This section examines relevant concepts of CBET, particularly in relation to social work. I have divided the section into two parts. In the first part I present definitions of CBET in order to clarify the philosophy driving it. In addition, I present some critique of CBET approaches. In the second part of this section I present a brief history of CBET. Throughout this study I have attempted to provide some historical context, as I believe this to be highly relevant to understanding the research topic.

Defining CBET

CBET has been an increasing force in the education industry since the latter part of the twentieth century, and its influence shows no signs of abating. The basis of the competency movement is that occupations should be defined according to the competencies needed to perform them, rather than through the formal qualifications necessary for workers. This requires courses to be defined in terms of outcomes that students need to achieve and is based on criteria expressed in competency standards developed by each industry group.

CBET is a controversial initiative that has polarised opinion in some spheres. Harris et al (1995 p9) summarise the controversy eloquently stating that for many it is 'the answer', however for others it is simply 'the wrong answer'.

CBET relies on the concept of 'competence' or 'competency', the definition of which is also a 'contested notion' (Gonczi, 2000 p25). Early definitions of competence in an educational context were simplistic. Harris et al (1995 p18) state that the earliest definition was suggested by Elam (1971) who defined competence simply as 'knowledge, skills and behaviour'. In the 1980's the Further Education Unit (FEU) of the UK defined competence as

> *The possession and development of sufficient skills, appropriate attitudes and experiences for successful performance in life roles. Such a definition includes*

employment and other forms of work; it implies maturity and responsibility in a variety of roles, and it includes experience as an essential element of competence (FEU, 1984 p3, in Harris et al, 1995 p20).

In 1992 the National Training Board of Australia released the following definition of competency.

> *The concept of competency focuses on what is expected of an employee in the workplace rather than on the learning process; and embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments. This is a broad concept of competency in that all aspects of work performance and not only narrow task skills are included. It encompasses:*
> - *The requirements to perform individual tasks (task skills)*
> - *The requirement to manage a number of different tasks within the job (task management skills)*
> - *The requirement to respond to irregularities and breakdowns in routine (contingency management skills)*
> - *The requirement to deal with the responsibilities and expectations of work environment (job/role environment skills), including working with others*

(National Training Board, 1992 p29 in Cooper, 1994 p19).

These definitions of competence have developed as the notion matured, and sometimes in response to critics. Gonczi (1993), Gonczi and Hager (1992) provide a developmental framework for thinking about definitions of competence. They suggest that there are three main approaches to defining competence, which have developed over time. The definitions above loosely fall into these categories.

1) The Task Based or Behaviourist Approach. In this approach, competence is defined in terms of 'discrete behaviours associated with the completion of atomised tasks' (Gonczi, 1993 p1). This definition does not take into account

the connections between tasks and confuses competence with performance. The approach has many weaknesses (which are frequently cited by critics) including that 'it is reductionist, ignores group processes, is conservative, atheoretical, and ignores the role of professional judgment in intelligent performance' (Gonczi, 1993 p2).

2) The General Attributes Approach. This approach 'concentrates on the underlying attributes e.g. knowledge or critical thinking capacity, which provides the basis for transferable or more specific attributes' (Gonczi, 1993 p2). In this approach, general attributes are thought to be applied to many or all situations, but the context of the situations are ignored. Criticism of this approach includes a lack of evidence that generic competencies exist as described. Attributes in this sense are seen as being specific to particular contexts.

3) The Integrated (or holistic) Approach. This approach 'seeks to marry the general attributes approach to the context in which these attributes will be employed. This approach looks at the complex combination of attributes (knowledge, values, attitudes and skills), which are used in combination to understand the particular situation in which professionals find themselves'. In other words, competence within this approach, is a 'complex structuring of attributes needed for intelligent performance in specific situations [incorporating] the idea of professional judgment' (Gonczi, 1993 p3).

Gonczi (1993) and Gonczi and Hager (1992) also assert that the integrated approach is what modern standards should be based on, as it is the most encompassing, holistic, up to date and philosophically robust.

Concepts of competence and competency, such as those above, have been brought into education and training. The result is a movement that suggests occupations should be defined according to the competencies required to perform them, rather

62

than through the formal qualifications required of members. Courses should therefore be defined in terms of the outcomes that students need to achieve and are based on criteria expressed in competency standards developed by each industry group.

In social work, competency standards are required to reflect the integration of knowledge, skills and attributes/values (the integrated approach) that are essential to the achievement of industry outcomes. Competency standards do not define the curriculum or teaching/ delivery systems, however they may reflect essential theory, values and skills (Kane & Hopkins, 1995).

The role of education providers is to design the curriculum and teaching delivery systems to ensure graduates meet industry standards. Industry in this sense ideally includes all stakeholders including employers, employees, professions and occupational groups. In practice, representatives of these groups are assembled into advisory panels that provide feedback and recommendations on the standards. One criticism is that standards are skewed towards the needs of employers, as they tend to dominate panels (ibid).

Other criticisms of the competency approach have been made. Adams (1998 p258) assembles them into six main categories:

1) They tend to focus on areas of expertise that are most appropriate in stable, bureaucratic work settings, rather than being directed towards future job requirements.

2) They encourage fragmentation. This is a somewhat artificial atomisation and reduction into components of activities, which could otherwise be viewed holistically.

3) They are convergent. In other words they may bring about a narrowing of ideas consistent with outcome-based activity rather than encouraging

divergent thinking, an emphasis on the value of the process or activity, and creative practice.

4) They focus mainly or wholly on easily measurable aspects of people's performance.

5) They concentrate on techniques and skills, and this relegates considerations of values, critical evaluation and the deployment of front-line knowledge, particularly at more advanced levels, into second phase.

6) They emphasise students acquiring specified techniques rather than developing approaches based on critically reflective practice.

Critique of CBET is mostly theoretically and intellectually based. Little actual research in the area, such as comparative studies between CBET and traditional education systems, has been conducted. As previously noted, in the field of social work, no comparative studies were found despite thorough database searches.

At present the status of CBET approaches is still illustrated by polarised opinions. These are summarised by Gonczi as follows.

Amongst educationalists the debate is characterised by excessive claims on both sides. In the real world of the implementation of competency-based education the hopes of its proponents have not been entirely fulfilled but equally the denigration of it by its opponents has proved to be wildly exaggerated (Gonczi, 2000 p16).

History of CBET
The history of CBET commences in the United States around the 1920's (Gonczi, 2000; Harris et al, 1995). It appears to have developed out of challenges arising from industrialisation that were considered in management studies at that time. The concepts did not meet with universal acceptance even then.

Competency approaches of some description were again considered in the 1950's, also in the USA. This came partly from the rise of behaviourism, but also from 'soul searching' in response to the cold war and military/technological advances that the Soviet Union had demonstrated ahead of the USA, such as Sputnik. This 'soul searching' led, amongst other things, to an increased interest in analysing and revolutionising the education system, which was partly thought to blame for the perceived shortcomings (Harris et al, 1995). The ideas mooted at this time also did not gain enduring acceptance.

The 1970's saw a further period of growth in which the main foundations of the modern CBET movement were established. It is in the last 15 years however, that the current development of CBET systems has occurred internationally. This form of competency system is much more widespread than its precursors. Gonczi (2000) suggests that there are four interconnected reasons for the present popularity of CBET.

The first reason cited is the ongoing basic desire to make the complex simple. Education and training is a complex process and CBET to some extent attempts to clarify the process or at least the outcomes. At a time of greater technology than ever before, this is seen as increasingly important in some areas. Secondly, at a general level he suggests there is an increase in anxiety and uncertainty resulting from globalisation and the concomitant changes in society. As CBET attempts to clarify and make transparent the complex area of education and training, this may be addressing some of the generalised anxiety.

Gonczi considers that the third reason for the current popularity of CBET relates to the perception that education can provide solutions to societal concerns. As perceived societal concerns have increased, education has been turned to as a solution. Finally, he suggests that the there is some re-thinking occurring regarding western educational traditions. The 'old dichotomies between knowing and doing' are

increasingly accepted as false[13], and competency approaches are addressing an 'enduring dilemma' (ibid p181).

The current manifestation of competency approaches resulted from economic rather than educational circumstances. The needs of industry were particularly highlighted through claims that traditional education programmes were not creating graduates able to effectively assimilate into the workplace and undertake the tasks required of them (Gonczi, 1993, 1999, 2000) [14]. Relevance to the workplace is increasingly being demanded in education. Education is also increasingly conceived of as related to work preparation (Harris et al, 1995).

The economic led implementation of CBET was criticised by educators who felt that governments made significant decisions impacting on educational delivery and structures, with little or no consultation and input from them (Gonczi, 2000). Gonczi claims that the decision to progress with CBET was made because governments felt that 'traditional vocational education and training providers were not sufficiently in touch with industry needs to lead the reform process' (ibid p18). Vocational education and training was also under the spotlight due to the increasingly sophisticated skills necessary for professions, in addition to a decrease in unskilled work opportunities.

Competency standards became a way of implementing a whole raft of educational reforms aimed at improving the 'efficiency, effectiveness and equity of the vocational education and training system' (ibid p19). One outcome has been significant tension between the fields of education and training, as previously discussed in chapter three. Further tension has also arisen in Aotearoa New Zealand as the competency system has moved beyond vocational through to professional education.

---

[13] Gonczi is referring here to Technical-Rational approaches to learning, which have been heavily critiqued by Schön (1983, 1987) and are discussed in the following section.

[14] Gonczi is a major commentator in the area of CBET whose relevance to the Aotearoa NZ context is clearly indicated by his 1993 invitation to New Zealand from the government of the day.

Despite tensions surrounding the implementation of CBET, it has had an enormous impact in the past two decades. CBET is now established and consolidated in many industrialised countries including Britain, USA, NZ, Canada, Ireland, Germany, Australia and some Asian countries such as South Korea and Thailand. As Yelloly put it in 1995 (p51),

> *the tides of competence are running and…the changes have already touched the lives of millions and are set to expand yet further and more rapidly.*

In Aotearoa New Zealand, CBET has been part of a formal, government-sanctioned approach since the education reforms and dissolution of the Education Department in 1989. This included the inception of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) in 1992. NZQA developed an eight level National Qualifications Framework (NQF), incorporating education at all levels from primary schools through to higher degrees. The framework is designed to cover all fields of general and vocational education and caters to all post-compulsory learning[15].

Competency-based assessments are integral to unit standards, which constitute the building blocks of the framework. Unit standards define the outcomes that need to be demonstrated by an individual in relation to a particular area of knowledge, skills or values. Unit standards are assigned a level according to their complexity, and packaged by industries into relevant qualifications. Under the Industry Training Act of 1992, Industry Training Organisations (ITO's) were set up to 'administer the delivery of systematic training programs and to set national industry standards' (Harris et al, 1995 p49). Where an ITO does not exist, National Standards Bodies are established.

To ensure consistency and quality, training providers need to be registered and accredited with NZQA. Providers include a range of bodies including some Universities, Polytechnics, Wananga, Colleges of Education, Schools, Government Training Establishments (GTE's) and Private Training Establishments (PTE's). This

---

[15] This is a much broader framework than in many other countries that have adopted CBET approaches.

system, as coordinated through the NZQA, now provides the basis of the vocational education and training system in Aotearoa New Zealand (Gonczi, 2000).

In relation to social work in Aotearoa New Zealand, a competency approach was endorsed, albeit controversially, in 1995, with the creation of the Kai Awhina Social Services Industry Training Organisation (KASSITO, now known as Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi the Industry Training Organisation for the Social Services – TKA).

Since 1995 ten new social service qualifications have been registered on the NZQA framework through TKA. These include National Certificates in Social Services, Youth Work (2), Iwi/Māori Social Services and Pacific Island Social Services and National Diplomas in Social Work, Community Work, Youth Work, Iwi/Māori Social Work and Counselling. The National Diploma in Social Work, a two-year course, is the only recognised professional social work qualification of those listed above.

Tertiary institutions started offering CBET social work qualifications in 1994 with Waikato Polytechnic offering a Diploma in Social Work and Christchurch Polytechnic offering a Diploma in Community Work in the same year. Since this time a number of Tertiary Education Institutions (TEI's) including Polytechnics/Institutes of Technology, Wananga and Private Training Establishments have been accredited to run the National Diploma. Currently over eight TEI's have active programmes, with courses available throughout the country. In addition, the largest employer of social workers in Aoteaora New Zealand, Child Youth and Family, provides an in-service competency-based training program, based on approximately 50% of the National Diploma qualification.

As previously mentioned however, the two-year National Diploma qualification will not meet the educational requirements for Social Work Registration from 2006, due to the standard being set at a three year bachelors degree level. This has a number of implications for CBET social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand. A new

qualification meeting Social Work Registration standards will need to be developed. If not, CBET courses will be relegated to lesser, un-registerable qualifications.

Thus far, this chapter has presented the historical and defining contexts of CBET. I now progress on to present themes and concepts relevant to adult learning and their relationship with CBET.

Transfer of Learning – Adult Learning Theories

The purpose of this section is to consider how learning is transferred in relation to CBET and social work education. I am considering transfer of learning in this context to be the process by which social work theory is translated into practice. In other words it is the process through which social work education and training occurs. In this section I will explore transfer of learning in relation to adult learning theories. In the following section I consider two models of the stages through which the learner moves, in order to develop expertise and integrate theory with practice.

Despite being based in behavioural and adult learning theories (Harris et al, 1995), CBET is designed to be compatible with a variety of teaching and learning methods. This can be achieved because CBET fundamentally 'emphasises outcomes rather than processes' (Harris et al, 1995 p18). In other words the focus is on the product or outcomes (demonstration of competence) of education, not so much the input (teaching), or even the process within this system. In this way CBET is purely a philosophical approach, as it does not dictate how ends are to be achieved.

Current social work is beginning to move away from the procedurally driven delivery systems of the 1990's towards 'an approach that emphasises the use of professional judgment grounded in evidence-based practice' (Horwath and Thurlow, 2004 p7). Evidence-based practice essentially reflects the move to ensure that social work judgments are validly informed. Emphasis is placed on research informing practice

(Sheldon & Mac Donald, 1999) in addition to the values of professional practice expertise and the preferences of service users (Atherton, 1999).

It can be argued that this move towards evidence-based practice is a reaction to shortcomings perceived in the adoption of corporate management techniques and the resultant outcome driven, case management approaches throughout social work, as outlined in chapter two. Whilst competency approaches came from the same reformist neo-liberal thinking that underpinned such procedural approaches, CBET may nevertheless have the capacity to function effectively within new and different environments. This is due to an approach, as outlined above, that does not dictate how learning must be undertaken. CBET merely sets up a system for ensuring that industry standards are attained. Thus if industry standards change, the system merely adapts to incorporate them.

Nonetheless, preparing a practice ready social work graduate, grounded in evidence-based practice, requires a range of appropriate learning opportunities in order for transfer of learning to effectively occur. Adult learning theories provide some insight into how this might be achieved. The theories and concepts most relevant to this discussion are:

- Positivism
- Kolb's Learning Cycle
- Reflective Learning
- Critical Theory

The remainder of this section outlines each of these concepts in turn and demonstrates the relationship with CBET and social work readiness to practice.

Positivism

Due to its historical positioning in education, positivism is the theoretical position 'against which other theoretical positions are compared and contrasted' (Peca, 2000 p3). As such it has had, and continues to have, a strong influence on educational and transfer of learning approaches in general, as well as in relation to social work

(Harre-Hindmarsh, 1992). In many ways positivism has formed the basis of traditional academic learning (Schön, 1983, 1987). Since the late 1970's however, it has come under increasing criticism, due to perceived shortcomings in relation to the transfer of learning.

In order to understand the arguments for and against positivism, it is first necessary to provide a brief outline of positivism. Positivism essentially espouses the idea of an objective, measurable reality. It locates reality outside of the person undertaking the knowing, as 'facts' can only be known if they correspond to an independently existing reality. Thus scientific method is favoured as it is grounded in observable facts (Peca, 2000).

Positivism also lends itself to breaking down knowledge into component parts. Compartmentalisation of knowledge is a potential characteristic of competency approaches, as discussed earlier this chapter, and therefore a strong relationship is considered to exist between positivist and CBET approaches. In other words, CBET is seen as descending from positivist and also behaviourist philosophies (Harris et al, 1995).

In relation to professional education, positivism may be applied through what Schön (1983, 1987) refers to as a Technical-Rational approach. Schön is a major critic of Technical-Rational approaches to education in the professions. His criticism is their suggestion of a split between theory and practice, in which theory is learnt in one environment, and then applied to practice in another. This he argues, leads to professionals being seen as practical problem solvers, who 'apply theory and technique from systematic, preferably scientific knowledge' (Schön, 1987 p4). Moreover there is an assumption that theoretical learning will somehow automatically be transferred to practice.

Fay (1987) suggested that Technical-Rational views of education tend to limit the social work task to instrumental problem solving. Whilst this approach may work well

71

in situations that are stable with well-formed problems, many situations that social workers face are not well-formed. They are messy, complex and ill-defined (Schön, 1987 p4). Therefore education and training based solely on a Technical-Rational model may be limited in its ability to assist social work graduates to reach practice readiness.

CBET approaches have also been criticised for emphasising Technical-Rational approaches over other forms of learning/teaching (Dominelli, 1996; Gonczi, 2000). It has been argued that CBET promotes Technical-Rational learning methods as it encourages the breaking down of learning into small, supposedly well-defined and stable chunks[16]. It is also seen as lacking the flexibility required for dealing with the messy, ill-formed problems found in social work, as described by Schön. In addition, it is argued that Technical-Rational approaches to education in social work are employed at the expense of the critical thinking and social justice requirements of the profession (Dominelli, 1996).

Similarities have been noted between Technical-Rational educational approaches, CBET and the continued existence of outcome driven, case management approaches to social work still found in many social work agencies. Whilst it can be argued that Technical-Rational approaches, potentially delivered through CBET, could be the most useful training for such procedurally driven social service agency environments, this does not measure up to best practice in any of the educational, agency or social work practice standards.

Despite the criticism of Technical-Rational approaches, there may continue be some place for them within best practice social work education. According to Horwath and Thurlow (2004), some areas of the social work curriculum lend themselves well to learning through this model. These areas include the use of legislation, agency and particular practice procedures and empirical research to inform judgments (ibid).

---

[16] See Adams' critique earlier in this chapter.

Clearly however, Technical-Rational approaches are insufficient in themselves to provide the transfer of learning necessary for practice readiness. Alternative paradigms are therefore required for adequate learning. These alternative paradigms may require active rather than passive educational methods and may involve interpretive methodologies as espoused by adult learning theories (Harre-Hindmarsh, 1992).

Despite being criticised for having too strong a Technical-Rational focus, CBET approaches have been purposefully fashioned to allow a range of teaching and learning systems, as they are primarily focused on assessment. The integrated approach to standards, described earlier in the chapter, was also developed to address criticisms of lack of holism and an overly structured approach to learning. The integrated approach also allows greater flexibility for providers of education and training and emphasises the importance of knowledge, skills and values, including the ability to think critically.

I now proceed to explore the relationship between CBET and other adult learning theories, many of which have arisen in response to positivist ideas, and which may be considered more consistent with adequate transfer of learning. I commence with Kolb's concepts of experiential learning.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Model
Experiential learning emphasises the importance of experience as the source of learning and development. Often seen as the founder of experiential learning, Kolb (1984) outlined a learning cycle based on four steps. These are concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation.

Kolb's cycle shows the importance of learning as a process, as opposed to being fixed to outcomes. In the experiential learning process, learners have an experience, which is in turn reflected upon. From this experience, links are made with theoretical material or other ways of conceptualising the experience in order to create a kind of

cognitive map. Realisations and new concepts are then trialled, through experimentation and problem solving in practice situations (ibid).

Learners can enter the learning cycle at any of the four stages, although all four steps in the cycle are required for learning to occur. Kolb also suggests that each learner will have a preference for one or more mode of learning. This development introduced the notion of individual learning styles.

From an experiential learning perspective it can be argued that practice readiness will be enhanced when students are given learning opportunities that reflect all four steps on the learning cycle. Moreover, opportunities that fit with the student's individual learning styles will also support effective learning and thus readiness to practice.

The competency paradigm may well promote experiential learning within social work education and training. From personal experience of teaching in such social work courses, I am aware that the competency approach often requires skill demonstrations as part of assessments. Such skill demonstrations are likely to lead to students having frequent learning experiences within real or simulated activities, in order to be able to demonstrate the ability to undertake a range of social work tasks. This requirement may increase the experiential component within education and through the lens of Kolb's model, therefore provides significant opportunities for enhanced learning.

Reflective Learning

Reflective learning is a concept pioneered by Donald Schön (1983, 1987). He strongly critiqued the Technical-Rational view cited above, essentially inverting the order of learning, especially for situations of uncertainty, uniqueness or unpredictability. Instead of learning theory and then applying it to practice, he suggests that effective transfer of learning requires the creation of a reflexive relationship between theory and practice.

We should start not by asking how to make better use of research-based knowledge, but by asking what we can learn from a careful examination of artistry, that is, the competence by which practitioners actually handle indeterminate zones of practice (ibid p13).

Schön identifies that whilst we acknowledge professionals who practice with expertise, our understanding of how they do this is limited. So is our understanding of how to educate for it. In other words, he questions the whole notion of creating practice readiness, asserting that institutions may be limited in their ability to assist students to attain this, especially by using traditional Technical-Rational methods.

He also re-emphasises the notion of learning by doing, with reflection built in. He suggests that we may better learn the artistry of practice from being coached under appropriate conditions, rather than being taught per se. These appropriate conditions include opportunities to reflect on practice and then try out new methods resulting from the reflection. It is this dialogical learning that is important in a profession such as social work.

Schön's work is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it emphasises that effective education requires someone to be skilled in more than teaching or information dissemination, and secondly, it emphasises the importance of the practicum and practical experiences (real or simulated) as a venue for learning, provided opportunities for reflection are provided. Finally, opportunities for reflective practice are emphasised.

Whilst the social work practicum is an essential venue for social work students to develop practice ability and integrate theory with practice[17], Schön clearly emphasises the desirability of practical learning opportunities throughout the student's learning, not just whilst on placement. CBET, with the requirement for students to be assessed on their demonstrated abilities, and therefore have practical

---

[17] See chapter 3 for more details about placements in social work.

learning opportunities, whether real or simulated, may fulfill many of these requirements, provided reflective practice is sponsored.

Critical Theory

Social justice is supposed to be a major component of social work. Social workers have a clear mandate to engage in work that creates change at a structural level, where structures create or maintain injustices (NZASW 1993). Social work is charged with a task that includes the need to

> *free the minds of the oppressed, to enable them to see beyond the limitations of their misfortunes, to become actors taking back control of their own lives, instead of passively accepting their status as victims* (Benton et al, 1990).

Understanding and critiquing power structures is therefore an important part of social work education and critical theory provides an important platform for developing such an understanding. Critical pedagogy also aims to liberate people from oppressive structures (Freire, 1972). This is very relevant to social work.

Application of the principles of critical theory to adult education is assisted through the work of Mezirow (1990). He builds on the notions of reflective learning, but argues that critical reflectivity is important as well. In particular, Mezirow (1990 p14) introduced the notion of 'perspective transformation'. This is the

> *process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings.*

As previously discussed in chapters one and two, the importance promulgated by the profession of a critical understanding of power structures, is challenged by some

aspects of the social work industry with regard to practice readiness. In particular, employers tend to value skills and techniques more directly transferable to the workplace. CBET approaches have been criticised for under-emphasising critical thinking and understanding (Dominelli, 1996) as competency standards within formal social work education are influenced by social work employers who may not value critical perspectives.

Within CBET social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand, incorporation of critical theory approaches are demonstrated by unit standards requiring analysis of social and political structures. An example is unit standard 7996, 'Facilitate strategies to effect change in social policies, structures, or service delivery'. Strategies to achieve student progression towards critical thinking skills are also required to support accreditation of CBET courses by Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi (2003).

This section has focused primarily on adult learning theories and outlined a range of educational concepts relevant to the transfer of learning. These related primarily to Technical-Rational, experiential, reflective and critical approaches. The relevance of these theories and concepts to CBET and social work was also highlighted. I now proceed into the final section of this chapter, and discuss the transfer of learning in relation to notions of integration of theory into practice and development of expertise.

Transfer of Learning – Integration of Theory into Practice and the Development of Expertise

In the final section of this chapter, I continue to consider the process of transfer of learning. Unlike the previous section that focused on teaching, this section focuses on the learner. The concepts of integration of theory and practice and development of expertise are highly relevant here and there is a strong relationship between the two. The degree of integration of theory is generally the most significant indicator of expertise development (Fook, Ryan & Hawkins, 2000).

Integration of theory and practice, and development of expertise are important in relation to social work education in at least two ways. Firstly understanding the stages of expertise development may enhance learning by ensuring appropriate teaching is provided at the relevant stages. This in turn may enhance practice readiness. In addition, models of expertise development provide an important measure for the level of ability that graduates have attained, and allow further discussion about the adequacy of these levels.

A number of models have sought to delineate the process of professional expertise development. There are still considerable knowledge gaps however (Ryan, Fook & Hawkins, 1995). This may be due to a lack of longitudinal studies conducted over extensive periods of time (Cornford, 1999). In addition there are overlaps between the related fields of professional knowledge development, expert systems studies, studies of knowledge acquisition, studies in professional socialisation, aspects of clinical decision making, and the ways in which professionals use theory (Fook, Ryan & Hawkins, 2000).

There are two models that I shall refer to within this study. These are from Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) and Secker (1993). The Dreyfus and Dreyfus approach is commonly accepted in the literature as a model for the development of professional expertise across a range of professions (Cornford, 1999; Eraut, 1994; Fook et al, 2000). Secker's model by contrast, was developed specifically out of social work, and thus has a higher level of fit with the current study. They are both outlined briefly below.

The Dreyfus and Dreyfus Model

Dreyfus & Dreyfus outline a five-stage process of knowledge and skill acquisition in professions. These stages are novice, advanced beginner, competence, proficient and expert.

In the 'novice' stage, the practitioner 'learns to recognise various objective facts and features relevant to the skill and acquires rules for determining actions based upon those facts and features' (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986 p21). The novice operates in a broad and 'context free' state. That is, they learn all-purpose rules to guide behaviour. The novice thus tends to be locked into these rules and unable to deal with situations that require more than the application of the rules.

The second stage is 'advanced beginner'. Advanced beginners practice at a

> *marginally acceptable level* [and are able to] *consider more context-free facts and to use more sophisticated rules, it also teaches him [her] a more important lesson involving an enlarged conception of the world of the skill*
> (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986 p22).

Advanced beginners add the ability to recognise situational elements to their repertoire. These are aspects of an event that can't be defined in a context-free objective way, and that co-occur with a situation. In other words the advanced beginner starts to recognise that the rules don't cover every situation and are generalisations. This is learnt through exposure to real situations.

Competence is the third stage. As the number of recognisable context free and situational elements of a real world circumstance increase, they become overwhelming.

> *To cope with such problems, people learn or are taught, to adopt a hierarchical procedure of decision-making. By first choosing a plan to organise the situation, and by then examining only the small set of factors that are most important given the chosen plan, a person can both simplify and improve [their] performance* (ibid p24).

79

Competent practitioners are able to prioritise and make plans. They have a much fuller understanding that rules may need to be varied depending on the situation and context. Whilst this definition of competence has not been referred to by standard setting bodies, Fook et al (2000) consider it an appropriate level for graduates of professional training courses.

At stage four, the person becomes 'proficient'. Conscious planning becomes unnecessary and is replaced by intuitive organising and understanding of the task.

> *Because of the performer's perspective, certain features of the situation will stand out as salient and others will recede into the background and be ignored. As events modify the salient features, plans, expectations and even the relative salience of features will gradually change. No detached choice or deliberation occurs. It just happens, apparently because the proficient performer has experienced similar situations in the past and so associates with present situations plans that worked in the past and anticipates outcomes that previously occurred* (Fook et al, 2000 p28).

Proficient practitioners are beginning to develop intuition based on experience and do not have to consciously think about making adjustments. They are able to notice similarities between events and can analyse situations and make decisions based on more flexible observance of the rules.

By stage five, the performer has developed 'expertise'. 'An expert generally knows what to do based on mature and practiced understanding.' (ibid p31). Conscious decision-making activities are no longer necessary, and the skill has become an integrated part of them. Performance is therefore fluid, with an understanding and linking between different areas of knowledge.

This model purports to be generic and to cover students or entrants into a range of professions through to highly experienced practitioners. Whilst the data for the model

developed by Dreyfus & Dreyfus uses chess players and airline pilots as subjects, the model has also been employed with nurses (Benner, 1984) and social workers (Fook et al, 2000).

There are similarities between Kolb's experiential learning ideals and this model of expertise development. Kolb suggested that student's required learning experiences that accorded with their learning style/s. Expertise development shows the need to tailor learning according to the stage of development an individual is at. Benner (1984) suggests that different teaching methods and techniques are necessary at different stages. Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (2000 p203) argue instead that

> *What is important is not so much what teaching methods are used, but it is how they are used to achieve the relevant learning which is important.... different learning is simply drawn out for different learners – what is important for all learners though is that the specific learning arises completely out of their own experience.*

The Dreyfus and Dreyfus model also clearly highlights continuity of learning beyond the end of qualifying courses. As previously mentioned, what is important here is that readiness to practice is informed by the appropriate stage of this model and that education of social work graduates leads to attainment of this level. As noted above, Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (2000) argue this is the stage of Competence. Thus there is also recognition of the need for further learning beyond graduation, toward the development of further expertise.

The Secker Model

In contrast to Dreyfus and Dreyfus as outlined above, Secker (1993) provides a model that particularly encompasses the integration of theory into practice. In doing so, she also acknowledges the place of personal experience alongside practice theory. Furthermore, unlike Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) her model does not attempt to analyse the abilities of advanced practitioners, and instead focuses entirely on

students and recent graduates. Therefore it is more a model of the development of competence than one of expertise development.

Secker (1993) suggests that learners move through three stages of theory use. Starting with the Everyday Social approach, they move towards the Fragmented approach and (if they progress this far) ultimately to the Fluent approach. There is no guarantee that a learner will develop beyond the first stage.

The Everyday Social approach is characterised by learners using knowledge derived from their personal, everyday, social lives as opposed to what is 'usually described as theoretical' (ibid p33). This tends to comprise their values and beliefs and affective responses to situations. Other studies have termed this a 'pop-psychology' approach. Ryan, Fook and Hawkins (1995) for example, saw students often attributing the clients' problem to the main or presenting behavioural or emotional state. Very general descriptors such as 'attention seeking behaviour' and 'low self esteem' were often used.

A further feature of the Everyday Social approach includes an understanding of social work that is 'reinforced by reference to life experiences of their own which they compared with the situations of the people with whom they worked' (Secker, 1993 p31). Additionally, everyday knowledge was 'described as providing a framework for practice' (ibid p33).

The Fragmented approach is 'characterised by conflicts between their [learners] everyday and theoretical knowledge which resulted in dilemmas about how to act in the course of interactions with clients and others' (ibid p24). Theories of practice tend to be implemented in an absolutist fashion and are often used in hindsight. This approach also involves swapping from one theory of practice to another, if the sought solution is not achieved.

A further aspect of the Fragmented approach is the experience of 'conflicts between ways of making sense of situations' (Secker, 1993 p48). Overall, Secker (1993) suggests that learners in this category displayed a greater awareness of ways in which they managed their interactions than in the Everyday approach.

The Fluent approach, by contrast, reflects an ability to use theories as a framework to guide assessment and intervention approaches. Practice theory is developed to fit the client situation, drawing from theory and analysis of past action, in addition to other sources of knowledge.

In terms of which stage should be attained upon graduation, Secker (1993 p26) argues that 'the development of a Fluent approach to practice can be regarded as representing a desirable educational objective'. Working from a Fluent approach allows students to sustain work based 'on the kind of theoretical material taught during their course' (ibid). In other words, she equates the Fluent approach with competence.

Summary

In this chapter, I have built on the context of readiness to practice that has been discussed in the first three chapters. The main purpose was the addition of a theoretical analysis to enable greater discussion. I have provided this in a number of ways. In the first instance I have considered the philosophical and historical nature of CBET and reflected on possible strengths and weaknesses in the application to social work. Secondly, I have discussed concepts and processes of transfer of learning, considering CBET and readiness to practice within theories of adult learning and development of expertise.

In the analysis of CBET I showed that this approach to education has gone through a range of developments historically and contemporaneously, though is still in its

genesis. CBET has also been a controversial development, with a number of criticisms, some of which have been as a result of the economic imperatives that drove its implementation. Other criticisms assert that CBET methods are reductionist, encourage fragmentation of tasks, focus on easily measurable aspects of professions and don't develop essential critical thinking skills.

I argue that despite the criticisms of CBET, the approach has had sufficient depth and breadth to enable successful implementation into wide areas of the education system, not only in Aotearoa New Zealand, but also internationally. Little evidence is available in the way of research studies evaluating CBET approaches, and as a consequence the debate is to a large extent academic.

Despite being based on a positivist philosophy, competency approaches are also sufficiently broad to encompass a range of adult leaning theories. This is due to the nature of CBET as a fundamentally assessment focused approach, allowing teaching and learning practices to be decided by education providers. As a result, the application of best practice in adult learning can be consistent with CBET, if used appropriately. Indeed, I suggest that the nature of CBET within social work may even encourage the use of experiential and reflective learning, due to assessment requirements stipulating demonstration of skills and techniques. This is despite criticism that CBET approaches over-emphasise Technical-Rational activity and do not adequately cater to critical theory.

Finally I discussed how students learn, develop expertise and integrate theory with practice. In this discussion I outlined both the Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) theory of expertise development and Secker's (1993) three-stage model. There is a higher level of fit between the Secker (1993) model and the current study due to her creating the model from a study on social work students.

These models provide a reference point for the educational level that graduates should be attaining at the end of courses. In the Secker (1993) model this equates to

the Fluent approach to practice, in which graduates are able to draw from a range of past actions and theoretical influences to create a practice theory that has a high level of fit with the client/s.

The end of this chapter concludes the scene setting and establishment of theoretical concepts relevant to this study. The remainder of the study is now focused on gathering, interpretation and discussion of data. In the following chapter I discuss the methodology on which these processes are undertaken.

Chapter 5
Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methods and processes used in undertaking the research component of the study. The research methodology is presented and the rationale for utilising the described design is outlined. Some discussion of the issues and debates that arose from the design choice is also provided.

The Research Context

As described in chapter one, the primary aim of this thesis is to investigate graduates' experiences of competency-based social work education and training. It also focuses on graduates' perceptions of readiness to practice and enquires into the efficacy of CBET in this process.

In addition, due to the lack of other studies evaluating competency-based social work education, the research is exploratory. In other words, it is not highly informed by other previous research.

A Qualitative Approach

I have employed a qualitative approach to the research within this study. This choice was due to the fit between the main features of qualitative enquiry and the purposes of this research. This relationship is explored below.

Given that the students participating in the study have graduated with the same National Diploma in Social Work qualification, there is an element of programme evaluation about this research, despite a number of different education providers being involved. Patton (2002 p10) suggests that qualitative methods are often used in evaluations

> *because they tell the program's story by capturing and communicating the participants' stories. Evaluation case studies have all the elements of a good story. They tell what happened, when, to whom, and with what consequences.*

Qualitative research inquiry is also naturalistic, inductive and represents the participants in their own terms rather than imposing an external schema (Patton, 2002). Patton (p39) describes naturalistic research as research taking place in real world settings, in places and under conditions that are comfortable and familiar for participants, using methods in which the researcher 'does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest.' That is, naturalism is an approach to research that provides minimal disturbance to the study setting, with no controls on study conditions and has no prior restrictions on the outcomes of the research.

Naturalism is important in the current study, as I am primarily interested in the experiences of graduates. Thus it is important to place minimal conditions on participants in order to allow for as wide a range of responses as possible. Providing suitable width for responses also fits with the exploratory nature of the study.

The inductive nature of qualitative research refers to the orientation of this approach in the direction of exploration and discovery. Rather than attempting to fit the research into preconceived categories, qualitative study allows patterns and categories to emerge from the data.

Qualitative inquiry is especially powerful as a source of grounded theory, or theory that is inductively generated from fieldwork. Grounded theory emerges from the

researcher's observations and interviews out in the real world, rather than in the laboratory or purely through philosophy (ibid p11). In this approach the researcher does not begin with a set hypothesis as in some other methodologies. In fact the researcher attempts as much as possible to be 'as free and as open as possible to discovery and to emergence of concepts, problems and interpretations from the data' (Glaser 1998 p67). Again there is a good level of fit here with the exploratory nature of this work.

A further basic tenet of grounded theory is that 'all is data'. This means that 'whatever...may come the researchers way in his [sic] substantive area of research is data for grounded theory' (Strauss & Corbin, 1994 p8). Such things include the researcher's own bias, brief or lengthy comments, documents supplied by the interviewee, personal observations, etc. Therefore it is the job of the researcher to allow the data to emerge in its own right and to induce meaning as it is happening.

Grounded theory is based in an interpretivist view of the world through which meaning is derived through our cultural and historical interpretations. It postulates that there are no absolute rules or laws of behaviour or society, and that these are explained by our individual experiences relative to our backgrounds and cultures. As such it also rejects positivist ideas of preconceived, or a priori theorising (Crotty, 1998).

Use of Case Study Methodology

Yin (1994 p13) defines a case study as 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident'. It is a method of studying 'social phenomena through the thorough analysis of an individual case' (Reinharz, 1992 p164). In this context, a case could be an individual, a group, an episode a process or any 'unit of social life' (ibid).

I also decided to use a case study format as it is highly consistent with the notions of a qualitative, grounded theory approach and is appropriate also for exploratory research. This format allows the collection of rich data. It is appropriate in this study because the aim is to understand participants' accounts of situations. Furthermore, the case study format is not restricted to any one data collection method, and easily incorporates interviews, questionnaires, document analysis and observations (Harre-Hindmarsh, 1992).

As this study is investigating the experience of participants in relation to their initial practice, an in-depth, semi-structured interview with each participant was used. This approach allowed a balance between my questions and the conversation with the participant, to regulate how information was obtained. Furthermore it allowed participants to be more involved in the research process and to have more say over data collected about them (Reinharz, 1992).

Research Design

In this section I outline the various aspects of the research design. This includes human ethics requirements, anonymity and confidentiality, conflicts of interest, cultural concerns, procedures for recruiting participants the interview, data collection and analysis processes.

Human Ethics Requirements

The research was carried out in accordance with the Massey University Human Ethics Committee requirements for research in this area. This required an application for the research to be submitted to the committee, which was duly undertaken. The committee gave its approval to proceed in 2002, with approval code PN Protocol 02/24[18].

---

[18] See appendix 1 for a copy of this approval letter.

<u>Anonymity and Confidentiality</u>

All participants were asked to choose a pseudonym for their case study to provide anonymity and confidentiality. Other potentially identifying features such as their place of work, institution of study and references to current location were also removed. In this way any potential harm to participants was minimised.

Within the discussion chapters, I decided to utilise the pseudonyms of participants rather than leave quotes and comments unnamed. I chose this approach for two reasons. The first was to enable the reader to develop a sense of each respondent. The second was to maintain the sense of intimacy within the study. As a result I was very careful to avoid the use of any other identifiers.

<u>Conflicts of Interest</u>

A potential conflict of interest existed in undertaking this study. This related to my role both as researcher and being involved in competency-based social work education and training. Potential conflict was possible in two areas. Firstly this involved the possibility of interviews with students that I had taught, or had been involved in the institution/s where I have worked. Secondly, my proximity to the area of study required care to ensure that I represented the participants' information in a fair and accurate way and did not direct or lead responses or analyses according to my own interests or perspectives.

To minimise possible conflict in the first area I decided not to interview any graduates from courses in organisations in which I had been involved. This included the New Zealand Institute of Training in Social Services (NZITSS) and Te Wananga o Aotearoa (TWOA). The impact of this was a negative effect on my ability to find respondents.

Whilst proximity to the study area provides the benefit of some first hand experience and knowledge it can lead to potential bias. To stay aware of my own biases I have

been as transparent as possible regarding my position, both within this write up and during the interviews.

Cultural Concerns

This section is particularly relevant to the relationship the research has with tangata whenua Māori. This study does not directly address Māori experiences of competency-based education. The resources required to undertake a Māori perspective are beyond the scope of this study. Māori, and indeed any other cultural groups, were not prevented from participating in the research however. No culturally identifying questions were asked, and procedures were designed to be as widely appropriate, particularly to Māori, as possible.

The recruitment procedures involved making contact with a third party who then approached the participant. In this way no cultural pressure was put on the potential participant to take part. In interviews I also created space for cultural requirements. In particular, this involved asking the participant if there were any ways in which they wanted the interview to be opened, closed or punctuated. Any requests were then adhered to.

Recruiting Participants

Participants were recruited via two main strategies. These were through responses to advertisements/fliers and the 'snowball method'.

Advertisements were placed in the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers 'Social Work Notice Board'. Fliers with basic study and contact details were also given to most relevant educational institutions, which were invited to let their graduates know about the study. In addition, fliers were also distributed to a variety of social work employers to publicise the study.

The snowball method involved requesting respondents to inform fellow graduates about the study. In these cases I asked participants to pass the Information Sheet on

to other people they knew that might be interested and eligible. In this way, respondents were involved on a voluntary basis with no pressure from the researcher. In order for them to be involved with the research they needed to contact me, not the reverse, and I was not privy to their details unless they did.

Requirements for participants were that they had graduated from nationally recognised, professionally qualifying competency-based social work education and training programmes within Aotearoa New Zealand. In practice, this meant all had graduated with the National Diploma in Social Work (or it's predecessor the National Diploma in Social Services/Social Work) from an educational institution, as opposed to work-based assessment.

A further requirement was that participants had been in social work practice post course completion, for a minimum of six months. This requirement was to ensure a reasonable level of practice experience and thus the ability to judge initial practice readiness. All potential participants were provided with an Information Sheet and Consent Form[19].

In my initial conception of the study, I made the assumption that there would be no difficulty in obtaining participants for the research. This was based on the fact that several (eleven) institutions were accredited to and had been involved in delivery of this diploma qualification. However as the study wore on and it became clear that few people were responding to the advertisements and fliers, I was challenged to revisit this assumption.

Gaining access to the desired population through third party mechanisms proved substantially more difficult than initially expected. Several obstacles needed to be faced, such as navigating internal social work employing agency procedures. An example was going through the internal research ethics committee process to get access to staff at one major social work employing agency.

---

[19] See appendices 3 and 4.

When recruiting participants continued to be difficult, I undertook some investigation into the potential participant population. Statistics from personal communication with NZQA showed that the entire population of graduates from the National Diploma in Social Work qualification or its predecessor the National Diploma in Social Services/Social Work, since inception was only 306 at the time of investigation (NZQA, 2004). Of these, I calculated that a mere 172 were eligible for the study. The remainder did not meet my criteria for entry having either completed the qualification through work-based training, graduated within the last 6 months or come from an institution in which I had been involved.

Therefore despite the number of accredited providers, the actual number of eligible graduates was still very low. In addition to the reasons stipulated above, this may also be due to the fact that many institutions have only recently obtained accreditation.

The difficulty accessing the population ultimately affected the number of interviews I completed. Whilst I had intended to undertake eight interviews, the lack of response resulted in only seven taking place.

The Interviews

Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted over the telephone, with one interview per participant. The small size of the sample was decided on in conjunction with the qualitative nature of the study. In this paradigm the size of the sample is less important than the richness of information from the participants (Patton, 2002).

Each interview lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours and was guided by a prompt sheet[20]. Patton (2002 p343) considers this to be an Interview Guide approach. This approach allowed me to ensure I covered the same basic topic areas within each interview, whilst also providing the flexibility to 'explore, probe and ask questions' to gain more information in an area as required (ibid).

---

[20] See appendix 2.

93

The Interview Guide was created to facilitate ease of interviews. Interviews commenced with relatively simple questions to establish rapport with the participant and put them at ease. This included asking them about their family circumstances and when they studied. More complex and reflective questions occurred approximately one third of the way into the interview. By this time the participant had had a chance to 'warm up'.

Respondents were asked questions reflecting on their first six months in practice. The purpose was to gather data regarding the relatively early period after commencing their first social work employment post-graduation, to explore readiness to practice.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected in the interviews with the assistance of a recording device and then transcribed. Transcription was undertaken either personally or through a transcription service. Unfortunately a difficulty arose with the data from one of the participants, Maria. An aspect of the interview was lost in the transcription process due to a technical problem. The lost data related to questions about integration of theory into practice. As a result, except for comments made at other stages of the interview, she is not represented in this area of analysis.

'Making sense' of the data gathered from qualitative research is a three-fold process, according to Patton (1990). This involves data reduction, identifying themes and patterns and constructing a framework for communicating the essence that the data reveals. This section outlines the use of these processes within this study.

Qualitative interviews produce an enormous amount of data and reducing it to a useable size is an important feature. The process of organising the data greatly assisted with this. After making decisions about how the data would be organised, the remaining data became redundant.

In order to organise the data I undertook a thematic analysis from the transcriptions. It quickly became apparent that two processes were necessary. The first involved creating a chart of participants' features. This included both demographic information in addition to features such as previous work and educational experiences. I created this chart by generating a computer-based table and entering relevant data onto it for each participant.

The second process involved discerning categories from the data and was a move towards data interpretation. This process was very much in line with the Grounded Theory approach described earlier in this chapter. Categories quickly emerged. They tended to be around some of the clusters of questions that I had asked, or around theoretical concepts outlined in the previous chapter, such as the development of expertise and use of theory. Some new categories also emerged from participants' responses.

I use the term category purposefully here, as a concept greater than a theme. Each category was a general area in which participants made comments. Comments within a category did not necessarily all echo similar sentiments, in fact many were contradictory. In effect they were clusters of comments grouped by a particular idea. Within each cluster I considered that further analysis would lead to interpretation of the various ideas expressed in the category.

This categorisation approach fits with Patton's ideas about data organisation. He states that data organisation occurs through the use of categories articulated by the participants themselves to represent themes and patterns. This is in addition to those created by the researcher, which are necessary to clarify the 'categories or patterns for which the participants did not have labels or terms' (Patton, 1990 p390).

In the next aspect of data analysis methodology I was guided by Newport (2004). As each category emerged, I headed up a blank A2 sheet of paper with that category title, and stuck it to the wall of my study with blue tack. I then highlighted the relevant

sections in the interviews, assigned them numbers for easy reference and wrote out the passages onto the relevant sheets of paper. Each time a new category emerged I created a new sheet of paper.

Having noted several categories, I then went through each interview systematically, highlighting areas of relevance, numbering them and writing the data again onto the sheets of paper. In this way I ended up with three sets of organised data. The first was the computerised table. The second was the sheets of paper each representing a particular theme and the third was each interview, with relevant sections highlighted. In addition to the above, I also maintained a section of my workbook for noting thoughts that occurred to me whilst I was organising the data, to follow up on later. These included some observations about particular participants, such as someone contradicting themselves, or observations that might lead to the creation of a new category.

Through selection of categories and themes I became very aware of the importance of minimising my personal biases and existing theoretical conceptualisations from the analysis and interpretation of the data. Whilst it is commonly accepted that researchers bring preconceptions to a study, according to Patton (1990), this puts the credibility and competence of the researcher into question rather than their subjectivity.

The final aspect of data analysis was in relation to the integration of theory and practice. In order to identify relevant comments relating to this area, I created an A2 sheet of paper specifically for this category and noted all comments down. I then considered these comments in light of Secker's (1993) model, placing them into one of the three typologies that she identified[21].

Of the two models of development of expertise outlined in chapter four, I chose to use Secker's (1993) for two reasons. The first reason is because her model was

---

[21] See previous chapter for more details of Secker's model.

developed directly from research in social work, using social work students/graduates. In addition however, the Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) model required respondents to undertake and analyse a practice exercise. This was not a technique used in the interviews for this study.

Summary

This chapter has presented and discussed the various research methods and processes utilised in this study. A rationale for their use was provided along with discussion of relevant decisions made during the research process. This discussion has provided the necessary preparation and contextualisation for presenting and discussing the data. This now occurs in the following two chapters of the study.

Chapter 6
Graduate Accounts of Practice Readiness and the Relevance of their Education and Training

Introduction

The interviews conducted with respondents yielded a rich and varied collection of data. To give credit to these responses and the amount of information retrieved, I will present and discuss the results over two chapters.

This chapter contains an overview of the respondents and their biographies. It also presents results and discussion regarding their reflections on education/training and readiness to practice. Chapter seven considers the integration of theory into practice as identified by respondents and relates this to the development of expertise. It also discusses notions of social justice and equity and how they have appeared in relation to respondent comments.

In the presentation and discussion of data I have deliberately used a technique of frequent repetition of findings and their relationship with the literature from earlier chapters. I made this decision for two reasons. The first was to facilitate simpler reading of these sections. Secondly, many of the concepts discussed have some overlap, thus repetition was necessary to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Respondent Biographies and Experiences

As previously mentioned, this study involved seven respondents. A number of demographic features were common amongst them. These commonalities included gender, parental status, age, previous social services experience, experiences of induction, supervision and in-service training, and finally whether their first post-

qualifying work was in a statutory or voluntary agency. This information is also summarised in Figure 1 below (p103).

An explanation for these common demographic features may be due to the requirement for entry criteria into the National Diploma in Social Work courses from which I was sourcing respondents[22]. Whilst entry criteria were different at different institutions, students tend not to be directly accepted into these Diploma programmes. A frequent requirement is completion of a one-year certificate in social services or significant social service work experience.

Gender, Age and Life Experience
Gender
All respondents to the study were female. No males either enquired about the study or were interviewed. From observation of classes I have been involved in, both as an educator and student, it seems common that females outnumber males in the study of social work. It was still something of a surprise that there were no enquiries from males whatever.

As noted in chapter three, Marsh and Triseliotis (1996 p16) reported that whilst they expected gender to be 'an issue in a number of different areas of the study' there was actually remarkable similarity in the responses of both genders. Unfortunately the lack of data from the study prevents greater comment in this area.

Age
Of the seven respondents interviewed, all except one was aged 30 or over when they undertook their qualifying training. The range was from early twenties to late forties (see Figure 1 p103). Whilst social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand initially involved more mature applicants, this was opened up to new graduates to a much greater degree from the 1970's, with the increased availability of courses (Harre-Hindmarsh, 1992). Recent conversations with educators from other social work

---

[22] Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi requires providers to have clear entry criteria as part of their accreditation process.

education institutions indicate that this may be changing again, with older students being predominant within courses.

The predominance of mature students may particularly apply to CBET courses. Some respondents clearly chose to undertake their courses at a non-university environment, due to a perception that they are suited for more mature students. As remarked by Maria

> *age bracket has a big factor I think in diplomas .... We're not 22 year old students coming straight from school and in this line of work that's got a huge significance.*

Helen also states that

> *I have been through quite a bit in my own life and I think I was lucky because I was older. I don't think it would have been very good if I had of [sic] ... come straight from school.*

Entry criteria may again be a factor here, as some CBET courses have minimum age requirements.

Life Experience

Life experience is a difficult term to define. For this study I am considering it to reflect experiences such as having a family, previous work experiences and having lived through a range of different life events such as births, deaths, and a variety of life situations.

Of the seven respondents, six were also parents, whose children were mostly in their custody at the time of training. Additionally, all respondents had work experience prior to study and six of the seven respondents had had previous work experience in the social services, either in voluntary or paid roles (see Figure 1 p103).

A further noteworthy factor is that most (five) had undertaken some sort of previous social services related education/training prior to commencing their National Diploma

course. This may have been the completion of the one year foundation level National Certificate in Social Services immediately prior to entering the diploma programme (a requirement of some courses) or other social service related qualifications. Of the seven respondents, only one had not undertaken any form of post-secondary training, whether in a social service related or other field.

Given their age, it is reasonable to conclude that most of the respondents had a high degree of life experience prior to undertaking their social work education/training. A possible explanation for this may again lie with entry criteria for CBET programmes.

What impact did life experience have on competence and readiness for practice? A number of respondents remarked that their ability to undertake the social work task was, at least to some measure, improved by their life experiences. Typical comments supporting this notion included the following from Helen.

> I didn't have a problem with it [undertaking the social work task] because of my life journey.

Maria adds that

> my life experience in dealing with people and all sorts of things over the years … just makes it [social work] a sort of easy process for me.

Previous work in the social services was also commonly mentioned as a major contributing factor to readiness to practice. Sally stated that what assisted her in relation to practice readiness

> was having lots of work experience and working through the time I was studying.

The youngest respondent (Megan) also articulated the least readiness to practice. She was the only respondent without children and had limited work experiences. In addition, she made more comments about lacking confidence than the others. Furthermore, she suggested that more life experience, especially work experience,

would have benefited her. This was despite the fact that she had worked part time in a care-giving role prior to her study, for over one year.

If I was coming from a working background to tech [polytechnic] to study I would be a lot more prepared [for practice].

These results suggest that life experiences are perceived by respondents to increase the confidence and readiness to practice of graduates. This broadly corresponds with Fook et al (2000 p47), who assert that 'older students tended to draw on their age and life experience to support their professional confidence'. It is interesting to note differences to the results found by Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) however. They concluded there was no significant difference between judgments of readiness to practice across a range of respondents with a variety of ages, educational backgrounds or gender. The reasons for the difference between the results of this study and Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) are not entirely clear, but may relate to cultural differences between Australia and the United Kingdom.

Nature of First Post-Qualifying Workplace Experiences
A further demographic detail also emerged from the different workplace experiences that were shared by the respondents. Six of the seven were working in statutory environments, the majority of which were Child, Youth and Family (5) and one was working within the mental health sector. The seventh worked in a voluntary organisation and then changed to a statutory role after about one year, which is where she was working when interviewed.

The most likely explanation for this phenomenon of similar post qualifying employment agencies is that statutory social workers were most exposed to marketing about this study. This was because I promoted the study within CY&F in addition to a number of Hospital and Health Services. Whilst the study was also promoted to a number of other national social service providers such as Barnados, it was much more difficult to gain thorough access to potential participants and no respondents were forthcoming from these areas.

Figure 1: Summary of Respondent Characteristics

Name	Age Range While Studying	Children While Studying	Previous Social Services Work Experience	Previous Quals or Training	Work at Statutory or Voluntary Agency	Induction	In-Service Training	Super vision
Maria	45-50	4 children.	Volunteer Phone Counsellor 6 yrs	Nat Cert Social Services	Stat CY&F	None but did placement there	No	Good
Janice	30-35	1 child	Volunteer at CAB, Rape Crisis, Kohanga Reo	Nat Cert Social Services	Stat CY&F	Yes	Yes	Good
Megan	20-25	No children	Caregiver for people with Intellectual Disabilities	1.5 Yrs towards degree	Stat CY&F	No	No	Ambiva lent
Helen	30-35	3 children.	Nil	No	Vol	No	No	Poor
Sally	30-35	2 children	Community Support Worker for Intellectual Disability 9 yrs	Nat Cert Human Services	Stat A&D	Yes	Yes	Good
Jessie	30-35	2 children	Community Support Worker for Intellectual Disability 7 yrs	Cert Tchg Adults with Disabilities Adv Dip Accty and Sm Bus Mgmt	Stat (CY&F)	Yes	Yes	Good
Janet	30-35	1 child	Relieving Care-Giver in family home	Play centre training for parents (in-house)	Stat (CY&F)	Yes	No	Good

A further explanation is that statutory organisations are also the largest employers of social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand and are perhaps the most likely employers of those with National Diploma in Social Work qualifications. Certainly CY&F recognise this course as an acceptable entry qualification[23], are actively involved on the board of Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi and deliver unit standards leading to this Diploma qualification.

<u>Orientation, In-Service Training and Supervision</u>

My intention in asking about orientation, in-service training and supervision was to derive an understanding of how such factors may have impacted on respondents' first practice experiences. Other studies (Marsh & Triseliotis, 1996; Pockett, 1987) show that these factors can have a significant bearing on practice readiness. Pockett (1987) even suggested a format for ongoing orientation, which involved regular reviews over the first year to facilitate smoother entry into the workplace.

The results of the current study showed that within their first six months of post-qualifying work, four of the respondents had received some orientation or induction at their agency. Most found some aspects of this process helpful. A common sentiment was the value in meeting others in similar positions. This sentiment was expressed by three respondents. Jessie is typical of them and states orientation was

useful to meet other social workers.

There was also a feeling that in relation to the subject material, they were revisiting things from their training as opposed to learning new material.

Only three had received any in-service training, though this was generally found to be extremely helpful. Respondents stated that they learnt specific skills or knowledge relevant to their practice area at these forums. As Sally put it, in service training workshops have been

really really practical and I've utilised a lot of those skills.

---

[23] Until such time as Registration supercedes it.

All respondents had received some form of supervision within their first six months, which most found to be useful. Only two (Megan and Helen) were either ambivalent about their training or rated their experiences of supervision as poor.

Comparison of respondents' experiences of induction, in-service training and supervision were made with their statements of readiness to practice. There was some indication that positive experiences of induction, in-service training and supervision were linked with stronger expressions of practice readiness. The two respondents with the highest levels of practice readiness (Sally and Janice – see later in this chapter for the section on practice readiness) also had positive experiences in terms of their induction, supervision and in-service training. The respondent with the lowest self-expressed level of practice readiness (Megan) had no induction, in-service training and was ambivalent about her supervision.

There were also a number of respondents, such as Maria and Helen, who had high levels of self-expressed practice readiness and poor induction, in-service training or supervision. Likewise there were respondents, such as Janet and Jessie, with good experiences of induction, in-service training or supervision and much lower levels of practice readiness.

The mixed responses regarding the impact of induction, in-service training and supervision on practice readiness, suggest a great deal of variance in quality of provision. Positive experiences of these services may not assist practice readiness, whilst negative experiences may not detract from practice readiness.

From these areas of the interviews, one feature does stand out very clearly however. This relates to the youngest respondent, who had little prior social services or life experiences and had no orientation or in-service training. It may be of no surprise to note that she was also the respondent that expressed both the lowest level of confidence in her initial work experiences, and the least readiness to practice.

<u>Reflections on Education/Training</u>

Given the focus of the study on CBET social work education and training, respondents' reflections on the efficacy and impact of their education and training are a key area. From the interviews my intention was to obtain a good understanding of how CBET education and training affects readiness to practice. An overview of comments relating to this area is made below. I use two sub-categories: Interest in and Enjoyment of the Education/Training and The Most/Least Useful Aspects of Education/Training.

Interest in and Enjoyment of the Education/Training

Finger and Asun (2001) suggest that there is a link between enhanced learning and interest in/enjoyment of a subject. Respondents' indications of interest in or enjoyment of their courses may therefore reflect effective learning, potentially making this area of the study one of high importance.

In the interview, two questions related to interest in and enjoyment of the social work course of study. These questions were 'How enjoyable did you find the course?' and 'How interesting did you find the course?'

All respondents commented that they had found the course either interesting or enjoyable. Comments such as

> *I enjoyed the course* - Megan

and

> *I found it really interesting* - Janice

were typical of the responses. Respondents were not indicating that the courses were perfect, but definitely rated them quite highly. Where comments were qualified, fairly typical statements as follows were made

> *80% of the time it was interesting and stimulating* - Janet

and

> *[I'd rate it]...7 out of 10* - Janice.

106

The results above generally concur with the studies undertaken by Boswell et al (1993) and Marsh and Triseliotis (1996). Marsh and Triseliotis (1996 p41) found that 'in general students had enjoyed the course, and around three-quarters had found it interesting'. In both the current and Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) study, enjoyment of the course did not necessarily correlate with perceived practice readiness. In other words, despite enjoying the course, there were a number of respondents in both studies that did not experience feelings of readiness to practice from the course (see Readiness to Practice later in this chapter).

This finding is of interest as it suggests that making a course enjoyable is not in itself necessarily sufficient for it to be effective. This initially seems to contradict Finger and Asun (2001) discussed above, who suggest a link between interest/enjoyment and learning. However it is possible that respondents may have had interest in/enjoyment of their course and learnt well, but still not experienced readiness to practice. This could be due to some irrelevancy between what is taught and what is necessary for practice. Additionally, it could indicate that readiness to practice is created more by non-course related factors, such as life experience or other variables as discussed already in this chapter.

The link between enjoyment and effectiveness of education was not a major focus of this study however, and is a further area of research to be explored.

The Most/Least Useful Aspects of Education/Training
Further information regarding graduates' experiences of their courses was gathered through questions about the most and least useful aspects of respondents' education/training. Questions were also asked about what they considered to be under or over taught. I consider the most useful areas of education/training first then move on to the least useful aspects.

A number of similar responses related to simulated and practical activities within courses. Four of the seven respondents stated that simulated activities such as role-

plays were one of the most useful aspects of their education/training. Helen and Jessie respectively comment that

It was specific practice examples you did, role-plays

and

I really enjoyed the focus on direct skill development and the opportunity to do a lot of simulated exercises.

Janice adds that she

loved the practical based side of things.

Despite enjoying the practical aspects of their study, respondents clearly wanted even more of it. For one of the respondents, their preference for practical learning influenced the choice of institution in which they undertook a social work course. Sally comments that this

really influenced the course that I chose to train into, because I'm a really interactive learner. That was one of the reasons I didn't go for a university based programme. I'm not sure that sitting in lectures and then going to tuts [tutorials] is something that sits well with me.

Sally's comments suggest that students may perceive non-university sites (polytechnics, wananga etc) as providing a particular type of education, in this case provision of more applied learning. Given that most of the non-university sites also utilise a CBET approach to social work courses, student choices about which course to enter may in part be between CBET and curriculum-based approaches to education.

Exploring respondents' expectations of their education based on the type of institution they attend is not a focus of this study. However it may well be a fruitful area for further research. Expectations may not only influence which institutions students choose to attend, but may also influence the satisfaction and effectiveness of their education.

In addition to respondents enjoying practical styles of learning, it can be argued that practical methods are consistent with the reflective learning process described by Schön (1983, 1987) in chapter four. The use of simulated activities provides opportunities for students to have experiences, which they may then be able to reflect upon and integrate theory with. As Helen states

I felt really prepared because we worked in such as practical way.

Reflection is not an automatic process however (ibid), and opportunities for this to occur within courses are still necessary.

Small group learning was a further factor that respondents appreciated in their education/training. Janice provides a typical response commenting that

> *working with such a small group, it became like a family and so we got really good at working together.*

All respondents were taught within a small group paradigm. Discussion with educators from these institutions indicates that typical class sizes ranged from eight to twenty students although classes were frequently sub-divided for smaller group learning.

Small group approaches to learning may be particularly relevant to CBET courses, where there is a strong requirement for practical learning, which may be difficult to teach and assess in larger class sizes. These small groups appear to be flexible and allow for valued class discussion. Jessie supports this notion saying

I really liked the open forum teaching.

Other useful components of courses outlined by respondents included community development, social policy, counseling and personal growth opportunities. Finally, the use of internal assessment was also singled out as a positive factor. None of the courses at which respondents studied conducted formal examinations. Assessments were entirely internal.

There were no commonalities between respondents regarding what they found least useful in the course. The list of areas under this heading included 'cultural stuff', social policy, 'government stuff and law', the Treaty of Waitangi and, in contrast to others enjoying the simulated activities, one respondent mentioned role-plays.

When asked about what was over-taught in the course, there were a variety of additional comments. Two respondents stated that social policy was over-taught.

> *Social policy [...] took a huge block of our time [...] that probably would have been the one that most definitely had too much* - Janice.

It is also important to note that some respondents considered social policy a very useful area of teaching. Further discussion regarding the social justice components of CBET courses is taken up in the following chapter.

As well as respondents' finding teaching about the Treaty of Waitangi un-useful, a number also considered this, and Māori perspectives, to be over-taught. Jessie commented that

> *It's really hard to say because it's not politically correct but we were really bashed with the whole Treaty thing and the three guiding principles, which are so fantastic and interesting in the beginning [...] and it gave me a different appreciation for [Māori culture], but by the end of two-years [...] I just got fed up with it.*

In terms of under teaching, respondents mentioned that they also wanted more focus on human development (two responses, both CY&F workers), worker safety and abuse, Multi Disciplinary Team processes, risk assessment, and document and report writing. Other areas included ideas behind violence, social work practice theory (two responses), sociology, and comparisons between governmental and non-governmental environments.

Some negative comments about their education centred on the use of unit standards. As noted in chapter four, unit standards are integral to the National Diploma in Social

Work. They are produced by TKA for the Social Services and define the standard of outcomes that graduates must achieve to be competent in a particular practice area. There are some 43 such standards within this Diploma.

A struggle to interpret this system by respondents was evident, through comments such as the following from Maria.

Unit standards are [...] hopeless so that was always a big stress every time we got an assignment was trying to decipher exactly what it was they wanted, what was required.

This comment may reflect a lack of maturity in use of unit standards by providers. Unit standards are not designed as curriculum documents, and are there merely to provide a clear guide as to the expected competency outcome in a particular area of knowledge, skill or values. Unfortunately unit standards tend to be overused as teaching and/or assessment documents, possibly resulting in the confusion described above (J. Hopkins. National Moderator TKA. Pers. Comm. May 2004). The discussion of teaching methods is developed further in the following chapter.

This completes the section on reflections of education/training. I now focus on readiness to practice in the following section.

Readiness to Practice

Readiness to practice, the central tenet of this study, is an important area as it highlights an essential aspect of graduates' experiences and provides rich data regarding the fit between ending a course of study and early practice experiences. To access information about this area I asked respondents questions about their experiences of practice readiness, levels of confidence and levels of well-being in their first six months of practice. I also asked questions about their education and training, in order to examine the area of fit between course and agency more closely.

The first part of this section discusses responses to questions regarding practice readiness, confidence and well-being. I have grouped these together, as there was much over-lap between them. I then move on to discuss the impact of both educational and non-educational influences on graduates' perceptions of their practice readiness.

Perceived Readiness to Practice

This major area of investigation was conducted through questions such as 'How able did you feel to perform the tasks required by your agency?' and 'How ready to practice did you feel?'

A wide range of responses were made. These formed a continuum from those feeling not ready through to those with a high level of readiness. Of the seven respondents, four made statements congruent with a good level of readiness, two identified areas of readiness and lack of readiness, and one clearly identified that she did not feel ready for practice.

As this is a critical area of the study, I have chosen to provide comments from each of the respondents to illustrate the continuum. Comments are described starting from 'most ready to practice' through to 'least ready for practice'. Where ambivalence exists, I have attempted to represent this as accurately as possible. A summary is also provided in Figure two below (p117).

Sally

> *In most cases I've felt really competent...eight out of ten*
> *Having models and frameworks to base my practice on [has given me a sense of competency].*

Janice

> *90% of the time [in relation to readiness to practice I felt] fine*

I was probably really settled …[because]… we did a lot of practice based stuff at tech [polytechnic].

Maria

I think I received what was necessary for practice.

As a social worker probably eight [out of ten with ten being highly ready to practice].

Helen

I was able to do it [undertake the agency tasks required for practice] but I don't think it was the best way.

Jessie

In the first six months I thought I spent time holding things together, like it didn't feel like I was going forward with my clients, like I was just managing.

Janet

What I learnt during my training didn't prepare me for the hard coal face stuff of the reality of this work.

Probably prepared me more for emotive aspects rather than theoretical aspects of the job.

It gave me preparation in terms of … being aware of transference, being aware of the impact this job has on not just the child but surrounding the child you have the whānau.

Megan

I felt inadequate at that time [in my first six months].

It was all new experiences.

It doesn't prepare you for the actual…there is a lot more to … social work than meets the eye but you have to learn that on the job.

The continuum of results shown above indicates that the majority of respondents perceived themselves to be ready or fairly ready to practice. Similar continuums are demonstrated by the results below regarding levels of confidence and well-being. Because of this similarity and the connections between readiness to practice and these other two categories, I present the results for all three areas and discuss the implications of them jointly thereafter.

Level of Confidence

The continuum of responses to questions about levels of confidence closely echoes the findings described above about readiness to practice. Respondents that felt more ready to practice generally also felt more confident about their practice. Comments are again described in order from 'most confident' to 'least confident'.

Sally

Yeah [I was pretty confident] but I think that was from lots of work experience.

Janice

I was pretty confident most of the time.

Maria

Pretty confident.

Helen

I'm probably quite a confident person.

Jessie

For that first six months I didn't feel very confident and sometimes I still don't.

Janet

I think I probably started about mid-range on a scale of 1-10 about 4 or 5.

Megan

I wasn't too confident in the first few meetings ... it's not so easy yeah it can be quite the experience of going in there and people expecting you to know the answers.

These results clearly suggest a relationship between readiness to practice and levels of confidence. This relationship also demonstrates consistency between aspects of respondents' initial practice experiences highlighting a general level of perceived practice readiness. Further comparison and discussion regarding the relationship between readiness to practice, levels of confidence and well-being occurs below, after Figure 2 (p 117).

Ability to Maintain own Well-Being
In order to achieve a deeper understanding of respondents' experiences of practice readiness in their first six months, I decided there would be merit in exploring how their personal health and well-being, including stress levels, were affected during this time. If graduates experienced good levels of practice readiness then they might also have experienced a reasonable ability to maintain their well-being. Again, a continuum of results for well-being was demonstrated and is shown below.

Maria

[I didn't suffer from stress or anxiety] because I'm doing something that I really enjoy, I love it yeah.

Sally

I've only noticed a couple of times that I've been taking work home with me, in my head, working through issues. But I haven't noticed that its been a significant cause of stress.

Janet

I was happy to be working here because this was my goal.

Janice

Stress levels um pretty low actually like only when we have high stress situations like say the uplifting of kids or things like that that my stress levels really rise.

Helen

I loved my job. I hated the house parents I worked with.

Tina

In the first six months I spent time holding things together ... I was just managing.

Megan

I actually lost weight.

[I was] thinking about work all the time and not being able to sleep.

As previously mentioned, there was a strong relationship between respondents' personal health/well-being, confidence and readiness to practice (as described in the sub-sections regarding confidence and practice readiness above). The table below (Figure 2) provides a summary, in my words, of each of these three sub-categories.

Clearly, those respondents who perceived themselves to be ready for practice, also perceived themselves to be confident, and able to maintain their own well-being and stress levels. Conversely, respondents that perceived themselves as being less ready to practice also tended to perceive themselves as less confident and had poorer well-being and greater stress levels. The consistency between practice readiness, confidence and well-being suggests that respondents were also consistent in perceptions of their own ability and experiences across this range of areas.

Figure 2: Overview of Readiness to Practice, Levels of Confidence and Well-being in the First Six Months of Practice

Name	Readiness to Practice	Level of Confidence	Well-being
Sally	Very ready	Pretty confident	No problem Average stress levels
Janice	Very ready	Pretty confident	OK Eating habits got worse
Maria	Very ready	Pretty confident	No problem with well-being as enjoyed the job
Helen	Mildly ambivalent	Pretty confident	Full of 'vim and vigour'. Able to turn off from job after work
Jessie	Highly ambivalent	Not very confident	Stress fluctuated wildly at first
Janet	Partially prepared	Medium confidence	Not too stressed
Megan	Not very prepared	Not very confident	High stress levels, lost weight, couldn't sleep

There is a relationship between the results found here and the social work literature. Much of the existing literature, as outlined in chapter one, cites an area of difficulty in the transition from course to agency practice. As Harre-Hindmarsh (1992 p15) put it

> talk of tensions and dichotomies is used to refer to difficulties students and new graduates experience when moving between university and agency. Students and new graduates are said to struggle with problems of integration and the repercussions of institutional compartmentalisation.

O'Connor and Dalgliesh (1986 p444) were stronger in their wording, stating that

> The graduates considered that social work education did not prepare them for the organisational context of practice.

In addition, the study by Marsh and Triseliotis (1996 p136) found that

In spite of practice placements during training, the reality of the work situation seemed to come as a big surprise to almost half of those qualified to work in the social (work) services.

Results from the current study do not concur with the findings above. Whilst some respondents articulated a lack of confidence and lack of practice readiness, this was by no means the predominant expression. Respondents instead commented that they felt either very or fairly ready to practice and had a reasonable level of confidence rather than a lack thereof.

I considered that because respondents from this study had cited life experiences as a major reason for their perceived readiness to practice, that there might be a difference between the level of life experiences of respondents in this study and those described above. Comparison with the literature indicated that this was not the case however. Respondents in all studies had similar age ranges and previous work and educational experiences.

An explanation for the differences with previous studies may involve their age. Some of the studies cited above are now up to 20 years old. Many changes have occurred in social work and education, which could have contributed to the differences described. These include the increasing professionalisation of the industry and the influences of managerialism and neo-liberalism on society[24].

A more obvious difference is the paradigm of education in which respondents from each study were taught. In the studies cited above, a curriculum-based approach was used. In the current study, all respondents were graduates from a CBET course. As described in chapter four, the standards on which CBET approaches rest are created by the relevant industry, in this case social work. Because industry (employer) groups

---

[24] See chapter two for more information on developments in social work education over the last 20 years.

are highly involved in the development of the unit standards that prescribe the outcomes of learning, the course may be closely aligned with their needs. This may include a greater focus on skill and procedural learning than other courses. The results could be an increased practice readiness for graduates.

In this study, CY&F is the main employer of respondents. CY&F is also the largest single employer of social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand, and is strongly represented within Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi the Industry Training Organisation for the Social Services, which sets the standards for the National Diploma in Social Work qualification. CY&F also has an interest in the diploma qualification, being an accredited provider for approximately half of the unit standards comprising the qualification. The effect of CY&F dominance in these spheres and being the major employer of respondents in this study, may have contributed to respondents' enhanced perceptions of practice readiness.

In this section I have discussed respondents perceived levels of readiness to practice. Discussion has already highlighted possible links between readiness to practice and courses, particularly CBET. Further discussion regarding the relevance of education and training is undertaken in the section below.

Relevance of the Education/Training

As previously mentioned, one of the main philosophies behind competency-based education is relevance to employers. Indeed, a principle motivation for the movement was employers' frustration regarding the perceived irrelevance of courses for workplace requirements[25]. In this section I further explore the relevance of CBET social work to first employment experiences.

The main question asked of respondents relating to the area of relevance was 'How relevant was what you learnt for your practice? A diverse variety of responses were

---

[25] See chapter 4 for more information about philosophies of CBET.

119

given. Most respondents could see some relevance to their education and training. Sally illustrates this through her comment that

> *having a framework, having a skeleton and being able to flesh them [the framework and skeleton] out, so that I'm clear about what I'm trying to do and how I'm going about it.... that's been really helpful in terms of the training I've received.*

Some ambivalence did exist regarding the degree to which respondents experienced courses to be relevant. Megan conveys her ambivalence saying

> *there are some parts of the course that are relevant ... there are things I took with me and others I just haven't used at all.*

Links between education and training also appeared to increase with distance from the time of study. Helen states that

> *at the time I used to think "Oh God how am I ever going to use that"...however I can see that now I am getting further into my practice I can actually see the links more.*

With regard to the relevance of their education, a theme emerged indicating that respondents wanted more specialised education/training for their specific area of practice. Whilst most learned a number of useful and applicable skills, greater orientation of the education and training to their specific workplaces was requested. This occurred across the limited numbers of fields of practice that were represented by the respondents. It indicates that it is not just in one specific area or field of practice that graduates would have liked more specialised teaching (such as child protection), but across the board.

The desire for greater specialisation of education towards fields of practice is clearly articulated by Sally and Janet. Sally responded that

> *I certainly feel that the education and training didn't focus on the issues I'm dealing with here [in my workplace].*

Janet stated the need for

more realistic information about what truly happens here [in the workplace].

These results reflect the findings of Davies (1984). He states that students tend to demand practice readiness and a high level of relevance to training rather than grand theory and social justice components. Certainly a number of respondents in this study saw little relevance of teaching with regard to social justice[26].

As I noted in chapter four, both a strength and a weakness of CBET education and training is the attempt to produce graduates that are more immediately able to undertake the agency function. This places less requirement on the agency to manage the transition to the workplace. The results of this study suggest that a CBET methodology within social work does not completely remove the tension between course and practice. The generic nature of social work education may make relevance more difficult, and until clear specialisms within fields of practice are offered, graduate experiences may continue as they are.

The request by respondents for greater specialisation is an interesting finding considering the orientation of CBET courses toward workplaces, as demonstrated by the prominence of employers at all levels of the ITO. Because employers were not also interviewed, it is not known whether they share respondents' concerns regarding the need for greater specialisation. This may be a fruitful area for further research.

The situation regarding specialism is further highlighted in view of findings from other studies. In particular, Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) found that graduates who already had a clear idea of the field of practice in which they wished to work, generally experienced higher levels of practice readiness. Consideration of these results in addition to those from the current study suggest that it may not be teaching within a specialism per se that increases practice readiness. Practice readiness may also be affected by students' clarity about desired fields of practice for future employment.

---

[26] See the following chapter for discussion about social justice.

Within the current study, two of the respondents (Jessie and Janet) indicated they had clear ideas of their future practice field. As Janet states

I was happy to be working here [CY&F] because this was my goal.

Nevertheless, their responses regarding practice readiness were both somewhat ambivalent however. This is in contrast to the findings of Marsh and Triseliotis (1996), which indicated that knowledge of field of practice enhanced practice readiness.

Allied to the concept of relevance is the idea of fit between what was learnt on the course and social work practice. In particular, I was interested in respondents' ideas and expectations of social work that developed on their courses. I wondered how these were similar to or different from the way social work was practiced in their first places of employment.

To explore this area my interview questions probed any tensions between the agency and course views of the social work role. Respondents made a number of comments regarding the area of fit. These formed two groups, those with a high level of fit and those with lower levels of fit. Each group was roughly equal in number.

Where the fit regarding expectations of practice between course and work was good, comments such as the following were given.

It fitted really well – Jessie.

Yes, there's a high level of fit – Sally.

Both comments were balanced with some mediating factors such as expecting more client continuity.

In the group describing a lower level of fit, the difference was mostly regarding the level of expectations respondents' had about what social work might achieve. Typical comments were

[I had] these fantasies if you like of I can make such a difference but in fact you can't – Janet

and

It's frustrating in the sense that at times you feel like you're banging your head against a brick wall and not getting anywhere, you're dealing with the same thing over and over and over, whereas I suppose my sense of social work might have been that you ... make change and that's great, and you move out, and you go into another family, yeah, so you feel like you're sort of moving all the time and you're accomplishing – Maria.

As indicated in chapter three, the expectations that graduates have can impact greatly on their first practice experiences. Lithgow (2001) found a strong link between realistic expectations and job satisfaction in a study of Police recruits. Those that had unrealistic expectations conversely suffered from job dissatisfaction and poorer psychological and physical health.

The results of this study again roughly compare to Marsh and Triseliotis (1996). They found that around half of their sample experienced practice differently from their expectations and were disappointed. A mismatch of expectations between courses and practice is apparent across many fields of professional training, including nursing, medicine and as previously mentioned, the Police (Heslop et al, 2001; Jones et al, 2001; Lithgow, 2001). Clarifying realistic expectations for graduates is clearly an area for improvement throughout professional education and training. CBET social work education is no exception. Clarification of expectations may also contribute to a smoother transition for graduates between courses and first practice experiences.

This concludes the presentation and discussion of data relating to respondent demographics, readiness to practice and the relevance of respondents' education to their practice. I now move on to conclude this chapter with a brief summary.

Summary

This chapter is the first of two presenting and discussing the study results. A number of clear themes have emerged from the data analysis with readiness to practice as the central concept.

In overall terms, respondents indicated a continuum of experiences regarding practice readiness. Most described at least a partial if not fairly high level of practice readiness. In addition, similar findings regarding confidence for practice and maintenance of well-being during early practice experiences were made.

Most literature regarding the end of courses and initial social work practice experiences cites a tension or disjunction for new practitioners at this point (Davies, 1984; Fook et al, 2000; Harre-Hindmarsh, 1992). Whilst the current study does not contradict these ideas, the level of tension was not remarkable.

There are a number of factors that may have contributed to this. Some relate to the course of study, others seem incidental. Factors relating to the course of study included a high level of enjoyment of study, general consideration that courses were relevant to practice, appreciation of a number of aspects of course teaching, and similar expectations regarding practice to those found in overseas studies. Factors incidental to the course of study mostly related to life experiences, which respondents indicated had a big impact on their practice readiness.

The majority of respondents enjoyed their courses and found the subject matter interesting. This is a similar finding to other studies that have investigated this area. Whilst enjoyment is not correlated with practice readiness, some relationship is probably relevant, but further research is needed.

Most respondents also found the course relevant to their practice. The most highly valued learning experiences were simulated and practical activities and small group

learning. Such learning activities may be consonant with notions of experiential learning and CBET delivery methods. These may have provided potent formats for learning.

Graduate expectations were also in line with other studies. In practice this meant that about half the respondents felt the expectations of practice in their first setting were similar to those they developed in studying. Assisting students to have realistic expectations of practice is a theme worthy of further research. It appears that appropriate expectations may further enhance experiences of practice readiness.

Life experience was the major non-course related factor in preparation for practice. A number of respondents indicated that life experiences had assisted in their practice preparation as much as the course. A variety of responses were also given in relation to whether respondents had received orientation, supervision and in-service training. There was little that was conclusive about the value of each of these formats in terms of preparing the respondents for practice.

The following chapter continues with the presentation of data from respondents. In it I consider, describe and analyse respondents' comments with particular regard to the concept of competence and the development of expertise. I also cover the integration and use of theory in practice and concepts of social justice.

Chapter 7
Development of Expertise and Social Justice

Introduction

The previous chapter commenced the presentation and analysis of data collected in this study. In this chapter I continue the process by presenting data and discussion relevant particularly to the notions of development of expertise and social justice. Concepts of integration of theory into practice are also discussed due to their relevance to the development of expertise.

In chapter four, I outlined two models of development of competence and expertise. These were by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) and Secker (1993). As discussed in that chapter, the model created by Secker (1993) was developed out of a cohort of social work students/graduates. This makes it highly applicable to the current study and therefore I use it as a basis for analysis of the development of expertise here[27].

In the final part of this chapter, I discuss social justice and critical thinking aspects of social work, and their application to CBET. Social justice and critical thinking are highly valued components of social work and social work education. However they are contested aspects of CBET courses. Therefore the extent to which CBET in social work promotes critical social justice aspects of social work education is relevant to this study.

Overview of the Data

In the first part of this chapter I present a brief overview of the data gathered relating to the integration of theory into practice. To gather appropriate data from the

---

[27] See also chapter 5 for more discussion about the differences between Secker (1993) & Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986).

respondents relating to this part of the chapter, the Interview Guide contained a series of questions as illustrated below.

- o What theories did you learn about on your course?
- o How useful did you find the theoretical perspectives you learned?
- o What theoretical perspectives do you most frequently use?
- o When you are undertaking practice with a client, what is the process you go through to make decisions about what to do?
- o How able were you to relate theoretical underpinnings from your training to your practice?

There are two main categories highlighted from the data. The first focuses on the different social work theories and models used and mentioned by the respondents. The second involves respondents' comments relating to the integration of theory in practice.

Theories and Models Used and Mentioned by Respondents

As one illustration of the use of theory in respondents' practice, I decided to analyse each interview and highlight any times that a theory was mentioned in relation to practice.

By using the term 'theory' here, I am consciously adopting an approach to theory that includes both theories and models of practice. This inclusive approach also accomodates different meanings of theory because, according to Brown (1996) the terms 'theory', 'knowledge' and 'methods' are used interchangeably in social work.

I grouped responses into the categories of theories and models. An analysis of these theories and models mentioned and by whom is presented in Figure 3 below. This table shows that respondents were able to name a wide variety of theories and models that influenced their practice. The number mentioned varied from two to six with most respondents mentioning three or more. Task-Centred was the most

127

Figure 3: Theories and Models Mentioned by Respondents.

Theory	Respondent
Client Centred	Sally
Eclectic	Sally
Feminist	Jessie Janice
Māori	Jessie Janet Sally
Psychoanalytic	Jessie
Systems	Sally Jessie Janet
Model	
Crisis Intervention	Sally Helen
Empowerment	Helen Janet
Maslow	Megan
Micro-Counselling	Janice
Multi-Systemic	Helen
Narrative	Janice
Strengths Based	Jessie Sally Janet
Task Centred	Helen Jessie Sally Megan

commonly mentioned, with four respondents citing it. Systems, Strengths Based and Māori approaches all received mention by three respondents.

Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) found from their study, that the range of theories mentioned through the interviews was wide. In their study a greater proportion of graduates were influenced by only one or two theories than in the current study, where the majority named three or more. Whilst most of the literature refers to the integration of theory in practice (Elliott, 1995; Gould, 1996; Secker, 1993), the ability to choose and be influenced by a wide range of theoretical concepts is clearly linked with greater professional ability (Fook et al, 2000; Secker, 1993).

Sally clearly articulated the value of being able to use a range of theoretical concepts. She commented that

> *it's about having the integration and being able to use a range of different models to support each other. So it's not about using systems theory in isolation, it's about using systems theory with an understanding maybe of human development, as well as a task-centred approach for different things as well as having a good grounding of how to do a needs assessment.*

Clearly the ability to use a range of different approaches is valuable in practice. The results indicate that graduates of CBET courses are at least able to name a variety of theoretical influences. However, the results do not present any indication of how well or frequently respondents were informed by these theoretical ideas in their practice. Further discussion of the use of theory in practice is taken up below.

Use of Theory in Practice.

Questions about the use of theory in practice yielded a wide variety of responses. These are best illustrated on the continuum below (Figure 4). Responses included both attitudes towards theory and its use, in addition to how it is used in the respondents' practice.

Because of the broad continuum of responses given, I have again decided to use the approach of briefly outlining the comments of each respondent. This allows their own words to do the speaking and is an effective way of displaying similarities and differences. This approach is in keeping with a case study methodology[28] (Yin, 2003).

Figure 4. Continuum Of Theory Use by Respondents

Limited Use of Theory				**Frequent Use of Theory**
Megan	Janet	Jessie		Sally
Janice		Maria	Helen	
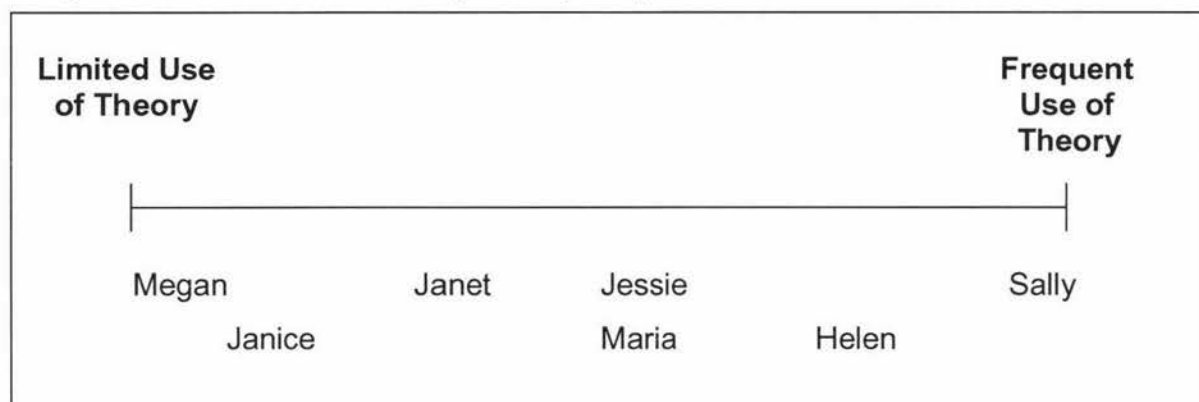
Megan presented a very limited theoretical analysis. She rarely mentioned theory and struggled to identify any, let alone how these informed her practice.

Maslow had the hierarchy ... I can't think of any others.

Janice also presented a fairly atheoretical picture of her practice. She commented that theory lacked value for her, although she did acknowledge that it is in the background providing a guideline.

[Theory is] not high priority in my life.... It [social work practice] is all by osmosis, like you absorb something and it's there, but you don't actually realise its there until you need it.

Another respondent that stated theory lacked value for her was Janet. Instead of theory, she indicated that her practice was derived more from common sense than anything else.

---

[28] See chapter 5 for more details about case study methodology.

One thing I was least interested in with my studies was theories because again I don't retain that stuff.

It's just common sense for me, its like what are you going to do to keep this child safe and how do I need to get there and what support do I need and what support does this child need to ensure they get it.

These comments were her responses to questions about the use of theory in practice. In responses to other (often unrelated) questions she provided practice descriptions that showed a degree of theoretical underpinning not considered in her comments above. The following excerpt demonstrates this phenomenon in regard to empowerment theory.

I really enjoyed … the opportunity to meet with whānau to share this information and enable them to make some decisions for their mokopuna, their children.

Jessie also found theory unhelpful during her studies.

That [theory] is something I thought was a huge waste of time.

In her practice however, she recognised the importance of theory and acknowledged that it might underpin her practice more than she gave it credit for. She also described being too busy with her work to consider theory actively.

I think if I sat back and took two weeks off I'd think oh that makes sense and I can see where that theory applies, but you know, you're too busy doing it.

Maria again acknowledged the importance of theory but also stated that she doesn't think about it.

I think in reality social work, you don't think about it [theory], you don't link theory to what you're doing and that's kind of reality, but I think it's important to have it and to have that background there anyway.

For Helen, the links between her practice and theory weren't initially obvious

because you are too caught up when you initially start practising.

However she was now able to reflect more actively about practice.

> *You are able to go to this other place and start thinking about right now I need to be doing this and I need to be thinking about that so you are able to go back to your theory and it sort of relaxes you to work to it.*

Sally described the most articulate integration of theory into practice amongst the respondents.

> *Theoretical tools and frameworks have really let me be able to name what I'm doing.*
>
> *I've had sufficient theory to feel purposeful about what I'm doing.*

In summary, of the seven respondents, three either didn't value or use theory. Two were ambivalent about theory use and two appeared to value it and use it effectively. There are a number of themes that emerge from the analysis above. These include a lack of value and/or interest in theory, the idea that common sense or life experience is more valuable than theory and finally that theory does not need to be consciously considered, it is just in the background. In addition, some indication was found that graduates used agency policy and protocol in place of social work practice theory. These themes are each explored further below.

Perceived Lack of Value in Practice Theory
Three respondents articulated a disinterest or perceived lack of value in practice theory. Their comments are listed below.

> *[Theory is] not high priority in my life* – Janice.
>
> *One thing I was least interested in with my studies was theory* – Janet.
>
> *That's [theory is] something I thought were a huge waste of time* – Jessie.

The same respondents also made comments in other parts of their interviews that indicated at least some application of theory. This is most obvious in the example already discussed by Janet, from the continuum above. In this example she

discusses the enjoyment she gained from empowering whānau to make decisions about their children.

It is a matter of some concern that social work graduates might have such a low regard for theory. However, the extent to which this attitude affects their efficacy as social workers is unclear. Certainly the results contrast with Marsh and Triseliotis (1996 p59). They found that 'most respondents saw value in a good theoretical grounding'.

CBET is criticised for being an atheoretical approach (Adams, 1998; Dominelli, 1996). These results provide some support to such arguments.

Common Sense and Life Experience are More Valuable Than Theory

The second and related theme that emerged concerned the idea that common sense and life experience are more valuable than theory. This theme arose from comments by Janice and Janet (shown below) in response to questions about what informed their practice.

> *What I use in my practice now is what I've learnt from life experiences –* Janice.
>
> *It's common sense for me [that guides my practice] –* Janet.

Their responses echo sentiments from chapter six in which a number of respondents claimed that their life experience was a major factor in their experience of practice readiness. Clearly life and everyday experiences are valuable in social work practice. This is supported by Secker's (1993) typology of theory use. I explore this notion in more detail later in the chapter, in the section relating to development of expertise.

Theory Doesn't Need to be Consciously Considered

The third theme that arose was the idea that theory is not something that needs to be considered consciously, it just occurs in the background. This arose from comments

by Janice, Jessie, Maria and Janet. Janice's comments provide a useful summary. She states that

> *It's [theory] all by osmosis, like you absorb something and its there but you don't actually realise it's there until you need it.*

There are a number of possible interpretations of these comments. One interpretation is that this is further evidence of an atheoretical approach. If accurate, this may further indicate that CBET approaches do not provide adequate theoretical backing for practice.

Another explanation relates to the development of expertise[29]. Secker (1993) indicates that in the development of expertise, theory tends to become less conscious in the Fluent stage. The comments above may indicate that theory is thoroughly integrated, to the extent that conscious consideration is no longer necessary. Again, further discussion about the development of expertise follows later in this chapter.

The Prevalence of Agency Rules and Regulations

A number of respondents (3) indicated that they were guided in their practice not by theory, but by the rules, protocols or regulations created in their workplace. Examples of these comments are given below.

> *The conference plan actually guided how I worked because it had the tasks I needed to do* – Megan.
> *I was quite confident about what I did because I would follow the protocols* – Janice.
> *[The things that guide my practice are] essentially the policy and requirements* – Jessie.

The meaning of this finding is a matter of some interpretation. It may however be indicative of 'defensive practice'. Defensive practice is considered to be practice that

---

[29] See chapter 4 for further details.

limits 'the risk of being sued, or scrutinised by the media, rather than being in the best interests of the client' (Smith, 2004 p23). Defensive practice can also lead social workers to be 'bound by the policies and procedures due to the accountability system in place' (ibid: p23).

According to Smith (2004), defensive practice tends to occur in large, statutory organisations due to the level of policy and regulation involved in their operation. All respondents that made these comments were working at CY&F, which as previously stated, is the largest single employer of social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand, and a statutory agency. Not all respondents working either in CY&F or in large statutory organisations made these comments however.

As mentioned in chapters one and two, some tensions between social work employers and the profession exist regarding the definition of the social work task and purpose. This is primarily in relation to the social change and social control elements of practice (Nash, 1998). The needs of the state as an employer of social workers, tends to reflect social control. The profession however is also concerned with social change.

Social work graduates' reliance on agency protocol as a main guide for practice supports the idea that employers are active in defining the social work task. It may be that CBET social work education encourages this practice due to the weighting towards industry in creation of the qualification.

From an employer perspective however, it could be argued that CBET social work education prepares graduates well for working in structured work settings such as statutory environments. Graduates working according to agency policy and procedure may be an indication of this. There is some consistency between this argument and the structured format and emphasis on task achievement for which competency-based approaches have been criticised (Adams, 1998; Dominelli, 1996; Nash, 2003).

Development of Expertise

In the previous section I commenced the presentation and discussion of data relating to the use of theory by respondents. Here I introduce the notion of development of competence and expertise, in particular through the lens of Secker's (1993) three-stage model.

As discussed in chapter four, Secker (1993) suggests that as students develop practice ability, they move through three approaches toward theory use. The initial approach she terms Everyday Social. Students then move towards the Fragmented approach and (if they progress this far) ultimately to the Fluent approach, which is consistent with competent practice. There is no guarantee that development will occur beyond the first stage.

The Everyday Social approach is characterised by students using knowledge derived from their personal, everyday social lives, as opposed to social work practice theory. Comments from two respondents fell into the Everyday Social approach. They were from Janice and Janet who made the following statements illustrating this.

> *What I use in my practice now is what I've learnt from life experience* – Janice.
> *I don't relate to any particular model, it's just common sense* – Janet.

The Fragmenting approach involves a variety of characteristics. One of these is that practitioners may experience a conflict between different knowledge bases, including their everyday and theoretical knowledge. Jessie and Maria demonstrated this conflict, which was illustrated by different attitudes towards theory at different places in the interview.

For instance Jessie initially comments that

> *[theory is] something I thought [was] a huge waste of time.*

Later in the interview she demonstrated her ability to fit practice into a theoretical framework.

*I think if I sat back and took two weeks off I'd think oh that makes sense and I
can see where that theory applies, but you know, you're too busy doing it.*

She also demonstrates the use of a greater range of influences on her practice than
relevant to the Everyday Social approach.

Helen's comments may demonstrate a further characteristic of the Fragmented
approach. This further characteristic involves employing theory in a rather absolutist
fashion. This is evident in her following comment.

*You are able to go to this other place and start thinking about right now I need
to be doing this and I need to be thinking about that*

Another aspect of the Fragmented approach is the experience of 'conflicts between
ways of making sense of situations' (Secker, 1993 p48). Respondents' contradictions
of themselves over the course of the interview demonstrate some fit within this
category. An example of this is Jessie's comments about the use of theory. At one
part of the interview she states that theories are

a huge waste of time.

Later in the interview she says

*I guess concepts and theories and stuff, we probably use them all the time
now at work.*

One respondent, Megan, was difficult to place in any of the typologies. However, she
indicated a very strong adherence to policy and procedure. This has strong
similarities with the application of theory in an absolutist fashion. Using this rationale I
decided also to place her in the Fragmented approach.

The Fluent approach is demonstrated by the ability to use theory as a framework to
guide assessment and intervention approaches. Practice theory is developed to fit
the client situation, drawing from theory and analysis of past action, in addition to
other sources of knowledge.

Sally is the only respondent that fitted within this category. The fluent use of theory is captured in her statement below.

> *It's about having the integration and being able to use a range of different models to support each other. So it's not about using systems theory in isolation, it's about using systems theory with an understanding maybe of human development, as well as a task centred approach for different things, as well as having a good grounding of how to do a needs assessment.*

In order to undertake further analysis, I assembled the results above into a table of the different typologies represented by graduate responses (Figure 5). The table also shows results in relation to Secker (1993). Overall, the analysis above demonstrates that two respondents fitted with the Everyday Social approach, four with the Fragmented approach and one with the Fluent approach. Secker (1993) states in her research that there was always some overlap between the different categories. This is certainly the case here, particularly between the Everyday Social and Fragmented approaches.

Figure 5: Typology of Respondent in the Current and the Secker Studies.

	Secker Study	Current Study
Everyday Social	1	2
Fragmenting	12	4
Fluent	6	1

Figure 5 clearly shows that the majority of graduates from the current study were in the Fragmenting stage. The Everyday Social stage had the second largest group, followed by the Fluent stage. As discussed in chapter four, Secker (1993) considered the Fluent stage to represent an adequate level of educational achievement. This suggests that the National Diploma in Social Work could be providing inadequate integration of theory in practice.

There are a range of similarities and differences in relation to Secker's (1993) own results. Both studies placed the majority of respondents within the Fragmenting stage. However, Secker (1993) encountered fewer respondents in the Everyday Social approach and a further difference was the greater number of respondents she placed in the Fluent approach. It is also of note that the greater proportion of respondents from both studies did not achieve the Fluent approach, which was considered the 'desirable educational outcome' (ibid, 1993 p26).

The similarities between these samples suggest that there may be some broad comparability with standards from other courses. I also acknowledge that in a study of this small size and qualitative nature, that anything more than broad comparisons are problematic.

It should also be noted that there is a significant difference in the respondents used in Secker's (1993) study and the current one. Secker (1993) involved respondents from a post-graduate social work course in the UK. The current study was conducted solely with under-graduates and within Aotearoa New Zealand. Whilst many of the respondents had undertaken previous study, none were existing graduates at a bachelor degree level.

It may be reasonable to assume that post-graduate students will already have developed substantial study abilities, including the ability to assimilate practice from theory. This may therefore mean that respondents in Secker's (1993) study had more opportunities to develop an integration of theory into practice than those in the current study.

A second difference is that respondents from Secker's (1993) study were limited to one class only. The current study takes respondents from a number of different institutions offering the same qualification, but delivering them in different ways. Thus it is unclear to what extent the course selected by Secker (1993) represents an 'average' course. Her respondents may represent a more (or less) able cohort due to

the particular course selected. Finally, the current study is within a CBET framework, whilst Secker's (1993) is not.

The results from the data regarding integration of theory are mixed. On the positive side there are some broad similarities to Secker's (1993) sample, suggesting that CBET courses may be producing graduates roughly equivalent with some other social work courses. Less positively, adoption of her model suggests that the level of theoretical integration and therefore development of expertise is inadequate in CBET courses.

A criticism of CBET courses, as outlined in chapter four, is that

> *they concentrate on techniques and skills, and this relegates considerations of values, critical evaluation and the deployment of front-line knowledge, particularly at more advanced levels, into second phase* (Adams, 1998).

Application of theory may well be considered to be within the second phase. The results of this study therefore provide some support to Adams' (1998) statements.

The lack of graduates within the Fluent approach may also relate to the teaching in courses. In chapter four I outlined some ideas from Donald Schön (1983, 1987), who pioneered the concept of reflective learning. He claimed that a reflexive relationship is necessary between theory and practice, instead of traditional Technical-Rational approaches. In other words, it is not sufficient for educators to assume that because they have taught theory it will automatically be transferred to practice. A problem with reliance on a Technical-Rational approach is that it may lead to surface level learning (ibid). To prevent this, Schön suggests that learning opportunities are required in which learners are able to have and reflect upon experiences of their actual integration process.

CBET is criticised for over-emphasising Technical-Rational approaches[30]. These results lend some support to this notion and may indicate that reflective approaches to learning are under-utilised within CBET environments. However, insufficient information was gained from this study to shed more light on the value of this speculation.

What is demonstrated is that the level of social work graduates' theoretical integration, both internationally and in Aotearoa New Zealand, is an under researched area. More needs to be done to evaluate the extent to which graduates are attaining integrated theory from their practice. Such research may help to ensure that the education and training being delivered is meeting the standards required by all stakeholders.

This concludes the presentation of data on and discussion of the development of expertise. I now consider concepts of social justice in relation to the results.

Social Justice and Social Equity

The final area of analysis undertaken in this study is in relation to respondents' comments regarding critical thinking and social justice. This is an important and contentious area of social work and social work education. Furthermore, it is an area in which CBET approaches are criticised[31].

Criticism tends to focus on two areas. The first area of criticism is that CBET is focused too greatly on the needs of employers, who may not have the need nor desire for their employees to think critically, or to challenge their organisations or the structures of society. The second area of criticism is that CBET may concentrate on techniques and skills, with critical thinking, an underlying ability, not being adequately achieved (Adams, 1998).

---

[30] See chapter 4.
[31] See chapter 4 for a fuller exploration of CBET and social justice.

Data was gathered in response to questions such as 'How do you incorporate thinking about power structures and critique of systems into your work?' Comments were also gathered in response to other areas of questioning, including the relevance of education/training and the areas of education/training that respondents found the most and least useful.

A number of themes emerged from the data gathered. Respondents were almost equally grouped into three categories; those who found the learning about social justice either unhelpful or irrelevant, those that enjoyed learning about it but didn't use it in their practice, and those that felt they didn't know how to apply it.

Janice was one respondent who was in the category of those who found social justice learning unhelpful or irrelevant. Her comment below summarises this attitude towards critical social justice components.

> *Unless you're going higher in whatever place you're working, it's not necessary.*

There was also an implied lack of enjoyment of social justice elements due to their seeming irrelevance.

Jessie typified those that enjoyed learning about social justice and critical approaches but didn't apply it to their practice. She comments that

> *ideas of community development and social change, and how someone's observations or experiences can change a whole policy, that there is that ability to make a historic difference…. we don't kind of do a lot of that here, but I thought that was really interesting when I was studying.*

Two respondents had community development roles as aspects of their current work. Both stated they felt unprepared for this area of their practice. Sally comments

> *I felt really ready to do the client work but I'm still feeling unsure about what the community development aspect of my job description means for me in this setting.*

Maria said

I'm still kind of not too sure because no-one did it [community liaison] before me so there is no-one to take over from and I get supervision from the site manager who is not 100% sure what the community liaison role is and how to go about it.

Maria's comments are particularly interesting as she also appears to contradict herself. After describing ignorance about undertaking a community liaison role (which I consider a form of community development), she also claims that teaching about community development was irrelevant.

Some things that we got that I don't think were relevant to where I'm working anyway, is we did a lot of community development stuff.

As discussed in the previous section, contradictions such as this may represent fit within the Fragmenting approach to integration of theory. In this instance, the respondent seemed unaware of the contradiction.

On the face of it, these results appear to suggest that whilst respondents received education/training to assist them with consideration of social justice concepts, this was generally either inadequate or perceived as irrelevant and unhelpful.

As noted above, social justice is a major aspect of professional social work standards and CBET social work education/training is criticised for under-emphasising the development of skills and abilities central to this area (Adams, 1998; Dominelli, 1996). The results of the current study may provide some support to this argument.

Rigorous literature searches were unable to locate other studies examining these areas of graduates' performance. Thus further research is necessary to show to what extent social justice aspects are taught or learnt within any social work educational forum.

Summary

This chapter presented and discussed a range of data gathered from respondents. In particular it examined the notions of graduate competence through analysis of integration of theory into practice, and application of critical and social justice concepts.

Throughout the course of the interviews, respondents mentioned or discussed a wide variety of theories or models of practice, demonstrating at least a surface knowledge of such areas. Further investigation of the integration of theoretical concepts was undertaken using Secker's (1993) approach. Using this model as the basis for theoretical analysis, respondents fitted mostly into the Fragmented approach, with a minority in the Everyday Social and Fluent approaches.

Secker (1993) suggests that the Fluent approach represents an appropriate level of practice for new graduates. Results of the current study suggest that graduates of CBET social work courses in Aotearoa New Zealand are not attaining an adequate level of theoretical integration. Broad comparison with Secker's (1993) own analysis showed that the level of integration of theory was slightly less than their British cohort, graduates of non-CBET courses. The results from both studies indicated that a lower level of theoretical integration was occurring than that considered desirable by Secker (1993).

The results also highlighted that some graduates did not value theory and that a number used agency rules and regulation instead of practice theory. This enhances suggestions that CBET concentrates overly on techniques and skills, putting insufficient emphasis on underlying theoretical knowledge (Adams, 1998) and reflective practice.

Social justice notions central to the social work profession were also analysed in this chapter. Results highlighted two features. The first was that many respondents found

this area of education irrelevant to their practice. In other words they were not using the ideas learnt from their education in their practice. The second finding was that respondents with a particular role requiring the use of social justice notions felt unprepared for practice in this area. The results demonstrate some support for ideas expressed by Dominelli (1996), that CBET social work education and training does not assist graduates with critical (social justice) thinking to the level considered ideal by the profession.

Conclusions such as these do not isolate a cause however. It is therefore difficult to attribute findings entirely to CBET approaches to social work education. Whilst competency-based approaches could be a part of the explanation, other possibilities also exist. An alternative explanation could be the length of courses. CBET social work diplomas in Aotearoa New Zealand are two-year courses. This is in direct contrast to the three or four year degrees offered by other educational institutions, typically universities. Longer courses may provide graduates with greater opportunities to develop an integrated practice theory.

It may also be that teaching methods used in CBET courses are not allowing the required development of theoretical integration. This could be due to a lack of experiential and reflective opportunities.

Overall, the methodological nature of the study makes these findings indicative not conclusive. Furthermore the lack of comparative analysis with other courses within Aotearoa New Zealand, provides some difficulty in ascertaining whether the results are symptomatic of all social work education in this country or relate solely to CBET courses. Clearly however, the findings indicate that further research in these areas is necessary and is likely to be interesting and rewarding.

Chapter 8
Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

Introduction

This final chapter is divided into three sections; conclusions, limitations and recommendations for further research. I commence with a summary of findings and draw out several conclusions, revisiting the central aims and questions of the research and outlining how these have been addressed. The study also has a number of limitations, which I discuss in the second section. In the third section I outline recommendations for further research and suggestions for CBET social work educators. I conclude the chapter and this study with some final considerations.

Summary of Findings

The aim of this research was to investigate the effectiveness of competency-based social work education by way of an analysis of graduates' experiences of their education and first six months of practice. The central organising theme for the study was readiness to practice, and a range of variables that might influence this were considered.

At a macro-level these variables included the current tensions affecting social work at a global and national level. These tensions are created by multiple stakeholders, each competing to define the profession. Stakeholders include the state, the professional association, academics and employers.

At a micro-level, readiness to practice is influenced by student attributes such as their age, background, expectations of practice, and previous life and work experiences. A further set of influences includes variables in graduates' first workplaces such as

orientation, supervision and in-service training. Finally, readiness to practice is also influenced by the nature of education and training received by graduates.

To obtain the results, seven graduates of competency-based social work education (the National Diploma in Social Work or the National Diploma in Social Services/Social Work) each with at least six months practice experience, formed the study sample. Each shared experiences and descriptions of their education and first six months of practice. The research was qualitative, using semi-structured interviews.

Results were considered against the literature in three critical areas; readiness to practice, the integration of theory into practice, and competency-based education and training. A discussion and summary of findings for each of these areas is provided below.

Readiness to Practice

Readiness to practice, for the purposes of this study, was defined in chapter one as "the extent to which a new graduate is able to practice effectively within their initial employment environment, most commonly within the first year of employment".

There were a number of findings in relation to practice readiness. The most significant was the level of perceived practice readiness experienced by graduates. Five of the seven interviewed felt either adequately or very ready to practice. Most (five) also felt confident in their practice, although those who felt confident were not always those who described a sense of practice readiness.

The indications from these expressions of perceived practice readiness is positive. The study also raises questions regarding the extent to which we can expect graduates of social work to be practice ready. Can we realistically expect all social work graduates to be practice ready and able to undertake all agency tasks immediately upon completion of their course?

147

Requiring practice readiness in social work may be more difficult than in other professions given the diversity of social work and the generic nature of training. Much is written expressing the notion of a tension, disjunction or gap between the end of social work courses and the beginning of practice (Cox, 1982; Elliott, 1995; Hearn, 1982; Marsh & Triseliotis, 1996; Pilalis, 1986; Ryan, Fook & Hawkins, 1995; Secker, 1993; Waterhouse, 1981). New Zealand based studies are also included in this analysis (Harre-Hindmarsh 1992). These results strongly suggest that a number of graduates from a wide range of social work courses frequently do not achieve practice readiness by the end of their courses or early practice.

Harre-Hindmarsh (1992)[32] suggests that a gap between ending courses and first practice experiences may be inevitable and that instead of attempting to reduce it, we should instead prepare graduates for it. If work towards reducing the gap is undertaken however, the question of responsibility for it is also raised. Does this responsibility belong with the agency or with courses?

If closing the gap is a responsibility of the practice agency, and is achieved through orientation, in-service training and/or supervision, then the results of this study suggest that agencies had some way to go in order to make good on this responsibility. This was indicated by the variation of experiences and degree of ambivalence expressed by respondents relating to these areas[33]. This finding was contrary to other, overseas studies[34], suggesting that practices of orientation, in-service training and supervision may be less well applied in Aotearoa New Zealand.

If closing the gap is a responsibility of courses then the question is again raised as to whether social work education should be focusing on providing broad generic training with a solid theoretical basis (curriculum-based courses?) or aiming to provide graduates with familiarity in specific procedural matters (competency-based courses?).

---

[32] See chapter 1.
[33] See chapter 6 p107
[34] Particularly Marsh and Triseliotis, 1996.

148

Greater specificity of courses may well be the answer, despite social work educators opting for provision of generic education in the past (Parsloe, 2001). Most educators were not writing in relation to CBET courses however, which strongly emphasise work readiness and industry (employer) requirements, and therefore by design may lead to an increased fit between courses and workplaces. Given that respondents were from competency-based courses, it may therefore be no coincidence that the levels of perceived practice readiness found in this study were generally fairly high.

In addition to those discussed above, other factors may also help to explain the levels of perceived practice readiness found. In particular, the results suggest that graduates' education and training were not the only influences in promoting practice readiness. Life experience was cited by a number of respondents as having a large role in assisting with practice readiness. A number of respondents commented that their previous experiences in life had been most influential in terms of assisting them with managing first workplace experiences.

This may support the contention discussed in chapter three, that it is the type and quality of the person entering the profession more than the training itself that affects practice ability.

Integration of Theory into Practice

Graduates mentioned a wide variety of social work practice theories in their interviews and displayed a wide range of responses about the degree to which theory was used in their practice. Some actively derided the use and value of theory. For others, mention of theory was almost absent in their responses. A high value was placed on theory, knowledge and integration by yet others.

Analysis of the integration of theory was undertaken using Secker's (1993) typological model[35]. This model was chosen for its ease of use and fit with the data gathered. Her three typologies form a hierarchy of practice theory integration. Least

---

[35] See chapter 4 for a more detailed explanation of Secker's model.

integrated is the Everyday Social approach. The middle type is the Fragmented approach and most integrated is the Fluent approach. The majority of the sample fitted into the Fragmenting approach, with two in the Everyday Social approach and one in the Fluent approach.

Secker (1993 p26) states that the Fluent stage is 'a desirable educational objective' for graduates. This suggests that most respondents are achieving an inadequate level of theoretical integration. It therefore raises some concerns about the adequacy of CBET education and training to ensure appropriate integration of theory into practice. Discussion regarding the impact and adequacy of respondents' education and training in relation to integration of theory and practice are taken up further in the section below on competency-based education and training.

The second area of consideration surrounds the possibility that despite some graduates' perceptions of practice readiness, this may be different to external measures. This was highlighted because of the contrast between the high levels of perceived practice readiness and poor levels of theoretical integration.

To investigate the possibility of graduate misperceptions further, I compared the results of those who had the highest levels of perceived practice readiness against their level of theoretical integration. The results of this comparison are displayed in Figure 6 below.

Of the three respondents who had the highest expressed levels of practice readiness, one fitted in the Fluent approach, one in Fragmenting and one in Everyday Social. This analysis tends to support the notion of some disjunction between perceived practice readiness and what may be actual practice readiness, for some graduates.

Figure 6. Comparison Between Readiness to Practice and Level of Theoretical Integration

Name	Level of Practice Readiness	Level of Theoretical Integration
Sally	Very ready	Fluent
Janice	Very ready	Everyday Social
Maria	Very ready	Fragmenting
Helen	Mildly ambivalent	Fragmenting
Jessie	Highly ambivalent	Fragmenting
Janet	Partially prepared	Everyday Social
Megan	Not very prepared	Fragmenting

This finding raises a number of questions. The first is whether the level of integration of theory that Secker (1993) considers 'desirable' is actually realistic. As Figure 5 from the previous chapter shows, few graduates in either her own study or the current study attained this desired level.

If the Fluent stage is indeed an appropriate level for graduates, then this study raises questions about the practice of graduates that have an imbalance between their perception of their practice readiness and the adequacy of their theoretical integration. This again suggests some limitations in the education and training received. The need for outcome studies of social work to use methodologies involving more than self-reports is also highlighted.

A more detailed investigation into the nature of the disjunction described above is beyond the scope of the current research. However this would be a valuable area for further investigation and is taken up below in the section on recommendations for further research.

A further finding in relation to the integration of theory into practice was the number of graduates that acknowledged following agency rules and regulations as the main source of direction for their practice, instead of recognised social work practice

151

theory. This method of practice may fit the label of 'defensive practice' as described by Smith (2004)[36]. Defensive practice involves risk minimisation by the social worker, rather than necessarily working in the best interests of the client (ibid). Possible implications for CBET social work education are substantial and are explored more in the following section.

<u>Competency-Based Education and Training</u>
It was important in this project to explore the relationship between the literature regarding CBET and the findings of this study. This section summarises that relationship.

There were mixed findings from this study in relation to CBET. On one hand these particular graduates of CBET social work education in Aotearoa New Zealand felt adequately prepared for entry into social work practice. On the other, they also showed a poor level of theoretical integration and some disjunctions between their perceptions of practice readiness and their actual readiness.

Furthermore, there is some suggestion that social justice concepts were not well learnt, or this learning was not seen as relevant. This suggestion is demonstrated by the way in which a number of respondents displayed either a lack of interest or a lack of understanding regarding social work practice in social justice areas.

The poor results regarding concepts such as social justice and theoretical integration may reflect a number of concerns about CBET social work education. These concerns include the idea that CBET approaches may not foster critical thinking to the depth desired by the profession (Dominelli, 1996). Instead CBET may

> *concentrate on techniques and skills, and this relegates considerations of values, critical evaluation and the deployment of front-line knowledge, particularly at more advanced levels, into second phase* (Adams, 1998 p258).

---

[36] See previous chapter.

The same criticism about critical thinking may also be applied in relation to the use of agency rules and regulations instead of recognised practice theory. In addition, the practice of following agency rules and regulations also suggests that graduates may be supporting managerialist management techniques rather than showing a critical awareness of them and their practice implications (Culpitt, 1999). This may indicate that CBET courses could move social work away from social justice principles. Instead of fostering a critical awareness of power structures and change strategies in relation to them, CBET may in fact be maintaining an industry defined status quo.

In my opinion however, attributing the problems described above solely to CBET is too simplistic. Ensuring integration of theory into practice is perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing educators and is an ongoing area of development. Radical changes have occurred in education over the last two decades, which have transformed teaching methods. Traditional Technical-Rational approaches to learning are no longer seen as adequate in and of themselves, and movement has been made towards reflective and experiential approaches instead (Schön, 1983; 1987). Additionally the context of social work practice has changed rapidly[37], putting new pressures on social workers, organisations and service users.

I suggest instead that the results indicate that understanding contemporary workplace conflicts for social workers and how to address them in education and training is an area of social work practice not yet well understood. Further research clearly evaluating differing styles and lengths of social work education programmes needs to be undertaken to shed more light in this area.

---

[37] See chapter 2.

Limitations

The nature of the research conducted in this study was exploratory and has highlighted a number of relevant themes and considerations. The graduate reports provided a rich and informative source of data for this study. Respondents were highly forthcoming in their comments, which were also very honest and candid. In addition to the range of findings highlighted by this study however, there are also a number of limitations, which this section outlines.

I analysed data regarding to the integration of theory into practice using the model developed by Secker (1993). I chose her model due to the good fit with my study and it provided valuable analysis. Further research in this area may benefit from utilising the model developed by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986)[38]. Use of this model may have advantages for a follow up study as it enables more in-depth analysis of the data based on respondent case studies.

It is also appropriate to reiterate again here in this section outlining limitations, that technical difficulties prevented some data from being included in the study. This data related to aspects of the integration of theory into practice for one respondent. Given the small size of the study, this was clearly unfortunate.

Limitations may also have arisen due to the breadth of subject area I have covered. In the study I collected and analysed data relating to two major areas of social work; practice readiness and theoretical integration. Whilst I found this dual focus both stimulating and interesting, it may have resulted in obtaining shallower data instead of a more detailed focus on one or the other area.

A further limitation was the ability to attract participants to the study. As noted in chapter five, my initial assumption was that making contact with graduates from the National Diploma in Social Work would be relatively simple. This proved incorrect and

---

[38] See chapter 4.

finding participants was more difficult than expected, at least in part due to the smaller potential participant population than initially conceived. The limited ability to attract participants resulted in lower numbers of respondents participating than planned.

Finally, some limitation may have occurred as a result of the majority of respondents working within statutory organisations, particularly Child Youth and Family. This may have resulted in a potential bias reflecting either this statutory environment or the attributes of those social workers that choose to work there. Workers in community or voluntary organisations may have presented quite different experiences.

Recommendations

There are two sets of recommendations arising from this research; recommendations for further research, and recommendations for CBET social work educators.

Recommendations for Further Research

As far as I have been able to ascertain from within the literature, this is the first study that has been undertaken regarding CBET graduates of social work courses within Aotearoa New Zealand. As such, the research was broad and exploratory and a number of areas for further research have been highlighted. These are identified below.

The indications regarding readiness to practice, integration of theory and use of critical social justice concepts within practice strongly demonstrate that further research of greater depth in these areas would be both interesting and rewarding. As has previously been mentioned in a variety of areas, such further research could include a comparative analysis from both CBET and curriculum-based courses. Additional research could also be both qualitative and quantitative in nature, in order to produce meaningful results. Accessing wider sources of information than purely

graduate accounts, and requiring graduates to complete some form of case study or vignette to allow for greater identification of theoretical integration, may also be of benefit.

Other areas of research that have been highlighted as necessary or beneficial are in relation to student/graduate expectations and teaching methods. Student/graduate expectations of social work practice clearly have a major part to play, not only regarding their feelings of practice readiness, but also in the choice of educational institute and field of practice. Increasing evidence is being provided that shows these expectations may also have a large impact on stress and well-being within the job (Lithgow, 2001). Further examination of students/graduates' expectations may well indicate that they affect the quality of outcomes, both for graduates and for clients. This would have major ramifications for social work education and additional research would greatly assist in this area.

A further area for future research comes from the findings that graduates may have different levels of perceived and actual practice readiness. Greater investigation into the generaliseability and possible consequences of such a finding would also clearly be of benefit. In addition this may require a further look at the levels of theoretical integration that courses are expecting students to attain by graduation. Ascertaining whether practice in the Fluent approach, as considered desirable by Secker (1993), is realistic, would assist educators and students alike.

Finally, the area of teaching methods was only briefly touched upon in this research. Exploration was sufficient to conclude that greater research is necessary. For instance, what teaching methods are linked to higher levels of practice readiness and theoretical integration? Are there differences between teaching methods in CBET and other courses and what impact does this have on graduates? Such research, whilst clearly relevant to social work, may fall more naturally into the domain of education.

Recommendations for CBET Social Work Educators

There are three recommendations for CBET social work educators arising from this research. These consider the areas of integration of theory into practice, use of social justice and critical thinking, and graduate expectations.

Integration of Theory into Practice

The results of this study demonstrated a much lower level of theoretical integration in respondents' practice than can be considered ideal. Whilst this is and probably always will be a highly contested area of education, greater development of graduates in this area is still necessary.

Due to the recent advent of CBET social work education, and the range of tensions involved in delivering any social work curriculum as outlined in chapters two and three, insufficient focus in course design and delivery may have been paid to the need for theoretical integration. Renewed focus in this area is necessary to ensure graduates are able to perform social work tasks in a skilled and theory-driven way.

Social Justice and Critical Thinking

A further gap shown up by this study is in the area of social justice and critical thinking. A large proportion of the respondents either felt unprepared for practice in this area and/or did not see value in the relevant teaching they received.

These results suggest that this essential aspect of social work is not being adequately attended to. Innovative thinking is necessary to create teaching and learning environments in which students will value such a perspective and also have the skills to apply it to their practice.

Graduate Expectations

Graduate expectations of practice clearly have more impact on their practice readiness than may have been accounted for. This may be an area where reasonably simple solutions can be applied. NZCETSS and TKA guidelines clearly

demonstrate the need for personal development in social work courses. It may be a reasonably easy task to build student reflections on their own expectations into the curriculum, both in relation to where they intend to practice, how they think this practice will be, and at what level they expect to be able to practice.

Clarifying student expectations and ensuring these are realistic may have a much greater impact on areas such as readiness to practice than any other easily addressed variable.

Conclusion

The over-riding question driving this research was whether graduates of CBET social work education were ready to practice. The methodology enabled two primary areas of analysis. These were in relation to graduates' perceptions of their own practice readiness and an analysis of their responses in relation to Secker's (1993) typological approach to integration of theory into practice.

The results from this study suggest that the majority of these graduates perceived themselves to be ready for practice. A number of factors lead to them having this perception of readiness. The most frequently noted were life experience and their education and training. Significant for their mixed impacts on practice readiness were orientation, in-service training and supervision.

In relation to integration of theory into practice, the results of the study were very clear. Secker's (1993) typological model indicates that the desirable level of integration for graduates is demonstrated by the Fluent approach. In this study however, most graduates practiced using the Fragmented approach. Two practiced using only an Everyday Social approach and a number of respondents actively derided or placed a low value on theory. A number of respondents also indicated that agency rules and regulations drove their practice as opposed to theory. In addition, a

number of those that perceived they were ready to practice did not adequately integrate theory into practice, in relation to Secker's (1993) model.

These findings were perhaps the most important results and strongly suggest that inadequate integration of theory into practice is resulting from CBET social work courses in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Despite its limitations, the study is able to provide a range of important information in relation to CBET social work courses in Aotearoa New Zealand. In particular, the results from this study indicate that CBET graduates achieve adequate levels of perceived practice readiness. This appears to be consistent with some of the principles behind the implementation of CBET frameworks, which required graduates to be able to quickly assimilate into the workforce (Gonczi 2000).

One of the criticisms of CBET social work approaches is that they may be too weighted in favour of employers, and thus de-emphasise critical social justice elements, recognised as professional standards. This study demonstrates some support for such a notion.

CBET approaches have also been criticised for over-emphasising skills and techniques and under-emphasising theory. The results of this study clearly indicate that a higher level of integration of theory is necessary. This finding tends to support the criticisms of insufficient theoretical depth.

A number of important questions are also raised from the study. These include the need for CBET social work educators to enquire into the extent to which critical social justice and theoretical integration are occurring in their courses. In addition, there is clearly a need for further research in relation to the outcomes of social work education. As educators we have a responsibility to find out how effective our courses are, and take any necessary action in relation to the results. If we do not,

then we risk modeling to our students exactly the opposite of the social justice models that we attempt to instill.

To this end, I would like to conclude with the words of Gambrill (2001 p2), quoted earlier in this study.

> *Shouldn't we do more than "educate and hope"? Shouldn't we evaluate the extent to which graduates use competencies shown to be of value in helping clients, honor ethical guidelines, and take effective steps to alter dysfunctional agency practices and policies?*

Adams, R. (1998) Social work processes. *In* Adams, R., Dominelli, L., & Payne, M. (eds) *Social work themes, issues and critical debates.* London, MacMillan.

Ainley, P. & Rainbird, H. (1999) Apprenticeship, towards a new paradigm of learning. London, Kogan Page.

Aldrich, R. (1999) The apprentice in history. *In* Ainley, P. & Rainbird, H. (eds) Apprenticeship, towards a new paradigm of learning. London, Kogan Page.

ANZASW (2004) Statutory registration – information from the social workers registration board. *Social Work Notice Board,* June 2004, p14.

Atherton, C. (1999) Getting a grip. *Child Care in Practice.* 5(3), p199 – 203.

Austin, D.M. (1997) The institutional development of social work education: The first 100 years-and beyond. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 33(3), p599-612.

Barbour, R.S. (1984) Social work education: Tackling the theory-practice dilemma. *British Journal Of Social Work*, 14, p557-577.

Barretta-Herman, A. (1993) Development of social work in New Zealand: 1969-1988 Part II: Social work professionalism. *Social Work Review*, July 1993.

Barretta-Herman, A. (1994) Development of social work in New Zealand: 1969-1988 Part II: Social work development. *Social Work Review*, 6(3), p12.

Baumgart, N .L. (1985) Education: A map for introductory courses. Sydney, Ian Novak.

Benner, P. (1984) *From novice to expert. Excellence and power in clinical nursing practice.* California, Addison Wesley.

Benton, R., Benton, N., Croft, C. & Walsh, A. (1990) *Kahukura: The possible dream: What the Treaty of Waitangi requires of courses in the social services.* NZCETSS, Wellington.

Billett, S., McKavanagh, C., Beven, F., Angus, L., Seddon, T., Gough, J., Hayes, S. & Robertson, I. (1999) *The CBT decade: Teaching for flexibility and adaptability - An overview.* Adelaide, NCVER.

Bisno, Herb, Cox & Fred (1997) Social work education: Catching up with the present and the future. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 33(2), p373.

Blumenthal, D., Gokhale, M., Campbell, E. & Weissman, J. (2001) Preparedness for clinical practice: Reports of graduating residents at academic health centres. *The Journal of the American Medical Association,* 286(9), p1027.

Boswell, G., Davies, M. & Wright, A. (1993) *Contemporary probation practice.* Aldershot, Avebury.

Brown, H.C. (1996) The knowledge base of social work. *In* Vass, A.T. (ed.), *Social Work Competencies.* London, Sage.

Brown, M. (2001) *Care and protection is about adult behaviour: The ministerial review of the department of child, youth and family services: Report to the minister of social services and employment, Hon Steve Maharey.* Wellington, Ministry of Social Policy.

Canning, R. (1999) Discourses on competence: A case study of students' experience of higher level national/Scottish vocational qualifications. *Journal of Education and Work,* 12(2), p201-213.

Cantor, J., Baker, L., & Hughes, R. (2001) Preparedness for practice: Young physicians' views of their professional education. *The Journal of the American Medical Association,* 270(9), p1035.

Connolly, M & Rathgen, E. (2001) Social work students: Readiness to practice and issues for the field. *Social Work Review,* 12(2), p13-16.

Cooper, L. (1994) The development and demise of competency standards in Australia. *Social Work Review,* March 1994, p19 – 27.

Cooper, L. (2000) Teaching and learning in human services fieldwork. *In* Cooper, L. & Briggs, L. (eds) *Fieldwork in the human services.* Australia, Allen and Unwin.

Cornford, I. (1997) Competency-based training: An assessment of its strengths and weaknesses by NSW vocational teachers. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training,* 49(2), p 53-77.

Cornford, I. (1999) Skill learning and the development of expertise. *In* Athanasou, J. (ed) *Adult Educational Psychology.* Australia, Social Science Press.

Cox, R. (1982) The educational expectations of social work students. *British Journal of Social Work,* 12, p382-94.

Cranna, J. (1989) *Towards bicultural development.* Auckland, Auckland College of Education.

Crotty, M. (1998*). The foundations of social research.* Australia, Allen & Unwin.

Culpitt, I. (1999) *Social policy and risk.* London, Sage.

Davidson, C. & Tolich, M. (1999) *Social science research in New Zealand.* Auckland, Longman.

Davies, M. (1984) Training: What we think of it now. *Social Work Today,* Jan 1984, p12-17.

Dominelli, L. (1996) Deprofessionalising social work: Anti-oppressive practice, competencies and postmodernism. *British Journal of Social Work,* 25, p153-175.

Dreyfus, H. & Dreyfus, S. (1986) *Mind over machine.* New York, The Free Press.

Elliott, N. (1995) College reflections on practice theory. *Social Work Education,* 14(3), p5-24.

Elliott, D. & Walton, R.G. (1995) United Kingdom. *In* Watts, T., Elliott, D., & Mayadas, N. (eds). *International handbook on social work education.* London, Greenwood Press.

Ellis, G. (1998) Through the looking glass – Fieldwork supervisors' perceptions of their role and needs for support, education and training. Unpublished Masters Thesis: Massey University.

Eraut, M. (1994) *Developing professional knowledge and competence.* London, Falmer Press.

Fay, B. (1987) *Critical social science.* Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

Finger, M & Asun, J. M. (2001) *Adult education at the crossroads. Learning our way out.* London, Zed Books.

Fook, J, Ryan, M & Hawkins, L. (2000*) Professional expertise: Practice theory and education for working in uncertainty.* London, Whiting and Birch.

Freire, P. (1972*) Pedagogy of the oppressed.* London, Penguin.

Gambrill, E. (2001) Evaluating the quality of social work education: Options galore. *Journal of Social Work Education,* 37(3), p418-429.

Gibbs, I. & Cigno,. (1986) Reflections from the field: The experience of former CSS and CQSW students. *British Journal of Social Work,* 16(3), p289-309

Giddens, A. (2000) *The third way and its critics.* UK, Polity Press.

Giddens, A. (2001) *Sociology.* Cambridge, Polity Press.

Glaser, B. (1998) *Doing grounded theory: Issues and discussions.* California, Sociology Press.

Gonczi, A. (1993). An integrated competency approach to professional education and assessment: A consideration of arguments for and against. Paper to tertiary education sector, NZQA.

Gonczi, A. (1999) Competency-based learning. A dubious past – an assured future? In. Boud, D. & Garrick, J (eds) *Understanding learning at work.* London, Routledge

Gonczi, A (2000) Review of international trends and developments in competency-based education and training. *In* Gonczi, A (ed) *Competency-based education and training: A world perspective.* Mexico, Limusa.

Gonczi, A. & Hager, P. (1992) *General issues about assessment of competence.* Unpublished. Sydney, University of Technology.

Gould, N. (1996) Introduction: Social work education and the crisis of the professions. *In* Gould, N & Taylor, I (eds) *Reflective learning for social work.* London, Arena.

Harre-Hindmarsh, J. (1992) *Social work oppositions: New graduates' experiences.* Aldershot, Avebury.

Harris, R., Guthrie, H., Hobart, B. & Lundberg, D. (1995) *Competency-based education and training. Between a rock and a whirlpool.* Australia, MacMillan Education.

Healy, L (2001) *International social work: Professional action in an interdependent world.* Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press.

Hearn, J. (1982) The problem(s) of theory and practice in social work and social work education. *Issues in Social Work Education,* 2(2).

Heraud, B. (1981) *Training for uncertainty. A sociological approach to social work education.* London, Routledge and Keegan Paul.

Heslop, L., McIntyre, M., & Ives, G. (2001) Undergraduate student nurses' expectations and their self-reported preparedness for the graduate year role. *Journal of Advanced Nursing,* 36(5).

Hodkinson, P. (1995) Professionalism and competence. *In* Hodkinson, P. & Issitt, M. (eds) *The challenge of competence.* Hodder, London.

Hopkins, J. & Cooper, L. (2000) The competency approach. *In* Cooper, L. & Briggs, L. (eds) *Fieldwork in the human services.* Australia, Allen & Unwin.

Horwath, J. & Thurlow, J. (2004) Preparing students for evidence-based child and family field social work: An experiential learning approach. *Social Work Education,* 23(1), p 7-24.

IASSW (2004) International definition of social work. Available from: http://www.iassw.soton.ac.uk/Generic/DefinitionOfSocialWork.asp?lang=en [Accessed 14 December 2004]

Ife, J. (1997) *Rethinking social work.* Australia, Longman.

Ingamells, A. (1999) *Counting ourselves in or out – Community work and the industry training agenda.* Paper presented at the Joint Conference of the AASW, IFSW, APASWE and AASWWE, Brisbane, Sept 1999.

Jones, A., O'Neill, P. & McArdle, P. (2001) How well prepared are graduates for the role of pre-registration house officer? A comparison of the perceptions of new graduates and educational supervisors. *Medical Education,* 35(6), p578 – 585.

Kadushin, A. (1991) Field education in social work. *In* Schneck, D., Grossman, B. & Glassman, U. (eds) *Field education in social work – Contemporary issues and trends.* Iowa, Kendall Hunt.

Kane, R. & Hopkins, J. (1995) *Forcing round pegs into square boxes: Partnership or hegemony in social services educational reform.* Paper given at the Asia Pacific Regional Social Services Conference.

Kaufman, J., Rothschild, N., Merrill, D., Rathmell, J., Lema, M. & Blumenthal, D. (2001) Graduating resident's perceptions of their preparedness for practice. *The Journal of the American Medical Association,* 286(21), p2666

Kolb, D. (1984) *Experiential learning.* London, Prentice-Hall.

Levett, A. (1970) The crisis in university education for social work. *The New Zealand social worker,* 6(2), p23.

Lishmnan, J. (1998) Personal and professional development. *In* Adams, R., Dominelli, L. & Payne, M. (eds) *Social work themes issues and critical debates.* London, Macmillan.

Lithgow, T, C. (2001) *The effects of job expectations on health outcomes and job satisfaction: The mediating effects of reality shock within the New Zealand police.* Phd Thesis, Massey University.

Lyons, K. (1999) *International social work: Themes and perspectives.* Hants, Ashgate.

Maharey, S. (2001) *Values and politics. Some reflections on the new social democracy in a New Zealand context.* Speech 26/3/2001.
www.executive.govt.nz/speech.cfm?speechralph=33971&S

McDonald, M. (1998) *Social work in Aotearoa New Zealand.* Auckland, Longman.

Mc Nabb, D. (2003) Excerpt of a speech given at the presentation of ANZASW course approval certificates. *Social Work Notice Board.* May 2003.

Marsh, P. & Triseliotis, J. (1996) *Ready to practise? Social workers and probation officers: Their training and first year in work.* Avebury, Aldershot.

Mezirow, J. (1990) *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood – A guide to transformative and emancipatory learning.* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Māori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare. (1986). *Puao-te-ata-tu. The report of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Māori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare.* Wellington, Department of Social Welfare.

Misko, J. (1999) *Competency-based training: Review of research.* NCVER: Adelaide.

Moorhouse, C. (1992*) Registered nurse: The first year of professional practice.* Australia, La Trobe University Press.

Nash, M. (1994) Social work education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. *In* Munford, R. & Nash, M. (eds) *Social work in action.* Palmerston North, Dunmore Press.

Nash, M. (1998) *People, policies and practice.* Phd Thesis, Massey University, New Zealand.

Nash, M. (2003) Social work education: Agencies and academic disciplines. *International Social Work*, 46(1) p23-35.

Nash, M. & Munford, R. (2001) Unresolved struggles: Educating social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Social Work Education*, 20(1), p21.

Newport, C. (2004) *Cook Island women's spirituality and their social service practice.* Master's Thesis, Victoria University, Wellington.

NZASW (1993) *Code of ethics.* New Zealand Association of Social Workers.

NZQA (2004) *Database of graduates from national diploma qualifications since inception.* Unpublished Report, NZQA.

O'Connor, I. & Dalgliesh, L. (1986) Cautionary tales from beginning practitioners: The fate of personal models of social work in beginning practice. *British Journal of Social Work,* 16(4), p431-447.

O'Hagan, K. (1996) Social work competence. An historical perspective. *In* O'Hagan, K. (ed) *Competence in social work practice.* London, Jessica Kingsley.

Parsloe, P. (2001) Looking back on social work education. *Social Work Education,* 20(1), p9-19.

Parsloe, P. & Hill, M. (1978) Supervision and accountability. *In* Parsloe, P. & Stevenson, O. (eds) *Social services: The practitioner's view.* London, HMSO.

Patton, M.Q. (1990) Designing qualitative studies. *Qualitative evaluation and research methods (2nd Edition).* London, Sage.

Patton, M.Q. (2002) *Qualitative research and evaluation methods (3rd Edition).* London, Sage.

Peca, K. (2000) *Positivism in education: Philosophical, research, and organisational assumptions.* Opinion Paper. Eastern New Mexico University, New Mexico.

Pilalis, J. (1986) The integration of theory and practice: A re-examination of a paradoxical expectation. *British Journal of Social Work,* 16, p 79-96.

Pithouse, A. (1987) *Social work: The social organisation of an invisible trade.* Aldershot, Avebury.

Pockett, R. (1987) New graduate social workers: Mutual expectations in employment. *Australian Social Work,* 40(1) p38-45.

Reinharz, S. (1992) *Feminist methods in social research.* New York, Oxford University Press.

Ryan, M., Fook, J., & Hawkins, L. (1995) From beginner to graduate social worker: Preliminary findings of an Australian longitudinal study. *British Journal of Social Work,* 25, p17-35.

Ryan, M., Fook, J., & Hawkins, L. (1994) Becoming a social worker: Educational implications from preliminary findings of a longitudinal study. *Social Work Education,* 13 (2).

Schön, D. (1983) *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action.* New York, Basic Books.

Schön, D. (1987) *Educating the reflective practitioner.* San Francisco, Jossey Bass.

Secker, J. (1993) *From theory to practice in social work.* Ashgate, Vermont.

Sheldon, B. & Mac Donald, G. (1999) *Research and practice in social care: Mind the gap.* CEBSS/School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol.

Slocombe, G. (1993) If field education is so vital why isn't everyone doing it? *Australian Social Work*, 46(2), p43-49.

Smith, N.J. & Sandford, R. (1982) The professionalisation of social workers in Australia: Background to a study. *Contemporary Social Work Education*, 5(2).

Smith, P. (2004) Defensive social work: Square peg – round hole. *Social Work Review*, 16(3), Spring 2004.

Spoonley, P. (2003) The importance of immigration to New Zealand's future. *Massey*, Issue 14, p4.

Statistics New Zealand (2004) Available from: http://www.stats.govt.nz/economy/default.htm [Accessed 14 December 2004].

Straughan, R. & Wilson, J. (1983) *Philosophising about education.* London, Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory methodology: An overview. *In* Denzin, N & Lincoln, Y. (eds) *Handbook of qualitative research.* London, Sage.

Stubbe, D. (2002) Preparation for practice: Child and adolescent psychiatry graduates' assessment of training experiences. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry,* 41(2), p131.

SWRB, 2004. Qualifications policy paper. Available from: http://www.swrb.org.nz/Documents/Qualifications_Policy_Paper.pdf [Accessed 15 December 2004]

Syson, L. & Baginsky, M. (1981) *Learning to practise. A study of practice placements in courses leading to the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work.* London, CCETSW.

Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi the Industry Training Organisation for the Social Services. (2000) *Accreditation and Moderation Action Plan.* Wellington, Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi.

Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi the Industry Training Organisation for the Social Services. (2003) *Guidelines for Providers.* Wellington, Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi.

Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi the Industry Training Organisation for the Social Services. (2004) *Submission to the Social Workers Registration Board.* Wellington, Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi.

Waterhouse, L. (1981) *The relationship between theory and practice in social work training.* London, The Association of Teachers in Social Work Education.

Watson, F., Burrows, H. & Player, C. (2002) *Integrating theory and practice in social work education.* London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Yelloly, M. (1995) Professional competence and higher education. *In* Yelloly, M. & Henkel, M. (eds) *Learning and teaching in social work towards reflective practice.* London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Yin, R. (1994) *Case study research design and methods (2nd edition).* London, Sage

Yin, R. (2003) *Case study research design and methods (3rd edition).* London, Sage.

Younghusband, E. (1978) *Social work in Britain: 1950 – 1975.* London, George Allen and Unwin.

Appendix 1 – Massey University Human Ethics Committee Approval

Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North (HEC: PN)
Old Main Building, Turitea   Fax: 64 6 350 5622   http://www.massey.ac.nz/~muhec

Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair   Miss Karen A Kahukoti, Secretary
Telephone: 64 6 350 5249   Telephone: 64 6 350 5573
Email: S.V.Rumball@massey.ac.nz   Email: K.A.Kahukoti@massey.ac.nz

Massey University

Private Bag 11 222,
Palmerston North,
New Zealand
Telephone: 64 6 356 9099

6 June 2002

Mr Martin Vere-Jones
PG Student
Sociology, Social Policy & Social Work
TURITEA PN381

Dear Martin

Re: HEC: PN Protocol – 02/24
Graduates experience of competency based social work education

Thank you for your email received 5 June 2002 and the amended Information Sheet.

The amendments you have made now meet the requirements of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee and the ethics of your protocol are approved.

Any departure from the approved protocol will require the researcher to return this project to the Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North for further consideration and approval.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents "This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 02/24. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email S.V.Rumball@massey.ac.nz."

Yours sincerely

Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair
Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North

cc   Dr Mary Nash
Dr Michelle Lunn
Sociology, Social Policy & Social Work
TURITEA PN381

Interview Guide

There are a number of themes that I want to investigate via the use of the interview. Each of these themes will have a number of questions attached to it to allow the theme to be examined in depth.

Theme 1: General Information

- o Choose a pseudonym
- o When did you graduate with a National Diploma in SW?
- o What other qualifications/training do you have?
- o What grades did you receive?
- o What other work experience do you have?
- o At what agencies did you do your placements?
- o What is your work experience in the social services?
- o How old are you?
- o What gender are you?
- o Do you have any family?

Please answer the following questions in relation to your first six months of work.

Theme 2: Induction, in-service training and supervision at work.

- o What was the nature of your orientation or induction into your current agency?
  - o How did it impact on your ability to practice?
- o What in-service training have you had in your first 6 months?
- o Thinking about supervision at your current workplace during your first six months:
  - o Did you receive supervision?
  - o Was the supervision internal or external?
  - o How often did supervision occur?
  - o How formal were your sessions?
  - o Were you ever interrupted in the sessions?

Theme 3: readiness to Practice

- o What are the tasks you have been required to perform at your agency?
- o How able have you felt to perform them?
- o How ready for practice did you feel?
- o Reflecting on your first six months of practice:
  - o How confident were you regarding your practice competency?
  - o How happy were you at work?

- o How would you rate yourself with regard to safe practice?
- o How able did you feel to undertake required agency functions?
- o How able were you to maintain your own health and well-being?
- o What were your stress levels like?
  - o What sense of professional identity did you have at the end of your course?
  - o How did your identity as a social worker (your ideas of social work) fit with your practice environment?

Please answer the following questions relating to your education and training for social work/

Theme 4: Effectiveness and satisfaction with your education and training.

- o Please describe the training programme you undertook
- o How relevant was what you learnt for your practice?
- o What was most/least useful?
- o How stressful was the course?
- o How interesting was the course?
- o How enjoyable was the course?
- o Were there any areas that were under/over taught i.e. law, ethics, theories, social policy, psychology etc.
- o How do you feel about whether you received the educational and training requirements for practice?

Theme 5: Competency Education and Training/
- o What is your understanding of competency-based education and training?
- o What did you find most useful about this approach to your learning?
- o What did you find least useful about this approach to your learning?

Theme 6: Integrating Theory and Practice.
- o What theories did you learn about on your course?
- o How useful do you find the theoretical perspectives you learned?
- o What theoretical perspectives do you most frequently use?
- o How do you incorporate thinking about power structures and critique of systems into your work?
- o When you are undertaking practice with a client, what is the process you go through to make decisions about what to do?
- o How able were you to relate to theoretical underpinnings from your training to your practice?
- o What, if any, changes to your thinking occurred in relation to your theorizing about social work situations in your first six months of work?

GRADUATES EXPERIENCE OF COMPETENCY-BASED SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction

Tena koe and thank you for your interest and assistance in this project. This information sheet is designed to provide you with details on this research project and what would be required of you should you choose to participate in it. Information contained herein will be discussed at our first meeting or on the phone and your formal consent to participate in this project will also be requested at that time. If you require further information please contact me on the details below.

Contact Details

My name is Martin Vere-Jones and I am a Masters student at the Massey University school of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work. I can be contacted by phone, email and via work at the listings below.

My contact details are as follows:

Address:	c/o NZITSS	Phone:	Mobile: 025 40 45 40
	PO Box 9322		Work: 04 385 0437
	Marion Square		
	Wellington.	Email:	
martinverejones@yahoo.com			

My supervisors' names and contact details are as follows:
Dr Mary Nash. Senior Lecturer, Massey University, Turitea Campus.
Ph 801 2794 ext 2827.
Dr Michelle Lunn. Lecturer, Massey University, Wellington campus.
Ph 801 2794 ext 6945.

The Research

This research will explore the relatively unknown area of competency-based education in social work. This style of education is very young, having come to the fore mostly within the last decade, and whilst lively debate has arisen regarding its' efficacy, there is a paucity of research on the outcomes.

The objective of this research is to conduct an investigation into the experience of graduates of competency-based social work education programmes in New Zealand and it will focus on the area of readiness for practice.

The kinds of questions I wish to discuss in the interview will be:
- Your work experience in the social services.
- What you found useful in your social work training and what was not so useful.
- How able you were to relate theoretical underpinnings from your training to your practice.
- To what extent you learnt the skills and techniques necessary for your practice.
- How ready for practice you felt.
- What impact your agency orientation had on your readiness to practice.
- Reflections on the first 6 months of your practice with regard to:
  a. How able you felt to undertake required agency functions.
  b. How able you were to maintain your own health and well-being.
  c. How confident you were regarding your practice competency.
  d. How you would rate yourself with regard to safe practice.

The interviews will take approximately 1-2 hours and will be conducted at a place of your choice. If you would like a venue provided, I will be happy to do this. The results of this study will be used primarily for my masters thesis, however, academic articles may also result from it.

Ethical Issues

All research processes will occur in line with the Massey University Human Ethics Committee protocols.

My intention is to audiotape the interview and take notes whilst we are talking. All tapes and notes will be treated confidentially and will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at my place of work. All identifying features of yours will be removed to protect your identity, as will all references to your place of learning. A pseudonym of your choice will be used in the transcript of your interview and in the thesis and any articles coming from it. The tapes may be transcribed by an assistant who will sign a confidentiality agreement. Tapes will then be disposed of according to the preference you have described in the consent form.

Please note that you are under no obligation to take part in this research and until the study is complete you have the following rights:
- *to decline to participate;*
- *to refuse to answer any particular questions;*
- *to withdraw from the study until the research is concluded;*
- *to ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;*
- *to provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;*

- *to be given access to a summary of the findings of the study when it is concluded.*

Thank you for your interest in this project. If you are aware of other people that are suitable for the study that might also be interested, please pass this information on. Alternatively feel free to give out my contact details and ask them to contact me, or gain their permission and contact details for me to contact them.

Warm regards

Martin Vere-Jones

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 02/24. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249,

email S.V.Rumball@massey.ac.nz.

Graduates Experience of Competency-Based Social Work Education

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission. (The information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project).

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I would like the tape destroyed/sent to me after transcription.

I also understand that I have the right to ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed: ....

Name: ....

Date: ....