Building Professional Capital: New Zealand Social Workers and Continuing Education

By Elizabeth Beddoe, BA, MA (Applied) in Social Work

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Deakin University May, 2010
Candidate Declaration

I certify that the thesis entitled:
“Building Professional Capital: New Zealand Social Workers and Continuing Education”

Submitted for the degree of:
Doctor of Philosophy

Is the result of my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.
I also certify that any material in the thesis which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by any university or institution is identified in the text.

Elizabeth Beddoe

Signed

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Date......................................................................................…………….
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Summary

It is a feature of modern professions that they determine requirements for their members’ ongoing professional development. Social work in New Zealand is currently in the midst of major change, as processes of professionalization, including higher entry standards and greater regulation, impact on how the profession seeks to define itself in contemporary New Zealand society. This thesis reports on a qualitative study which has explored the engagement of New Zealand social workers in continuing professional education. The thesis describes how issues of power and influence within organisational and political fields impact on practitioner participation and interrogates these circumstances through a critical lens. Contradictions between the stated social justice focus of social work and its search for greater recognition emerge in the study. These contradictions reflect the complexity of relationships between the many stakeholders within continuing professional education in social work and the tensions inherent in social work as a phenomenon of modern society.

In summary, the key findings are thus:

1. In the professional project of social work, the impact of the organizational context on practitioners, and in particular the impact of managerialist practices is highly significant;
2. There are complex links between perceived status within complex institutional settings and the aspirations of individual practitioners in this study, and this reflects a struggle to build professional capital that is ‘felt’ and expressed as a collective struggle;
3. The struggle to gain resources for CPE is a significant part of a strategy to improve the power and status of social work and as such CPE is not an end in itself. In this strategy, the focus is more on the application of knowledge and the desire to produce new knowledge is weak.

The construct ‘professional capital’ is used in this study as an extension of Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural and social capital. Professional capital is conceptualized as a form of symbolic capital; where prestige, status and influence
in both institutional life and the wider public discourse are important to social workers, because they perceive themselves as lacking. The findings of this study suggest that the profession might employ a more conscious, deliberate strategy of development to ensure access to and engagement in scholarship, research and professional development in order to further its stated aims.
Chapter One: New Zealand Social Work- Change and Challenge

This study examines the perceptions of continuing professional education (CPE) held by practitioners, professional leaders and managers working at the frontline within social work agencies in New Zealand. Social work in New Zealand is currently in the midst of major change, as processes of professionalization, including higher entry standards, education and greater regulation impact on the way in which the profession seeks to define itself in contemporary New Zealand society.

In this study, CPE is a phrase used purposefully, although many other terms to describe it are used interchangeably in practice; for example: continuing professional development, professional development, training and so forth. Each word has significance to the core themes in this study: continuing because this is education that builds on and develops practice from a firm foundation of knowledge and skill gained in pre-service education; professional because of the many meanings attributed to the term and the contextual significance; and education because education is inclusive of a range of pedagogies, whereas training is instrumental, and limited, and development too vague.

The study has explored the nature of continuing education in social work and in particular examined how the profession’s espoused commitment to social justice fares in a field dominated by the largely state-funded organizations in which social work is practiced. The study focus posed questions about the nature of CPE and the commonly offered functionalist approaches which assume that the ‘professions are service or community-oriented occupations applying a systematic body of knowledge to problems that are highly relevant to the central values of society’ (Cervero, 1989, p. 519). Such approaches are grounded in a Parsonian conceptualization of professions (Parsons, 1951). A more critical examination of CPE seeks explanations that assume there are significant issues of power in the nature of professions and their activities.
The participants in the study saw CPE as a major component of the professionalization process and their accounts suggest a complex relationship between the profession, its members and its organizational contexts. A simple binary conceptualization (social workers/ managers) would fail to explain not just the complexity of these relationships, but the manner in which they change over time as new trends and forces impact on understandings. An alternative approach to CPE is to seek instances where issues of power and influence impact on practitioner participation, and interrogate these circumstances through a critical lens. The contradictory elements that emerge in the study reflect both the complexity of relationships between the many stakeholders within CPE in social work and the contradictions inherent within social work itself. These contradictions can be better understood by drawing on Bourdieu for an analytical framework to apply to the significance of educations and credentials as signifiers of social position and power (Bourdieu, 2002) and Habermas, for an understanding of social work and its position in contemporary society (Habermas, 1987). Bourdieu’s work is of particular importance in this study because it ‘transcends the dualism between explanations that attribute social change and social reproduction to certain overarching structures and theorizations that privilege individual subjective intentions or experience’ (Bridge, 2004, p.59).

Commonly held assumptions about CPE include an implicit expectation that professional status and profile are enhanced by CPE (Cervero, 2001) and this is pertinent to the themes that emerge from this current research and are further interrogated in Chapters Two and Three. A second major assumption in the literature is that lifelong learning is vital to professional performance (Nowlen, 1988) and that as such continuing learning is an ethical and professional imperative (Cervero, 1989). As Cervero points out, until the 1960s the focus was on pre-service education, with scant attention paid to the education of those professions during the following 40 years of practice (Cervero, 2001). In social work in New Zealand it is fair to say until recently not much has changed. There has been little research into pre-service education, and even less on the development of practising social workers. This study takes particular cognizance of the organizational and
professional contexts of social work, with explicit consideration of the impact of new public management policy in New Zealand since the 1980s.

The major themes that emerge include the following: the tensions inherent in positioning of the profession in relation to its stated mission of working to achieve social justice; the influence of functionalist approaches to continuing education for professionals, and the impact of current changes on how social workers perceive their continuing education.

The context of this study is New Zealand at a time where social work faces significant change due largely to a government-sponsored professionalization strategy. Professional identity tends to be derived from status, autonomy and closure (Witz, 1992; Burns, 2007), a claim to specialised knowledge; and a defined scope of practice (Freidson 2001). Professionals in social services are able to exert less control as much of their work is determined by the political discourse of welfare and the related programmes of government. It has commonly been assumed that social work is a simple, values-driven helping activity, often ill-defined (Green, 2006). Managerialism (inclusive of features such as rationalism, bureaucracy, authority, audit culture, accountability) and professionalism (knowledge claims, autonomy, independence, and identity) are both significant forces in the field of social work. These forces contribute to tensions about aspects of both professional development and formal education. Neoliberal ideology has challenged traditional understandings of professions. These discourses influence the perceptions of the participants as they describe their experiences.

Theoretical approach to the study

A broad sweep of contemporary critical social theory has underpinned the conceptualization, design and method of this study. At its simplest, the approach is premised on an understanding that such objects of study as social work, professions, higher education and organizations are the product of social forces and trends. The participants in this study are part of complex and overlapping webs of social relationships. Participants consciously recognise their interests as both individuals and members of groups in the practice of CPE activities. Inherent in the
theoretical foundations drawn on in this study is the assumption that power relations between social workers and the other stakeholders within their sphere of action are highly significant in determining their access to resources for continuing education.

Social work shares with other helping professions, (for example, health workers and teachers) a location on the margin between the everyday lives of citizens and the major social systems. Where social work differs perhaps, is that it is a social practice born in modernity, its development propelled forward by the shift in focus within social policy from improvement and social need, to the current obsession with risk (Webb, 2006). In following this shift, social work has become more embedded in the state apparatus in some countries and in commercial health services in others, and while this has bought some gains, it has led to increasing ambiguity about its core mission (Olson, 2007). Contemporary social theory assists us to investigate and analyse the nature of social work in order to better understand practitioners within the current context. In the contemporary literature in both education and social work, scholars have drawn on the work of Bourdieu (Garrett, 2007a, 2007b; Houston, 2002) and Habermas (Lovelock & Powell, 2004; Welton, 2005; Hayes & Houston, 2007) to assist in this interrogation.

In his discussion of the ‘just learning society’, Welton cites Habermas’ conceptualization of two main domains of human experience— the lifeworld and the system (Habermas, 1987 in Welton, 2005). There are ‘four key roles (employee, consumer, client and citizen), which are anchored in the lifeworld and enter into exchange relations with the media of money and power’, (Welton 2005, p.135). In this perspective, the state system ‘reifies everyday life situations (family, education, old age, physical and mental health and well-being) …the ones who do the actual work are experts in lifeworld administration’ (Welton, p.145). Social work, along with other helping professions is situated in a marginal space between these domains. But social workers are not technologists; they are motivated generally by values such as altruism, service and emancipatory zeal. They are also individuals and members of families and participants in civic society, with hopes, worries and dreams; they live in the same everyday world. It is in the aspect of their careers that they are actors in ‘the system’. Social work is thus one of the
groups (including health care workers, adult educators) whose ‘professional practice is tugged between systemic and lifeworld interests’ (Welton, 2005, p.145). Bourdieu (in Bourdieu et al., 1999) recognized the contradictions inherent in social work very clearly. This passage was written following his interview with a municipal social worker in the north of France:

Social workers must fight unceasingly on two fronts: on the one hand, against those they want to help and who are often too demoralized to take in hand their own interest, let alone the interest of the collective; on the other hand, against the administrations and bureaucrats divided and enclosed in separate universes (Bourdieu, 1999, p.190).

In this passage Bourdieu captures a strong element of the day-to-day discourse of social workers that will be seen in Chapter Five as they talk about their experience within large agencies of the welfare state. The sense of being in authentic communication with clients within complex health and social care systems while having to manage their own space within those systems resonates with Bourdieu’s ‘fight on two fronts’. The difficulty for social work is that, unlike other professions, it has an *explicit stated aim* to work for social change. For other professions, their day to day practice, it could be argued, might continue relatively unchanged by changes in social policy, as social change is not their prime purpose (nurses’ work with the physical care of patients, for example). Thus the emancipatory goal is problematized, as in Bourdieu’s analysis social work is an agent of the state ‘shot through with the contradictions of the State’ (Bourdieu, 1999, p.184). The attachment of social work to the modern welfare state, and its normative inclinations to manage citizens’ messy problems, has intertwined its loftier aims with the drive of the state to intervene in the lifeworld – the domestic sphere, of citizens. In seeking to advocate for those most vulnerable its difficulties resonate with Habermas’ critique – ‘the ambivalence of guaranteeing freedom and taking it away has attached to the policies of the welfare state from the start’ (Habermas, 1987, p.361). It is an essential player in the ‘policing of families’ (Donzelot, 1980). In this current era social work is increasingly involved in a broad range of activities beyond child protection (for example in health education and promotion, parenting
‘training’, sexuality education) that further intensifies its normative functions. A fundamental consideration is embedded in the fact that governments control the regulation of professions:

The state licenses professions and helps determine the kind of work practitioners may legitimately do. The point here is not to dispute post-structural insights into the ways in which professionals govern behaviours through patterns of professional discourse. It is simply to point out that their capacity to do so is enhanced by their relationship with the state (Harris, 2001, p.341).

Bourdieu’s conceptual framework of fields, habitus and capital provides the major theoretical framework for this thesis. Social work can be viewed as a group of ‘agents’ occupying a field, in Bourdieu’s terms a ‘structured social space, a field of forces’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.40). In his discussion of the usefulness of Bourdieu’s work for analysis of social work Garrett (2007a, p.230) writes that fields:

are crucial in terms of the evolution of the habitus of those located or positioned there. Second, a field seeks to maintain its autonomy. So, for Bourdieu …maintaining the autonomy of the fields of cultural and scientific production was to become increasingly important, indeed urgent, as the forces of neo-liberalism attempt to penetrate them, undermining this (relative) autonomy.

Furthermore a third feature of fields is the competition between players which takes place within them for the accumulation of different kinds of capital (Garrett, 2007a, p.230). Within the field of social welfare a profession can be seen to be defined by its roles, positions relative to other agents and by its ability to be competitive in possessing various kinds of capital, especially social and cultural capital. Professions legitimated by the state are in a complex position when that state aims to leave many aspects of social and economic life to the logic of the market (Bourdieu, 1999).
The ‘mission’ of social work

It is useful at this juncture to consider the heritage of social work, as this has undoubtedly influenced the participants’ perceptions of their profession and its educational requirements. The foundation on which social work is built can be found in the modernist narrative of structural inequality (McDonald, 2006), and the belief that a more just society can be created through social change that ameliorates, or indeed removes, that inequality (Bartlett, 1958).

Social work has been traditionally located at the intersection of individuals and society as was outlined in Bartlett’s classic definition (Bartlett, 1958.) This definition suggests that social workers must attend to ‘private troubles’ while being ready to respond to the ‘public issues’ of poverty and inequality (Mills, 1970). A recent definition developed by the International Federation of Social Workers continues that tradition of dual focus as follows:

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing 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.

(International Federation of Social Workers, 2000; adopted by the IFSW General Meeting in Montréal, Canada, July 2001).

This grand emancipatory project provides the intellectual and theoretical framework underpinning much social work purpose and practice as a response to structural inequality and the oppression of populations. The social justice mission though, has never been accepted uncritically and historical sources indicate a range of theoretical standpoints from which this key concept has been interrogated. From a class analysis Walkowitz (1999, p.48) describes the early decades of social work as a time when ‘the meaning and achievement of social work were contested and elusive, both among social workers and among their clients and funders. Group,
medical, and industrial social workers each sought to authorize their own work responsibilities and perspectives as the basis for professional recognition that conferred middle-class status’.

There is a rich tradition of radical social work, from the Marxist critique of state social work during the 1970s and 80s (Bailey & Brake, 1975; Galper, 1978; Corrigan, & Leonard, 1978; Jones, 1983) to contemporary critical and structural social work (Mullaly, 1993; 2007; Rossiter, 1996; Pease & Fook, 1999; Allan, Pease & Briskman, 2009; Ferguson & Woodward, 2009). In the United States, Margolin (1997) contributed a Foucauldian analysis of social work in which social work is presented as surveillance of marginalized groups, carried out ‘under the cover of kindness’. In a similar vein, Specht & Courtney’s text ‘Unfaithful Angels’ (1994, p.88) castigated American social workers for their retreat into private practice: ‘social workers should not be the secular priests in the church of individual repair; they should be the caretakers of the conscience of the community’. More recently, Olson (2007, p.46) has argued that within social work, two central discourses or projects, one of social justice and the other of professionalization have historically combined or conflated resulting in the social justice project becoming ‘a powerful instrumental vehicle of the desired ends of the professional project—status and legitimacy’.

Contemporary social work has struggled with its social justice mission in the face of an onslaught of social, political and economic change as it is vulnerable to the vicissitudes of government policy (Jordan, 2000; Duncan, 1995; Harris, 2003; Powell, 2001). It is clear that social workers struggle to pursue their aspirations to social change as they were outlined by early proponents and reaffirmed as a key component of the profession (O’Brien, 2005). In this study it is not argued that the pursuit of social justice is impossible, just difficult given the contradictions inherent in an activity that challenges oppressive systems where those systems are often our employers and, in direct state funded social work, provide the social policy platform on which social work depends.

While the impact of decades of managerialism and increasingly regulated practice have taken their toll, there are calls to reorganize and revitalize the profession in a
new collaboration with marginalized groups, unions, advocacy organizations, community groups, and health trusts to promote social justice issues (Healy & Meagher, 2004; Morley, 2004; O’Brien, 2005; Stepney, 2006; Lonne, 2009; MacKinnon, 2009). In New Zealand O’Brien writes of the centrality of social justice in social work:

Social justice is a fundamental part of social work practice and a fundamental part of professional life and behaviour. It lies at the historical roots and core of social work – without social justice there can be no social work (O’Brien 2005, p.13).

McDonald (2006) provides a critique of this position, arguing that the origins of social work in modernity and its relationship to the grand narratives of social class no longer serve social work’s current reality. First, she asserts, social work’s encounter with people at those intersections of person and environment has for most of the 20th century occurred within institutional and bureaucratic contexts. Secondly, McDonald (2006) argues that social work’s emancipatory project is gravely weakened, by both the neo-liberal ideology of the economic right and the substantial postmodernist contemporary perspective, in which the grand narrative of major social division is replaced by ideas of fragmentation, diversity and, multiple voices. She suggests that ‘contemporary theory not only destabilizes the emancipatory and progressive intent of social work, it also undermines specific sets of practices—particularly those social workers use when engaging in social and community development’ (McDonald, 2006, p.91). O’Brien (2005, pp. 22-23) acknowledges this destabilization but suggests that the notion of critical practice enables social workers to work, albeit differently, through partnerships with service users and advocacy groups for greater justice and social inclusion.

McDonald (2006, pp.206 -7) argues that social work traditional values and ideals are no longer well aligned with the neo-liberalist state in which market freedom is dominant over social rights and individualism is valued more than collectivism. In this scenario, social work’s mode of operating either ‘becomes isomorphic with the values of neo-liberalism’ (p. 209) or, perhaps more optimistically, social workers may take a strategic approach and align themselves more with social development
and global social work (p. 209). In either case, she suggests, the ‘professional project as a mode of organizing and of thinking about practice will increasingly become of limited relevance’ (pp.209-120).

The social work profession in New Zealand

The following section provides a description of the context in which stakeholders experienced CPE and formed their perceptions. It must be noted that as an educator and a member of the inaugural Social Workers Registration Board (2004-6), the author could not assume a position of neutrality. Clearly, personal views on the link between the profession’s education and its identity provided an impetus to pursue this particular study, though it is noted that early work in this study began prior to the passing of key legislation. The rise of registration and the attendant debates and challenges provided a heady atmosphere in which to engage in discussion about continuing education.

New Zealand social work is a small professional group with a low profile, largely defined by a contradiction, that on the one hand, it has its own idealized self-image, and, on the other is plagued by media stereotypes that are not flattering. As such, it shares with social work everywhere in the West the uncomfortable business of wanting to be a proper profession (with the requisite status and respectability) while maintaining a purity of purpose based on ideals of empowerment and social justice (Gillingham, 2007; O'Brien, 2005). It can be argued that social work in New Zealand is evolving within the dynamics of the ‘professionalization project’ (Witz, 1992, p.64); the process in which it seeks greater occupational closure which will be examined further in Chapter Two.

The gendered origins of social work in New Zealand in child welfare in education (Nash, 2009) and in handmaiden roles in health as an expansion of nursing (Mattinson, 1951; Spensley, 1953) favoured a perspective in which personal attributes were of greatest significance, although by the 1960s the young professional association had aspirations for social work to become a university educated profession (Ritchie, 1967). At the beginning of the study social work still
had low levels of formal professional education and was unregulated (Randal, 1997). For many decades there was confusion about the standards for pre-service education. Despite the aspirations of the 1960s (and university preparation having been available since 1949) by the 1990s entrants to the profession still possessed anything ranging from no qualification, a certificate, a degree or a postgraduate qualification in social work (Nash & Munford, 2001). This lack of mandatory training was the subject of much debate in New Zealand (Beddoe & Randal, 1994) and proponents of professionalization have long argued that formal education is the major boundary setter between voluntary welfare work and ‘professional’ social work.

Internationally, (with perhaps the exception of the United States), social workers are commonly defined as ‘bureau professionals’ who exercise professional judgment most frequently within an organizational context, rather than in an autonomous private practice (Pietroni, 1995, p.36). Of course a significant feature of late 20th century society was the extent to which the site of professional practice has shifted from the idealized benevolent autonomy envisaged in classic formulations (Flexner, 1915; Greenwood, 1957) to government, commercial and not-for-profit organizations (Burns, 2007, p.75). Pietroni notes that social workers are expected to make ‘individual judgments of great complexity in conditions of extreme uncertainty within the constraints of a bureaucratic decision-making structure’ (Pietroni, 1995, p.36). It is within this complex and often ambiguous context that social workers plan their careers and consider professional development.

The fact that much of the territory of practice is defined by bureaucratic processes is a major factor in the relative tardiness with which social work has approached greater regulation. Social work has also always emphasized its community origins, leaving it inclined to reject the trappings of professionalism as incompatible with the mission of social justice. Professionalization has often been equated with elitism and therefore problematic in light of the social justice aims of social work. The value of statutory regulation continues to be debated (Healy & Meagher, 2004; O’Brien 2005; McDonald, 2006; Orme & Rennie, 2006).
In considering features of social work in New Zealand, it is necessary to examine the development of a profession where social welfare services were imported within a context of colonizing domination of Western ideas. Social work education has long been a site of struggle in New Zealand (Nash & Munford, 2001), with the level of educational qualification being the focus of much debate. The profession’s education system was modelled on an English system, with early educators recruited from England (Nash, 2003). The ‘trappings’ of professionalism such as formal education, qualifications and other credentials were seen as a barrier to increasing the participation of Maori people in social services. In 1989 the state responded to the fundamental challenges contained in an influential report, Puao-Te-Ata-Tu (Social Welfare, 1986) which was an indictment of the state child protection and youth justice system for its treatment of Maori children and their families. The subsequent introduction of the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act (1989) signalled a journey towards the development of services designed to meet the needs of Maori and Pacific Islands families based on indigenous and cultural practices. Bradley (1996, p.3) states ‘Maori concepts of child welfare and family wellbeing became the norm and were no longer seen as alternative’. Schools of social work responded as well and by the turn of the century many more Maori graduates had entered the profession.

In 2003 the New Zealand government introduced regulation intended to raise standards and provide a greater public accountability for social work in New Zealand. Participants in this study were likely to be registered or taking steps to register during the data collection period. The Social Workers Registration Act (2003) (SWRA) is modelled on similar New Zealand legislation used to regulate other professions that are largely controlled through state employment—for example, teaching and nursing. It differs in being essentially voluntary and only social workers in certain state sector agencies are required to be registered. At 17 March 2010, 2385 social workers are registered of an approximate 6000 eligible (Jan Duke, SWRB, personal communication). Thus this legislation produces considerable state control, rather than the purer form of professional autonomy envisaged by those seeking occupational closure (Witz, 1992).
CPE requirements in New Zealand social work

Since 1989 members of the ANZASW have been required to demonstrate how they maintained quality in their practice in accordance with the Association’s practice standards as part of a five-yearly recertification process. This requirement may have served to remind some practitioners of the need to keep their knowledge and skills current; but it did not provide a strong impetus to maintain high levels of professional development. In particular, it did not require practitioners to work towards a recognised qualification if they were unqualified. Suitable evidence of professional development required for recertification of competency includes: evidence of regular professional supervision, attestations from a supervisor and manager, logged professional development activities over the previous five years and a requirement to state intentions regarding future professional development.

The passing of the SWRA (2003) added impetus to the development of a stronger culture of continuing education in New Zealand. It requires registered social workers to hold a degree and maintain an annual practicing certificate. This led to further discussion and exploration of the issue of CPE and a survey of professional social workers in 2003, carried out for ANZASW, found there was a strong uptake of CPE amongst members (Beddoe & Henrickson 2003, 2005). This 2003 study reported 88.7% of respondents (N= 285) were undertaking some CPE in 2002 and 65.3% of respondents report doing some CPE in 2003, mostly courses related to their field of practice (Beddoe & Henrickson, 2005, p.79). In 2006, the ANZASW released a continuing education policy (ANZASW, 2006, April, pp. 13-14). The association has aligned its policy closely to the SWRB policy, adopting 150 hours CPD over three years as a guideline for minimum expectations and utilizing the Board’s description of types of CPE activities(SWRB 2006).

The study of CPE is both topical and useful within this present period. Greater surveillance by professional bodies foreshadows a shift from CPE as a mere local matter –for consideration by practitioners, their supervisors and managers – to an activity subject to scrutiny and compliance measures. The data were collected during a period of intense discussion of the likely outcomes of greater regulation of
social workers (Orme & Rennie, 2006). It is clearly acknowledged that this inward focus on the profession itself tends to take the attention away from an outwards focused perspective of advocacy and concern with public issues (O'Brien, 2005). This study finds that indeed New Zealand social workers are preoccupied with matters of professional status.

The professional project is international; registration or some form of regulation has been achieved in England and Wales (minimum three year undergraduate degree), Scotland and Ireland, South Africa, Australia (minimum four year degree) and in New Zealand a review of the SWRA recommends protection of title and changing ‘voluntary’ registration to mandatory (Social Workers Registration Board, 2007). The review of the SWRA (2007) makes a number of significant recommendations including systems to promote higher standards of practice across the profession and to raise public awareness of the registration system. Further the review recommends legislative amendments to the SWRA ‘to provide for a comprehensive system of social worker registration through protection of the title ”social worker” and by requiring that functions normally performed by social workers cannot be performed by unregistered persons’ (SWRB 2007, p.13).

**Parameters of the research: Identification of stakeholders**

CPE engages a number of participants from differing positions and therefore different perspectives and expectations (Queeney, 2000). In social work the organizational context is very significant in the positioning of stakeholders and their relative power and influence. Taylor (1997) for example, has argued that further education for the professions has a more permeable boundary than ‘pure’ higher education (degrees by research) and that as such both educators and the professions need to be more aware of the political context and the influence of agency culture:

At best, the external influences of the context can be negotiated and take the form of a partnership between professional education and various agencies or stakeholders. At worst, professional education can become colonized and
become the province of stakeholders whose agendas are dominated by short
term objectives and political considerations (Taylor, 1997, p.11).

A British study identified six key stakeholders in continuing education: individual
practitioners, their managers, their employing agencies, service users, CPE
providers and their staff (Youll & Walker, 1995). After a decade of change in the
manner in which public sector organizations are managed, Bierema and Eraut
(2004, p.56) would add to this list funding agencies and the wider public interest.
In a regulated environment, the professional association (ANZASW) and the
regulatory body (SWRB) must be included. Table 1: Stakeholders in CPE in
social work provides a description of these complex relationships.
### Table 1.1: Stakeholders in CPE in social work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Internal participants</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Ministers&lt;br&gt;Policy advisers&lt;br&gt;Government departments and funding agencies&lt;br&gt;Treaty partnerships in Te Tiriti o Waitangi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The regulator</td>
<td>Professional bodies (regulatory and statutory)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The profession</td>
<td>Professional bodies (voluntary)&lt;br&gt;Governance&lt;br&gt;Executive management&lt;br&gt;Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employing agencies</td>
<td>Policy makers&lt;br&gt;Senior management&lt;br&gt;Supervisors and managers&lt;br&gt;Individual practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE Providers</td>
<td>Governance&lt;br&gt;Management&lt;br&gt;Universities&lt;br&gt;Educators in CPE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Users</td>
<td>Individual service users in all communities&lt;br&gt;Whanau, hapu, iwi (Maori communities)&lt;br&gt;Pasifika communities&lt;br&gt;Migrant communities&lt;br&gt;Consumer and advocacy groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CPE exists at the intersection of these complex groups of stakeholders as indicated in Figure 1.1. A complex map can be drawn in which the aspirations, motivations and perceptions of stakeholders intersect. Within each group both similar and unique discourses may influence decision making. The complexity of the map illustrates the nature of the environment in which choices made by potential participants in CPE. This multiplicity of stakeholders creates difficulties—even if the individual worker was entirely free to choose whatever kind of CPE opportunity they wanted, their actions would be influenced by what CPE providers choose to provide, i.e. the strand of CPE privileged by the university or the professional body. If the choices able to be made for CPE are influenced by organizational policies and constraints then there may be a poor fit between what practitioners want and what they get. In addition, it cannot be assumed that the stakeholder groups are unified entities. Government departments may operate on
corporate management agendas but are still in the end creations of policy and therefore at the mercy of shifting government policies.

Figure 1.1 Stakeholders in CPE

Choice of focus for the study

The selected topic reflected the author’s long interest in social workers’ aspirations to greater professional status and the role of education in this journey, as reflected in publications (Beddoe, 1999, 2005, 2006; Beddoe & Henrickson, 2003, 2005). This academic interest accompanied a personal engagement in national level professional activities within the professional association (1984-1996), in social work education as a head of school (1994-present); and as a member of the Social Workers Registration Board and other bodies (1994-2006, including a term as chair of the Education and Professional Standards committee of the inaugural board). The topic rekindled my interest in the sociology of professions, significant in my MA research and thus brought several interests together. The study focuses
particularly on the experiences of social work practitioners and their managers, professional leaders and supervisors at local level; educators were not included in this study because the aim was to hear the voice of frontline workers on this issue, as professional body officers and educators had many opportunities to express their views and the experience of practitioners was not known. It is noted though that many of those interviewed held multiple roles and therefore their views and experiences are not purely driven by any one particular perspective. For example, several of those interviewed were practitioners and supervisors, as well as holding office in various professional bodies. Many were undertaking postgraduate study in social work or management; they were generally well informed and cognizant of current issues and debates.

The significance of the research

The fieldwork for this study was undertaken during late 2004-5, a unique period in the development of social work in New Zealand. The relationship of social work’s core purpose to its provision of continuing education is not well understood and is under-theorized. Green (2006, p.250) notes the common assumption to portray the profession as simple activity rather than one requiring knowledge and analytical skills. This thesis will contributes a better understanding of the role of CPE in social work and may assist the profession, educators and leaders to consider how continuing education can be both more responsive to the core aims of the profession and the needs and hopes of frontline practitioners. The study contributes to the critical appraisal of CPE in social work through enabling the voices of participants to be heard enabling a fuller picture to emerge, constructed from the experiences of current participants. This thesis has been enlivened by the currency of the issues. Publication from this thesis arises at a point where the registration of social workers in New Zealand is established, albeit still voluntary outside the state sector. It is timely for professional leaders to consider next steps in developing the profession through scholarship and research.
The research questions

An influence on the choice to focus mainly on practitioners and frontline managers was Taylor’s (1997, p.11) assertion that professional education could be ‘colonized’ by narrow and short term considerations of the multiple stakeholders. The research questions focus the study on three areas: the overall views of managers and practitioners, an examination of whether there was an alignment between CPE and the stated mission of the profession and the links to the broader issue of professionalization. In this study CPE is examined from three perspectives: the profession, the organization and the individual career. Three broad sets of questions emerged from the review of the literature undertaken at the beginning of this study:

Perceptions of CPE: What are the perceptions and assumptions held by managers and practitioners in New Zealand social work?

- Do the views of managers differ from those held by practitioners and can these be linked to the corporate goals of the agencies in which they work?
- Do social service agencies (via the managers who may influence decisions about funding and study time) tend to assess value in continuing education activities on the basis of content and focus of study rather than the generic value of education and analytical skills?
- To what extent were they influenced by the managerialist conceptions of learning for professionals, for example, ‘the learning organization’?

The Social Justice Mission: To what extent do individual practitioners in social work in New Zealand align the CPE activities they are engaged in to the espoused aims of social work?

- Do individual practitioners feel they have agency in their professional development choices?
- If they feel these are constrained by organizational factors to what extent might they wish to subvert these?
What conceptualizations of learning exist within practice settings?

Do practitioners link their learning activities directly or indirectly to the profession’s goal of social justice?

**Professionalization:** The impact on social worker perceptions

- What is the impact of legislated regulation of CPE?
- How does the mandate for CPE impact on practitioner choices?
- How does it impact on managers/supervisors choices?

Underpinning all of this of course is the concern to develop a critical appraisal of CPE itself: the constraints and contradictions experienced by the participants in the research can these be theorized as tensions between functionalist/instrumentalist models of CPE and those critical approaches which seek to create personal and social change through learning. Functionalist approaches may assist practitioners to accommodate or adapt to current issues in practice and better achieve organizational outcomes (technical rationality, corporate goals). In contemporary professional education, more critical (reflective and reflexive) approaches seek to explore, analyse and explicitly challenge both theory and practice within the contexts of the organization and its social/political context. A CPE that is critical theory-informed will have more explicit transformative goals (praxis).

**Epistemological and theoretical approaches**

This study has an underlying assumption that a number of social trends (including the neoliberal approach to public welfare, challenges to the modernist project) as described above will be visible in social workers’ experience of the current environment. The neoliberal philosophy is a feature of New Zealand society, influencing every public sphere. The ‘processes of neoliberalization seek to retool, reconfigure, radically change and remake the state, its role and core functions’ Garrett (2009, p.3). Public services organizations have undergone massive changes under the new public management (Duncan, 1995). CPE practices would thus be influenced by technologies of practice, ‘corporate’ strategic aims operating in social services (Reich, 2002). As such, it seems as assumption worthy of
consideration that functionalist and more pragmatic approaches to agency policies on continuing education for the profession might have prevailed (Youll & Walker, 1995; Taylor, 1997). It was never assumed that social work managers would be unquestioning of organizational policy. Most agency managers have come from social work practice careers and early on in the study it was surmised that there might be points of resistance to the control of learning within agency settings.

While the broad focus of this study draws on a critical social theory, described further below, the choice of a qualitative approach to design and methodology enables the assumptions described above to be checked, expanded and challenged by the ideas of practitioners themselves (Charmaz, 2000; 2006). The issue of employing such a methodological approach whilst taking a critical theory stance is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. It is held that the two, while not mutually exclusive, do lead to tensions. A constructivist approach to the research subject enables a researcher to approach her/his study with particular interpretive frames, because ‘we interact with data and create theories about it. But we do not exist in a social vacuum’ (Charmaz, 2006, p. 129). Human subjects, ‘including the social researcher, can never fully gain a totally accurate picture of the social world’ (Houston, 2001, p.851). There is a complex interplay between individuals, social forces and constraints. It assumes that ideology and power relations influence the researcher and the researched. A qualitative approach enables the researcher to examine the research questions through giving voice to participant subjective experience; how meaning is made from experience, what action results and how individuals and groups respond to constraints and opportunities. An interpretative approach is useful in exploring the perceptions of individuals and in ‘investigating the areas of ambiguity and negotiation which are central to our acts and thought processes’ (Cree, 2000, p.15). While the findings of research emanate from the voiced ideas and experiences of participants these are not formed free of ideology. Such meaning-making can also be interrogated with a critical lens, seeking to explore alternative explanations and determining the operation of power, inequality and governmentality of practices within the situation of their accounts. This study has sought to discover what points of resistance and agency occur in the day to day context.
This study is grounded in the epistemological tradition of critical social theory and employs qualitative research methods in the post-positivist paradigm. It is underpinned by a critical realist approach to power and privilege in the field of social welfare. In this field there are various intersecting interests and while meanings are constructed through various lenses, the proximity of social work to government ensures that it is subject to powerful discourses. It is assumed that participants in the study experience a world in which there are many diverse perspectives subject to challenge and revision during the research process. It assumes that power relations are not fixed and immutable but dynamic, and changing with shifting perspectives in practices and understandings. Social workers and their managers in this study are subject to influences but are not passive—they observe, analyse and reflect on their responses to change. They are agents in a competitive field and seeking to define their space. The conceptual framework of Bourdieu is employed to interpret the participant accounts emerging from the study and provide direction to the analysis.

The research design is underpinned by the constructivist grounded theory approach advocated by Charmaz (2000; 2006). Data is systematically gathered and analysed, and theorizing evolves during the process, through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 273. Charmaz (2006, p.10) suggests a shift from a classical grounded theory approach:

Neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives and research practices. My approach explicitly assumes that any theoretical rendering offers an interpretive portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it.

There were three main goals in the research design which incorporated a literature review, six group interviews and a series of 17 individual interviews. The first goal, achieved by the literature review, was to review contemporary understandings of CPE and explore these in relation to the stated approaches to CPE within New
Zealand social work. The second goal was to describe common (and uncommon) perceptions amongst social work practitioners, through an analysis of their views and experiences gained during group interviews. The third goal was to explore these perceptions in greater depth in individual interviews with experienced practitioners, leaders and managers, especially those whose employment role requires them to consider the CPE opportunities provided for practitioners.

**An overview of the organization of the thesis**

This first chapter has established the problematic nature of CPE and outlined the rationale for the research. The focus of Chapter Two is a review of the literature in the field of continuing education. Two strands of the critical evaluation of the practice of CPE emerge: first with brief consideration of the pedagogical issues about the methods and practices of CPE and second, the sociological considerations of the 'mission' of CPE, its espoused purposes and its relationship to adult and continuing education. An examination of recent CPE research in social work finds that there is little that explicitly considers continuing education within the context of the professionalization journey.

Chapter Three develops a conceptual framework for the further exploration of CPE. This framework, grounded in critical theory, is developed to examine the major discourses within continuing education for professionals. The analytical framework is located *before* the presentation of the detailed findings because it emerged during the early stages of analysis and has provided a useful conceptual frame for presenting the data. This theoretical framework developed from a synthesis of a critical perspective on professions, the literature review of CPE and those themes that emerged from the early analysis of the data. It is clear that this departs from the traditional approach but provides a transparent account of the choices made.

The timeframes of data collection (2005) and thesis writing (2005-09) meant the thesis was constructed over a five year period, and it proved impossible to write it up in a vacuum where the NZ social work hadn’t changed, or the researcher hadn’t changed in some perspectives and standpoints because of different experiences in
my other roles. The presentation of the framework between the literature and the method chapter illustrates the iterative nature of my research process. The framework contextualises the field of study at three points where the prevailing discourses impact: the profession, the organization and the individual. The research design and methodological approaches of the study are outlined in Chapter Four including: the rationale for the methods chosen; selection and recruitment of participants; methods utilised in data collection and the approach to analysis.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven describe the participant accounts of their experiences in three sites: the place of CPE within the ‘professional project’ of social work; social work organizations and CPE; and practitioners’ reflections on careers, learning, scholarship and research.

Chapter Eight provides a discussion of the implications of this research for social workers, social work employers and educators and the profession itself. This discussion focuses on theorizing CPE as building professional capital for social work. This chapter also discusses potential way forward to the challenges uncovered and a direction for further research is suggested.
Chapter Two: The Study of Continuing Professional Education

Introduction

It is a feature of modern professions that they determine requirements for members’ ongoing professional development. It can be argued that CPE developed within the project of the traditional professions and has largely served their interests (Jeris & Armacost, 2002; Jeris & Conway, 2003; Tobias, 2003). A survey of the literature reveals marked differences between functionalist and critical understandings of CPE. This review also points to the considerable impact of global trends in developing an understanding of CPE in the changing context of professional practice within managed public and private services (Cunningham, 2004; Jarvis, 1999; 2000). This chapter primarily focuses on a review of the literature and contains four main sections: first, some definitional matters related to CPE as a field of study; second CPE and its contemporary reworking as adjunctive to the contemporary discourse of lifelong learning. The third part considers the organizational context of CPE. A typology of modes of CPE is presented with reference to published research on professional development for social workers. The fourth and final part considers recent CPE research in social work. The literature review was conducted using a broad range of electronic databases across the humanities and social sciences and in the health education literature. Key terms such as continuing education and professional education produced a broad range of literature, much of it descriptive rather than analytical or empirical. The search narrowed in focus when developing the theoretical framework to specifically include Bourdieusian scholars and the study of the sociology of the professions. Little thesis research of direct relevance was located during searches.

Part One: An examination of continuing professional education

CPE has been the subject of study since the early 1980s and has become a 'distinct field of practice' declares (Cervero, 1989, p.154). Much of the literature that refers specifically to CPE is descriptive, or focused on pedagogical considerations
As a field of study CPE draws strongly on scholarship in adult education, continuing education, higher and professional education. The relationship between CPE and ‘adult’ or ‘continuing education’ is in itself complex. Adult and continuing education developed as a progressive aspect of civil society, linked to social movements such as adult literacy (Jarvis, 1996) and the labour movement (Cunningham, 2004 p.227). Arguably, by the beginning of the 21st century, adult education has been captured by the neoliberal agenda and its concomitant economic imperative of ‘lifelong learning’. As such it has become inextricably bound up with the world of work, in business and industry, as well as the professions (Olssen, 2006). This represents a departure from the more transformative aims and ideas underpinning the adult education/literacy movements of the 20th century with their origins in workers’ education and community arts ‘and connotations of adult literacy and liberal adult education’ (Jarvis, 1996,p.8). A major appropriation of learning has increased the control of CPE by the organizations in which professionals are employed. Bierema & Eraut (2004) have noted that as a consequence, there is an increasingly artificial divide between education and development for professionals (CPE) and human resource development (HRD) for everyone else in the workplace. Dirkx, Gilley and Gilley (2004) define the difference as follows: CPE has a major focus on the learning of the individual professional practitioner while HRD more broadly addresses service development learning (and frequently support for change) in organizations. With professionals increasingly part of corporate workplaces much internally organized learning activity can be interchangeably described as CPE or HRD (Bierema & Eraut, 2004).

Some matters of definition are usefully addressed in the following section.

**Defining CPE**

Several terms are used in the CPE literature require some differentiation. The term ‘continuing education’ generally refers to all post-school education. Continuing learning (Houle, 1980) related to paid employment can also be referred to as ‘vocational education ‘and ‘post-qualifying’ education or training. Continuing professional education refers specifically to learning beyond the preparatory curricula of the professions. Queeney describes CPE as:
The education of professional practitioners, regardless of their practice setting, that follows their preparatory curriculum and extends their learning…throughout their careers. Ideally this education enables practitioners to keep abreast of new knowledge, maintain and enhance their competence, progress from beginning to mature practitioners (Queeney 1996, cited in Queeney 2000, p.375).

Battersby provides a slightly different perspective in a 1999 definition:

Continuing professional education refers to the ongoing, structured and unstructured learning and educational opportunities that are pursued by particular professional groups and their members (Battersby, 1999, p.58).

A number of key elements are found in definitions of CPE. These relate to time and focus as shown in Table 2.1 Time and focus of CPE, and these were considered in devising the interview questions.

Table 2.1. Time and focus of CPE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE follows the period of pre-service education undertaken by professionals in which they achieve a first qualification with eligibility for entry to their profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE extends professionals’ learning in and about their work environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE enables professionals to update with new knowledge and new practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPE supports professionals’ progress from beginning to mature practitioners</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPE is ideally ongoing throughout professional careers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE maintains and enhances practitioners’ individual competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE may be structured or unstructured, formal and informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE is generally separated from the main activities of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE is located within the workplace or in an external institution</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Time and place therefore are important aspects of understanding CPE and these ideas were important to consider in designing this study. The two definitions quoted above formed a small starting point for the interviews. This approach
recognises that the nature of the construct ‘professional’ is dynamic and evolving as a feature of social and economic change.

**The impact of regulation on CPE**

Quality assurance legislation has provided impetus to the profession’s development of requirements for ongoing professional education and development. In New Zealand the SWRA (2003) enables the SWRB to set requirements for supervision and professional development linked to eligibility for renewal of an annual practicing certificate. These legislative features lead to employing organizations needing to pay closer attention to the professional development of their staff. While in a purist sense, self-regulation can be seen to shift responsibility for professional renewal to individual workers, in the pragmatic world of health and social care, managers need to intervene to maintain ‘quality’, or at very least meet the compliance standards, dictated by purchase agreements with funders. For example, in New Zealand the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act (2003) has a principal purpose to protect the health and safety of the public by ensuring that health practitioners are fit and competent to practise. This directly leads to health employers’ development of requirements for ongoing professional development. Mandated CPE aims to raise standards during a period of intense competition for resources. Mandating sends a much stronger message about the professional aspirations of social work (Beddoe, 1999; Beddoe & Henrickson, 2003; 2005) and its desire to be recognised as a ‘real’ profession especially where social workers work alongside the medical profession (McMichael, 1998). On one hand, such legislative mandates provide support for resources for continuing education, but on the other, the impetus for and focus of CPE is shifted away from the individual practitioner (and her or his personal professional accountability), towards a more managed approach within organizational settings. This shift renders CPE part of managerial control; education becomes an outcome not a process.

**Interrogating CPE**

It is useful at this point to consider a critical perspective on CPE. In the 1989 edition of the Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education, Cervero describes
three major viewpoints on the professions and the link to learning for professional practice. First, the functionalist viewpoint emphasizes the service orientation of professions and their application of knowledge to the problems of society (Cervero, 1989, p.519). Secondly, the conflict viewpoint ‘asserts that professions are in conflict with other groups in society for power, status and money and as such a part of an oppressive society in which knowledge is controlled’ (Cervero 1989, pp. 518-19). A third approach, based on critical reflection suggests that professionals are aware of critical choices and implications when faced with work-related problems in situ. From this latter viewpoint, ‘the purpose of CPE thus becomes centred on professionals understanding the ethical and political, as well as the technical dimensions of their work’ (Schön, 1991, pp. 518-19). Schön’s work is important because it challenges the notion that professional competence is largely linked to the application of specific technical knowledge (technical rationality) gained primarily through preparatory education. Rather Schön suggests that competent professionals think, reflect, experiment and act within practice situations, thus constructing a more fluid notion of competence. Schön’s contribution has provided a focus on the processes of ongoing learning and influenced much in ongoing education for professionals, in particular the growth of reflection and critical reflection (Fook, 2004; Redmond, 2004; White, Fook, & Gardner, 2006).

The fourth critique of CPE comes from the proponents of a more radical approach to education and in particular those who discern the capture of professional learning by managerial agendas under the neoliberal regime. In this study, CPE is interrogated with regard to the issues of power and status inherent in the professional project of social work. A positive and hopeful perspective on CPE is maintained, because while it may be a tool of the professional project and therefore in Tobias’ terms not ‘innocent’, CPE can be a powerful medium for the profession to maintain its emancipatory vision (Jaris & Armacost, 2002). Through a critical social theory lens, the development of social work is not seen as linear and the interpretations based on simple binaries. Rather, a deeper exploration of the profession, its writings, and the talk of its practitioners, exposes contradictions. CPE, like social work, is strongly associated with a grand vision, in this case that of lifelong learning for all citizens and yet for the study of professions this is problematic. Within this study the purpose is not to critique CPE as a set of
pedagogical practices per se, but to critically interrogate how it is perceived and managed by one profession in a complex environment. Jeris and Armacost (2002) for example, asked the question of CPE: is it ‘Doing good or doing well?’, and by implication, doing well for whom?

A review of the literature elucidates a prevailing theme that CPE must change if it is to continue to be effective. Cervero (2001) noted that a functionalist approach is still reasonably dominant despite the critique. Proponents of change have taken a rhetorical approach to this urging critical examination of the nature and purpose of CPE if it is to remain relevant. Bickham (1998, p.73) for example argues that:

Continuing professional education must be more integrated with practice if it is to be effective. In addition, we must break down the epistemological barriers separating knowledge construction and theory from actual professional practice.

In a similar vein, Daley and Mott (2000, p.81) point to the ‘real world’ of professional practice as an important site for CPE to examine:

Education is only one aspect of the improvement of professional practice…the shift to a more integral and practice centred role for CPE will propel the CPE provider into other areas of practice development…. If we frame this issue as understanding what business we are in, we come to realize that our business is more than planning workshops…rather our business should be….to foster [CPE] programs that ultimately promote the ability to work in the uncertain, confusing and dynamic world of professional practice

These authors point to an emerging consideration of the importance of strong links between the practice environment and learning in CPE. This is not necessarily about where CPE occurs in a physical sense but where it applies itself in the space between the site of professional practice and sites of learning. Both Bickham and Daley have emphasized the need for CPE to focus on a more transformative approach, taking cognizance of the complexity of current practice. Jeeawody
claims that a ‘post-technocratic model’ of CPE is needed in mental health practice, such a model utilizing ‘systematic reflection, critical thinking and action research’ (Jeeawody, 2003, p. 124). Jeeawody proposes a more emancipatory form of further education demanding ‘some method of dialogue between practitioners and other interested spectators’ (Jeeawody p.129). On a similar theme, Lifvendahl (1998, p.11) is critical of the nature of CPE research, arguing that much of it is dominated by functionalist approaches and notes the absence of research that places centrally the critical analysis of ‘ethical or foundational reasons for the existence of CPE’.

There is room for territorial dispute here as the debate about the so called ‘theory-practice gap’ suggests a dichotomy— theory belongs to academe, and practice to practitioners. Academics may seek to promote approaches to continuing education that support reflection, critique and critical inquiry. The context is the world external to the social worker’s employing agency and thus distance is created between the educational institution and the site of practice. This distance may be unhelpful and limiting and does not align with practitioners’ accounts of their learning, but is material as these sites are different; they privilege and promote different ideas. Dirkx, et al. (2004, p.38) expresses this clearly:

Practitioner stories suggest that lifelong learning and change in continuing professional development reflect an ongoing struggle to keep the rational deeply connected with the richly felt experience of practice. Despite prevailing models of cognitive and intellectual development, which seem to honor abstract and independent thought, development of practical expertise and wisdom involves a refusal to ‘sever cognition from its application’(Labouvie-Vief, 1994, p. 3)....From this perspective, the knowledge we use to inform our practices evolves in an ongoing way from dialectical relationships that involve the relevant technical or scientific knowledge, the sociocultural context of practice, and the practitioner’s self.

Practitioners and their managers may wish to promote ‘training’ approaches to real workplace problems. These approaches are not always mutually exclusive or contradictory. In part three of this chapter it is proposed that seeing these approaches on a continuum is far more useful than seeing them as antithetical.
Where technical rationality dominates, much of what passes for CPE is a box of new technical tricks, designed to focus the professional gaze on problems and actions, e.g. performance. Often the language reflects this problem focus, with catch phrases such as ‘continuous improvement’ and ‘corrective action’ which seems to imply that professional practice is almost inevitably tainted by mistakes and practitioners in need of correction. This ‘education’ is ‘narrowly defined, within the narrow realm of information, skills, techniques and strategies that one might consider for use in his or her practice setting’ (Dirkx et al., 2004, p.37) and furthermore suggests that this dominance of technical rationality is not intentional or malevolent, but rather coming from the functionalist way of seeing the world which has dominated the professional view:

The dominance of the functionalist viewpoint in CPE is neither the result of its superiority in framing and fostering lifelong learning for the masses nor the product of a politically motivated, dark conspiracy of the powerful elite. Rather, it implicitly reflects a model of the mind - a cultural ethos- deeply embedded for centuries within Western civilization (Dirkx et al., 2004, p.37).

Because functionalist accounts of CPE tend to dominate, Dirkx et al. (2004, p.36) argue that ‘learning and change are conceptualized largely as cognitive, decontextualized, individualistic, and solitary processes’. Of relevance to this study is the extent such functionalist accounts have dominated the expectations of continuing education amongst social workers. It may be represented in debates about where learning activity should be located, on site or away from the workplace. This in turn is influenced by common confusion about whether continuing education is an individual responsibility – part of a professional’s obligation to remain competent – or a matter of ‘human resource’ to be managed.

The nature of the location of much professional work has changed as well. Queeney (2000) asserts that a major factor impacting on professionals is the reduction in the solo practitioner mode as professionals move into group and agency settings. For professionals such as general medical practitioners, this sees a shift to greater involvement in collectives where while they maintain ‘private practice’, they and their patients benefit from pooling resources, including CPE
activities. Accordingly, 'practice based CPE' is of greater importance than the more traditional updating of knowledge and skill (Queeney, 2000, pp.378-9). The shift in focus necessitates more complex relationships between professionals, professional systems, organizations, service users and the many regulating bodies. Queeney (2000, p.377) suggests that the traditional functionalist and technical views of competence are being overtaken by perspectives that focus more on the context of professionals:

Professionals must have the performance ability to function competently within a practice context that includes the work setting, other professionals with whom they must cooperate and collaborate, and relevant cultural and individual conditions affecting daily practice

This greater emphasis on the work setting, and the attendant need to focus on groups of workers, rather than individual autonomous practitioners, is of significance in this study as the social workers’ and their managers’ views on and experiences of CPE are sought.

**Part Two: Approaches to CPE and the discourse of lifelong learning**

Major cultural, social and political changes impact on all professions, their standing and power. These issues are tied inextricably into the nature of CPE, its relationship to employment and the differing perspectives of the stakeholders described in Chapter One. The professions are social, political and economic constructions hugely influenced by changes in the world. Professions are subject to the major trends of the era: globalization; the commodification of knowledge; the growth of international markets for education; the growth of consumer power, and the nature of occupational demarcation within an increasingly specialized workforce (Jarvis, 1996).

The late 1990s saw a greater interest in the critical review of CPE; posing some crucial questions about its purpose and the challenges it would face in the new
millennium (Jarvis 1996, 1999; Taylor, 1997; Daley, 2000; Queeney 2000; Cervero, 2001). This period of rather introspective review examines the forces that have shaped CPE. In 1980 Houle predicted that continuing education would grow to rival pre-service education as a crucial point in the history of CPE (Houle, 1980, p.302). CPE is now undoubtedly a large enterprise with multiple providers, many outside the traditional university or professional association setting. Cervero argued that CPE was in transition as professions themselves were in transition and were experimenting with different forms (Cervero, 2001, pp.17-18). Cervero identifies several further factors impacting on CPE at the turn of the century: notably the explosion of research based knowledge and the uptake of distance learning enabled by advances in information and communication technology. In addition, he notes the increasing corporatization of CPE as a product that produces income for both universities and professional associations and a tendency towards the use of CPE to regulate professional practice (Cervero, 2001, p.23). In the case of New Zealand social work, this is particularly apposite, given the major changes taking place in the work environment and within the profession itself. In New Zealand in 2007, the professional association started a programme of continuing professional development in which courses are directly offered to its members. This is linked to compliance requirements for competency and certification.

**Knowledge as a commodity: credentials and the consumer society**

Knowledge has become a marketable commodity in a global economy. Social and geographic mobility and information technology have led to an education ‘industry’ in which students and educational institutions can be much more easily aligned in time and place (Jarvis, 1996, p.239). Continuing education is part of this movement – it is already ‘big business’ (Cervero, 2001) and in the post-Fordist economy can be seen in both mass markets (business and information technology degrees) and in niche markets (intensely specialized small programmes, professional doctorates). In a neoliberal conceptualization, learners are now ‘consumers’ who can choose from a menu of education options both large and often highly flexible, or small and exclusive. Universities are increasingly seeking to increase postgraduate enrolments and commercial research in order to address gaps between state funding levels and the costs of provision, and CPE is a source
of new income and research. An immediate impact of this is the extent to which universities perceive the profession, their institutes and regulatory bodies amongst their stakeholders.

When participants in CPE are viewed and perceive themselves as consumers, there is a change in focus. Consumers look for the certification of learning (some formal credit bearing status for learning activities) and thus some may make choices based on whether there will be some formal validation of their learning within the workplace (Jarvis, 1996). As knowledgeable consumers they want to know about credits, levels and pathways, and will 'shop around' for the 'product' that matches best their aspirations and resources. Others may make decisions based on access, delivery mode and style. In the 'consumer culture' of adult education, Field (1994) suggests there are a number of factors for consideration including increasing numbers of adults in Western society able to exercise choice in terms of spending power and time. Field suggests educational activities have become consumer goods in themselves linked to notions of 'personal' as well as professional development in which individuals gain satisfaction and enjoyment (Field, 1994 p.3). Field cautions though that 'consumption is not a simple given; it may be an active, generative process as well as a passive reproductive one' (Field, p.10), and certainly the 'consumers' of CPE are generally already well-educated and thus tend to make choices based along a continuum between pragmatic matters and desires. Edwards (1994) argues that when students are re-positioned as 'consumers', they make new demands on providers – when they become ‘learners’ changes follow in control and content of curricula. Learners make choices based on desire, including an assessment of the worth and marketability of the post education person. This latter point is important in terms of social workers' perceptions of what CPE could and should mean for them.

Knowledge as an element of cultural capital: credentials and professions

The conceptual constructs provided by Bourdieu are employed to examine the role of CPE, in reviewing the pertinent literature and ultimately in the examination of the data gained in the study. In particular, Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘field’ and
‘capital’ are employed to aid our understanding of the role of post qualifying education in the discourse of social work. In this study CPE is examined in three sites—the profession, the organizational context and the individual. The construction of ideas and understandings held by individuals about CPE occurs within the social environment in which they practice. The profession and social services organization and the broader social welfare system can be conceptualised as a field in the Bordieusian sense. Individuals, their colleagues, supervisors and managers create the framework of CPE within complex environment and in hierarchical organizations. For Bourdieu these sites contain complex sets of power relations in which strategies are employed by participants to gain traction in meeting their aims. Houston (2002, p.155) states:

A central pillar of [Bourdieu’s] theoretical edifice relates to the question of how social systems reproduce hierarchy and domination in culture without mass opposition arising. The answer to this question can be found in his view that at the heart of culture lie vested interests and struggles to attain symbolic and material advantage over others. Inherent within all forms of action, then, is power and a drive to attain the upper hand through sometimes deliberate, but more often habitual or tacit strategizing.

In employing Bourdieu’s ideas in this study the broad territory of social work, health and social services is conceptualised as a field, which is ‘not founded on consensus. Rather, Bourdieu presents the field as a battleground where interests, power and prestige all operate’ (Houston, 2002, p.158). Social workers undertake further education in order to mark Bourdieu’s ‘distinctive social space’, and; in this way seeking to signal ‘social position and worth’ in the profession (cited in Field, 1994, p.5). Here Field refers to the Bordieusian concept of ‘field’ – ‘a structured social space, a field of forces’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.40). The field is the ‘crucial mediating wherein external factors – changing circumstances – are brought to bear upon individual practice and institutions’ (Jenkins, 1992, p. 86).

For Bourdieu (1986, pp. 245-6) the gaining of academic qualifications is a feature of building cultural capital:
Academically sanctioned by legally guaranteed qualifications, formally independent of the person of their bearer. With the academic qualification, a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture, social alchemy produces a form of cultural capital which has a relative autonomy vis-à-vis its bearer and even vis-a-vis the cultural capital he effectively possesses at a given moment in time. It institutes cultural capital by collective magic bullet.

How might changes in the nature of continuing education impact on social workers as they participate in CPE; as workers, professionals and individuals within a career? Social workers have aspirations and expectations as individuals; these may be shaped by public and professional discourse. Jarvis argues that one of the consequences of the greater demarcation of the workforce in contemporary society is the need for credentials and the concomitant professional recognition of being ‘up to date’ (Jarvis, 1996). The higher qualification is pragmatically valued for what it symbolizes, as the passage from Bourdieu above suggests, rather than what it entails. Similarly, as continuing education becomes more closely aligned to paid work, many higher degrees are now available for part-time enrolment and are linked back to the work context through practical work-based components (Jarvis 1996, p.240). While this is the business of universities and professional associations, it is also pushing learning into the domestic sphere, as this learning is conceptualised as having value for individuals, the organization (employer) and the profession and the worker contributes her share of the ‘cost’ of this by contributing time in after work hours. Thus, further qualifications are the ‘currency’ for the individual in the job market. This process of credentialing can exert some considerable pressure on individuals as they consider their value in the ‘marketplace’ and is of significance for social workers as they strive for voice in multidisciplinary workplaces. The explicit recognition of the socioeconomic value of participating in CPE emerges in this study as a significant theme. Social workers ‘participation in higher education may be valued for its capital value as well as, or even more than, for the personal, intellectual journey of undertaking study. These links between consumption and advancement in personal career and status issues for the profession of social work are explored further in Chapter Three.
Part Three: The organizational context and claims of CPE

The proponents of CPE claim it assists professional practitioners to maintain practice competence through the undertaking of learning activities but in its traditional forms it has been largely delivered by traditional didactic information based pedagogies. This section first provides a brief examination of the influence of organizational learning approaches; then an overview of currently offered types of CPE. It is noted that the literature is largely from UK, Australia and the US.

While there are numerous professional development activities, they can be categorized across three broad themes which emerge from examination of the literature: first, the provision of activities carried out with the aim of improving practice through increased technical competence or new skill (Nowlen, 1988; Queeney, 2000). These approaches are strongly grounded in ideas about organizational learning, the object of employer and managerial activity and may therefore be expected to be in the forefront of the perceptions of professional leaders and managers in social work. The second and third categories include the discovery, construction, application and utilisation of new knowledge in practice (Eraut, 1985, Schön, 1991), and the adoption of reflection in and on practice via supervision and structured reflective processes (Brookfield, 1987; Schön, 1991; Fook, 2004; White et al., 2006). While organizational learning is very context driven and therefore the focus of greatest attention by managers, the latter two might be expected to be of interest to professional leaders, supervisors and practitioners. The following section provides an overview of these approaches and presents a typology which will be returned to in Chapters Six and Seven.

Organizational learning approaches

Social work organizations tend, like most complex organisations, to locate responsibility for ongoing learning within supervisory and managerial positions, although the policy that guides this may be remote from ‘the frontline’. Such practice is not new; rather just intensified as since the 1980s there has been a strong trend towards active ‘managing’ of employee learning. Training for social services management has exposed health and social service managers to the field of
organizational learning. In previous decades social workers’ ongoing learning would perhaps have been located more in the personal sphere - perhaps supported by the employer through assistance with fees and time off, but not planned in the contemporary way that links individual learning to organizational goals. Social workers who commenced practice in the 1970s, for example, will mention the many one-day and weekend workshops they attended, usually promoting some new clinical skill or approach to work with particular client groups. Attendance at these was by choice and there was little pressure.

By the turn of the century learning was promoted as a responsibility of the corporate employer. A strong workforce, able to be responsive to rapid environmental change was seen as a product of a ‘culture of learning’. In the health and social care arena, the notion of the learning organization gained the attention of the new breed of managers. It will be shown in Chapter Six that it has considerable influence on the field. This concept emerged in the 1980s (Garratt, 1986) and its rise in prominence has generally been attributed to Senge (1990) who is credited with the popularisation of the concept (Reich, 2002). Senge's prescription for a learning organization required five core disciplines: self-mastery, shared vision, team learning, mental models and systems thinking. The management of knowledge in the workplace is a departure from the traditional ‘in-service’ and tends to be a more reactive, driven by a risk-averse culture and bureaucratic sensitivity to the demand for accountability for practice failures. This feature will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Six.

Recent research findings suggest that much current learning and development policy utilises ‘technologies of training’ linked to new public management practices including learning contracts or professional development plans and strong managerial control over learning opportunities (Reich, 2002). Much training within social work may be grounded in the ‘diagnostic and prescriptive discourse of managerial experts in their quest for the perfectly controlled workplace’ (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994, p.147).
A typology of modes of professional learning activities in social work

A review of the literature reveals seven broad categories of activity broadly encompassed by continuing education: compliance, performance, knowledge updates, evidence-led practice development, reflective practice, practitioner research and scholarship and critical and structural social work. Tables 2.2. and 2.3 set out these modes with their main features.

The first four modes of professional learning activities can be categorized as fitting a functionalist paradigm, serving a clear purpose within the organizational context of social work, meeting requirements to maintain knowledge, update procedures and utilize research findings. These modes are organizationally generated and more likely to be policy driven and system focussed.

The second group may be described as more change-oriented in character as they aim to transform practice at a more fundamental level; either through reflection on self and environment in practice or through ‘unsettling assumptions’ in critical reflective practice (Redmond, 2004; Fook & Gardner, 2007), or through research and the construction of new knowledge or professional practice. These activities also show variation in the extent to which social work organizations might typically provide support for practitioner activity in these areas, or where they are largely generated by individual aspirations.
Table 2.2: Modes and foci of CPE: Functionalist Organization Focused

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODES OF CPE</th>
<th>FOCUS OF CPE</th>
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| Compliance (organization generated, generally compulsory) Nowlen (1988) | • Learning to perform specific new tasks  
• Learning to implement policy change in practice  
• Policy "roll-outs"  
• Service development |
| Performance (organization generated) Nowlen (1988) | • Learning to solve problems defined within work context  
• Applying new information /procedures  
• Audit and evaluation activities |
| Knowledge Updates (organization generated, increasingly delivered via Intranet and so uptake more tenuous ) Nowlen (1988) | • Learning about research evidence for new practice  
• Learning about new knowledge from other disciplines material to social work with clients  
• Learning about new theoretical developments |
| Evidence –based practice (Government agency and organization led, policy driven, minor input from practitioners, applied to practice ) Munro (1998) | • Using such new information to review and change practice  
• Synthesizing and utilizing research findings  
• Testing and evaluating new information |
Table 2.3: Modes and foci of CPE: Change Oriented Social Worker Centred

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODES OF CPE</th>
<th>FOCUS OF CPE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflective practice</td>
<td>• Learning to be a reflective practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Organization can generate and support but requires social worker commitment and input)</td>
<td>• Learning to deconstruct and reconstruct expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fook (1996, 2003, 2004)</td>
<td>• Learning to utilize action research to solve problems or enhance practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schön (1983)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redmond (2004)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Fook &amp; Gardner (2006)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice-led Research / and scholarship</td>
<td>• Practitioner research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Organization can support but requires considerable individual investment and commitment)</td>
<td>• Conducting effective research including focused data mining of available data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youll &amp; Walker (1995)</td>
<td>• Learning to theorize from analysis of research data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Dissemination of findings and ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Application of knowledge to practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical and Structural Social Work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Organization unlikely to support unless has a grassroots activist purpose. Requires considerable personal commitment)</td>
<td>• Critical appraisal of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mullaly (1993)</td>
<td>• Critical inquiry in practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pease &amp; Fook (1999)</td>
<td>• Structural analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Radical action research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Organizationally oriented activities in CPE

The ‘compliance mode’ includes such things as induction training for new graduates, or those new to a specialist field of practice; service development; training workers in a new method or approach; and genuine compliance training: health and safety; cultural safety; family violence; suicide risk screening tools and so forth. ‘Performance’ may also include service development, because an organization may take on a new approach or use new technologies to solve
problems or reduce risk. Nowlen (1988, p.23) provided this description of a typical short course:

It is dominated by the informational update……a single instructor lectures and lectures and lectures fairly large groups of business and professional people, who sit for long hours in an audiovisual twilight, making never-to-be read notes at rows of narrow tables covered with green baize and appointed with fat binders and sweating pitchers of iced water.

This model developed from what was convenient (for busy professionals) and what was available (from academics busy with research). It is to a large extent located in the functionalist tradition. Research and scholarship have produced new knowledge through the application of scientific technique (in academe). This knowledge is then delivered to professional practitioners as new or complementary to the knowledge they gained in their pre-service education (in the workplace). There is a strong sense that the pace of change and growth of new knowledge means that CPE needs to consist of easily consumable ‘bites’ of information to enable stressed practitioners to ‘keep up’. In the reflexive society there is ‘no excuse’ for falling behind as for many professions the latest research can be delivered almost instantly to the actual site of practice via technology. Universities may be pressured to reduce face to face teaching (and learning) and replace it with web-based learning where students learn at their work station.

‘Compliance’ and ‘performance’ modes are organizationally generated and generally applied to all staff in categories. These modes usually represent the organization’s minimum expectations of staff development. Inherent in these forms is the assumption that there is an irrefutable, constantly improving knowledge underpinning professional expertise. Within the organizational contexts of social work, it is the organization that determines what is the knowledge to be utilized by the practitioner, thus the organization is the body that offers up the ‘the mantle of unconditional expert’ (Redmond, 2004,p.144), rather than the profession itself. The organization, in the form of a service unit responsible for training, decides what knowledge is to be offered to social workers, packages it and delivers it.
Induction training and much of the training often categorized as service development, is generally delivered ‘in-house’, and it is often described in the jargon of the managerialist era. Research conducted by Smith, Cohen-Callow et al. (2006, p.474) found that social workers attributed lower perceived value to in-service training as it ‘focused on the needs of the organization and not their own personal learning needs’. This was consistent with previous studies as noted by Furze & Pearcey (1999). In New Zealand, in larger corporate social work settings in-service training is ‘rolled out’ via ‘road shows’ (to use the popular jargon of corporate training) as a component of those mechanisms designed to deliver new policy initiatives from the corporate heart to the various sites and domains of the organization. Increasingly an ‘intranet’ is utilized to ensure currency of information. If the policy environment is volatile and change is constant, then ‘training’ needs to be able to be able to deliver a rapid response. Eraut (2002, p.64) points to the use of training as part of change management strategies within corporate environments in health and social care:

Changes preceded by an artillery barrage to soften people up, and accompanied by minimal or misdirected support for learning, just make practitioners more resistant the next time they are challenged.

In the author’s own experience, social workers are very critical of attempts to dress policy change up as training. An increasingly tertiary-qualified workforce does ‘know the difference’ (as will be demonstrated in Chapter Six). Reich’s Australian study found that policy documents in corporate child protection organizations in Australia revealed strong links between the popularity of the idealized ‘learning organization’ and the implementation of neo-liberal reforms in the public sector (Reich, 2002). This is compliance training, rather than the provision of continuing education. An example from an anonymous policy document, quoted by Reich (2002, p.225) illustrates this argument:

Training, education and development is aligned with strategic and workforce planning to ensure individuals and work units proactively respond to a changing work environment
As a consequence, there may be cynicism about in-house training amongst professional social workers, unless it can be seen to solve real problems and provide some individual sense of achievement and mastery. An over-reliance on slick delivery of pre-packaged material, however well done, may risk rejection as corporate puffery, bereft of any critical or intellectual engagement, by an increasing well educated workforce. Unfortunately it is often at this compliance level that most investment in training occurs in the social services. In-house training therefore is provided with inadequate time to practice new skills, discuss and explore new information and little opportunity for critical reflection (Fook, 2004; Postle, Edwards, Moon, Rumsey and Thomas, 2002; Frost, 2001).

Beyond these rather utilitarian approaches is a form of continuing education that is more focused – the update of practice and policy knowledge through research diffusion and the application of new theoretical understandings to practice. Knowledge updates may be organizationally generated or may include some individual investment. Professionals in health and social care may participate in journal clubs, seminars and research presentations. Rarely is the information or research produced locally, rather it is supplied. Kincheloe and McLaren (1994, p.150) argue that managerial perspectives characterise workers ‘as rationalistic problem solvers who apply scientifically tested procedures to workplace situations …in the modernist workplace hierarchy, managers start with research provided by experts and train workers in accordance with such findings’. It is arguable that this is so in the contemporary social services sector, and certainly in health care. The engagement of social work practitioners in research activity (both via utilization and production) has been a source of concern over the last decade. It has been noted that social workers concentrate on the work at the ‘front line’ without much attention to the development of an empirical basis for their practice and in particular, to utilizing or developing a body of research on practice outcomes (Munro, 1998).

In New Zealand it is doubtful that the social service workforce is currently sufficiently capable to take on a more active role in utilization of research, let alone produce new knowledge (Beddoe, 2007). Research confidence is low and there are
not large numbers of practitioners who hold a research degree. An examination of
the ANZASW membership in 2003 found a wide disparity in qualifications held by
members: 14.0% have no tertiary qualification, 9.7% have a certificate, 22.7% have
a diploma, 22.7% have a bachelor’s degree, 6.5% have a postgraduate diploma,
7.0% have a master’s degree and 1.1% has a doctorate (Cited in Beddoe &
Henrickson, 2003, pp. 15-16). A more recent unpublished paper reported that only
3% of education funding spent on social work was on postgraduate study, based on
Tertiary Education Commission figures (Aotearoa NZ Associations of Social Work
Educators, unpublished draft 2008).

Over the last decade social work academics have debated how far research-related
activities should become the core business of practice (Webb, 2001, 2002; Sheldon,
2001). Webb (2001 p. 570), for example, is sceptical about the term evidence-
based practice, referring to it as ‘the emerging panacea’, with its application to
social work practice, because it ‘proposes a particular deterministic version of
rationality which is unsatisfactory’ and furthermore ‘its positivistic methods and
determinate judgement entraps social workers within a mechanistic form of
technical rationality’. Sheldon, in response, argues that:

Science grew as a process of checking and interrogating deeply the given
cognitions or factors in human belief. We needed science in this sense to
break from some conventions, many of them dangerous predispositions.
Things that serve us well in ‘everyday living…. let us down badly and
occasionally very dangerously when a particular degree of acuity of judgment
is required’ (Sheldon, 2001, p.803).

The impact of the evidence based-practice concept will be returned to in the
discussion of the implications of this study, especially in Chapter Seven. While
social workers’ research activity may be problematic, (McCrae, Murray, Huxley, &
Evans 2005), their awareness of the trend toward evidence-based practice is
considerable, particularly in the health setting. Social work practice requires a spirit
of inquiry as a minimum feature of ‘research- mindedness’, if it is to be reflexive
and able to contribute new ideas to apply to social problems.
**Change oriented activities in CPE**

In the next mode of CPE, Reflective practice, the organization can support continuing education, but strong engagement to completion may require worker (and manager) commitment and input (Fook, 2004). Reflective practice and its more overtly interrogative cousin, critical reflection, are popular concepts in the social work literature, (Lynch, 2006). In the social work literature reflection often holds a key place in the exposition of professional development, to a large extent dominated by professional supervision as a mechanism for structuring reflection, (Yelloly & Henkel, 1995; Morrison, 1997; Ruch, 2002; Redmond, 2004; White et al. 2006). This process of reflection within professional practice can be seen as the ability and opportunity to micro-critique practices and processes within the day to day activities of the profession. For others what is required is Critical Social Work, the application of critical theory to social work. Webb and Gray (2009) employ Critical social work (with a capital ‘C’) to delineate a method of inquiry that seeks to understand ‘how dominant relations of power operate through and across systems of discourse’, (Webb & Gray, 2009. pp. 78). In Critical analysis one undertakes macro-critique of the practice itself e.g. being able to stand back and look critically at ones' own profession, being aware of issues of discrimination, oppression within practice that aims to work for social justice, (Fook, 2003; Lovelock & Powell, 2004; White et al., 2006).

To be more than ‘navel gazing’, reflective approaches need to be change oriented and put all practices up for close scrutiny. Baldwin (2004, pp.47-9) identifies four threats to critical reflection in social work contexts: the influence of managerialism, the neoliberal agenda for ‘what works’, rational policy implementation focused on processes, and failures of critical reflection. Truly transformative learning requires, at very least, that learners are supported to take off their expert mantle, admit that they often struggle to find answers to the really hard questions in practice and look for partnerships with service users and others. As Redmond’s reflective practice research demonstrates, practitioners often find it immensely liberating to be relieved of the responsibility of always being right and, as a consequence, their relationships with service users and the outcomes of intervention improve (Redmond, 2004, pp. 144-6).
The perceived lack of research activity, mentioned above, is deemed to negatively impact on the status and credibility of social work as a profession. McCrae et al. (2005) for example, express concern about the weak position of social work within mental health services, due to the lack of research produced, especially in comparison with allied health professions, such as psychiatry. McCrae et al. (2005, p.70) assert that ‘until social work can assert the value of its unique contribution, its impact on policy and practice will remain weak, and the prospects for a more socially based model in integrated services may be undermined’. Internationally, this has led to significant pressure aimed at the development of ‘evidence-based practice’ where data keeping, interpretation, the appraisal of client needs and evaluation were to be integrated into everyday practice (Bradbury & Reason, 2003; McNeill, 2006). In practice though, attempts to impose/develop models of evidence-based practice in which ‘interventions must be selected and used on the basis of their empirically demonstrated effectiveness’ (Mantysaari, 2005, p.254) have not been without challenges and criticism from the field. This has been due to both the difficulties in producing such control-oriented knowledge, and the tendency for such ‘evidence’ to overlook local, cultural and socio-economic contexts.

Practitioner scholarship and research is much more likely to rely on the individual, (and a supportive manager); for to undertake research within a practice setting requires a huge personal investment of time and money, as will be borne out in participants’ perspectives reported in Chapter Seven. Most often employing agencies do not see practice research as ‘core business’ and in the case of large bureaucracies, research would be the prerogative of those employed for their research skills rather than practitioners. Few social work managers, for example, would currently find the resources to support a practitioner to undertake a PhD. Employers’ motivation may not be strong to support practitioners’ enrolment in research degrees, in part their ambivalence may be due to cost but it may also be that practitioner scholarship may challenge and disrupt (Youll & Walker, 1995, p. 204). And yet without this kind of support, social work will remain a poorly-resourced profession in terms of ‘growing our own’ knowledge base. Harington (2006) asks whether registration will lift the game of social workers, in terms of
their engagement in scholarship and research, especially in relation to the kind of scholarly activity (Harington, 2006). He suggests that ‘registration places practitioner scholarship under the spotlight …… [it] increases the odds that inertia, frustration or resistance cannot linger as hazards to the growth of practitioner scholarship’ (Harington, p. 92).

**Part Four: Recent CPE research in social work**

The final part of this chapter summarizes some recent research on CPE in social work. It is noted that there is very little research on the broad aspects of CPE in social work; a keyword search revealed that most articles outlined specific projects to address knowledge and skills for work with particular populations. For example, the journal *Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education in Social Work*, only appears intermittently, and mainly focuses on narrow issues of practice. The literature reveals two main strands of inquiry: the first focusing on the experiences of practitioners themselves and their CPE activities; the second strand with a greater focus on the profession itself.

**Research on practitioner perspectives of CPE**

McMichael (2000) found links between social workers’ perceptions of their professional status and the opportunity to participate in CPE, a finding echoed in this current study. McMichael’s (2000) study of CPE in health social work in Australia, carried out in 1994, found a link between the strength of CPE opportunities and the status of the profession which supports the link between CPE and the professionalization journey made by Tobias and others. McMichael’s participants expressed views about the ‘value, status and profile of social work’, and some questioned whether ‘social work was seen as important enough by hospitals to undertake CPE, when direct work was a priority’ (McMichael, 2000, p.177-8). McMichael’s conclusions included an explicit link between CPE and the status of the profession, the ‘credibility of social work must be established, and a key factor in that process is visible CPE outcomes’ (p. 182). This is a very significant point and the link will be further considered in Chapter Five.
In a more recent article Kent examines the nature of CPE in relation to maintaining social work knowledge and awareness of the broad political environment and its impact on clients (Kent, 2006). Kent’s study examines the CPE Calendars of the branches of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) during 2005. The study found that two branch calendars ‘included CPE topics related to social policy and social justice issues’ but there were no topics that superficially focused on ‘increased knowledge and understanding of prevailing ideologies and their influence on social policies, social work practice and social work clients’ (Kent, 2006, p.436). Kent notes that the AASW has an expressed commitment to the ‘pursuit of social justice’ and that it has some ability to ‘prioritise areas of learning deemed a priority for members’ (p.437). Kent urges the profession, via its academic and regulatory bodies to ensure that CPE offerings will ‘ develop skills to counteract the negative impact of ideologies on social policy, whether local, national or global’ (p. 445).

A key question in this study is whether the social justice mission of social work, outlined in Chapter One, has much influence on CPE. There is a general consensus in the literature that the march to professionalization has in fact refocused the attention of social workers elsewhere. Was this shift inevitable? The professionalization project certainly focuses social workers inwardly on their own status and place in the complex web of power relations of health and social care, but O’Brien (2005) suggests that we can retain some optimism that this is not a permanent departure from a practice that looks outwardly and acts on its perceptions of injustice.

Kent (2006, p.44) argues that the AASW in Australia, in order ‘to improve the competitiveness of AASW members in the labor market, shows a predominant focus on knowledge and skills that maintain and update social work knowledge, skills and competencies’. Furthermore, learning opportunities ‘specifically related to the impact of the ideological and political environment upon social work and social work practice are absent from CPE calendars, (Kent p. 444).

A British study evaluated the impact of a ‘Post Qualifying Award for Social Workers’ on social workers practice (Mitchell, 2001). The Post Qualifying Award
is a centrally managed system of professional development administered by a national council but delivered through partnerships with tertiary providers. There is no equivalent in New Zealand or Australia. This study found that the organizational culture of the social workers' agencies exerted positive and negative influences on the individual's experience. In 'learning cultures' individuals felt their professional development was valued and they were more likely to seek further professional development within the same setting (Mitchell, 2001, p. 439). Tensions arose around the 'ownership' of academic study in some settings where managers acted as gatekeepers putting constraints around what would be supported:

Some candidates were keen to access academic credits…but the majority of employers….would only pay for professional registration and assessment. [One manager] said 'if they want the academic cap…that's a private investment' (Mitchell, 2001, p. 439).

A study of a postgraduate programme in the United Kingdom is useful (Youll & Walker, 1995). While this research studied participants in a Masters programme, offered jointly by Brunel University and the Tavistock Clinic, the students were a cohort of frontline practitioners, and therefore had similarities to some of the participants in the New Zealand study. The research examined a number of relevant questions: ‘who wants advanced programmes and for what purpose? What kind of investment do individuals make and why? How is advanced education and research viewed by social service agencies?’ In addition the researchers considered whether students needed to effect some compromise between workplace, professional, course and personal principles and goals. Youll and Walker’s study revealed students desiring the opportunity to take a critical appraisal of social work practice. It is expected that the critical appraisal of current practice leads to innovation and service development. The authors suggest that while this should be attractive to employers it may also be challenging to bureaucratic norms, where change is expected to be generated from the top. Youll and Walker's (1995) study found that engagement in higher education was generally a personal initiative, rarely undertaken as part of agency-managed professional development programme (p.205). Formal reasons include service aspirations, service development, career advancement, personal reflection and reappraisal (Youll & Walker, 1995, pp.205-
7). Deeper discussion revealed more complex motivation: ‘students wanted a more powerful voice within their organization and thought they could gain authority by taking a higher degree and by using research findings to back their views’, (p.206). Also expressed were the opportunity for professional renewal, intellectual refreshment and personal satisfaction (p.207). Advanced study involves a shift away from knowledge acquisition to the development of analytical and conceptual skills and the production of knowledge through independent inquiry. This approach may include the higher order skills – reflection, systematic review, and critical analysis (p. 203). The basis of these skills lies in the development of more autonomous critical reflection on practice.

Youll and Walker conclude from their study that the ‘burden of managing the tensions and complexities involved in advanced study is shouldered by the individual student’ (Youll & Walker, 1995, p.203). Students found it extremely difficult to find the physical and mental space and time to complete and the drop-out rate was 25% (p.215). They noted that the instrumental nature of ‘post-qualifying is more attractive to employers. These courses emphasize new required knowledge, skills and information that can be quickly assimilated and applied to practice, echoing the functionalist approaches outlined earlier in this chapter. Higher education, while appreciated for producing new knowledge that can stimulate change and innovation, can also ‘challenge or disrupt’ (Youll & Walker, p.204).

Postle et al. also note the tensions between employers instrumental and managerial approaches to continuing education, pointing out that practitioners’ immediate line managers are often caught by the conflict between meeting the work demands of the frontline and the need to support staff development (Postle et al., 2002, p.160). Citing Clarke (1998), the authors note that the tendency to focus for the resolution of such conflicts at middle management and the frontline is a feature of managerialism, again a point echoed in the findings of this study.

Professional perspectives

A number of studies have examined CPE in order to explore what is happening in the field or to ascertain how social workers view the needs of the profession.
In New Zealand the literature on CPE is sparse with the exception of articles published by the author (Beddoe, 1999, 2006). The most recent study was conducted by Beddoe and Henrickson (2003, 2005). In a survey undertaken in New Zealand during 2002 an encouraging 97.4% (N=285) of respondents reported they would like to undertake some CPE in the future. In this study 37.5% of respondents reported no barriers to CPE while 24.5% report that their work commitments are the largest barrier that prevents them from doing CPE. Other most frequently cited barriers included time constraints, cost, geographic location, opportunities and management support (Beddoe & Henrickson, 2003, p.27).

The 2003 survey on CPE in New Zealand social work supported a number of recommendations (Beddoe & Henrickson, 2003, pp.32-9). Among these is the suggestion that professional bodies should continue to support the existing ethic of CPE for social workers at all stages of their careers, and provide specific encouragement to non-tertiary qualified and certificated social workers to up skill themselves to attain formal social work qualifications. Professional groups were also advised to ensure that professional standards of culturally appropriate continuing education in New Zealand are created including the provision of opportunities to undertake specialist training in fields of practice. The authors advocated not only paid time off for CPE and financial support, but also workload relief for employees attending training courses or undertaking formal study. While employers could be expected to take a broader view of the benefits of CPE expenditure, it is likely that a workplace demands encourage a more utilitarian approach. Generous provision for CPE can be viewed as employer support for the growth of the profession in general, rather than only meeting agency requirements. It was suggested by Beddoe and Henrickson (2003, p.24) that employers who held a ‘strong sense of social work identity and who embrace a learning culture, often recognize that by supporting their employees to gain further qualifications, they may speed up their departure from the organization, but are able to see this, not as a loss, but as a broader a contribution to the profession and the community’.

Echoing Kent’s Australian commentary O’Brien (2005, p.22) suggests the profession needs to explore ‘exciting possibilities for the profession and for
professional development, opportunities that are entirely congruent with the historical and fundamental role of social justice in social work’. Whether or not the profession through professional development can, as suggested by O’Brien, retain its ability to make a critical contribution to civil society is a question for further consideration in this study.

Two studies demonstrate a social work focus on improvement of direct practice with service users. Daley (2001) outlines the findings of a study of how practitioners from four different professions experienced the CPE activities they participated in. A general finding was that each profession studies ‘framed their meaning-making process through an understanding of the nature of their professional work’ (Daley, 2001, p.39). Daley found that social workers ‘had their clients’ needs in mind, and felt it was ‘vital to have the newest information’ so that they could ‘support, defend and advocate for their clients within larger systems and with other professionals’ (Daley, p. 44). These social workers also sought refreshment and professional renewal to ‘refresh both their mind and spirits…. So they could re-enter their profession with renewed commitment, enthusiasm and energy’ (pp. 44-5). This was echoed in a recent study by Smith et al. (2006) which found that professional knowledge was the primary motivation for social workers’ application of CPE, although professional advancement and compliance featured as well.

This review of the literature has provided fruitful theoretical and discursive material with which to approach this study. What appeared to be missing is a study that examines in any detail the perceptions of practitioners concerning continuing education within the profession of social work and any links they might make to the profession’s particular features in the contemporary environment. The lack of this particular focus adds support to the contention that this study provides an opportunity for a fresh approach to building an understanding of CPE in general, and its place in the professional lives of social workers in particular.
Conclusions

CPE claims to assist professional practitioners to maintain practice competence through the undertaking of learning. CPE can be self-serving (at the levels of the individual, the agency or the profession) or it can be emancipatory and empowering for individuals, for practitioner teams, agencies, for service users and communities. These strands emerge from the first part of the review of the literature: first the functionalist approach in which practice is deemed to be improved through increased technical knowledge (Nowlen, 1988; Queeney, 2000). Associated with this approach is the emphasis on professional refreshment and renewal, thus introducing the psychological aspect of CPE (Youll & Walker, 1995; Daley, 2001). Secondly, this review has considered organizational approaches – the management of learning, the consideration of ongoing informal (situated) learning in the workplace and the notion of the learning organization (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Garratt, 1986; Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Finally this review has briefly surveyed critical examinations of CPE, including challenges to the domination of organizational learning perspectives (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; Field, 1997). The first part of the literature review has identified strong linkages between understandings of the role and purpose of CPE and the professionalization journey of the professions.

The second part of the literature review examined the research on CPE in social work, with some reference to other similar professions. Social work’s significant location in organizations and in particular corporate organizations will be explored further in Chapter Three with reference to two major contemporary discourses, lifelong learning and the learning organization.
Chapter Three: Hovering in Uncomfortable Places: Theoretical Perspectives on Profession, Power and Education

Introduction

Chapter Three commences with a more in-depth examination of professions and the professional project. Part One considers the problems associated with defining professions and Part Two explores power and status in the professions and considers the phenomenon known as ‘the crisis of trust’ (O’Neill, 2002). The remainder of the chapter explores in greater depth the ideas introduced in the review of the literature. An analytical framework is developed which will structure the presentation of the findings. This framework has emerged via an iterative process of early analysis of the data and further exploration of ideas from literature in the sociology of the professions. Critical social theory contributes to an understanding of the role of CPE in the social work professional project. Repeated exploration of the data for new and surprising insights, including checking for what might be ‘missing’ in participant accounts has refined the framework.

The study explores CPE in three distinct fields: the career of the individual practitioner, the organizational context and the wider professional context. The theoretical framework expands these fields into three key foci which will be explored in turn: the study participants’ perceptions of the professional project of social work; their awareness of managerialism in the organizational context; and the complex links between the profession, organizations and individual aspirations in social work careers. This analysis of fields depicts a search by social workers for ways to increase their professional capital, a term which will be further defined by this study. The theoretical framework provides a detailed explanation of how this study is conceptualized, what its parameters were and why a particular theoretical approach was selected to facilitate the research journey.

The journey starts with a conceptualization of social work as uniquely placed in the fabric of social policy; in an intermediary zone between service users of health and welfare services and the large bureaucracies that maintain them. Social workers,
their managers and other stakeholders occupy that zone. Within that zone, hierarchies and structures impact on the choices made by individuals, whether they are in direct practice, management or leadership roles. The order of presentation of the three foci within the framework is deliberate: the significant impact of the professional project within social work was the strongest theme emerging from the analysis of the data gathered for the study, and furthermore, discourses of professionalism emerge within the other two fields.

Part One: The problem of being ‘professional’

Some definitional issues are of considerable relevance at this juncture because education and training, both preparatory and continuing, are mechanisms utilized in the professional project. Social workers have joined many other occupations in seeking occupational closure in order to control, define and manage their expertise. A focus on a ‘process’ approach to professional journeys is useful at this point, primarily because it suggests a less elitist stance than earlier work such as the traits perspectives of Flexner (1915) and Greenwood (1957) briefly described below. A process account also avoids the highly gendered approach in constructing the idea of ‘semi-professions’ provided by Etzioni (1969) and continued uncritically by others including Rueschemeyer (1986), while acknowledging issues of power and control. What a profession is, is not a fixed, objective matter: a profession is constructed and given meaning by the stakeholders who are part of it or interact with it. At its core a profession is an exchange, it needs at least two parties to function. Modernity, even in the so-called ‘oldest profession’ has brought new stakeholders into the relationship: there are risks to be managed, costs to be determined and boundaries to be stated and policed. In modernity everyone is a professional (Wilensky, 1964).

Defining professions

The definition of ‘profession’ or ‘professional’ is not entirely straightforward. Queeney (2000, p.375) notes that the term ‘professional’ in the context of CPE is applied ‘broadly to describe a wide range of occupational areas that are based, to some extent, in a discrete body of information and specific competencies’. A brief discussion of approaches to the study of professions is provided here to add depth to the understanding of the nature of ‘professional’. Frost (2001, p.5) notes
common British usage of professional as a term to denote 'the activities of a wide range of people across many occupational groups….a professional is one who has a minimum of a degree level professional qualification'. Many common accounts of 'professional’ can be described as traditional ‘traits’ (Greenwood, 1957) and 'functionalist' approaches in which the former defines and describes the characteristics or professions, and the latter examines the societal roles and functions of professionals. The traits approach generally requires the following attributes of a profession to be met: skills based on theoretical knowledge; provision of training and education, often at entry; testing of the competence of members of the profession by the profession itself; some professional organization; a code of ethics and some degree of altruistic service to recipients of the professional's skills and interventions (Millersen, 1964). The major weakness of the traits approach is that it suggests an ‘ideal type’ of professionalism. In addition traits approaches tend to be descriptive, lack a theoretical base, are silent on issues of power and self-interest and as such it becomes too easy to uncritically accept a profession's own description of itself.

Functionalist accounts assume that members of professions apply science, learning and skills to particular situations that are essential to society and ensure that powerful control over nature and social life is directed to the best interests of the community, especially where professional practitioners gate-keep resources (Parsons, 1951, p.426-47). The primary critique of the functionalist account is that it underplays the status and power differentials between professionals and their clients and the tendency of professions to exercise power-over to ensure that they maintain status, autonomy and levels of income.

All professions encounter these dynamics in their development and maintenance. Houle (1980) identifies three sets of characteristics of professions; conceptual, performance and those aspects that may be termed professional identity. He recommends a dynamic approach which examines the context in which occupations pursue their goal of professionalization. Such an approach focuses on the process rather than any fixed set of attributes at a given time. A process approach is much more helpful to the conduct of this study as it allows for the 'social mobility’ of occupational groups, while recognizing that this process is not
entirely independent and autonomous. Statutory regulation for example, can’t happen without approval of the government. Political patronage is usually required for groups to achieve greater control and significant legislation is required for ‘protection of title’ of professions requiring regulation. A functionalist account would assume that some tacit agreement amongst powerful forces would ensure a balance between professional self-interest and the public good. As Evetts (2006, p.134) puts it:

Professionalism requires professionals to be worthy of that trust, to put clients first, to maintain confidentiality and not use their knowledge for fraudulent purposes. In return for professionalism in client relations, some professionals are rewarded with authority, privileged rewards and high status.

Evetts notes that further analysis revealed that high rewards are more the result of power and that the earlier interpretation was a consequence of ‘the rather peculiar focus on medicine and law as the archetypal professions in Anglo-American analysis, rather than a more realistic assessment of the large differences in power resources of most occupational groups’ (2006, p.134).

Other accounts emphasize the control of knowledge and information; and the power gained by those able to control this knowledge within the economy (Johnson, 1972). Freidson (2001, p.29) suggests the professions represent the organization of this knowledge into 'disciplines' in the Foucauldian sense; the constructed notion of:

Institutions set apart from everyday life. Special groups of intellectual workers embody the authority of those disciplines, their work being to create, preserve, transmit, debate and revise disciplinary content. The formal knowledge of particular disciplines is taught to those aspiring to enter specialized occupations with professional standing (emphasis added).

Witz, citing Wilensky (1964) favoured a ‘less static’ approach to the examination of ‘what an occupation had to do to turn itself into a profession’ (Witz, 1992, p.40)
and noted that ‘professionalisation is not simply a process of occupational closure, but is locked into broader sets of structural and historical systems’ (p.56). Witz examines the gendering of professional projects: ‘indeed, gender was integral to the very definition of a 'semi-profession' which according to Etzioni (1969) has two defining features. It is an occupation located within a bureaucratic organization and one in which women pre-dominate’ (Witz, 1992 p.57). In Witz’s feminist analysis, professions are constructed as a feature of patriarchal societies. Gendered activities of caring and support, developed last century into paid roles in health and social care, underpin the nature of the helping professions. Witz’s case study of midwifery,(1992, p.104) for example, demonstrates the processes in which midwives battled with the new medical specialization of obstetrics for autonomy within the territory of childbirth. This remains a potent example of ‘turf-conflict’ many years later (Abbott & Meerabeau, 1998).

The gendered nature of social work has always been a salient issue in consideration of the journey to professionalization. Etzioni (1969) coined the term ‘semi-profession’ to explain a distinct difference in the nature of teaching, nursing and social work. His inference was that they were semi-professions because they had not developed the degree of monopoly power and public esteem associated with medicine, and law. The semi-professions were occupations that drew on theory and knowledge, promoted membership and participation, and adopted codes of ethics, but they did not seek to position themselves above the communities they worked for, unlike Freidson’s ‘institutions set apart from everyday life’. Instead they preferred to keep close to the pupils, patients, clients; the people they worked alongside. They preferred to work in conjunction with the families and care givers who may also have an interest in the person’s welfare. Witz (1992, pp.88-93) challenges this suggestion of ‘preference’ in relation to nursing and midwifery, suggesting that the history of medicine includes deliberate attempts to exclude women from medical school. She cites as evidence of a continuing androcentric approach to the study of professions, Rueschemeyer’s remark (1986, p.137) that the 'high devotion/low power syndrome' of the social service professions 'articulates well with women’s traditional roles’ (Witz, p.58). The professional project challenges this linking of social work with domestic roles.
The professional project needs to be seen not as a conscious, articulated project in the everyday sense of the word, but as a sequence of activities linked to an underlying purpose, which in the field of professions in society, is directed at the improvement of the standing and power of an occupational group. Part of this process is creating a distance between the practices that are constituted as ‘professional’ by members of a group, and those that may be the business of volunteers or practitioners of lesser training or different focus. Oerton (2004, pp.454-6) reporting research undertaken with therapeutic massage practitioners, notes the need for such workers to create distance between themselves by boundary setting, especially because of the widespread elisions between massage and sex work. There is a similar tension for social work. While social work struggles to maintain an egalitarian spirit, if it is to be successful in its journey towards greater public legitimacy, it is compelled to distance itself from the practitioners of similar work, for which higher education and credentialing is not required.

While other professions were regulated much earlier, social work struggled with both the internal and external conditions that would facilitate registration (Beddoe & Randal, 1994). Based on the different issues raised in defining professions several possible explanations for social work’s position can be offered: 1) gender and power constraints on social workers’ ability to influence lawmakers; 2) social workers’ qualms about the politics of professionalizing further discussed below; 3) the lack of a clearly articulated body of knowledge; 4) the associated low levels of autonomy and lastly, 5) the lack of a clearly demarcated social space or field (Bourdieu, 1984). This set of circumstances may have lasted for many more decades but for the changes in the public sector brought about through the ‘audit culture’ (Power, 1997) in which governments faced a crisis of trust in the professions, discussed further below (O’Neill, 2002). In spite of the marginalized nature of social work, by the turn of the century the importance to governments to at least be seen to be ‘doing something’ about ensuring high standards for public services outweighed any concerns about adding to the number of occupations able to professionalize. For social workers (political patronage aside) the professional project was inextricably enmeshed with aspirations to greater power and control.
Regardless of how it has been achieved, this professional journey is, in essence, a project of occupational closure. Witz cites Parkin (1979) as a major protagonist of the closure concept applied to professions (Parkin, 1979); in which groups ‘create exclusionary shelters…to secure privileged access to resources and opportunities’ (p.46). For the social workers and social work managers in this study, the professional project seemed to offer some greater control, as they expected registration would mandate and legitimize their aspirations for further education. It is interesting to note that there is no one single union for social workers in New Zealand. The largest group of social workers is to some extent unionized, as public service workers, though this is a weak force for social work, and union activity has not been a significant feature of the debates about professionalization. At the time of the data collection for this study, participants were experiencing the very beginnings of a regulatory environment and it will be seen that hopes were high that registration would make a difference.

The case for registration is usually the strengthening of a profession to be gained by regulation. A key question in this study however is about the extent to which the ‘profession’, as a stakeholder of significance, can empower individual workers within social work agencies, given the degree of managerial control currently in operation. The extent of this new sense of empowerment is tested in the interviews conducted when participants’ views are elicited about their ability to decide on their CPE and access the resources needed.

Tobias (1996, 2003) has considered the power relationships between professionalization and the processes of education and credentialising. These processes, including CPE, have served to justify some claims of privilege, power and monopoly. For powerful groups this can be seen to exclude others, for example, the dominance of medicine (Willis, 1983; 2006). For less powerful groups these same processes may lead to greater control over their own work and ‘greater recognition, respect and more equitable reward structures for work that has been undervalued and marginalized’ (Tobias, 2003, p. 452). He describes two models of professionalization, one ‘strong’ and one weaker. The stronger and predominant model of professionalization is ‘characterized by the production of a more or less standardized, research-based body of knowledge and skills, the
development of extensive and intensive programmes of initial professional
education and training for practitioners, and the establishment of exclusive
professional credentials’ (Tobias, 2003, pp. 454). Although relatively weak in
terms of its voluntary application, registration in New Zealand leans towards this
model. Tobias characterizes the weaker approach to professionalization as:

Characterized by greater openness and inclusiveness, the development of a
common identity among people engaged in similar kinds of activity who
share a common sense of purpose. It has close links with social movements
and generally implies the establishment of some form of organizational
framework through which this sense of common purpose may be expressed,
and may involve the establishment of ongoing education and training
programmes for practitioners. However, these programmes are not
necessarily focused on the acquisition and/or maintenance of exclusionary
credentials or licenses to practice (Tobias, 2003, p.454).

**Professions and the state: The crisis of trust**

Earlier accounts of professions assumed considerable degree of autonomy in
professional life. A practitioner’s expertise and clearly delineated territory ensured
their ability to act independently secured by a code of ethics and the commitment
to the public good. How accurate has that picture been throughout history? How
accurate is that picture in the 21st century? Freidson (2001, p.13) notes that
frequently the use of the term profession ‘obscures with the fog of mystique much
of what (professions) have in common with more humble occupations’. In
contemporary western societies, few professionals could truly claim to be fully able
to control their own work, or even their own knowledge, particularly where their
profession exists under the control of government systems of delivery of services
(Coburn, 2006; Willis, 2006).

This is clearly true of social work, given that much of its legitimization is as part of
the apparatus of the state. A Habermasian perspective situates the helping
professions as features of the exchange, under welfare state capitalism, of
autonomy and the exercise of responsibility for security and order (Welton 1995, p.144). Tobias, citing Murphy (1990) suggests that:

the contrasts and oppositions between bureaucratization and professionalization are not necessarily as great as studies based on ideal type models might suggest….both have been shaped by the growth of corporate and monopoly capitalism and by the expansion of state apparatuses during the 20th century(Tobias, 2003, p. 453).

Roach-Anleu (1992, pp.24-5) also rejects definitions of professions as ‘enumerated series of attributes’ and has suggested that, rather than conceptualizing strong professionalism and employment in bureaucracies as ‘intrinsically and by definition incompatible’, it is more helpful to examine how they work together within different organizational contexts. Therefore, allowing for problems in terms of true control over its circumstances, there is another compelling factor in the drive for professionalization that proved to be of great significance in this study: the search for improved status. Tobias cites Larson who explains ‘professionalization of successive occupations as one aspect of the rationalisation of capitalism’, in the drive to gain control and mark out territory (Tobias, 2003, p.448). Larson (1979, p.xvii) describes professionalization as implying ‘a tendency to monopoly: monopoly of expertise in the market and monopoly of status in a system of stratification’ (emphasis added). Expertise in modern societies is determined (and claimed) through credentials, not merely personal qualities and attributes. This struggle for credentials is significant, as while social work can’t claim to be advanced in gaining occupational closure, perceptions of status within (and between) large bureaucracies are significant. The credentialing of expertise is a useful construct to consider when examining CPE. In the case of social work in New Zealand (and the UK) it is significant that the limited closure afforded by the SWRA (2003) was achieved by direct government intervention, indeed via what can be seen as patronage. It is therefore unsurprising that some critics challenge aspects of registration as it has been developed in New Zealand (Pitt, 2005; Orme & Rennie, 2006; O’Donoghue, 2007).
There is a prevalent contemporary view that the power of professionals has been challenged. In general this challenge stems from two major standpoints. The first challenge to the widespread social acceptance of the claims to knowledge and expertise of the professions is a feature of the critique of the modernist discourse of professional power (Illich, Zola, McKnight, Caplan & Shaiken, 1977; Foucault, 1979, 1980; Donzelot, 1980; Duyvendak, Knijn & Kremer, 2006). For Habermas (1987, p.330), the development of expert bureaucracies that intervene in the private lives of citizens are problematic because they represent the ‘splitting off of expert cultures from contexts of communicative action in daily life’. Kremer and Tonkens (2006) link these developments to the changing roles of patients and clients and their reconceptualisation as citizens and consumers. Freidson (2001) has suggested the relationship of modes of professionalism is linked to three ‘logics’ of service delivery: patients (professionalism); citizens (bureaucracy) and consumers (marketisation). Kremer and Tonkens (p.122) note that social workers have been active in challenging the mantle of ‘expert’ and the development of less paternalistic approaches to working with people. In the new arrangements citizen consumers have increasing power and voice in services and are seen as partners in the development and governance of health and welfare services, although there is room to challenge some of these changes as features of new public management (Heffernan, 2006).

These forces have led to an increased consumerist aspect to the relationships between professionals and their clients as the consumer movement has ‘opposed professional and other monopolies that limit consumer choices’ (Freidson, 2001, pp. 189-90). Clients have the potential to rebel against their ‘systemically defined …client role’ (Welton, 1995, p.145). O’Neill’s Reith lectures in 2001 focused on the so called ‘crisis of trust’ and brought the challenges of the new arrangements for managing professional power neatly into the issue of trust in a risk society, the second theme in this review of professions:

The supposed ‘crisis of trust’ is, I think, first and foremost a culture of suspicion. We may not have evidence for a crisis of trust: but we have massive evidence of a culture of suspicion…. Perhaps claims about a crisis of trust are mainly evidence of an unrealistic hankering for a world in which
safety and compliance are total, and breaches of trust are eliminated. Perhaps the culture of accountability that we are relentlessly building for ourselves actually damages trust rather than supporting it (O’Neill, Reith Lectures 2001, Lecture 1; O’Neill, 2002).

The second influence on the prestige and trustworthiness for professions stems from the growth of what Beck (1992) has termed ‘the risk society’ in which professional autonomy is mediated by the heightened awareness of the need to identify and reduce risk to others. Giddens (1999) has captured the contradictory forces of the risk society and its impact on professionals vividly in this comment from the ‘Runaway World’ Reith Lectures on risk:

There is a new moral climate of politics, marked by a push-and-pull between accusations of scaremongering on the one hand, and of cover-ups on the other. If anyone – government official, scientific expert or researcher – takes a given risk seriously, he or she must proclaim it.

Evetts (2006, p.135) suggests that risk and uncertainty are significant features in categorizing modern professions: professions might be embodying ‘structural, occupational and institutional arrangements for work associated with the uncertainties of modern lives in risk societies’. Evetts notes, citing Olgiati et al. (1998), that many professions are involved in ‘birth, survival, physical and emotional health, dispute resolution and law-based social order, finance and credit information, educational attainment and socialization….and our negotiations with the next world’ (Evetts, 2006, p135). For social work this is intense as social workers deal with birth, death, assault, homicide, rape, mental illness, crime and every other challenging aspect of human life. Littlechild (2008, p.665-6) describes how the prevailing governmental response to the ‘riskiness’ of our professional endeavour is embedded in managerialism and its ‘focus on a controlling approach of technocratic micro-practice with an overwhelming focus on outcomes’. The lack of trust of social workers ‘has been clearly evidenced by the increasing tendency of government to issue reductivist checklists for social workers to follow’ (Littlechild, 2008, p.666).
Knowledge and reflexivity under these conditions become key elements in maintaining professional trustworthiness in a frightening and uncertain world. Olgiati (2006, p.543) argues that professionalism in contemporary society is now entering a new phase characterized by the coupling of ‘two contradictory epochal frameworks: the one epitomized by the notion of ‘risk society’, the other epitomized by the notion of ‘knowledge society’. In the risk society, professionalism has to confront the ‘outcomes of the vanishing guarantees of modernity’ (Olgiati, p.543) while in the knowledge society, professionalism has to respond to the challenges of global and local informational systems. Olgiati suggests that due to the increasing competition about organizational domain and rising uncertainty about knowledge:

Western professions… will undergo …a diffuse existential and moral insecurity about the contours of their professional jurisdictions, mandates and values. In general, to the extent that their entire setting and their habitus will be basically devoted to the imperatives of an all-embracing risk–knowledge management, they will also have to act as risk managers of their own sociotechnical competence (Olgiati, 2006, p.543).

The literature abounds with examples of social work suffering the impact of the risk-averse culture; paradoxically this occurs at a time when governments and profession alike promote strengths-based and ‘empowering’ approaches to human services practice. Risk-awareness and risk-management are fairly central to the ideology of welfare (Scourfield & Welsh, 2003). Both social policy and management practice have addressed risk in social work by developing many tools and technologies for identifying, assessing severity and managing risk in social work organizations. For social workers there is a particular set of anxieties as fields such as child protection and mental health are caught between the ambivalent public discourses of care and control. As Ungar (2001, p.287) has asserted ‘Social anxieties raise the basic issue of safety…..a safety discourse faces rupture in the risk society ….. as things are wont to go boom in the night’. It is commonly held that this creates defensive practice, and is particularly observable in child
protection (Parton, 1998; Stanley, 2007; Gillingham & Bromfield, 2008). Professional practice is perceived as plagued by technicist approaches where risk assessment systems and check lists are put in place to minimize practitioner risk of ‘missing something important’. A current daily reality for those working in human service organizations is the extent to which services which aim to empower are at the mercy of contradictory forces that are frustrating and limiting for service users. In ‘the knowledge society’ professions need to stake a strong claim in a territory (Olgiati, 2006). Olson (2007, p. 52) argues that in the 1970s (in the United States, later in the United Kingdom and other countries) ‘social work aligned itself with the academic social sciences’ after a 100-year search for theoretical and epistemological legitimacy’ thus fully adopting ‘the fundamental assumptions of the professional project’.

**Part Two: The social work profession, power and CPE**

At the outset of this study, a potential tension was identified between social workers and those who might exert influence over their choices in continuing education, because of the impact of power in the managerialist environment of health and social care. Managers in organizations hold several crucial types of power – coercive, reward and control of information – and these powers can be exerted in numerous ways to control workers’ access to particular educational opportunities (Mitchell, 2001), as will be illuminated by accounts of social workers’ experience presented in Chapters Six and Seven.

Tobias (2003, p.455) argues that ‘sites of professional learning and education can most usefully be theorized as sites of struggle’, and as a consequence, ‘issues and questions about the aims, purposes and structure of both initial and CPE, about who should gain access to what forms of knowledge and about which forms of knowledge should be seen as most valuable, constitute key political as well as educational questions that cannot be resolved in instrumental and technical terms or in liberal functional terms alone’.

Chapter Two introduced the conceptual tools of Bourdieu to assist in an analysis of the relationships between power, the professions in society, and the role of
education in establishing and maintaining social privilege. His constructs of cultural and social capital and the application of ideas about social capital have been applied by Field (2006) and others in theorizing contemporary adult and continuing education. Peillon (1998, p.214) notes a close correspondence between the main thrust of Bourdieu’s analysis of society and the:

central tenets of the contemporary discourse on welfare. They all focus on the idea of power and control…Welfare is analysed in the context of biopower and normalisation by Foucault. It belongs, for Habermas, to an exchange through which marginalized categories are pacified.

Habermas’ (1987) depiction of the split between the ‘life world’ and the ‘system’ assists in the interpretation of social workers discomfort in the world of the professions. Habermas’ work is useful here, as it locates social work in this ‘border’ zone, where practitioners are part of the system and yet drawn to advocate for the people and communities the ‘system’ acts upon. Lorenz (2004) draws on the work of Habermas to explain how social work came into being at a particular point in Western history. Habermas distinguishes two domains of human experience: the lifeworld, in which people experience and act freely in social contexts, and the system, where formal structures and organizations create, control and steer individual and collective actions. Lorenz cites Rauschenbach in asserting that the social work profession’s origins lie in both these domains (Lorenz, 2004, p.147). Lorenz suggests that social work’s origins in voluntary charitable activity reflected the aspirations of those involved to act to create a better society. Simultaneously the modernizing states in which social work first emerged exerted pressure on social work to become part of the system of social policy and the political agenda for greater social integration. Lorenz (2004, p.147) asserts that ‘social work was allocated its place and function in relation to the system’s need for setting firm boundaries and limits to destabilizing forces’. Thus social work becomes an intermediary between the lifeworld and the system. This mediating focus creates contradictions between radical forces of social justice and the more normative, conservative approaches to social reform; the nature of care and control, the call for social action and the link to ‘social engineering’ that characterize much of the writing about the profession during its 100 year history. Social work is a
phenomenon both created and captured by this intermediary function. Location within this intermediary function creates a seemingly inevitable marginalization for social work in contemporary society, a place further weakened by neo-liberalist approaches to welfare.

In this study, this mediating role underpins an understanding of how the participants described their world, and can explain their perceptions of disadvantage. Drawing on these ideas from critical theory, social work is conceptualized as a ‘profession hovering in uncomfortable places’ (Beddoe, 2010, p.14), caught between aspirations to contribute to social justice and bureaucratic constraints. While social workers frequently remain at the margins of organizations, they possibly function most effectively when they actively span the worlds of service-users and bureaucracies. Bourdieu’s concepts of field and capital conceptualize these worlds as sites of struggle—struggles for power and the domination of ideas. While Habermas wrote little about social work (Lovelock & Powell, 2004, p.186), Bourdieu was aware of the professions’ role. In his research for *The Weight of the World*, Bourdieu notes a positive perspective on social work’s role within bureaucracies, as he explores the work of a municipal social worker. In the introduction to a transcript of the interview he comments:

Paradoxically, the rigidity of bureaucratic institutions is such that, despite what Max Weber said about them, they can only function, with more or less difficulty thanks to the initiative, the inventiveness, if not the charisma of those functionaries who are the least imprisoned in their function (Bourdieu et al., 1999, p.191).

Powell and Geoghegan, (2005, p.132) explain that ‘in Bourdieu’s estimation, professionals are caught in a web of contradiction that requires them to respond to ‘social suffering’ without the means and without the support of the state. This makes the reality of front-line practice a painful one’. Bourdieu (1999) has identified the frequent disposition of social work to challenge oppressive practices from the inside of bureaucratic organizations. There is a political and moral imperative within social work’s stated mission to take this role. Lovelock and Powell (2004, p.182) argue that although social work ‘in both its
statutory/mandatory and its non-statutory /permissive aspects is either directly
implementing government policy enshrined in law, or otherwise acting within a
framework of legislation and guidance'; it is more than just this. It is inherently
moral and Jordan expresses this clearly in this passage:

The issues at stake are ones in which the community, through the state and in
the profession of social work use power and resources to promote certain
outcomes which are valued, and avoid certain others which are disapproved
(Jordan, 1990, p.25).

In the current environment social work negotiates this moral activity against a
political backdrop of modernization of the welfare state itself. In many developed
countries, including New Zealand, one crucial aspect of this modernization is the
development of ‘evidence-based’ policy and practice. This has its origins in
positivist, rationalist means of decision making (Sheldon, 2001; Webb, 2002) and
in this study will be shown to have considerable impact on thinking in social work.
Lovelock and Powell suggest this approach ‘seems to deny that social work is an
expression of a collective commitment to certain values, or to conceive the pursuit
they caution against simplistic and unreflective rejection of the evidence-based
practice on the basis of ‘normative ideals such as ‘empowerment’ and ‘anti-
oppressive practice’ as if these were somehow ‘above’ critical examination,
(p.210). In the current climate, social work is at the juncture of these debates:
evidence-based practice versus traditional relational approaches to practice;
strengths-based approaches versus medical models of diagnosis of problems and
treatment; professionalization versus retention of grass-roots activism, casework
intervention or social development (Shannon & Young, 2004).

The contradictory forces within these contrasting approaches to social work
practice experienced at this juncture can be seen to be played out in the experiences
of participants in this study. This current study has its major focus on CPE as one
part of social work activity, and the extent to which the profession’s members
conceptualize the purpose and nature of continuing professional development. This
exploration occurs at a time when continuing education itself is perhaps tipping its
collective hat towards the adult education movement and its role in civil society, having lost its focus in the face of an avalanche of managerialist ideas about education needing to support economic ideals (Tobias, 2003; Jeris & Armacost, 2002; Cunningham, 2004). A critical approach suggests an analysis should focus on power relations and Cunningham’s framework for a critical analysis of adult education can be usefully employed in this present study. She suggests educators should:

1. Analyse power and knowledge in relationship to human agency and societal structures, and
2. Examine how biography (the contextualized individual) intersects with societal structures, and
3. Recognise the importance of social as well as the personal dimensions of learning (Cunningham, 2000, p.574).

If Taylor’s scenario is realized and professional education is ‘colonized …by stakeholders whose agendas are dominated by short-term objectives and political considerations’, then CPE is potentially a site for challenge and resistance (1997, p.11). Cunningham (2002) expressly links the corporate influence of human resource management to the privileging of scientific rationality over other competing ‘knowledges’, and thus suggests an important distinction between adult education located in civil society and that which is linked to the economic sector through vocational focus. For continuing education in social work, the contradictions can be seen in the distinctions between the more vocationally oriented ‘Post-Qualifying awards’ in British social work (Mitchell, 2001; Youll & Walker, 1995), the service development focus of in-service training (Smith et al., 2006) and higher education that may develop higher order thinking and scholarship (Pietroni, 1995; Youll & Walker, 1995).

There is much support for maintaining the latter and developing a stronger element of critical inquiry in social work practice (Fook, 2003). In New Zealand, Harington has argued for support for developing practitioner research in order to lift civic literacy (Harington, 2006) and Shannon and Young’s (2004) social workers as ‘Smugglers’, requires considerable practical, scholarly and reflexive engagement with knowledge if they are to be effective. In a similar vein, in promoting
practitioner research, Beddoe et al.(2007, p.40) argue that: ‘Critical inquiry can facilitate social workers to utilise knowledge gained from practice to advocate for service improvements and the removal of barriers to full economic and social participation’

In the contemporary environment, education can be directed to be a servant to the knowledge based professions and the capture of value from knowledge. This is important because this language shifts our understanding of education from a transformative process to a transactional commodity. This shift may shape participants’ ideas about the purpose and benefits of CPE. Human resource development is a field now closely linked with continuing education for professional contexts (Cunningham, 2000, p.577) as ongoing learning is seen as investment. The tendency of the field of organizational development to objectify workers by use of such language as ‘human capital’ is noted by Casey (2003). This notion of the maximization of ‘human capital’ through learning and development activities in professional practice brings into question the aim and purpose of CPE (Bouchard, 1998, pp.135-9). Cunningham explores the relationship of critical pedagogy in continuing education increasingly controlled from the worksite (Cunningham, 2004; Jeris & Daley, 2004). On the one hand, this shift in emphasis from individual learning (and social capital) to organizational learning (and human capital) has reflected a shift away from adult education as a means of promoting social participation in civic society (Casey, 2003) and on the other it can be linked to control of workers (Casey, 2003; Coffield, 2002; Olssen, 2006). Cunningham (2004, p.222) suggests that the shift of adult education into ‘training’ is linked to social control;

We are in danger of becoming the compliant purveyors of ‘merely useful knowledge’ (i.e. knowledge that is constructed to make people productive, profitable, and quiescent workers) as distinct from the active agents of ‘really useful knowledge’ (i.e. knowledge that is calculated to enable people to become autonomous and, if necessary-dissenting citizens).
Cunningham (2004, p.232) cites Welton’s application of Habermas’ concept of the lifeworld to the consideration of the significance of critical education to the continued survival of the lifeworld and civil society itself (Welton, 1993, 1995). Implicit in much of the current discourse of lifelong learning is the assumption that engagement with continuing education is often understood by participants to be a component of the ‘life politics’ in which citizens are exercise choice; able to manage complex choices in a reflexive society (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994). The conception of those engaged in adult and continuing education as (freely acting) consumers identified earlier not entirely unproblematic in the context of this study. Education and career are major components in the contemporary citizen’s life plan, but it is important also to realize that this makes people vulnerable to market forces, persuasion and even subtle coercion. Professionals are not immune to these forces and other ‘social’ professionals may feel particularly vulnerable to shifts in policy. For example, in New Zealand social work post-registration, many community and youth workers feared the impact of registration on the funding of community based programmes. In New Zealand, counsellors are seeking professional registration and there are moves for youth workers to establish credentials. Tovey (1994, p.8) explains this shift for groups to seek positive differentiation within a competitive environment:

Professions…are socially constructed statuses; and …education plays a key role in achieving and securing that status and marking off lines of differentiation from non-professional.

The individual participants in this study will reveal themselves as experiencing limited agency in their choices in continuing education, or even in their ability to choose whether or not to engage. They wish to act freely in making choices but are aware at varying levels of critical consciousness of the shaping pressures operating on them within the system. The upwards pressure of ‘credentialism’ encourages participation in on-going learning. They must therefore conceptualize their CPE choices as an ‘investment’ in the development of their social capital in order to develop their career, at the individual level.
At a collective level, continuing education and professional development are tied inextricably into the issues of professional status, power and management control of resources. At the time that the field research was undertaken in New Zealand the consequences of state regulation were close to the surface in social workers’ thinking about education and professional development. Benchmark entry qualifications and some form of licensing set ‘professional’ social work apart from ‘grass-roots’ community work, as there is an implication of an expert status, linked to a knowledge claim. Tobias (2003, pp. 449-454) has suggested that the links between the ‘professionalizing project’ or ‘journey’ for each profession and their educational processes have largely been viewed through a functionalist lens (Tobias, 2003, p.451). A critical theory approach ‘seeks to expose the hidden agendas, tensions and contradictions inherent within continuing professional education’ (Tobias, 2003, p.454).

Olgiati cites Brante (2001) in noting that in all the variations of definitions of professions one ‘common pattern whose existence is shared by all specialists (and thereby distinguishing professions from other occupations) is the connection of profession with a particular educational training and the practice of a particular type of knowledge, basically academic knowledge’ (Olgiati, 2006, pp.540-541). Social workers have often rejected an outright knowledge claim as elitist, while at the same time believing in a unique approach and wishing to have some ability to protect vulnerable client groups from the impact of poor practice (Dominelli, 1996). This is expressed in the adoption of models of practice and standardized techniques and instruments, although these can be paralyzing for professional development (Kemshall & Pritchard, 1996; Parton, 1996; Parton, Thorpe, & Wattam, 1997; Kemshall, 2002; Gillingham, 2006). In every inquiry into an aspect of practice ‘failure’ there is the inevitable section on the ‘implications’ for training. See for example, Wood (1997) and Brown (2000). As the environment becomes more litigious and professions are held to greater account for their members the validation and accreditation of professional courses becomes more complex. ‘Town and Gown’ come together in a mutual defensive response to this environment.

Tobias’s description of emergent professions undertaking a journey – fluid and changing, requiring critical reflection on their place in the labour market and,
inevitably influenced by the nature of workplaces – is most useful here. In considering the journey of a profession towards greater closure, it is useful to question

the ways in which the structures, processes and curricular of professional education may contribute to or challenge the increasing commodification of and/or selective access to professional services as well as the increasing fragmentation, inequalities and power differentiation in the labour market in a global economy (Tobias, 2003, p. 449).

While Flexner (1915) and later, Etzioni (1969) felt that social work did not meet the requirements for full professional status, a great deal has changed since the 1960s. Despite strong challenges to its usefulness from both the right (in the 1980s Brewer & Lait (1980) asked ‘can social work survive?’) and from the left (Jones, 1983) social work has survived. As Jordan (2004, p. 7) points out ‘social work as a profession, while still mocked and attacked, has continued to expand’. Indeed, social work has entered the 21st century with a few more of the trappings of traditional professionalism; a code of ethics, disciplinary processes, legal definition and so forth, not the least being movement towards regulation.

**Part Three: A framework for analysis**

Cunningham’s (2000, p. 574) framework examined adult education from the perspectives of individuals, communities and social structures. All of these elements are important but in considering CPE for social work the organizational context (for both individual workers and ‘the discipline’ in relation to others) is of major significance. Practitioners do not play out their careers entirely from a position of autonomy and a free choice of educational options. The framework outlined in this chapter has developed from a synthesis of a critical perspective on professions, the literature review and themes that emerged from analysis of the data. It is clear that this departs from traditional grounded theory in which:
consistent with their assumption of neutrality,…grounded theorists treat how they portray the research participants in their written reports as unproblematic. They assume the role of authoritative experts who bring an objective view to the research, (Charmaz, 2006, p.132).

The binary of subjective/objective researcher stance was greatly disputed by Bourdieu: [his concepts] ‘call for critical examination of all assumptions and presuppositions not only of the sociological object investigated but also of the stance and location of the researcher relative to the object studied’ (Swartz, 2008, p. 46). In this study, the early close reading and analysis of the transcribed data led to questions about how the participants were describing their experiences, and, in particular, why a discussion of the status of social work, and perceived power in relation to other professions, seemed an inevitable subject in the interviews, despite my not asking explicitly about it. Critical social theory enabled the deeper understanding of the discourse of practitioners heard in the focus groups and discussions.

What was heard in the interviews and focus groups was that rather than simply viewing this as the limits of power to a weaker group, social workers perceived a need to strategize to gain access to improve resources; with these resources needed to ‘lift their game’. Here was Bourdieu’s depiction of ‘power and [the] drive to attain the upper hand through sometimes deliberate, but more often habitual or tacit strategizing’ (Houston, 2002, p.155).

The struggle to gain resources for CPE was part of a strategy to improve participants’ power and status, CPE then was not an end in itself. This realization led back to the literature and in particular critical social theory approaches to the study of professions. Three major foci emerged as a potential explanation: first, perceptions of the professionalization journey of social work; second, the impact of the organizational context on practitioners, in particular the impact of managerialist practices; and lastly the complex links between expectations of professional development and aspirations in social work career. A field note made during the data collection phase recorded:
They see evidence-for-practice as a goal for status reasons, quite cynical. Social workers feel the need to use the jargon for persuading others that the profession has something to offer (Research Note 24/6/05).

A later note during the first read through of all the transcribed interviews when fieldwork had finished reported:

I think what I am finding is that practitioners (and managers to a surprising extent) are negotiating their way through the various push/pull forces around CPE. In their ‘talk’ about CPE, there isn't a clear line of demarcation between the 'corporate' model and the more 'transformative' approach [to CPE]. Or even a boundary, though some people do differentiate. It's more a kind of dance between the various proponents.

I think that underpinning it is a lingering huge ambivalence about whether social work is a profession or not....so I'm back to the sociology of the professions again......social workers want control but when they get it they don't like it....the trappings of professional status can impinge on "freedom" (Research Note 1/9/05)

Later in the data analysis phase, the following research note was entered, after a return to the literature and in particular reading more about the 'professionalization project' :

Social work identity (weak) + status (weak) + power and influence in both the practice world and the academy (weak) = we are too weak to resist the managerialist take on CPE; this makes us dependent and that dependency is stifling our ability to act on our values and retain critical stance through education. The light at the end of the tunnel is that we can use the trappings of the 'professionalization project' to leverage some intellectual growth. It's an ambiguous situation, though and rather fraught. Things like registration shift attention away from clients and practice on to processes and power relations within the profession (Research Note 3/1/06).

It was already clear that the participants in the study saw CPE as a component of professionalization and significant, perhaps mostly because it was meant to enhance social work practice in the workplace, both at an individual level (professional refreshment and renewal, advanced career options, marketability and so forth) and for social work itself, particularly in multi-disciplinary contexts, (status, professional identity, interprofessional competition and positioning in society). This explicit perception linking CPE to enhancing professional status is a fourth focus.
The framework provides four key foci which will elucidate a clearer understanding of these key themes. Focus One, explores the CPE and the professionalization project in social work; Focus Two, the influence of policy and managerialism in social work organizations and CPE and Focus Three considers CPE and in social work careers. These three major foci become the three chapters outlining the outcomes of the study. The analysis supports the development of this framework to shape a discussion of how CPE is a feature of building professional capital in New Zealand social work, Focus Four in which Bourdieu’s analytical tools of capital and field are employed. Table 3.1 A Framework for Presenting Social Workers’ Perceptions of CPE in New Zealand Social Work, sets out a four-part framework for presentation and further exploration and analysis of the data.
Table 3.1  A Framework for Presenting Social Workers’ Perceptions of CPE in New Zealand Social Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The professionalization project in social work and CPE</td>
<td>Explores participants’ understanding of social work agency, sense of identity, claim to expertise, and construction and dissemination of expertise in the social circumstances in which it operates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The influence of managerialist discourses in social work organizations and CPE</td>
<td>An exploration of the perceptions of both individuals and the profession and the intersection with organizational structures and the policy environment present in the social work context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimensions of professional learning and social work careers</td>
<td>An exploration of the social, political and personal dimensions of continuing professional education: how concepts, understandings and aspirations about CPE impact on social work careers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Application: Building professional capital</td>
<td>An exploration of CPE in social work as practice connected to building collective capital and a distinctive social space.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus One:  The professionalization project and CPE

CPE may be seen as one of the ‘trappings’ of professionalization and therefore fraught with contradictions (Tobias, 2003). As such an examination of the practice of CPE in New Zealand social work reflects the immediate post-registration environment. Prior to registration, any institutional interest in CPE has been only a minor focus. As Bierema and Eraut (2004, p.53) suggest, ‘the greatest influences on CPE are the histories and current trajectories of the professions’. Tobias (2003, p.451) asks us ‘to investigate the material conditions and social forces that have historically influenced changes in the various kinds of paid and unpaid work. Within this wider context, as we have seen the concept of ‘profession’ is not an innocent one’. He suggests that for all the benefits conferred by professionalization, mainly in terms of standards, public protection from misconduct and incompetence, there is a ‘flipside’. The processes of professionalization, including CPE, have served to justify some claims of privilege, power and monopoly. For powerful groups, this can be seen to exclude others; for less powerful groups these same
processes may lead to greater control over their own work and ‘greater recognition, respect and more equitable reward structures for work that has been undervalued and marginalized’ (Tobias, 2003, p. 452). In an interesting study of three groups of Australian social workers (child welfare workers, probation officers and hospital social workers) Roach-Anleu (1992, p.40) found that credentials and qualifications were most important to social workers who needed to claim and maintain authority and expertise in some activities. Roach-Anleu (1992, p.41) found that child welfare workers and probation officers were ‘better able to counter attempted encroachment by appeal to legal rights and responsibilities, regardless of comparative expertise and skill’.

Chapter Five will illustrate the hopes of health social workers that registration will provide them the mandate missing when legal requirements and roles are not present. With regard to these issues contemporary social work in New Zealand finds itself at an intersection –to go forward and grasp the benefits of registration and the trappings of greater professionalization, of which intensified CPE is both a means and an outcome. Or, alternatively, to avoid being captured by the pursuit of privilege by resisting the pull of greater influence and respect. It seems for social work in the West the die is cast. Professional registration and / or forms of licensing are now in place in most western countries. In New Zealand social work has been preoccupied with issues of professionalization in much of its 60 plus years of history as an identified occupational group (Ritchie, 1967; Nash, 2009).

Registration has raised the membership of ANZASW, as all registered social workers require a Competency assessment to be done and the ANZASW is one of the two approved providers of such assessments at the time of writing. ANZASW had 4207 members in February 2010 (ANZASW, 2010, p.6) compared with 1834 members in June 2003 (ANZASW, 2003, p.13). The competency assessment system filled a gap for social workers seeking some sort of external recognition and mandate in the absence of a formal legal system. Membership of the ANZASW still does not require formal social work qualifications. Many non-registered social workers will be members of the voluntary professional body and some employers, in the absence of protection of title, will find this sufficient. In 2007 a review of the SWRA (2003) has recommended the amendment of the legislation to enable
protection of title to apply to social work (Social Workers Registration Board 2007). While a change of government in 2008 has delayed the implementation of the amendments it is likely that protection of title will eventually be achieved.

As the social work workforce in New Zealand moves towards greater homogeneity in entry criteria, the possession of a recognised qualification may have less value in differentiating an individual social worker from their peers. As such CPE could become a territory in which individuals participate to meet compliance requirements, and ‘get ahead’. The utilisation of education as a mechanism to mark professional status can be observed in New Zealand social work where social workers pay their own fees to upgrade their qualification to a degree, despite holding a recognised qualification. There is anecdotal evidence that some employers are requiring applicants to hold degrees, rather than diploma qualifications. This form of upward credentialising will be addressed through exploration of data in Chapter Seven.

Focus Two to follow, explores some of the major discourses that hold sway in the bureaucratic systems in which most social work is practiced.

**Focus Two: The influence of managerialist discourses in social work organizations and CPE**

In much of the Western world most social workers are employed in large state run systems or in non-governmental organizations, many of whom rely on funding from contracts for service with the state. As such much of the control of practice is vested in systems which implement government policy. So, in New Zealand social work, the government’s patronage has led to statutory registration and it is this mandate that underpins much of current practice around CPE. Government policy in turn is shaped by some significant global trends in the area of adult education. These are briefly considered here in as much as they form part of the backdrop for CPE.
The influence of new learning discourses on social work organizations

Post-school learning has grown radically in significance as an arm of social and economic policy over the past few decades. In particular there is a sustained belief in the importance for whole societies and their economies to engaging in continual learning and development (Jarvis, 1999; Olssen, 2006). This trend is crystallized in such terms as ‘lifelong learning’, ‘the learning society’ and ‘the learning organization’. These learning discourses are significant in this study because on superficial examination it seems that they provide one of those rare points where government policy, organizational policy, the professionalization project and the values of social work seems to be in harmony. On the surface what could possibly not be ‘good’ about ‘lifelong learning’? Welton (1995, pp.1-3) suggests that while these terms are new, the ideas underpinning them are not. They are manifestations of the ideology of human improvement that can be traced back to the late 15th century and expanded through the intense period of discovery that the world was not static. Welton, 1995 p.2-3) asserts, as have others (Coffield, 2002; Olssen, 2006), that the ‘self-conscious discourse of the learning society is worth careful and critical scrutiny’ and asks ‘what is it that our terrible and troubled global society is trying to name, to discover, to accomplish?’

The emergence of the construct ‘lifelong learning’ is linked back to post-war changes in western society in the developments in worker education, the growth of information and communication technology, the development of organizational learning and the explicit political rhetoric of the ‘information society’ and the ‘knowledge society’, with their explicit links to neo-liberalism. Coffield (2002 p.174 ) argues that there has been a ‘powerful consensus developed over the last 30 years to the effect that lifelong learning is a wonder drug or magic bullet that, on its own, will solve a wide range of educational, social and political ills’.

The idea of learning as a ‘fix’ for socioeconomic challenges of a rapidly changing society has some merit. Possessing, at the very least, an attitudinal predisposition
towards continuous education fits the ideal of reflexive modernity (Beck et al. 1994). Learning in this realm is an aspect of humanity that can be harnessed to business. Workers are termed ‘human resources’, more recently ‘human capital’; thus objectified by this language but also capable of being ‘empowered’ to work to maximize profit. Bourdieu rejects the notion of human capital and functionalist approaches to understanding the role of education: ‘From the very beginning, a definition of human capital, despite its humanistic connotations, does not move beyond economism’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p.46).

From a Habermasian perspective, transformative learning belongs in the lifeworld and represents the potential for deliberative democracy (Welton, 1995, p.5). Intrusion of the controlling forces of the system threatens this transformative potential. Olssen (2006, p.216) offers this analysis: ‘In Foucault’s senses, lifelong learning represents a model of governing individuals in their relation to the collective. More specifically, it constitutes a technology of control’. What has emerged from the literature review is a strong tension within the idea of lifelong learning, of learning valued for itself, and useful learning. This is sometimes held as the distinction between education and training. Bagnall’s (2004) description here is useful. In a discussion of the difference between the instrumental and the aesthetic, Bagnall states:

On the one hand here is the imperative to think and act instrumentally-concentrating on the value of one’s actions and engagements for the achievement of ends beyond the intrinsic value of the actions themselves- the ends to which training is directed in the present case … The contrasting imperative to the aesthetic is to value one’s actions, engagements and their outcomes for their intrinsic worth – their (autotelic) value in and of themselves as experiences, engagements or outcomes (education in the present case (2004, p.59).

Such a distinction is rooted in the historical distinction between ‘education of the mind, for contemplation and leadership, and the training of the body for work’ (Bagnall, 2004, p.59). The shift is also a shift in location of learning from the private sphere to the workplace, from individual continuing education to work-
based learning, in the professions from professional education to human resource development. In 2004 the journal *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, dedicated an issue to addressing the increasingly blurred lines between human resource development (HRD) and CPE (Jeris & Daley, 2004). Bierema and Eraut make a very useful contribution to this debate, published in this issue, in which they define the differences in each (Bierema & Eraut, 2004). While CPE and HRD both have an interest in professional learning, knowledge, performance, strategy and change (Bierema & Eraut, p.57), there are significant differences. Many of these divergences have to do with prime focus, for example: in relation to learning CPE focuses on individual knowledge, expertise and competence, while HRD is more aimed at managerial, organizational systems and training for performance (Dirkx, Gilley, & Gilley, 2004). Traditional CPE is professionally based; may be driven by the professional body itself, or in association with academia. It tends to operate on a market model, where practitioners choose from advertised programmes. HRD is employer driven and employs the tools of learning need analysis, which may or may not include worker perspectives but is generally focused on the perceptions of managers (Bierema & Eraut, 2004, pp. 56-58).

**The learning organization**

The concept of ‘the learning organization’ has probably had a greater influence on those who have control of resources for professional development than any other approach. This terminology is echoed in the reports, policies and statements of intent in various government departments in human services. See Reich for Australian examples (Reich, 2002, pp. 225-228). In New Zealand a major report on the capability and baseline funding of the statutory child protection agency (CYF) states that a raft of initiatives should have an underlying focus on 'supporting CYF to become a learning organization' (Treasury, 2003) [original emphasis]. This is not further defined nor supported by statements explicitly linking policy proposals to the concept of the learning organization.

The common features of ‘the learning organization’ include a systemic view of organizational learning and development, the notion of a cycle of continuous
critical reflection on the business of the organization, the notion of empowerment of individuals within the work world, emphasis on communication and the harnessing of knowledge and energy (Senge, 1990). These notions are attractive to those who manage professionals within bureaucratic systems. The learning organization concept's influence beyond the business sector is demonstrated by literature in professional contexts such as health, social services and education (Kurtz, 1998; Gould, 2000; Gould & Baldwin, 2004). Embedded within the phrase, 'the learning organization' is an assumption that stakeholders (often end users or clients, but arguably staff are stakeholders as well) in human and social services benefit from this 'learning' in human and social services. It is assumed that the inclusion of philosophical approaches to learning and development meet grander ideas of the democratization of workplaces and the empowerment of workers, and this is what has made it attractive to social workers. In this study the claims of 'the learning organization' are seen as somewhat rhetorical and worthy of closer scrutiny.

There is a robust critique of 'the learning organization' and a review summarised here reveals four consistent points of challenge: the domination of the organization as the site of learning (Fenwick 1998; Field 1997); the dominant role of managers (Coopey, 1996; Fenwick, 1998); cautions about the problem of power in worker empowerment (Casey 2003; Owenby 2002; Field 1997); and the preponderance of instrumental approaches to workplace learning (Battersby 1999; Reich, 2002). Reliance on the organization as a site for learning leads to a consequent focus on learning processes occurring within the organization's current culture. Field (1997, p.51) argues that organizational culture often reflects the assumptions and lessons of the past, and this is likely to impede the power shift required and thus hindering learning. Remuneration and recognition systems, approaches to disputes, work processes, the design of the work physical environment, the role of supervisors and so forth ‘can perpetuate control oriented ways of operating long after management has made a genuine effort to support empowerment and learning’ (Field,p.51).
The second point in this critique is that the ‘learning organization’ posits a dominant role for managers and a subordinate role for workers (Fenwick, 1998; Coopey, 1996; Owenby, 2002). Lee and Cassell (2009, p.8) note:

Rather than being built on harmony and shared visions and values, modern organizations comprise groups with disparate power, with the more powerful managers resisting ideas of their interdependence with others. Instead of pursuing learning to create a learning organization, many managers appear to be guided by short-term, bottom line considerations of profitability when considering learning provisions.

There are two aspects to this, the first being a shift towards control of workers’ learning to serve managerial imperatives (Olssen, 2006), and secondly, a move away from earlier notions of worker education that focused on broad social and democratic participation (Casey 2003). Casey regards this as part of ‘a heightened re-privileging of managerial agency in organizational design and behaviour’ (2003, p.263). Coopey (1996, p.357) argues that while learning organizations may be less hierarchical than conventional organizations, the ‘incumbents of such positions will typically occupy quite crucial roles at internal and external boundaries’ giving them informational power as well as the usual command over people and resources.

Identifying a third critical theme, Field (1997) argues that employees may also be cautious about moving into the role of empowered learner. Field's research showed that workers approached changes in work culture with some trepidation because of the underlying need for security and both overt and more subtle hierarchies in the current culture. Without acknowledgement of power differentials, the reliance on ‘open dialogue’ for learning may be shaky. Owenby (2002, p.59).considers there is a risk of organizational self-deception and that to be successful organizations must ‘commit to uncovering hidden power relationships and eliminating surplus control’.

A fourth theme acknowledges the emphasis on problem solving and instrumental knowledge as a commodity (Fenwick, 1998). Fenwick suggests that there is a focus on ‘learn how’ rather than ‘learn what’, and ‘there is no explicit curriculum’;
instead, long term commitment is deferred to meet short term objectives in order to keep up with change (p.147). There is a risk that in appropriating workers’ learning processes to promote organizational goals, the value of learning for its own sake, self-directed and free from manipulation, is jeopardized. Other kinds of knowledge – cultural, transformative and personal – may be relegated to the private sphere.

In summary, a critique of the learning organization is grounded in concerns about power and agency and about who sets the agenda (Casey, 2003). In a recent relevant study of internal training policies in child protection agencies, Reich argues that ‘the learning organization’ is a technology used to implement neo-liberalist management through the governing of practice for corporate aims. Reich (2002, p.225) found an emphasis in learning and development policy on the implementation of quality management systems and other aspects of corporate strategic management. In her conclusion Reich suggests the research ‘destabilizes the notion of neutral techniques, such as 'the learning organisation', spreading vision and goodness to workers and increased productivity to organisations’ (Reich, 2002, p.229).

In social work practice there is a risk of the deconstruction of professional knowledge that comes from critical reflection and meaning making over time and its replacement with technologies of learning and practice. Within the human services, this may be in part reflected in the current drive for evidence-based practice (Sheldon, 2001), if the outcome of this is to reify positivist empirical research over other methods of inquiry which may be more participatory. Fenwick also argues that the organizational appropriation of critical reflection focuses on the individual and puts their beliefs and values up for challenge. In this way ‘critical scrutiny is deflected from the power structures and the organization itself’ (Fenwick, 1998, p.149). Critical reflection is focused inwards and not onto the social structures and power relations that may impact on practice. Clearly organizational contexts exert considerable pressure. Fook (2004) describes the challenges of providing training in reflective practice within a corporate social work organization where demands of expediency overwhelmed participants.
The influence of these interlocking themes in contemporary social work is apparent in the themes emerging from this study and these ideas are further developed in the presentation of findings in Chapter Six. The next section examines the third component of the framework, the collective and individual dimensions of professional learning and social work careers.

**Focus Three: Dimensions of professional learning and social work careers**

This section considers the impact of the professional and organizational discourses explored in Foci One and Two and relates these to practitioners themselves, their experiences within their own careers. The linking of ideas of reflective practice, and reflexivity are attractive to social work (Fook, 2003). While the passions of the radical social work era (Bailey and Brake 1975) were dampened if not doused by two decades of managerialism (Jordan, 2000; Harris, 2003), recent approaches have emphasized more reflective approaches (Redmond, 2004) and constructivist approaches (Parton & O’Byrne, 2000) which have at their heart some sense that the service user and practitioner are at least partners in social work activity. The radical approach continues in the work of Allan, Pease and Briskman (2003); Allan, Briskman and Pease (2009); Pease and Fook, (1999); Mullaly, (1993, 2001, 2007); and Rossiter, (1996). The appeal of critical reflection and critical inquiry in social work is the opportunity to 'micro-critique' practices and processes within the day to day activities of the profession and further, with an aim to achieve praxis, to 'macro-critique' the practice itself; being able to stand back and look critically at ones' own profession, being aware of issues of oppression and struggle within the field of endeavour, and presumably some kind of action stemming from this. This inevitably casts a critical gaze at the organizational context of social work.

A recent contribution by Lynch (2006) provides a theoretical expansion of reflective practice towards a more critical stance by adding the requirement for ongoing structural analysis to the foci for continuing education. Lynch (2006, p.82) notes that the development of reflective practice as a key professional development goal necessitates striving for educational experiences which acknowledge the
social/political contexts of our knowledge, recognise the situated contexts of an exploration of our biographical experiences on our understandings of practice, draw on an analysis which links personal experiences to the socio-political context, facilitate social workers to remain true to their commitment to social justice [and] recognise the reflexive nature of our work with clients.

Lynch explores the question of how social workers can be both situated in our practice contexts and sufficiently distanced from them to be truly critical at the same time. For social workers, the question relevant to continuing learning is:

how can we be immersed in a specific context and reality whilst at the same time analytically observing the structural implications of that context? This dilemma, I argue, lies at the heart of how we think about social work knowledge and therefore social work education and social work continuing professional education. It is this dilemma which, I believe, is not sufficiently explored in the social work literature relating to reflective practice (Lynch, 2006, p.83).

Lynch argues that reflective practice is encouraged in pre-service education for social work, but not necessarily maintained in situ, largely because of the very nature of immersion in practice and the challenge to look beyond the situated experience of everyday practice. The findings of this study echo Lynch’s argument and also point to Casey’s (2003) argument that the appropriation of education is limiting worker activism and the implications for political advocacy. As such a managerial approach ‘represses or ignores the implicit recognition and legitimacy of the role of political action on the part of workers’ unions and their demands for participatory forms of industrial organization and for individual lifelong learning’ (Casey, 2003, p.263).
Focus Four: Building professional capital

The fourth focus for the presentation of social workers’ perceptions of CPE may be found in a newer construct of particular relevance to social work and other ‘new’ or emerging professions such as nursing. This construct is ‘building professional capital’. It is useful at this point to discuss the significance of Bourdieu’s work on capital, as some definitional issues are important when extending Bourdieu’s concepts:

According to my empirical investigations [there is] economic capital (in its different forms), cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital . . . Thus agents are distributed in the overall social space, in the first dimension, according to the overall volume of capital they possess and, in the second dimension, according to the structure of their capital, that is the relative weight of the different species of capital, economic and cultural, in the total volume of their assets, (Bourdieu, 2002, pp. 233-4).

Bourdieu defines social capital as ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources’ linked to ‘durable networks’ of relationships and group memberships:

which [provide] each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. These relationships may exist only in the practical state, in material and/or symbolic exchanges which help to maintain them. They may also be socially instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name (the name of a family, a class, or a tribe or of a school, a party, etc.) and by a whole set of instituting acts designed simultaneously to form and inform those who undergo them; in this case, they are more or less really enacted and so maintained and reinforced, in exchanges (Bourdieu, 1986, p.246).

Symbolic capital can be any of the three forms of capital, as expressed by Bourdieu (1991, p. 230), ‘symbolic capital, commonly called prestige, reputation, fame, …is
the form assumed by these different kinds of capital when they are perceived and recognised as legitimate’. Swartz notes that ‘Bourdieu did not offer a theory of cultural capital per se. Cultural capital …was always just one – albeit a very important one – among a variety of types of power resources – capitals – that individuals and groups accumulate and exchange in order to enhance their positions in modern stratified societies’ (Swartz, 2008, p.48).

Some brief discussion of the extensions to Bourdieu’s concept of social capital is useful here to aid clarity. Portes (1998, p.3) describes the various uses of the term as ‘a conceptual stretch’ and is critical of the use of the term in an ‘unmitigated celebration of community’ (p.22). A decade later Fulkerson and Thompson (2008) undertook a meta-analysis of definitions and extensions of ‘social capital’ and delineate two ‘camps’ in the usage of the construct. One camp is defined as composed of ‘normative social capitalists’; those social scientists

within the Durkheimian tradition… view [social capital] as a set of features in a social structure that lead to collective action in order to bring about mutual benefit for some aggregate of people (2008, p.540).

This perspective assumes a universal explanation of social development understood, ‘in varying levels of norms of trust and reciprocity …cohesion and solidarity’ (Fulkerson & Thompson, 2008, p.540) and includes, for example, Putnam (2002). Fulkerson and Thompson’s second camp are called the ‘resource social capitalists’ who draw on interactionist and conflict traditions and employ social capital as:

an explanation for uneven patterns in the accumulation of power, prestige, and other forms of inequality, in addition to recognizing the importance of context (Bourdieu 1980, 1983, 1984; Schulman and Anderson 1999). For this group, social capital refers to investments that individuals make in their networks (p.540).
Fulkerson and Thompson suggest that theorising about social capital must address context and power to avoid it becoming a normative paradigm within social science (p.555). In this present study the Bordieusian approach is intended. The concept is stretched to examine the professional project of social work, in this usage there is a debt to Garrett and Houston (Houston, 2002; Garrett, 2007a, 2007b).

The construct ‘professional capital’, is used in this study as an extension of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1986), and as a form of symbolic capital, where prestige, status and influence in both institutional life and the wider public discourse is important to social workers, because they perceive themselves as lacking. Professional capital is not particularly well developed and appears rarely in the sociological literature, although there is considerable attention paid to the application of the Bordieusian constructs of social and cultural capital to professional practices and the identity of professions (Houston, 2002; Garrett, 2007a, 2007b), and cultural capital in relation to education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). References to ‘professional capital’ are found mainly in discussion of changes and challenges in modern professions, including the challenges of multidisciplinary teams Sergiovanni, 1998 [education]; Brodie, 2003 [midwifery]; Chau, 2005, [nursing] Goldenberg, 2005 [bioethics]; Lingard et al., 2007 [interdisciplinary research].

Social historian Harold Perkin (1990) uses the phrase in his discussion of the rise of professional society in the United Kingdom, linking the increasing social power of professions to a form of property (economic assets) in the manner of social and cultural capital:

Since the essence of property is a right to (some portion of) the flow of income from the resource owned, professional capital – which is manifestly more tangible than corporate shareholdings, less destructible than building...and capable of self-renewal and improvement – is thus a species of property in the strictest sense’ (Perkin, 1990, p.379)[emphasis added]

It is interesting that Perkin regards professional capital as a renewable resource and capable of improvement and this is relevant to use of the construct elsewhere. The
concept of renewal is often applied to professional development and implies a continuing exposure to new knowledge. Given that the production of knowledge implicit in scientific endeavour is highly valued, then contributions to research and scholarship might be perceived to enhance professional capital further.

Sergiovanni proposed building professional capital amongst teachers by suggesting pedagogical leadership as an alternative to bureaucratic visionary and entrepreneurial forms of leadership in schools (Sergiovanni, 1998). Sergiovanni defines capital in this context as 'the value of something that when properly invested produces more of that thing which then increases overall value', (p.37). Sergiovanni introduces his notion of professional capital thus:

'[good schools] cultivate communities of practice as a way to generate professional capital. One hallmark of an established profession is the willingness of its members to be concerned not only with their own practices but with the practice itself. Professional capital is created as a fabric of reciprocal responsibilities, and support woven among its faculty that adds value to teacher and students alike (Sergiovanni, p.40).

Two scholars in the field of nursing have discussed professional capital. Brodie (2003, p.203) uses professional capital as ‘a construct that describes the potential enhanced capacity that midwives could experience if their work was understood, visible and recognised in the provision of maternity services in Australia’…. ‘by raising the professional capital and creating positive social networks’. Brodie (2003, p.204) suggests that ‘professional capital may be the result of efforts to increase trust, self-esteem and self-confidence in individual midwives, which in turn creates opportunities for new learning, fresh challenges and change to practice, leadership in organizational systems and the culture of the workplace’.

Chau (2005, p.671) uses the term professional capital similarly in the summary of an unpublished conference paper on knowledge in nursing, stating that she uses it ‘to inscribe a profession’s value, as being recognised and appreciated, by other professions’. Chau offers ‘a preliminary definition of ‘professional capital’ as the
value of recognition and understanding of the contributions of a profession to include trust, appreciation, reciprocation, and the allowance of growth through change within the context of related professions’ (p.671). Goldenberg (2005, p.6) specifically highlights the links between the evidence-based practice discourse, neoliberal assumptions about ‘best practice’ and the building of professional capital:

The political and professional capital of evidence-based medicine cannot be overstated … this evidence-based practice is supposed to increase professional responsibility and accountability … make managed care … more cost effective by ensuring that only the most promising technologies are funded….The allure of evidence should not be underappreciated, as it is thought to be able to assist us in seeing past our habits, biases, and mistakes.

Proximity to knowledge, science and ‘evidence’ for practice then are significant features for professional advancement.

If social capital has two elements (Bourdieu cited in Portes, 1998, pp.3-4), the first being the social relationships that allow claim to resources and the second being the amount and value of such resources, how then does this construct work when applied to a profession? Use of the term ‘capital’ implies a thing of value that can be invested in some kind of exchange or set of relationships that are reciprocal. For Sergiovanni (1998), this is created in schools through the notion of communities of practice, where leadership creates inquiry rather than rules.

We can thus distil from this discussion some the key attributes of the professional capital of any given profession within its social milieu. These desirable elements include but are not limited to the following:

1. The profession is trusted by others including users of professional services as well as other key stakeholders and other professions;
2. Mutually rewarding relationships exist within the profession with some cohesion between members and congruent values;
3. Mutually rewarding relationships exist or can be developed with other professional groups;
4. Members of the profession are able to occupy and perform well, roles of leadership, being invited or empowered to provide such leadership.

5. Reciprocal relationships exist, with some form of exchange;

6. Members hold some sense of collective identity and ‘self-esteem’;

7. Members are able to make a clear and understood knowledge-claim for practice and this requires both the application and production of knowledge;

8. The profession and its members hold a clear and well differentiated territory of practice;

9. Opportunities are available for ongoing and fresh learning within a profession that adds to the benefit of the wider multidisciplinary team and the service environment;

10. The particular profession is visible in the public discourse of the contributions professions make to society and is particular and recognizable for its distinctive contribution to social well-being.

How do we then conceptualize what might be observed or absent if these attributes listed above are essential features of strong professional capital?

1. Invisibility in the public discourse of professionalism or the profession being associated with negative outcomes;

2. A lack of recognition for the contributions of the profession to society –or this contribution is poorly understood;

3. A passive role in institutions rather than leadership by the profession;

4. A weak or disputed professional knowledge claim.

Conclusions

The framework provided in this chapter is utilised to present the outcomes of the research, to be reported in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. The search for professional influence and recognition is a major part of the discourse of identity in the social work profession. Thus CPE can be examined, and the views of a sample of practitioners explored, within a framework of profession, organizational context and personal career.
The relationship of continuing education (and the credentials thereby gained) to the desire to achieve greater professional recognition emerges from this study. It discovers a complex set of factors that contribute to social workers' perception of low status and suggests that, in the current climate, CPE is seen as a strong potential contributor to the growth of social work’s professional capital. The features of both having professional capital and not having it (or perceiving its absence) as described in the last section of this chapter will be returned to in Chapter Eight.
Chapter Four: Researching Continuing Education

Introduction

This chapter is guided by the four key questions posed by Crotty (1998) in respect to establishing the parameters of social research:

- What theoretical perspective lies behind the methodology in question?
- What epistemology informs this theoretical perspective?
- What methods do [I] propose to use?
- What methodology governs [my] choice and use of methods?

This chapter describes the nature of the study, its context and the epistemological, theoretical and methodological underpinning of the approach taken. The chapter outlines the aims of the research, the choices underlying the research design, the methods and techniques used, the methods of analysis and the theoretical perspective that underpinned the selection of this approach. The problems of conducting a small qualitative study within one’s own milieu are considered.

The focus of the study is the perceptions of social workers regarding continuing education in social work in New Zealand. The research questions were:

**Perceptions of CPE:** What were the perceptions and assumptions held by managers and practitioners in New Zealand social work?

- Do the views of managers differ from those held by practitioners and can these be linked to the corporate goals of the agencies in which they work?
- Do social service agencies (via the managers who may influence decisions about funding and study time) tend to assess value in continuing education activities on the basis of content and focus of study rather than the generic value of education and analytical skills?
- To what extent were they influenced by 'corporate goals' and managerialist conceptions of learning for professionals, for example, 'the learning organization'?
**The social justice mission:** To what extent do individual practitioners in social work in New Zealand link the CPE activities they are engaged in to be aligned with the espoused aims of social work?

- Do individual practitioners feel they have agency in their professional development choices?
- If they feel these are constrained by organizational factors, to what extent might they wish to subvert these?
- What conceptualizations of learning exist within practice settings?
- Do practitioners link their learning activities directly or indirectly to the profession’s goal of social justice?

**Professionalization: The impact on social worker perceptions**

- What is the impact of legislated regulation on CPE?
- How does the mandate for CPE impact on practitioner choices?
- How does it impact on managers / supervisors choices?

**Selecting a research strategy**

This study employs a qualitative research strategy within a framework of critical social theory. The key value of qualitative research is that it allows issues that have been under-researched to be explored in detail and enables the researcher to explore people’s opinions and the underlying rationale for attitudes and behaviours. However, qualitative research does not allow conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which views and understandings exist among a wider population in the field of study. Qualitative research is designed to be illustrative rather than providing statistically representative data. A qualitative approach was chosen because of the researcher’s desire to explore the experiences of social workers in New Zealand social work and to develop this framework based on a deeper understanding of ‘What is?’ ‘What might be?’ And: ‘What now?’ In other words, a reflexive approach to the research problems suited the goals of the inquiry.

Key assumptions were that participants in the study (including the researcher) experience a world in which there are multiple perspectives, and that the knower and subject create understandings within the research process. These perspectives are observed through the conceptual lens of the researcher. Qualitative research is grounded in the personal encounters with others, generally in a context as close to
the natural environment of the phenomena under study as is possible. The ‘perspective and subjective lenses that the researcher and research participants bring to the qualitative study are part of the context of the findings’ and there is ‘potential for the …understandings of [both] to be changed in the course of the inquiry’ (Schram, 2006, pp. 8-9). Rather than seeking to achieve the quantitative ideal of generalization of findings across time and place, qualitative inquiry seeks to preserve the natural context, with the caution that of course, context is not fixed and stable but constantly changing as those within it act, and circumstances and dynamics change in turn. This is a small study and caution must be applied to the application of the findings beyond the time and social climate in which the research is conducted. This is not to deny the power of participants’ ‘stories’ and their resonance with current critical social theory. Swartz & Zolberg (2004, p.3) write of Bourdieu’s approach to social research: ‘an orienting theme throughout Bourdieu’s work warns against the partial and fractured views of social reality generated by the fundamental subject/object dichotomy that has plagued social science from its very beginning’. Furthermore, ‘for Bourdieu, the solution lies not in finding a new or returning to an old unifying paradigm but rather in practicing a genuinely reflexive and critical social science that requires transcending the subject/object dichotomy by systematically relating agents and structures and by situating all social scientific inquiry within the broader context of power relations that embrace the researchers as well as the objects of their investigations’ (Swartz & Zolberg, 2004, p.5.) Reflexivity requires the researcher to continuously question their work, to ask such questions as, ‘how did I arrive at that conclusion?’, and ‘why did I focus on that data’ in respect to their own interpretations.

Qualitative research draws on multiple epistemological, theoretical and methodological approaches. Qualitative research is ‘infused with what is called epistemology…epistemologies ask questions about knowledge itself’ and the research process starts with ‘conscious and unconscious questions and assumptions that serve as a foundation for an epistemological position’ (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004, p.2). In this study an early assumption was that social workers’ perceptions and experiences would be affected by the organizational context of their work and the impact of power relations inherent within organizations and, that as a consequence, some tensions between professional and organisational aims
would be experienced. Implicit in this is an assumption that social workers, as actors in the milieu of practice, would ‘know’ and ‘name’ this experience in such a manner that could generate explanations. Their explanations, subject to the filters of my interpretation, would lead to greater understanding of the nature CPE in New Zealand at this time.

Drisko suggests that the following criteria should be considered in assessing reports of qualitative studies: identification of the researcher’s chosen epistemological stance; identification of the potential audience for the research and the objectives of the study; specification of method; identification of biases; the maintenance of professional ethics and lastly but most importantly the consistency between the conclusions and the study’s philosophy, aims and presented data (Drisko, 1997, pp.185). Therefore, this chapter provides an overview of the research process; methods, choices and underpinning ideas and frameworks. In addition some of the problems and limitations are discussed.

**Theoretical stance**

The philosophical stance informing the approach to this investigation is underpinned by critical social theory. Bourdieu’s conceptual tools have assisted the analysis of social work as a field or demarcated social space within contemporary society in which it seeks to define its territory and advance its social standing. Critical theorists such as Habermas have provided an analysis of the modernist welfare state society, in which the successes of instrumental rationality have ‘come to dominate the welfare state project, at the expense of communicative processes’ (Lorenz, 2004, p.147). Donzelot has located social work ‘as a hybrid of ‘the social’, in the space between the private household and the state (Jordan & Parton, 2004, p.22). Habermas’ conceptual framework of ‘system’ and ‘lifeworld’ has been useful in framing the social work project within an exploration of the contemporary discourses of managerialism and professionalization. This provides a context for the research process, its grounding in the world of practice, the voice of practitioners and an interpretive understanding of their role in health and welfare bureaucracies as intermediaries between the lifeworld and the system. Schram (2006, p.23) argues that:
The term critical theory is … a blanket term denoting a set of several alternative paradigms, including additionally (but not limited to) neo-Marxism, feminism and materialism and participatory inquiry …. [and three sub strands] post structuralism, postmodernism and a blending of these two. Whatever their differences, the common breakaway assumption of all these variants is that of the value-determined nature of inquiry-an epistemological difference.

In this study, an explicit position is held that social workers occupy a marginal position in the welfare state. This is an intermediary space countenanced by the state but its practitioners often caught between service users and the normative control mechanisms of the state. Practitioners’ understanding of this political position would be expected to vary considerably. The approach to the data collection process allowed that, despite the contradictions inherent in social work’s position in the modern welfare state, one might find that individual social workers seek to act and interpret this world in unique ways. Their unique perspectives are valued, though they might not all align with my interpretation of the social realm in which they practice. There were some key assumptions, for example, that social workers would demonstrate a wish to explore opportunities to link their professional development to the broad aim of the profession to bring about social justice, even though perhaps ill-equipped by educational opportunities and current management processes to achieve this. The methodological approach was selected to be congruent with the critical perspective. The study participants work within institutions that are maintained by powerful social structures and discourses in society. Within this viewpoint, the creation, dissemination and control of certain kinds of professional development is embedded in social organizations of practice: in this study, the employing organizations in which social workers’ work is situated and mandated. A key assumption was that employing organizations would exert pressure to promote instrumental task-focused learning ahead of more independent forms of critical inquiry, but that some individuals would resist this pressure.

The research questions were premised on an expectation that while organizational discourses may exert strong influence –or even dominate the phenomena under study – the participants were individual actors with personal, cultural and political
perspectives which may provide counter-stories to this dominant view (Jeris & Armacost, 2002). Cunningham’s 2000 sociological framework, discussed in Chapter Three, proved useful in acknowledging the place where ‘biography (the contextualized individual ‘intersects with social structure, in this case the organizational site of social work practice (Cunningham, 2000, p. 574). In CPE it is crucial to explore whose voice is heard, whose knowledge is privileged? A critical theory approach ought to provide a space for quieter voices to be heard, in this case the voice of practitioners as they identify barriers and challenges. Implicit in this view is a critical starting point in the exploration of the perceptions and ideas that occur in accounts of CPE in social work in New Zealand at the point of study. A set of assumptions about the impact of managerialism and economic rationalism in social work influenced my approach because this was part of a shared experience. The impact of neoliberalism was part of researcher experience as a practitioner, and as a social work educator and an academic in the ‘managed university’. The marginality and contested nature of social work in the health sector for example, were similar to aspects of the social work experience in the academic world;

Professional educators work at the interface of practices influenced by the government and relevant public sector bodies, their universities, and their original professional fields. Their discourses and practices were often contested and in flux, and the ways in which these contestations and changes were instantiated in the settings of the universities brought conflicting demands to professional educators (Murray & Aymer, 2009, p.90-91).

For this researcher, one whose professional life is immersed in the university, a qualitative approach to method, underpinned by the thinking frame offered by critical social theory, provided the best means to explore the relationships between individuals and groups of practitioners, the institutional contexts of their work and their ideals and aspirations for professional learning. Engagement with this topic was as an interested colleague, an enthusiastic provider of professional development opportunities and an active member of a community of interest. The various roles held at times during the fieldwork, analysis and writing up would challenge any claim to innocence of agenda or aspirations.
The researcher’s own situation as an academic leader without a PhD, during a time in which universities have experienced the impact of the managerialist neo-liberal agenda, has led to an empathetic understanding of the pressures in a professional career. As such methods that require strict neutrality and objectivity would have been inappropriate and adherence unattainable. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) argue that an approach informed by critical theory rejects the domination of instrumental/technological rationality as an oppressive feature in modern society:

Critical theorists claim that instrumental/technical rationality is more interested in method and efficiency than in purpose. It delimits its questions to ‘how to’ rather than ‘why should’? In a research context, critical theorists claim that many rationalist scholars become so obsessed with issues of technique, procedure and correct method that they forget the humanistic purpose of the research act (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p.282).

The research design

Three distinct tasks were established in the research design. The first was to identify and describe the current understandings and ideas in CPE and analyze these in relation to the stated policies and approaches dealing with training and professional development within the social services in New Zealand. This process included an examination of the literature and, where able to be located, key professional texts referring to education, professional development and policy that might inform and influence practice in New Zealand. The second goal was to describe common (and uncommon) perceptions amongst social work managers and practitioners, through an analysis of their views and experience gained during guided group interviews. The third goal was to explore these perceptions in greater depth in individual interviews with persons of influence: senior practitioners, supervisors, managers and advisors. These participants were those whose employment role enabled them to influence CPE decisions relating to practitioner choices and resources. Qualitative data gathered in this manner ‘will be subjective, interpretive, process oriented and holistic’ (Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2004, p.3) and in this study the interview was the major method employed to access such data.
The focus of the research process was on the relationships between data gathered in the study of the texts and from key literature and research, from which themes and key concepts were developed, and that gathered from the participants who were practitioners in New Zealand social service organizations. The essential tasks in such a design included; deriving beginning questions, conducting interviews, transcribing and coding, becoming immersed in the data, analyzing, sifting and sorting words, phrases and sentences within the textual data and the field records, making comparisons, writing and attempting to draw working models of the data, constructing questions within and about the research process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The research design was influenced to some extent by a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006). This differs from ‘classical’ grounded theory in a significant way and this will be explored in some detail below. Classical grounded theory is a methodology that is ‘grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed. Theory evolves during the actual research, and does so through the continuous interplay between analysis and data collection’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p.273). Classical grounded theory was developed in part as a response to positivist assertions that that qualitative research lacked scientific legitimacy. Glaser and Strauss’ work in the 1960s challenged the arbitrary divisions between theory and research and the prevailing view that qualitative methods were impressionistic and unsystematic. Grounded theory challenged the underpinning assumption that qualitative research could provide only descriptive case studies rather than the development of theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 cited in Charmaz, 2000, p. 511).

The basic assumptions of the grounded theorist, as summarised by Schram (2006, p.120) are: regard for human beings as ‘purposive agents’; the belief that ‘people act on the basis of meaning and this meaning is defined and redefined through interaction’; and an understanding that reality is socially constructed and constantly changing; the interrelationship between causes, conditions and consequences is important. In addition Schram asserts, ‘theories are provisional and fallible
interpretations’, time limited and needing to be checked and ‘generating theory and
doing social research are part of the same process’ (2006, p.102).

Grounded theory originates in the work of Glaser & Strauss (1967) and Strauss &
Corbin (1990, 1994). The main aim of grounded theory is to give voice to
participants’ views by building theory from interpretation of research data.
Grounded theory methods include: simultaneous collection and analysis of data,
two-step coding, comparative methods, memo writing aimed at the construction of
conceptual analysis, and sampling to refine emerging theoretical ideas and aid the
integration of the theoretical framework. The researcher begins with general
observations or description of data, and then through deeper analysis creates
conceptual categories. Throughout the process, the grounded theorist ‘seeks to
ensure that the theory arises from the data and not from some other sources: it is a
process of inductive theory building’ (Crotty, 1998, p.78). Grounded theory
encourages researchers to ‘keep their analysis within the boundaries of their data
….abstract concepts should remain grounded in empirical observations and if
necessary, be revised to reflect changes in the data’ (Marvasti, 2004, p.85).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) provided a fairly prescriptive approach detailing method
and procedures underpinned by an assumption of an objective external reality.
These methods include standardized interviewing, unbiased and meticulous data
collection with strong emphasis on technical procedure and verification. Such an
approach can be categorized as objectivist.

It is clear that an objectivist approach is premised on the stated neutrality of the
researcher. Theory emerges from careful application of method by an unbiased
observer. Charmaz, whose original research training was with Glaser and Strauss
(Charmaz 2006, p.xii), describes objectivist grounded theory thus:

Objectivist grounded theory resides in the positivist tradition and thus attends
to data as real in and of themselves and does not attend to the processes of
their production. This stance erases the social context from which data
emerge, the influence of the researcher, and often the interactions between
grounded theorists and their research participants (Charmaz, 2006, p.130).
Constructivist grounded theory differs in that it suggests that researchers ‘take a reflexive stance towards the research process’ (Charmaz, 2006, p.131). More recent constructivist approaches suggest that non-positivist approaches may be preferable, because of the flexibility. This approach allows, for example, less structured in-depth interviewing, suggesting this can provide a more authentic insight into how people frame their experience. Interviews are not exactly the same and the interview is free to follow a new line of inquiry, generated by an interesting response to a question. Charmaz (2006, p.127) states ‘social constructivist theorists: ‘see multiple realities and therefore ask: what do people assume is real? How do they construct and act on their view of reality?’ Pease (2007, p.128) argues that ‘because human beings produce knowledge they can be wrong. Unexamined assumptions and ideology can distort knowledge’. Social research cannot ‘provide the mirror reflection of the social world that positivists strive for but it may provide access to the meanings people attribute to their experiences’ (Miller & Glassner, 2004, p.126).

A pure social constructionist approach is not taken in this study, rather as Crotty (1998, p.63) neatly expresses it, ‘to say that meaningful reality is socially constructed is not to say it is not real’. This is not an ahistorical approach that ignores the historical and situated nature of a practice (or field) such as social work, emerging as it does as a feature of the welfare state. Rather, a critical realist approach is utilised that recognises the constructed nature of many practices within the field and the power relations that influence and govern those practices and practitioners. As Crotty asserts ‘while humans may be described in a constructionist spirit, as engaging in their world and making sense of it, such a description is misleading if it is not set in a genuinely historical and social perspective’ (Crotty, 1998, p.54).

Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study because it allows for the flexible relationship between pre-existing ideas and theory and the emergence of fresh insights from the materials gathered from the field. The work of Charmaz has been employed (2006, p.130) in choosing an interpretive method:
A constructivist approach places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data…. [it] lies squarely in the interpretive tradition.

Most significantly, Charmaz (2006, p184) suggests that ‘constructivist sensibilities are congenial with other traditions such as feminist theory, narrative analysis, cultural studies, critical realism and critical inquiry’. These traditions all share a common stance that knowledge is not neutral nor are the methods by which knowledge is generated: ‘the theory depends on the researcher’s view; it does not and cannot stand outside of it’ (Charmaz, 2006, p.130). Thus the epistemological and theoretical influences of the researcher are not denied.

In this study, the primary appeal of constructivist grounded theory was the more flexible approach to interviewing and the shift away from rigid interview schedules. Inquiry underpinned by critical social theory was compatible with a semi-structured interview design. It was not necessary or even desirable to make claims of objective neutrality. Charmaz (2000, p.513) argues for flexibility in proposing constructivist grounded theory. Constructivist epistemology holds that reality is shaped in the minds of the participants within an experienced event, in which knowledge is built, experience described, named and interpreted. Constructivist grounded theory thus views data collection and analysis as tools to help the researcher generate tentative theory about the phenomena being examined.

In this study, most participants did not have a clearly articulated theory or stance about continuing education: they simply experienced dimensions of it in their day to day professional lives and attempted to interpret this through their own lens. For example, as social workers, many held critical perspectives, and searched for explanations rooted in power relations. These interpretations did not come from “thin air” but in response to the interactions with me the researcher and based on assumptions that we shared some common language with which to construct meaning. In acknowledging this, the qualitative researcher accepts that by asking certain questions and engaging in interpretation in the research conversation with participants, their understandings, beliefs and truths about the subject are altered.
This approach fully acknowledges that some participants’ understandings were developed (and meaning made of particular notions and phrases), during the talk in the interviews, and my role in generating these understandings was not neutral.

Miller and Glassner (2004) aim to avoid the objectivist / constructivist dualism, and suggest that qualitative researchers need to acknowledge the displacement of experience that occurs in an interview, and that transcribing, coding and interpretive processes further displace and change that experience. While techniques to ensure credibility can be utilised, the important thing is to carefully record the data and to examine it in situ in transcripts, so that any piece of data can be seen in the context of the questions and responses that occurred in the sequence of conversation. A constructivist approach can employ the strategies of grounded theory without too fully embracing the ‘positivist leanings of earlier exponents’ (Charmaz, 2000, p. 510). Charmaz suggests ‘grounded theory strategies need not be rigid or unduly prescriptive [and] a focus on meaning while using grounded theory furthers, rather than limits, interpretive understandings’ (p.510) and that ‘coding starts the chain of theory development. Codes that account for our data take form as nascent theory that, in turn, explains these data and directs further data gathering’(p.510). In a similar vein, Ezzy asserts that the examination of data ‘right from the beginning of data collection for ‘cues’ is what makes grounded theory ‘grounded’ (Ezzy, 2002, p.63).

An iterative approach has enabled the pursuit of surprising data and to follow hunches in choosing to explore a phenomenon discovered early on in the data collection process: the employment of a deeper than surface ‘look for views and values as well as acts and facts’ and enables the researcher to ‘get at meaning not truth’, (Charmaz 2000, pp. 525-26). In the first interview, a participant, Summer, commented on the ‘day to day awareness of having to pit yourself against other really bright and intelligent people’. There was a sense that hospital social workers identified their educational aspirations based on a perception of the ‘smartness’ of other professionals with whom they work. This theme of comparison and judgement of different professions in relation to social work became a recurring theme in the study but especially in the encounters with health social workers.

Interpretation begins within the data collection process (Ezzy, 2002, pp. 62-3). The
question that generated this response had sought to explore whether participants perceived differential access to CPE opportunities. What stood out in this part of the data was the practitioner’s sharp observation that there was indeed competition for resources and that social workers struggled to feel they had sufficient professional capital to compete.

**The researcher’s professional roles**
The researcher has multiple roles in the context of New Zealand social work including: academic head of a university social work programme, member of the Social Workers Registration Board during the period 2003-6, well known commentator and writer on issues of social work education and professionalization. Gadamer’s contention that the social frames of reference influence the researcher’s approach to selection of subjects and subsequent interpretation of data is important. As a researcher the author has professional and disciplinary orientations (social work, sociology) membership of social groups (the academy, professional bodies) and a theoretical orientation (critical theory). Gadamer views these affiliations as ‘horizons’ and considers the act of interpretation as ‘the fusion of horizons’, (Gadamer, 1989 cited in Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p.288). In this research project the working title itself juxtaposed contradictory two notions: ‘towards corporate ends’ and ‘social transformation’. This juxtaposition suggested conflicting approaches to CPE. During data collection, it became apparent that while practitioners experienced these contradictions, they had developed ways of achieving aims within the constraints of the environment.

Another researcher may have been more interested in functionalist accounts : for example, did workers and or managers in social work hold consistent views on CPE, did the current provision meet their needs, what gaps should be filled ? Did employing organizations or universities have clear views on what was needed? While these questions were posed in the course of the research it was the underlying ideas and perceptions, the title hints at what might be privileged in these accounts and the dimensions of choice, constraint and resistance that the research was exploring. There is an implicit search for tensions and contradictory approaches.
In addition, these roles may have impacted on the participation and contributions of participants because of their existing and continuing collegial relationship and in various combinations of relationships as stakeholders in social work and social work education.

**The participants**

The participants in the study were 40 people engaged in social work and social services—most to some degree providing direct client services, some supervisors and managers, some in private practice and a number who held multiple roles-practitioners, professional supervisors and educators. In terms of their major role 17 were team leaders / middle and senior managers (including professional advisory roles, team leaders and supervisors), 20 were practitioners and the remaining three held significant leadership roles in specific professional communities. The participants in this study were 80% female (N=33) and in age, 60% were aged between 30 and 50 years. Pakeha (European) participants were the majority with 80% (N= 32); followed by Maori (10% N= 4); Pasifika (7%N=3) and 2.5 %( N=1) Chinese. The majority held professional qualifications, ranging from undergraduate diplomas and degrees to doctorates. It was difficult to get an accurate picture of the proportion of qualified social workers in the New Zealand setting. Significantly only 19% of those who self-identified in the social work category in the 2001 New Zealand census, also reported having qualifications, while 53% held some post school qualifications. Harington and Crothers point out, ‘this data does not elaborate on the nature of the educational qualifications that have been achieved [they] may not be in social work, and there could have been a great deal of water under the learning curve bridges masked in these figures’ (Harington & Crothers, 2005, p 8).

The required professional qualification in social work was determined to be a bachelor’s degree from 2006 onwards, having been an undergraduate diploma for many years, though qualifications are still not mandatory in all agencies. In this study the participants are to a large extent experienced practitioners, with only a small number being in their first few years of practice. The participants were from a range of social work agencies and settings- 39% (N=16) worked in health and
mental health agencies, 23% (N=9) in a statutory child protection agency, 23%
(N=9) in non-governmental community agencies and 15% (N=6) in mixed
education/leadership/supervision roles. All were volunteers in this study and
recruited by initial advertisement or by invitation.

**Recruitment of participants**

The aim of the research was to seek the views of practitioners and managers,
including very experienced senior practitioners and professional leaders who held
advisory roles. These latter categories were recruited because of their positional
ability to influence choices and discourses concerning CPE within the social work
sector and thus able to provide sufficient breadth of information and thematically
rich data. The purpose of both individual and group interviews was to explore the
extent to which groups of stakeholders held congruous or conflicting ideas and
views about the importance of CPE and what kind of CPE is privileged within such
groups (if any)? The main focus in the determination of who to include in the study
was on accessing the perceptions of managers and experienced practitioners
employed in or close to the frontline of practice.

The crucial issue with identification of the phenomena to study is that selection is
purposeful (Ezzy, 2002, pp.74-75). The issue is that the rationale is not just ease or
convenience but that the choice of phenomena is constructive on the basis that it
provides a clear rationale for the selection of participants and that that should relate
to the research question. A sample of participants that aims for maximum variation,
for example, needs to have a clear link to the phenomenon under study. If looking
to make comparisons, between stakeholders’ perspectives, as in this study, then it is
essential to ensure that sufficient variation exists in the participants from whom
data is sought. The researcher can look at a regular pattern or deviant cases in order
to illustrate things that could be difficult to find. In this study the researcher was
aiming to have some breadth of perspective amongst a group of people with many
common attributes (demographics, education and so forth), but for whom
organizational context led to different experiences. The study sought to find
‘common and uncommon’ perspectives.
Ezzy (2002, p.74) makes the point that ‘theoretical sampling as used by grounded theorists illustrates this link between sampling choice and research questions’. Charmaz asserts that theoretical sampling is a ‘defining property of grounded theory. As we refine our categories and develop them as theoretical constructs, we find gaps in our data … We go, back and collect ‘delimited’ data – we conduct ‘theoretical sampling’ (Charmaz p.519). The aim of theoretical sampling is to refine the ideas and increase the breadth or depth of data available for study, not increase the size of the original sample. In this sense the sampling in grounded theory is theoretical – it is not all defined prior to the research but can be refined as the theoretical dimensions emerge (Ezzy, 2002). In this study a decision was made to seek out further participants from non-governmental organizations. This decision was of a theoretical order because the rationale used was that NGO participants in one of the group interviews had seemed to link their CPE needs much more directly to client practice. An observation had been made that NGO social workers were less conscious of the comparisons to be made between social workers access to professional development and the access experienced by other professions. This decision was also linked to the researcher’s desire to reduce one potential bias should the study be dominated by health social workers whose place in multi-disciplinary teams might perhaps explain their acute observation of difference in power and status between professionals.

In choosing to strengthen the number of NGO participants in this research, a hunch or emerging theory could be pursued. Sampling conducted on a theoretical ground can provide the opportunity to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the issues that are encountered or the theory that is emerging from the research process. The later in-depth interviews with non-governmental organization personnel provided a rich source of data, able to be contrasted with the earlier data which had come largely from health sector social workers.

The research design sought participation from the following groups:

A group of social service managers who manage and/or supervise social workers and therefore are in a position to influence choices, resources and barriers to social workers' participation in CPE.

A group of social work practitioners from a District Health Board.
A group of social work practitioners from the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services.
A ‘mixed’ group of social work practitioners who self-selected in response to an advertisement in the professional association newsletter.

An additional group of practitioners from the non-governmental sector agencies was sought after consideration of the issues discussed above.

**Ethical considerations and procedures**

The proposal for the research was submitted to the Flinders University Social and Behavioral Research Ethics Committee (where the study commenced) and approval to commence was granted. Participant information sheets, consent forms and letters were approved by this committee. Copies of these documents are included in the Appendix A. A separate successful application was made to the Child, Youth and Family Research Access Committee (New Zealand) for permission to interview staff of the Department of Child Youth and Family.

In this study, genuine regard was given to the serious commitment to hearing the voices of practitioners while using adequate measures to ensure participants were not exposed to harm. Because of multiple roles, as outlined above, many of the participants had a prior relationship with the researcher. While many of these relationships were collegial, in some cases individuals had previously been students of the researcher. It can be assumed that these roles conferred power, especially as a member of the new Social Workers Registration Board during the data collection period and as a head of school of social work. Care was taken to avoid inclusion of participants where this potential power differential might have been problematic. None were current students and it was made clear that my role in the Board did not include direct decision- making of possible impact on individual participants.

Interview participants were advised of the right to withdraw their material, the right to see and amend the transcripts of interviews and were given the opportunity to choose their pseudonym. A discussion at the beginning of every interview explored how the employing body would be referred to in the text of the thesis, given the relatively small professional community in New Zealand. In this discussion
consideration was also given to the identification of organizations, geographical locations and reference to other individuals. Real names of other persons have been removed, except where there was direct reference to their published work. The use of any data that could inadvertently lead to identification, especially in relation to employment issues has been avoided. At the request of participants some information was removed from typed transcripts. Where participants did not request this, but where detail might have led to identification, or speculation, material has not been used or modified to protect confidentiality.

Group interviews
In the first instance an advertisement placed in the ANZASW’s monthly newsletter, *Social Work Notice Board*, sought participation in the research from social workers in social service agencies. This advertisement was repeated over several months. A copy of the advertisement is attached in the Appendix B. The following section describes the groups that were conducted. Table 4.1 sets out the groups, participants and location.

*Group One* - A group of six social work practitioners from a District Health Board. These were recruited through an offer made from a manager to invite her staff to participate and six volunteers were sent the information sheets and consent forms prior to the interview. The manager did not attend the group but had been earlier interviewed separately using the individual interview schedule. These participants all worked for a metropolitan District Health Board outside of Auckland, and were from several different services.

*Group Two* – Social workers who self-selected in response to an advertisement in the ANZASW newsletter. A number of people in a provincial city offered to participate. Several of the people who had offered identified colleagues who also wanted to participate. This group included seven practitioners from a range of health and family services and one from private practice. Four people had part time education roles as well as practice roles. All were sent the Information sheets and consent forms prior to the interview.

*Group Three* – A group of five social work practitioners from the Department of Child Youth and Family. One manager responded positively to an open request for participation sent to several managers in the organization. This manager enabled
me to attend the site at a specific time and offered her assistance. This manager invited staff to participate in my research. The manager was not part of the group interview but was later interviewed separately. The information sheets and consent forms had been circulated electronically prior to the interview. This group worked at a large metropolitan site of the national statutory social work agency.

*Groups Four, Five and Six* – these were recruited through an e-mail request to members of the professional association branch in a provincial city. This city was chosen as the researcher knew that social workers who were employed by non-governmental social service organizations (NGOs) were active in this branch. A request, using the same text as the previous advertisements, but specifically seeking NGO people, was sent to the Branch chair who circulated an invitation to participate through an e-mail list. This process recruited six participants in three separate group interviews. While these groups each had only two participants, the group schedule of interview questions and instruments were used. The information sheets and consent forms had been circulated electronically, prior to the interview

### Table 4.1 Group Interview Participants and Location

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<tr>
<th>Group Title</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
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<td>Christchurch</td>
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<td>Karen</td>
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<td>Tonia</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yvette</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Alan</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory</td>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>Auckland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lauren</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mandy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alison</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>Hamilton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO/other</td>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>Hamilton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Phillipa</td>
<td>Hamilton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Group interview process

Group interviews enabled exploration of some of the key questions underpinning the study within a context of different perspectives. Two groups were made up of social workers exclusively from one employer (A District Health Board) and a statutory organization and these organizations are both relatively well-resourced corporate, government funded organizations. In these groups all participants were well qualified, holding recognised tertiary qualifications in social work. The other groups were a mixture of practitioners from different settings, including two small groups from the NGO sector. These groups were identified in the research design stage as providing the opportunity to explore the ideas and perspectives of a varied group of practitioners in a range of organizational contexts in social work in New Zealand. Groups were located in both large urban and regional contexts.

Group interviews add richness to the data collected as the processes within groups can create new information (Fontana & Frey, 1994). The use of groups also creates a form of learning as individuals learn from each other through their participation in the research process and react to the responses from others, challenging assertions or refining their own thoughts in relation to another perspective or new material. Zepke and Leach identify three layers of meaning in group learning settings (Zepke & Leach, 2002, pp. 210-211). The first layer of meaning is found in the experiences and personal stories that people bring and how these are uncovered and analysed in the group setting, within the relationships created in the group. In the second layer, the group process encourages access to the hidden meanings that lie behind participants’ immediate experiences - beliefs and values. Zepke and Leach (in the context of group learning) discuss the way that these hidden meanings can be 'surfaced and connections made between group members’ (p.210).

In the research context, the group process of exploring ideas, beliefs and experiences within CPE enriched the development of meanings. The participants’ individual language and theorizing added richness to the accounts developed. Techniques can include asking the group to come up with hierarchies of ideas or lists of factors of influence. What is suggested is not that the process itself be studied but that the group process provides an explicit tool in the uncovering of common (and uncommon!) experiences. The themes that emerged from these groups were later able to be explored in greater detail in subsequent interviews, or
alternatively, contrasted with the responses to the same question in a different practice setting.

Zepke's third layer (p. 211) is that of the 'unheard voices; groups not represented in the group interviews. In the research process that could be addressed in subsequent group interviews, through seeking participants' ideas about other stories and voices or by ensuring that those perspectives were actively sought at the point of setting up the group interviews. In one instance in this study, it was noted that the NGO social workers had a different perspective on the link between CPE and the direct work with clients. This provided a potential different perspective that needed to be accessed further during data collection. To ensure this perspective could be checked further interviews were arranged with NGO social workers.

Individual interview participants

In the first instance an advertisement placed in the professional association’s newsletter, *Social Work Notice Board*, sought participation from social workers, professional leaders and managers in social service agencies. This was repeated over several months. A copy of the advertisement is attached in the Appendix A.

**Table 4.2 Individual Interview Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summer</th>
<th>Team leader</th>
<th>Child Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Professional leader</td>
<td>Mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Professional leader</td>
<td>Mental Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridget</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Statutory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Statutory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Team leader</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collette</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucky</td>
<td>Manager / teacher</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frances</td>
<td>Team leader</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>Team leader</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Statutory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meryl</td>
<td>Team leader</td>
<td>NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maree</td>
<td>Senior practitioner</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Team leader</td>
<td>Mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sina</td>
<td>Senior practitioner and teacher</td>
<td>NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang</td>
<td>Senior practitioner and supervisor</td>
<td>NGO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual interview technique

The original design required the individual interviews with persons of influence to be conducted after the group interviews, for these interviews to explore themes emerging from the group processes. In reality this proved difficult; for example, the opportunity to conduct a focus group in another city meant that, for practical reasons it was essential to take the opportunity to interview two influential managers and run a group interview on the same day, thereby reducing costs. In retrospect this was a useful process, enabling me to be saturated in different perspectives, from different vantage points. Having talked to managers in the morning, the group interview enriched understanding and led to a sense of the way in which the organizational culture, led from the top in this case, filtered through into practitioner expectations. It was known by the participants that two managers had been interviewed in the morning but this did not seem to limit the discussion in any way, rather they referred to their expectations of what the managers might have said, in a frank but good humoured and collegial way.

In-depth semi-structured individual interviews were used to explore key themes. Table 4.2 sets out the individual interview participants. The individual voice of managers was able to be heard and this allowed for new perceptions and perspectives to emerge. While rather structured interview techniques may enable generalizations to be made from larger groups of participants, the lack of spontaneity can limit the richness of the data. In this study in-depth interviews were utilized ‘to explore the complexity and in-process nature of meanings and interpretations that cannot be examined using positivist methodologies' (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). The ‘consciously active interviewer' can suggest ideas, orientations and perspectives, encouraging the respondent to explore more deeply the subjects of the research exploration (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 38).

Semi-structured interviews reflect the underlying assumption that not all the important questions can be known to the researcher prior to the collection of data. Using a list of themes or a schedule of broad interview questions enables the interviewer to choose vocabulary and linguistic style that engages the different styles and approaches of participants (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). For example, in this study, the individual interviews with managers and practitioners encompassed
similar topics. In order to ensure that their experiences were fully articulated, some questions were altered to suit their individual style and language: ‘open ended interviewing assumes that meanings, understandings and interpretations cannot be standardized’ (Denzin, 1989, p.42). Some participants, for example, also undertook formal teaching roles and therefore were more inclined to consider pedagogical issues.

Ezzy (2002, p.78) suggests continuing to refine questions during the research through preliminary analysis, for indeed:

Many qualitative researchers do not know the dimensions along which they will sample their data. These dimensions can be discovered only by conducting preliminary data analysis during data collection and thus following the practice of theoretical sampling. Many qualitative researchers seek to include participants in all aspects of the research process. Participants can only suggest additional or different research questions if they are provided with those preliminary analyses.

A new unanticipated idea, the ‘wish list’ question, was generated quite early on in the research journey. This developed from a spontaneous question and it was subsequently posed to every single participant and group because it provided an opportunity to get a range of views of what was ‘on top’ when asked the ‘miracle’ question: ‘if the world changed overnight and magically, you had a huge bucket of money to spend on continuing education, what would be on your wish-list?’ In a recent contribution, Holstein and Gubrium (2004, p.141) discuss the importance of the interview in the production of ‘reportable knowledge’. The interview is not merely a neutral encounter with participants who are ‘treasuries of knowledge, awaiting excavation’ but rather with those who are constructors of knowledge in association with the interviewer (p. 141).

**Data collection and analysis**

The following definition, **Figure 4.1: Definitions of CPE** was provided on a laminated card to all participants (in both individual interviews and focus groups) in order to provide a baseline definition to participants that encompassed both
traditional and more contemporary understandings of CPE. This process enabled
the participants to ask questions at the early stage of the interview to check
assumptions and ensure we were starting at a similar understanding of the term.
The researcher did not want participants to assume that only formal, accredited,
educational activities were included in the subject of CPE because the researcher
was a university academic. There was an underlying concern that participants
would say what they thought the researcher ‘would want to hear’, given her role in
social work education. The ‘definition card’ provoked some good beginning
discussion about what kinds of CPE activities were possible, desirable and
available.

Queeney describes CPE as:

*The education of professional practitioners, regardless of their practice
setting, that follows their preparatory curriculum and extends their
learning….throughout their careers. Ideally this education enables
practitioners to keep abreast of new knowledge, maintain and enhance their
competence, progress from beginning to mature practitioners*(Queeney 1996
p. 375 cited in Queeney 2000)

Another perspective was provided in a 1999 definition:

*Continuing professional education refers to the ongoing, structured and
unstructured learning and educational opportunities that are pursued by
particular professional groups and their members* (Battersby 1999, p.58).

Figure 4. 1: Definition of CPE

**Interview schedules**
A pilot was not used; but collegial feedback was gained on the schedules. The
schedules were viewed as broad guides to provide a consistent focus for the
interviews. As indicated above, in relation to the ‘wish list’ question, this was
added and asked in all interviews following the interview in which it was first asked. The interview schedule is found in Appendix C.

The broad questions that informed the development of the interview schedules included the following: do the views of managers about continuing education differ from those held by practitioners and can these be linked to the corporate goals of the agencies in which they work? Do work contextual attributes and organizational factors shape and influence practitioners’ ideas about continuing education? How do individual practitioners in social work in New Zealand experience the continuing professional development activities they are able to engage in to be aligned with the central aims of social work? Do individual practitioners feel they have agency in their professional development choices? If they feel these are constrained by organizational factors to what extent might they wish to subvert these? To what extent do agencies meet educational needs internally? A large number of potential questions were gathered through the process of the literature review. These were sorted into types and grouped into three main areas, matching the reflexive framework. Categories used were: (1) current practice and current thinking, (2) barriers and constraints, and (3) the ideal world. The interview schedules are in Appendix C.

Qualitative analysis procedures

This section describes the methods of data analysis including a discussion of the use of qualitative data analysis software and coding procedures. The issues of saturation and trustworthiness are discussed. Problems and limitations of the methodology are explored and techniques to enhance the reliability of the interpretive analysis are explored.

Qualitative research reports should provide readers and scholars with an explicit account of how the research was actually carried out by the researcher. Rice and Ezzy cite Silverman (1990) arguing that it is crucial for the researcher to carefully document the means of arriving at the qualitative research findings in order to avoid unwarranted over-generalization (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, pp.36-7). Drisko (1997, p.193) asserts that ‘Qualitative research is a powerful means to identify and
describe ‘local theories’….researchers should compare qualitatively derived local theories to the interpretations and meanings framed by formal theories on similar content’. In this study the data analysis has included frequent return to the literature, seeking to explore whether phenomena emerging from the data could be explained with reference to the findings of other researchers. This is one mechanism used to counter the effect of researcher voice dominating the interpretation of the data.

**Analysis**

The working title of the project was ‘Towards social transformation or a means to corporate ends? A study of the perceptions of (CPE) in social work in New Zealand’. The simple, either/or dichotomy suggested in this title could not have survived the first few interviews. As suggested in Chapter One, in spite of managed corporate environments, social workers have some agency in negotiating their own professional development aims and aspirations. Managers themselves could demonstrate resistance through ‘finding ways around’ restrictive policies and systems.

From the beginning of the fieldwork process, the interviews raised questions about recurring themes that were not anticipated. The first interview, for example, generated an interesting idea of a professional leader consciously employing CPE as a mechanism for management of status of both individuals and the profession itself within the hospital environment. There was a focus on interprofessional competition, rather than merely unequal access to resources and the former had not been anticipated. This theme recurred in several subsequent individual and group interviews and led to further exploration of this issue in greater depth. A specific question to elucidate this theme was not added as in order to allow the theme to develop only if it emerged as a spontaneous expression from participants.

Ezzy (2002, p.61) states that ‘the integration and interpenetration of data collection and data analysis is practised by a number of qualitative research traditions’. To this extent this process influenced the shape of subsequent interviews. A structured question, ‘the wish list question’ emerged spontaneously in the first interview and was intuitively recognised as having the potential to build ‘theory and
interpretations from the people being studied’ (Ezzy, p.61) and so was added to all subsequent interviews, including the group interviews. Huberman & Miles (1994, p.431) suggest that the ability to make changes to interview schedules within a field study ‘usually reflects a better understanding of the setting, thereby heightening the internal validity of the study’.

Summary of steps in data analysis

During the data analysis stage, many steps are repeated, as this is an iterative process; checking one set of data for themes would lead to further questions being asked, with a consequential return to the raw material to search for a new word or set of ideas. Hansen (1995, p.70) describes this as a ‘double helix operation: one spiral representing the ongoing data analysis in the form of anticipatory data reduction and the other spiral representing ongoing data gathering in the form of increasingly specific research foci’. Checking and rechecking the original material continued through the writing-up stage. It was felt necessary, because of the passage of time, to not entirely rely on the coding when displaying data; checking the unit of text in situ, enabled interpretation to be tested. In view of more recent insights, did my original interpretation and coding still stand? What was the question that provoked the particular response? Where did this lead to?

In most instances the original interpretation held, but several times the coding was revised, or refined through an identification of something ‘different’ about the particular participant’s usage. Table 4.3: Qualitative Analysis Steps sets out in chronological order the stages of analysis undertaken. This is based on process described by Hansen (1995, p.70) but with a seventh step added for the process used in writing up.

Data were analysed using qualitative methods and analytic induction and constant comparison strategies were used to locate patterns within the transcripts linked to key participant perceptions of CPE. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and entered into a qualitative research computer programme QSR N6. Where possible, individual data from the group interviews were coded by participant name, to provide 40 ‘cases’. Where the speaker was not discernable from the tape, that data is designated ‘group member’. 
Table 4.3: Qualitative Analysis Steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Data Process</th>
<th>Analysis Procedure Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Assemble</td>
<td>Transcribe material; save in qualitative data analysis programme ‘N6’ as ‘text files’. Initial seven interviews explored in paper print out and five or six broad themes emerged. These codes as ‘free nodes’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Browse and interpret</td>
<td>Read transcripts. Make notes; find and list key words and synonyms. Identify recurring words, phrases, concepts. Links between themes noted. Phrases of interest highlighted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Search</td>
<td>Text searches conducted to retrieve text units based on key words and synonyms and phrases. Additional coding undertaken and further search for material adjacent to coded data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Label</td>
<td>Assign labels to found instances of words and synonyms/phrases to store within ‘nodes’ database. A map of these created to aid tracking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Retrieve and refine labelling</td>
<td>Retrieve data by ‘nodes’; refine and create ‘tree nodes’ to separate and develop more fine-grained coding. Save retrievals as reports/concept searches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Review and interpret</td>
<td>Reading printed off reports again; noting new ideas, new expressions of existing themes; frequent returns to the raw files (transcripts in N6) to see a section or phrase in context. Identifying the major findings thematically. Examining overlaps and intersections. Checking for differences against demographic categories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Writing and re-checking</td>
<td>Writing about the findings, data display, returning to data in situ to check interpretations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coding with qualitative data analysis software

Gilbert (2002, p.226) asserts that it is insufficient just to note the use of qualitative data analysis (QDA) software and suggests that a more detailed description should be provided to aid evaluation of the research undertaken. There is considerable discussion of the use of QDA software in the literature (Richards, 1998, 1999; Gilbert, 2002; Bringer, Johnston, & Brackenridge, 2006) with researcher interaction with data being a significant issue for debate. Richards (1998) notes that qualitative researchers need to have both closeness and distance to their data during analysis. The former assists the researcher to have detailed knowledge of their data while the latter provides space for interpretation and abstraction (Richards, 1998, p.324). Gilbert’s study of researchers’ transition from manual data handling to use
of NUD*IST identified three levels of distance issues (Gilbert, 2002). The first of these relates to perceptual aspects of handling data, the second to closeness of knowledge of original data, and the third level those more complex issues of metacognitive processes of computer assisted QDA (Gilbert, 2002, p.216).

In this study N6 was used for many tasks, mostly related to data storage and retrieval. The first seven interview transcripts were entered at the same time and some broad themes formed early coding categories in the first stage of analysis. These provided a stable set of concepts for retrieving data in broad thematic groupings e.g. ‘professional identity’, ‘time’, ‘management and organization’, ‘renewal’, ‘academia’. In total nine ‘free’ nodes and 100 ‘tree nodes’ off twelve branches were created. Hundreds of text searches were performed and reports preserved on over 90 searches, for closer analysis.

These processes were not dissimilar to those outlined in Gilbert (2002, pp.218-220). The initial coding was done on paper printouts of the transcripts and then coded in sections in the N6 project file. Text searches were used to check all data for recurring words or themes. It was during the second part of this process the browser window’s limited view of the data assisted a closer examination of the text. Coding became more fine-grained as the data was explored line by line. This proximity led addition and splitting of the categories. Careful tracking of coding was required at this point. Lists of work done were kept so that if a new code emerged while coding a transcript, the risk of not checking earlier transcripts for this new concept could be avoided.

Gilbert’s third level of distance issue, the metacognitive aspect of using the computer assisted QDA processes, is of relevance here. It is important not to become ‘bogged down’ in the coding process, or as Gilbert notes to get caught in the ‘coding trap’ as the researcher can code mechanically and quickly (Gilbert, 2002, p.219). This can result in two risks, one of avoidance of analysis and writing up by becoming trapped into ever-expanding coding activities and second, of losing focus on the original research questions (Gilbert, 2002, pp.219-222). Becoming more aware of these risks and developing conscious strategies to minimize them is important. In this research more complicated node searches were not used until thinking led to the interrogation of data in detail, or where a hunch
motivated a ‘fishing trip’. The ease of searching does enable one to follow up on hunches, for example, having noticed several uses of the verb ‘to articulate’ led to a text search that generated a new code. An interesting use of a ‘battlefield’ metaphor stimulated a search for related words, ‘battle, ‘fight’, struggle’. This early examination of recurring words led to a significant finding, later able to be linked to the theme that social workers saw CPE as a major component in the drive to improve their status and esteem.

A risk inherent in using QDA software is that broad text searches can replace this line-by-line reading, the researcher looks for a word, finds incidences and makes interpretations from that process without going back again and again to check context: how that word or phrase appeared; which questions was it a response to; what else did the person say? A disciplined return to the whole transcript or at least the section where a theme or phrase was found is important to avoid assumptions taking too much hold. In order to ensure that themes held up to deeper examination, instances of thematic data were examined in context and the transcripts were read entirely in paper copies. An initial descriptive process enabled preliminary coding to be developed early in the fieldwork process. Some early questions asked of the data were:

- Are there common stories?
- Is there common language utilized to describe experience?
- Are there dominant or competing stories?
- Are these shaped by dominant discourses?
- Does the group itself hold to strongly differing accounts or does a collective or consensus account emerge in the discussion?

Qualitative analysis requires the researcher to be deeply familiar with the data such as transcripts and field notes. The first step in the data analysis phase was to develop descriptive codes. Description is essential to aid a conceptual organization of qualitative data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This initial coding was determined largely by the researcher’s location of key themes, based on an early reading of transcripts and memos written after interviews. For example, early codes were simple and enabled the researcher to track and test ideas about attitudes,
constraints, the profession, registration, social justice, organizational issues and resources.

Developing categories and related concepts were created through a process of coding text where immediate issues were identified and named, for example: comparative status, professional identity, management, registration and credentialing. Research notes and tables and diagrams have been used throughout the project to link elements and keep track of emerging ideas. **Table 4.4: Key codes developed in data analysis** illustrates framework of themes, foci and key codes used in the data analysis process for one theme, ‘Practitioners’ perceptions of professional learning, in social work careers’ The full set of codes by theme is provided to four levels as Appendix D

It was necessary at many stages, including during writing up, to print off text and node searches and use highlighters to explore in greater detail the participants’ different ways of talking about the key issues. Coding procedures were checked and regular updates were provided to the researcher’s supervisor and samples of transcripts and coded material retrieved from the N6 project file were made available. All the interviews and coding processes are available for scrutiny in an easily accessible form.
Table 4.4: Key Codes Developed in Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad Theme</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Level 1 codes</th>
<th>Level 2 codes</th>
<th>Level 3 codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practitioners’ perceptions of professional learning, in social work careers</td>
<td>Recognise the importance of social, political and personal dimensions of professional learning and how concepts, understandings and aspirations may be influenced</td>
<td>Practitioners</td>
<td>Specialization</td>
<td>Competition</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Career and promotion</td>
<td>Market</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td>Practitioners</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>Choice</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>Agency</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individual responsibility</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Learning dimensions/</td>
<td>Critical reflection</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In-service training</td>
<td>learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Research, knowledge &amp; scholarship</td>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>Gaps</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not visible</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Theory</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal development</td>
<td>Renewal</td>
<td>People like you</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection, learning and supervision</td>
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<td>Sabbatical</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Study leave</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Limitations and trustworthiness

There are four obligations that underpin trustworthy research, regardless of the theoretical and methodological paradigm: the truth value of the findings, their applicability to other contexts; consistency (assuming similar respondents and field contexts); and neutrality in representation of respondents’ views (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Truth of course is always problematic, but using credibility rather than reliability the qualitative researcher can demonstrate that the data presented in the findings accurately report ‘the phenomena those data represent’ (Guba & Lincoln 1982, p.246). Research practices such as use of schedules of questions, key questions always asked, good transcription, researcher memos and instruments designed to capture particular data, can assist in this demonstration. The trustworthiness of interpretations in a qualitative study is improved by utilising
sufficient verbatim material in the research report to illustrate the material from whence interpretation emerges. Detailed description of procedures, access to the researcher’s thoughts and hunches, recorded during the research process can all assist the reader of a completed study to make an assessment of its truth value.

How many people to interview is a matter for both practical and methodological consideration. For this study the original targets were ten individual interviews and four groups of up to six participants. Ezzy (2002, p.75) states that theoretical sampling stops when the researcher decides the study has reached saturation. The idea of theoretical saturation is attributed to Glaser and Strauss (1967). Ezzy (2002, p.75) does make the point though, that the researcher needs to be analyzing as data is collected in order to know when ‘there is enough data in order to feel that there is a strong foundation for analysis’. Saturation was reached after seventeen individual interviews and six group interviews were conducted, when no new material could be ascertained. As noted above, further interviews were arranged to ensure the participation of NGO social workers. So while there were some difficulties in recruiting groups in the anticipated numbers, the final result of 40 participants in total was satisfactory. In qualitative research ‘the aim is not to generalize about the distribution of experiences but to generalize about the nature and interpretive processes involved in the experiences’ (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p.42) [original italics].

Triangulation
Another aspect of research rigor is triangulation, or the use of multiple methods. In this study it had been intended to use textual analysis of training and learning policies in the organizations encountered to provide a different source of data. Unfortunately it rapidly emerged that most organizations didn’t have an overarching learning and development or training policy. In fact, many participants struggled to answer questions about whether there were explicit policies in their organization. If there were policies, it was explained that they tended to be about guidelines, rather than policy or purpose; for example: the hours available for study, study days, budgets, requirements in terms of induction courses and processes for application. One interpretation of this is that organizations’ policies for learning and development were fairly strongly linked into business and operational matters, rather than from any point of setting a philosophical stance for
the organization around learning. In the search of Child Youth and Family key policy documents in the public domain in 2002-3 at the beginning of the study, only one reference was discovered that was explicitly to learning and development. It became apparent that this search for textual information was fruitless and it was abandoned.

Another method that can be used for triangulation is to gain participant information using different methods. In this study three approaches were used; individual interviews, group interviews and employment of a rating instrument using cue statements. Early in the research design stage a decision had been made to use both individual interviews and group interviews, although both methods involved participants ultimately sharing some similar characteristics. The individual interviews enabled a much more in-depth discussion, particularly with stakeholders who were people able to influence decisions. In the group interviews the discussion was obviously more likely to be influenced by the positions of the participants, their relationship to each other and their sense of the other members’ views and beliefs.

Both sets of interviews provided rich data. A good example of that is the NGO group (Hamilton) in which the two participants were clear that they had different perspectives. They both worked in the NGO sector but they took different approaches. One held more of an emancipatory learning philosophy and the other had much more of an academic approach and was much more interested in evidence and research outcomes and practice being driven by ‘hard data’. This interview provided an interesting discussion of the different discourses of research within the profession, and one that will be examined in some detail in Chapter Seven. Thus, although there were only two people it captured some of the tensions and differences in the field around education issues.

Triangulation is intended to assist the researcher to rise above the biases of using a single approach. Triangulation does not guarantee to tell the truth; it does not necessarily give rise to ‘cast iron’ theory. Use of more than one method however, does assist to gain a more complete picture of what is being studied. Reflexivity is discussed further in chapter eight.
Cue statements

A set of cue statements was developed as a third technique for data collection in this investigation. This method developed out of some attempt to clarify the relationships between broad ‘modes’ of CPE and the focus of actual CPE activities. An early typology was developed, based on the literature review. The attempt to create ‘types’ was stimulated by Cervero’s delineation of Functionalist, Conflict and Critical accounts of professions and links to the types of CPE in evidence (Cervero, 1989, p.519). The orientations as represented were used to frame up the items in the cue statements instrument. These categories were generated from the preparation of the literature review.

In considering the problem of over-simplification of responses Orrell (1996, p.165) states:

Individuals are inclined to strive for equilibrium in their cognition of ideas.
This has had an impact on what is said in interviews…interviewees potentially ignore conflicting ideas and oversimplify the complexity of reality.

As such the cue statements (see Table 4.5 Group interviews cue statements and Table 4.6 Individual interviews cue statements) that were developed were effectively used as prompts. These were designed to encapsulate polarized view statements, activate beliefs and enable the participants to react directly to a set of ideas (Orrell 1996, p.334). Where possible the ‘talk’ during the completion of these instruments was recorded. This proved not at all helpful in the group interviews as there was so much cross-talk that it was often indecipherable to the transcriber. Some participants chose to pack up and leave while others were still thinking and talking about the rating scales. With benefit of hindsight, it may have been better to provide the cue statements at the beginning of the group interviews to stimulate discussion.
### Table 4.5 Group Interviews- Cue Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CPE should be limited to the maintenance of safe levels of knowledge and skill in the current field of practice.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPE should be broad and include mainstream social work knowledge and skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current CPE policies in social services encourage critical evaluation of policy and practice at all levels in the work force.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE which encourages scholarship and research is supported in the current climate in social /health services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE activities which are aligned to the broad aims of social work are supported in the current environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social workers should be supported financially to work towards higher qualifications in social work or social policy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The agency benefits from supporting staff to gain higher qualifications in social work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients and communities benefit from CPE opportunities we have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE contributes indirectly to the empowerment of disadvantaged communities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.6 Individual Interviews- Cue Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set 1 Focus of CPE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPE should be very focused on practical skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE should be focused on new knowledge and evidence for best practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE should focus on key agency tasks and policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE should encourage critical reflection and evaluation of current social work practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE should be strongly aligned to social justice and empowerment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set 2 Purpose of learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPE should encourage updating of knowledge and skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE should enable social workers to critically evaluate policies and practices in social/ health services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE should enable practitioners to develop practice innovations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE should enable practitioners to undertake research and produce new knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE should assist social workers to seek promotion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of participant information

Data from forty individuals (cases in N6 data) is described in Table 4.7. Seventeen individual interviews and six group interviews were conducted. Note: Pakeha means New Zealander of Anglo-Celt or European origins. Pasifika means from a Pacific islands ethnic background.

Table 4.7 Attributes of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Professional Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridget</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Team Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collette</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Maori</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Pasifika</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Pasifika</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Maori</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yvette</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Maori</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Maori</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frances</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Team Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucky</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maree</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Senior Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meryl</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Team Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60-70</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Team Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Pasifika</td>
<td>Senior Prac/ teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Senior Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dianne</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Team Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillipa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Five: ‘Still at the Bottom of the Heap’: Continuing Education and the Professional Project

I think one of the challenges social work has though, is that it is still at the bottom of the heap (Lucky).

Introduction

This chapter describes how participants in the study conceptualized CPE as a major component of the professionalization process of social work. The data presents a picture of the profession in a state of flux. Inherent in the quote that leads this chapter, is the theme explored in Chapter Three: the sense of vulnerability of social workers; the lack of recognized professional status they aspire to greater respect and express uncertainty about the support of employers. The ‘professionalization project’ (Witz, 1992) is at centre stage in New Zealand social work and the participants in this study seem acutely aware of the inequalities between the professions, and the issues of comparative status, power and access to resources. There is a strong desire for professional development but much of the ‘talk’ is of the constraints and culture of the organizational context. The participants in this study struggled to separate their desire for collective and personal investment in CPE from their preoccupation with comparative status. Social workers are acutely aware of the importance of assumptions and expectations within the profession; relationships with employers, and external relationships with other professions, and the public. They aspire to greater status and most of the participants in this study report at least a general acceptance of the compliance requirements that accompany registration and a belief that it will lead to better practice and an improvement in the standing of the profession. There was a general consensus among the participants about the value of professionalization. Several participants did express some concern that there might be some negative implications of increasing professional status. As noted in Chapter Three, there is a wider debate about the politics of professionalization but with the exception of Dave, it was rarely mentioned.
In Chapter One, it was noted that the profession of social work in New Zealand shares a number of characteristics with its counterparts in other Western countries. It largely operates in bureaucratic environments, it is influenced by state policies of social intervention; it has a commonly stated mission expounding the ideals of social justice and social change but too frequently finds itself bound up with issues of social control. These data were collected during a period of intense change for social work in New Zealand (October 2004- August 2005). During this time the first social workers were registered (October 01 2004), a decision had been made on the required qualification for registration, the competency requirements were set and policies on fitness for practice, continuing education and were developed. The SWRA (2003) required the setting up a disciplinary tribunal that could de-register social workers and a Code of Conduct was developed to guide practitioners and their peers who might serve on the tribunal.

During this period, the reality of the registration environment had started to have an impact. To some extent registration is seen as heralding more ‘compliance’ activity, but there is some hopefulness, as can be seen in the data presented here, that some positive impacts will be felt in terms of status, influence and resources, particularly for professional development. This is a set of circumstances in which the concept of profession is not ‘innocent’ (Tobias, 2003, p.451), as registration is intrinsically linked to occupational closure (Parkin, 1979) and an anticipated improvement in the social position of social work within the broad economy. As the data will demonstrate, there are some contradictions inherent within these trends. The themes explored in this chapter reflect responses to the circumstances of the time in which the data was collected.

Only one participant has expressed strong reservations about whether registration would make a difference, ultimately to practice and to clients. There is little linking of the issues and trends they perceive in their professional environment to the broad mission of social work. They are in the main silent on major issues of social justice, although in ‘the talk’ on needing to explain the role of social work and what it has to offer, there is some connection to the stories of marginalized people.
The data in this study largely support Cervero’s conflict viewpoint which ‘asserts that professions are in conflict with other groups in society for power, status ’ and money and as such a part of an oppressive society in which knowledge is controlled (Cervero, 1989, pp. 518-19). The social workers interviewed were acutely aware of the marginalized position of social work in society; some participants demonstrated a more overtly critical stance, others were more accepting that the profession does not have great professional capital and are keen to see effort to raise it. Almost all held views about the way the profession might be perceived by others; especially other professionals. That social work suffers from a poor public image is clearly documented in the literature (Franklin & Parton, 1991; Aldridge, 1994; Reid and Misener, 2001) and the participants in this study were aware of the manner in which social work is portrayed.

The prevailing themes which emerge from the data which tell the story of a professional project in progress in which knowledge and learning feature strongly as both assets of the professional and of strategic importance. Three main themes reflect the issues of a profession at a time of great change. The first theme, Professional Identity and Confidence identifies practitioners’ concern that social work is misunderstood and that practitioners need to develop better skills to be more articulate about social work. The second theme Comparative Status explores participant accounts of access to resources and identifies how they make comparisons of social work with other professions in group and individual interviews as they construct a picture of continuing education. The third theme, Externalization examines practitioners’ expectations and understanding of the impact of registration and credentialing processes on continuing education. While the participants in this study are predominantly supportive and hopeful about registration, some awareness of the contradictions inherent in the professional project is revealed. This ambivalence can be linked to some questioning of the march to professionalization as the mission of social work to work for social justice is recalled in the conversation.
Professional identity and confidence

It was clear in the interview process, both in individual and group interviews, that being invited to talk about continuing education caused participants to reflect on the nature of the profession and how social work is perceived.

*It's very difficult to actually be accepted by other professionals or to be thought of on the same level because so many of us are sort of under-qualified. It's almost like we lose credibility in other's people's eyes and I think that we shouldn't. We should aspire to actually being better qualified; the department should actually be paying for people to up-skill (Group member).*

Within the concern about professional credibility, the ‘bureau’ model of profession is still apparent: the profession needs to be better qualified to gain credibility but this is an employer responsibility - ‘the department should actually be paying’. The data show a strong linkage between continuing education and the professional project, echoing McMichael’s (2000) findings that there was a strong link between health social work practitioners’ thoughts about CPE and the relative status of the profession. McMichael commented that social work was seen as ‘valued in pockets’, not always valued for what it would like to be valued for and that ‘social work has an identity crisis with its self-perception’ (McMichael, 2000,p.177).

Many participants in this present study echoed these comments as this excerpt demonstrates:

*LIZ: Do you think that registration will make a difference?*

FRANCES: No. No. I don’t because I think that social work in health is still kind of like the ‘add-on’. I mean one of the things that I have wanted to do in my role ... is to have social work [listed in] the referral form, not just nursing, physio, OT. Social work is there- we were always included as integral to the team and it yet it’s got nursing doctors therapists and ‘other’…

*LIZ: It is one of those little symbolic things?*

FRANCES: Yes it is actually. I want the form changed .We are not ‘other’, we either go in the ‘allied health’ box or we have our own box.

There was some cautious optimism (linked to the benefits that participants expected registration would bring), most expressed a view that social work was not in a strong position and attributed this to the early and emergent nature of the professional project:

*But I guess, the profession is only just getting a solid foundation in some respects. Once we’ve got that we’ll be in better positions to do the research (Jill)*
Well you see I still see social work in NZ as a somewhat evolutionary embryonic, profession … so it is still quite young (Emily).

Maggie felt that social workers would be ‘validated’ by registration and that this would lead to greater opportunities for the development of a stronger knowledge base:

*Social work was going to be validated and therefore those opportunities would be available to grow social work knowledge and skills. But prior to this I mean we haven't had a solid profession in NZ for social work I think that has been the biggest influence yes we have had the association [ANZASW] but it hasn’t been wide reaching (Maggie)*

Registration would act as a push factor to ensure that social workers would seek more opportunities for further education:

*But certainly I do think that the registration of social workers will demand that that happens … but I mean when you go on the web and you are looking for information and you come across the amazing amount of American programmes that offer CPE credits (Maggie).*

In a research note I noticed that in one group, participants used war metaphors to describe their venturing into the medical world and saw evidence for practice as a goal for status reasons, and were quite cynical. There was a sense that social workers needed to use the jargon for persuading others that social work had something to offer, as this interchange indicates between Alan and Tonia:

*Don't you agree that part of the need for us for ongoing training is knowledge to compete against other health professionals regarding, not that we know intuitively at all, or we know at gut level that something is just not right and people aren’t happy but you have to fight on the battle field otherwise you lose (Alan)*

*Yes, that is one reason why I am doing my masters- it didn’t seem to matter that I had an opinion- I wasn’t on the same battlefield and if I got to the Masters level suddenly they start listening. I don’t see any difference, but it is about recognizing there is a game to be played here and if you, if you want to be taken seriously and if you do want people to listen to your message, you do have to recognize the game and you have to get into it with your ticket (Tonia)*

*I didn’t have the ticket, I was operating with doctors and people who perceived themselves as being higher in terms of the medical system so I thought right how am I going to get up there so I did my Masters, that is why I did it (Tonia).*
For Tonia then, a higher degree was an ideological weapon aimed directly at status differentials. A return to the data to search for the words fight’, ‘battle’, and ‘struggle’ found that the use of these words was quite common across all of the interviews. Table 5.1 ‘Battle Metaphors’ captures a selection of the comments made using these terms. Beckett (2003) found much evidence of use of ‘the language of siege’ in his study of social workers use of military metaphors.

Drawing on Lakoff (1993) Beckett argues ‘metaphors reveal how we think’. Lakoff (1993) suggests that the discourse form of the heroic battle (relating to argument) has the hero ‘defending [his] position and demolishing that of the villain’ (Lakoff, 1993, p.244). In the case of these social workers the fight is not to win an argument but to secure territory. There is a reasonable spread of agency and role amongst these participants and so the frequent usage of these metaphors reflects an overwhelming sense of the profession being challenged by its lack of power. There is not a significant gender difference, the male participants quoted in Table 5.1 use ‘struggle’ more and the female participants favour ‘fight’ and ‘battle’. Beckett (2003, p.637) argues that ‘the language of siege’ used by statutory social workers in the United Kingdom ‘is most usefully seen as a reflection of reality, problematic though the concept of reality may be’. Metaphor analysis can ‘help identify the different ways a theoretical concept is structured and given meaning, provide insight into the way these different representations relate to each other, and show how these representations impact the further theorization about the concept’ (Andriessen & Gubbins, 2009, p.847).
Table 5.1  Battle Metaphors for CPE Opportunities and Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Battle Metaphors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To fight for funds and all that sort of thing (Claire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information that social workers need to capture, I have had a huge fight (Claire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You actually have to fight for every little bit that you want to do that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have to fight for it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight for it really hard. But on top of that they expect you to carry on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whereas for us we fight, I mean I have had to fight to get funding (Frances)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge systems- we are supposed to fight injustice (Frances)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We don’t have enough analysis to fight; we just want to help (Frances)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight for social workers to be so specialized (Jill &amp; Paul)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seem to fight for professionalism in New Zealand at this point (Jill &amp; Paul)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have to fight on the battle field otherwise you, if you don’t fight… (Rotorua Focus Group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to fight constantly to validate (Rotorua Focus Group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have to fight for your patch (Summer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So that is something that we battle all the time (Summer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There’s a battle about how many people can be off doing whatever at which time (Megan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well it is an uphill battle (Sina)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I remember having to battle to do my BA(Hons) and get the time off (Sina)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I struggle to do what I’m doing now (Paul)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You struggle with that. We need to put a benchmark in (Lucky)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social workers I believe really struggle in that area (Lucky)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggle with the theories they have to learn (Lucky)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be honest I know my students would struggle (Lucky)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We struggle a bit because so much of our knowledge is process oriented (Megan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well we do struggle a bit (Megan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those who are new to the sector who don’t have qualifications who may struggle (Meryl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It should be important, but I guess that we struggle (Anne)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People do have a real struggle to get resources. Well for me personally it’s a struggle- my organization is not government-funded (Phillipa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggle to find good opportunities for their learning (Alicia)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strengths

Social workers did express a sense of pride in their profession, though it appeared often difficult to hold on to this pride and dialogue would veer from being upbeat about social work to focusing on the challenges. Participants frequently linked knowledge for practice to the breadth of social work practice and the broad sets of knowledge needed. This was expressed as strength of the profession. The knowledge and skills of the profession were often described in relation to clients and exposure to client trauma. Participants emphasized the broad knowledge base
and scope of social work and saw this as both a strength and a weakness, and certainly demanding in terms of managing ongoing professional learning.

I think we throw a lot of social workers in at the deep end and one of the things that I became quite aware of was if I took one day in the life of a social worker, and I presented that hectic day in emergency care to your average registrar, physio or OT, the self disclosures of the abuse, the trauma of the situations that people survive... I would guess that 90% of the other disciplines would say- ‘wow that has been a hell of a year you have had’, and the social worker would say,’ that was Monday’! (Collette).

The nature of the profession and its broad engagement across a spectrum of practice situations was vividly described by Tonia:

It might be being arrogant on my part but I see social workers, more than any other profession needing to have such a vast knowledge of all sort of different things so that you can draw on … I think you just, depending which area you go into, it [knowledge] just keeps expanding and your head feels like it will explode sometimes but that is the responsibility we have as social workers. Whereas other professionals I think can probably stick, well it looks like they can stick to a certain area; I don’t think we can do that (Tonia).

While Tonia saw this breadth of knowledge as significant, others perceived it as more of a superficial knowledge, perhaps lacking the mastery that came with depth. Two participants used a colloquial description to try to explain the impact of this breadth, capturing it in a common expression. Phil commented ‘social work is such a broad kind of profession that you kind of come out like a jack of all trades but master of none’. This was echoed by Lucky:

When I first began in social work, I think it was Ken Daniels that wrote an article for the journal, and he sort of said- look social workers are regarded as a jack of all trades and master of none and I don't know to be honest …. if things have really changed that much.

While participants held strong personal views about the importance of social work, a theme emerges of the profession having a tentative position in the scheme of things. Notwithstanding this, participants saw social workers as ‘change agents’, as this section of discussion in a group interview illustrates:

And without thinking too hard, [in] our organization- we are not quite in the bottom rung. They don’t know where to put us anymore, we have probably bumped ourselves out of the bottom position I don’t think we are there

Social workers have a habit of helping other people up
Perhaps that’s why we’re social workers

Initiating change

But I think we have certainly had an impact on the organization and I think that is reflected in that at one point in time there were only two of us working part time and now we have five staff, which is a kind of measure.

People don’t understand us!

While participants described the profession’s strengths there was a perception that social work’s best achievements were not widely recognised. This resonates with the earlier quoted remark about the 'high devotion/low power syndrome' of the social service professions (Rueschemeyer, 1986, p.137) in the sense that social workers were able to articulate their value in conversation with each other but felt that this went largely unappreciated. Within this experience is a sense that social work is inventive and innovative but that this is unacknowledged. Several participants felt other disciplines might take the credit.

We’re lacking the recognition ... I was just thinking, [people in] mental health services were forever talking about the ecological, holistic practice, and when you tell them that that comes from the social work model, ‘no way, it can’t possibly come from’ [social work] . I mean the consumer movement came from social work, consumers drove it but our profession gave the voice to start getting there (Jill)

It is just part of that humble cringe. Yeah all the concepts that get taken up by other professions as a new theme! (Mental Health group)

I am not sure how much social work as a profession gets acknowledged for the things that get taken on by other disciplines (Mental Health group)

Many participants felt that there was a lack of understanding of the profession, including a lack of awareness of the profession’s knowledge base.

And the other thing I have probably noticed about working with other professionals is that [they have] no understanding of our depth of knowledge, absolutely none. They think all we know about is benefits [income maintenance]

[They think] All you do is WINZ [benefits and pensions] and housing they have no understanding or very little understanding of what we actually do (Rotorua Group).
Bourdieu recognized that many social workers, and those undertaking similar work, ‘feel abandoned, if not disowned outright, in their efforts to deal with the material and moral suffering that is the only certain consequence’ of rampant neoliberalism (Bourdieu in Bourdieu et al., 1999, p. 183). Alison commented on the impact of the management focus on negative media discourse about social work:

> Since we started you never hear any positives or trying to keep our morale up it is always about negativity …but I think it is coming from the management. It is always negative, negative, negative and nothing saying positive about [us]. It is really difficult to be in that environment of always negative things nothing positive. How can we cope with our families and drive change for families when it is always negative in the media, nothing back us up? (Alison).

Dave emphasized the contribution of social work lacks recognition in the broader social, economic and political environment, using the language of business to do so:

> There needs to be some recognition…and say when we look at our contribution, our triple bottom line or whatever you want to call it. I don’t know how many bottom lines you’ve got, [laughter] that is one, saying look we’re actually contributing to social and professional capital building by doing that and it should be recognised that that’s what we do, but who’s going to recognise it? (Dave).

Lucky recognised similar problems of recognition but felt that social work’s origins in charity work didn’t help the profession to be understood as having a distinctive knowledge base:

> Well you have to look where social work comes from in terms of the charity movement in the States and a lot of do-gooders getting involved in it and so offering practical support – the heritage of social work – then it can’t claim its discipline base in terms of what psychology can claim and some other professions (Lucky).

Zhang felt that many people involved with services in the community sector were unclear that social work was a profession with a professional preparation and a theory base:

> I still feel some people are thinking the social worker’s [job is to] help people to transport and help with benefit they need… They didn’t think it is very professional. [They don’t know it takes] quite a long time to qualify I know and
Roach-Anleu’s study found that hospital-based social workers supported their claims to make a ‘distinctive contribution to health and illnesses’ by alluding to the content of their qualifications and their perception that doctors and nurses medical and nursing staff limited their focus on physical factors and treatment ‘without considering social factors juxtaposed their own self-conception (Roach-Anleu, 1992, pp. 40-41). The traditional territory of health social work has been in working with patients around the psychosocial aspects of health: the social and emotional impact of illness, grief, loss and change- and there was occasionally a concern that other professions were becoming more broadly and better educated, and that social work might be seen as lacking if social workers were not actively involved in education and research. Megan noted that nurses and physiotherapists were more commonly starting to do a masters degree reasonably soon after starting their careers:

MEGAN: the young physios are such a good example, they come in with their basic degree and they are all churning forward to get their Masters’ and well I think the nurses are getting on the train pretty damn fast too. My major concern is about psychology and counselling, we are going to get ourselves into some trouble if we don’t keep our tails up actually

*LIZ: psychologists are moving towards a clinical doctorate for registration -are they going do work that might have been done by social workers?

MEGAN: Yeah I think that is true, I mean we do stand to lose the ground around the slightly longer term work and around the more complex psycho-social and emotional issues if we don’t keep up with the play

*LIZ: how status driven is it in health? I mean do you think when social workers are out there in multi disciplinary teams, they are affected by the fact that they have got bright young physios doing their Masters and doing research … does it have an impact on the social workers do you think?
MEGAN: often the social workers out of the floor are not getting it about, say the physios, for example, but they certainly are getting it about the psychologists

*LIZ: Because of the territorial…

MEGAN: Yeah yeah because that is a direct challenge I don’t think they are necessarily getting that they are going to have to do something about themselves I think there is a definite feeling at the moment that somebody ought to make the psychologists go away.
Selling social work and telling our story: We do have something to say!

Many of the data presented in the previous sections have demonstrated that social work that practitioners have a sense of not being valued, and more importantly, not having their worth and contribution to society recognized. But there is another strong theme arising from the data about the need for social work to tell its story. Many of the participants felt that social work should take some responsibility for their invisibility and lack of recognition. The problem was often described in terms of social workers not being ‘able to articulate’ or indeed not ‘being articulate’.

I think we’re self-conscious and I think that we are sort of shy and we just don’t have that confidence about what we do and that we do it well and so we don’t sell it, we don’t articulate it (Maree).

A number of comments attributed relative weakness of the profession to a failure to adequately articulate what it actually is that social workers do. Jill felt that part of this problem could be attributed to humility:

We seem to have allowed a number of our absolutely incredible skills and opportunities to be [credited to] others and maybe that’s the humbleness, maybe it’s because we haven’t had enough confidence in ourselves collectively and the profession to do better (Jill).

A frequent theme in relation to the profile of social work was linked to the profession’s perceived lack of ability to articulate a clear definition of itself and promote itself through publication of its achievements. There is a sense that practitioner generated practice knowledge was separate from research and scholarship; it does happen but is hidden from view. This can be a matter of confidence in the profession but can also be a consequence of the mind-set that social workers are too humble to talk about their achievements:

Yeah, yeah but then also we don’t push it... because- and this is just a thought really- is that because the profession generally attracts people that are more humble (Paul).

They might need encouragement and support to be more serious in promoting the profession:
I think there is, definitely more of an opportunity for this but it is something, Liz, about, don’t you think, about people needing some practical support in, a shift in focus around it may be taking ourselves seriously –feeling like we do have something to contribute or something important to say (Jenny).

Humility was also linked by Jill to the position that we recognize the work that the client does in strengths based approach to social work. If we believe clients are the expert then how can social workers take the credit by writing up a successful intervention?

The other part about that ‘humbleism’ is I think that we give a lot of credit to the client who does good work. We’re the facilitator that creates the journey and they make the journey so we don’t want to write up their story (Jill)

Health social workers often talked about the nature of work in multi-disciplinary teams and the impact this has on social workers’ need to be able to hold their heads up in a competitive environment. This included an increased emphasis on presenting in ‘grand rounds’ and conferences and being able to ‘talk science’. The multi-disciplinary team seemed to generate more pressure on social workers to articulate the profession’s achievements in order to keep up ‘with the play’:

I think also working in such a strong multi disciplinary focus , you have got to keep yourself up with the play. You have got to be professional, you have got to present, and you have to know your stuff (Summer)

In mental health some of the jobs are open: nurse, social worker, OT, case manager type job. So to remain competitive with nursing and psychology and that we need to look at where we sit in terms of our contributions to [the service] (Emily).

Comparisons were made with social workers who worked in more uni-disciplinary environments, like CYFS:

I think that is what CYFS lacks. Yeah, is that they are in an organization where there are only social workers, and yes they do have contact of course but I don't think they have that sort of day to day, awareness of having to pit yourself against other really bright and intelligent (Summer).

Whereas in a place like CYFS you don’t have those sorts of professions around, you are not surrounded by scientists the whole time (Dianne).
Being articulate and articulating the value of social work became a common theme, with quite a strong emphasis on needing to be able to explain the ‘what, why and how’ of what social workers do in their practice:

And also for practitioners it takes that huge mantle of oppression off them in that things are transparent and you are able to articulate and talk about it and you are able to debate it, and question, why that path? Had you considered...? Where had you engaged? With whom and where were the family? It leaves it open for exploration and for building better practice (Maggie).

Similar comments from other practitioners echoed this theme of a lack of a strong voice for social work:

A lot of other people dictate to us what our profession is and what we can and can’t do, and unless we are able to articulate that which we do or can do they are going to say ‘no that is not part of your scope (Collette)

People say’ well what do you do’, ‘I’m a social worker’, ‘oh okay’. I do social work but I haven’t found anybody who can articulate, look what I do is, how ‘there are these difficulties and challenges that people face, well what I do is I do this, this and which allows people to do x y and z” (Dave).

I don’t find many people who can do that at all. They just, they can’t articulate beyond ‘oh I’m a social worker’, but what does that mean, what are the results for people and what’s important about that? (Dave).

There emerges from the data a sense of anxiety and pressure amongst social workers in health settings. Maree commented again on this lack of confident expression of social workers ‘claim to distinctive knowledge and skill within the wider environment of the multi-disciplinary team.

That’s another thing- social work needs to articulate what we do. We need to, especially in an environment like this where we’ve got doctors and nurses and all the other health professionals, people don’t know what we do because we’re not out there saying it. We should be running study days.... on how to deal with conflict, how to work with anxious families (Maree).

Colette believed strongly in the importance of scopes of practice as a means of building the effectiveness, status and confidence of social workers in mental health and there was the potential to lead the way:

In mental health, partly because it is easier to get into the news when things go wrong and partly because we don’t want social work to be marginalized. , we
make sure that we are presenting ourselves as a profession. There are doctors who feel that only doctors and lawyers are professionals: everybody else is just somebody else and so part of what we are trying to do is talk the same language so that they can understand where we are at....[scopes of practice] might expand peoples knowledge of what social workers are able to and capable of (Collette).

Comparative status and access to CPE

In the individual interviews, participants had been asked “How would you rate commitment to CPE in social work in NZ? “ Most participants responded to this in terms of institutional focus on practice deficits. Audrey (NGO) linked this question to public perceptions of the profession and poor practice.

I don’t think there is a simple answer, I think it is really patchy I think and in some areas where we’ve got some really good things happening and in other areas we’ve got some quite poor practice, in terms of the outcomes of social work practice –and I guess the public perception is always focusing on those mistakes and that probably affects some people’s attitudes too.

Asked to expand on this link she offered this

But I think they’re kind of interconnected aren’t they, some of the perceptions that people have about practice often reflect on training or people will link it back. Whenever CYF has a public sort of case sooner or later people will say ‘what about the training?’

Participants were asked to indicate how well resourced social workers continuing education was in comparison to other professions. Most participants did not feel social workers were well resourced and health social workers made the most frequent comparison with doctors, in part this was seen as due to tradition and long-standing arrangements, in part due to status and as sign of continuing medical dominance (Willis, 1983). The issue of comparative status of social work in relation to other professions emerges as a significant theme. Participants frequently make reference to the belief that in relation to the provision of CPE activities and opportunities social work is not well supported in comparison to other professions: ‘[social work] is never going to foot it with doctors and nurses somehow because it’s a much more nebulous sort of undertaking I guess’ (Dave). The place of social work feels insecure in the world and there is a strong consciousness of a hierarchy of professions in which social work is lowly rated.
Making comparisons: Professional leaders’ and managers’ views

Managers, professional leaders and other people with professional influence were asked ‘how does CPE provision compare in relation to other professions?’ They were fairly consistent in their tendency to comment on the hierarchy amongst professions and that the perceived relatively low position of social work had an impact on the support for and resourcing of CPE. The story is about power and status, and the share of ‘goodies’ that comes the way of social workers:

*Mind you when you are in a powerful position as the doctors are you are bound to be getting some goodies like that* (Bill)

*Because we work in health, the main focus is on the medical people and for example, they have a certain number of study days by right, in their contracts ....the training is aimed at all of the up-skilling and [practising certificates] as well other personal development* (Claire).

Missing out on well planned CPE processes led to the perception that social workers are less than up to date with vital information for practice:

*Well the situation that I’m most familiar with would be family law and there is no comparison. I mean there is obviously more money but they are also very focused. There is a leading Family Law expert on a tour at the moment, talking about the new [Care of Children] Act. I suspect that family lawyers will be more informed about that than social workers will be* (Meryl).

Being less powerful is perceived as making it more difficult for social work leaders to get resources for their staff to do CPE. This echoed the findings of Beddoe and Henrickson (2003; 2005) where participants commented on the demeaning processes for getting approval of requests for financial support for further education. A hospital-based social worker in that study had said

“The process of applying for support for training is not very supportive either as it first involves filling out forms to justify why this training will benefit you & the hospital. Then once you have done this [and] sent it off to management for approval you then have to keep on their case to seek a response. This can be very time-consuming [and] at times degrading” (Beddoe & Henrickson, 2003, p.30).
A professional leader in the current study echoed this earlier finding that it was difficult to secure funding:

_I have had to fight to get funding for one of my staff to go on something. I was asked for evidence that it was a suitable course and I thought, I doubt that would have happened for another profession—and I thought it was uncalled for actually, that we shouldn’t have to be doing that (Frances)._  

Budgets are seen as relative to the status of the profession and its ability to use mandates to gain entitlements:

_It is a good question actually … of course there is a mandated requirement for doctors to they get huge CPE. Do you know one doctor’s entitlement in dollars is the equal to my entire department’s budget for courses and conferences for a year? And they have huge entitlements in terms of time and of course that is very good (Megan)._  

The noting of unequal treatment was consistent and strong amongst those employed in health services, but was not exclusive to health social workers as Lucky, who had worked in a number of different organizations including NGOs, could perceive hierarchies operating within NGO organizations he had practiced in. When asked about how well he thought social work was doing with CPE, across fields of practice he too mentioned the ‘pecking order’:

_I think from my perspective social work has always been on the back foot because when I worked for the [NGO] the family therapists, the counsellors were sort of the top of the pecking order and social workers at the bottom. Going to [Youth agency], the psychologists, the mental health people are top and social work is down the bottom end (Lucky)._  

Managers expressed a sense of urgency described as a need to push staff, to encourage people to push the profession and promote social work well

_When you are working and stacking up on a day to day basis with skilled, intelligent, articulate professionals there is no way you are just going to be able to coast along and hope for the best, you are going to have to get out there and have to push (Summer)._  

This is seen as an area where social workers need to improve their skills:
Well again they need the opportunity to teach others and to articulate their skills in presentations and do research..., taking the lead in those kinds of areas and we just don't have the capacity to do that, only in a very limited way (Summer).

Making comparisons: Group interviews

In the group interviews this tendency towards constant comparison was also present, although the first group stood out, expressing less of a sense that the social workers were ‘hard done by’. This was a group of social workers working in a mental health setting in a large District Health Board. The practitioners generally felt lucky in this setting and acknowledged the resources that were available to them. One participant expressed his certainty that his present workplace stood out in terms of really strongly supporting university study at postgraduate level. In his organization, with a fully qualified staff, this generosity was linked to good alignment between the agency’s needs and what the university offered:

*I have certainly made use of that support too because it is open to you, financially and also time out from clients to study,… I think I was really lucky here because this service has a particularly strong focus on professional development …and I don’t think we would get it elsewhere and so I think we are incredibly lucky. The university courses are so pivotal on the types of the work we do here, they help really arm you to do the job* (Mental Health group).

Another participant in this group felt that this was even more localized and that it was the particular service group within mental health that provided a good environment, and linked this to the notion of respect in which social workers were held, despite the assertion that practitioners in this service were relatively well supported, awareness of the relative status of social workers was never far from the surface:

*Yes definitely. Having worked in adult settings at [a larger hospital based service] and coming here the respect that is given social work here is just beyond belief. You cannot compare. It is just amazing* (Mental Health group).

This mental health social worker was aware that even within the field of practice there could be major differences in how social work was regarded by other professions:

*And I don't know if I would have stayed in social work if I hadn't come here because I was so disappointed about graduating and going into the other clinical field and the lack of respect And also overhearing judging comments even within [service unit] made by other professions say like nurses, made in a good -*
Subsequent focus groups reflected the more common experience of the persons of influence, that social workers felt their status was reflected in unequal provision of resources. After the second focus group, I wrote this research note:

It struck me today how significant status is for the social workers I am talking to. They are incredibly status conscious and seem to be constantly comparing themselves with other professions, in people working in non health environments this is not so obvious but is still present…. [they are] externalizing everything, a lot of talk about how things are seen, how they want to be seen, how social work fares in the competitive workplace (Research note 25/5/05).

Whether asked to, or not, the participants in this study raised comparisons, between themselves and other professionals with whom they worked, alongside or in interagency relationships. A sense of hierarchy, ‘the pecking order’ pervades this description of how social work fares in relation to the place of CPE. A return to the data to search for references to ‘doctors’ and ‘medical’ found that the use these comparisons were common across all of the interviews. Table 5.2 The Doctors, captures a selection of the comments made using these terms. These participants were predominantly from health social work roles and so the frequent usage reflects an overwhelming sense of the profession being disadvantaged in the health system, as many comments refer to status.
Table 5.2 The Doctors

| Working in health, the main focus is on the medical people (Claire) |
|---|---|
| I would have to say generally because it is a medical model, the learning environment is just focused on medical staff (Claire) |
| The doctors are you are bound to be getting some goodies like that (Bill) |
| I mean your doctors are going to have resources because of that tradition (Bill) |
| Doctors have an expectation of being able to go to conferences (Claire) |
| The learning environment is just focused on medical staff rather than allied health (Claire) |
| I am unsure we have an overall policy but I guess the doctors would have it built into their contracts and nursing have it built into contracts as well (Claire) |
| Doctors and nurses training programmes were there and expected to be. (Collette) |
| There are doctors who feel that only doctors and lawyers are professionals (Collette). |
| You’re never going to foot it with doctors and nurses somehow (Dave) |
| Other than the doctors we are pretty well off (Mental Health FG). |
| Oh doctors are brilliantly funded (Frances). |
| Coming from a health model social work doesn’t even get a look-in whereas with nurses and doctors it’s considered an expectation …and they have a budget set aside per (Jill) |
| It is a mandated requirement in regard to doctors so they get huge CPE (Megan). |
| In health of course the doctors set the base line (FG) |
| Just not funded to the same level as the doctors of course (FG). |
| Well it is never going to stack up with the doctors (Summer) |
| Yeah you know that doctors routinely go to conferences (Summer) |

Having a more positive experience was often regarded as divergent from the norm; Alison, from a statutory agency, expressed a positive view, that in fact they were fortunate and received generous provision of support and access in her current workplace. This was regarded as lucky and there was a positive comparison made with other settings, though Mandy felt this was pragmatic for her employer:

*I’ve been thinking a lot about study and theory and practice and how they all link up because like well I’m doing [a paper] through the university and I think that Child Youth and Family as an organization has been quite generous in my experience compared to other employers with the amount of training that we get in-house and things that get paid for elsewhere and I think that’s really valuable (Alison)*

*I think that the department has been generous about the training and offering study time and paying for outside training. It’s really out of necessity because I mean really the department employs people with a minimal qualification and the complexity of our work requires something more and I think a lot of problems we*
face are around people who don’t necessarily have the skills so there are still social workers that don’t have a qualification (Mandy).

A senior manager in the same organization felt that this benevolence towards ‘training’ people without qualifications was marked:

*I think the organization that I work for at the moment is hugely benevolent about it. I don’t know in private enterprise of anybody who would hire somebody and then pay them while they got the qualification that they really should have come in with in the first place (Maggie).*

Amongst more senior managers, there was awareness that the need to support people to get to even basic social work qualifications had a cost and influenced the amount of support for CPE. She felt there was a major downside to this as ‘the cost of continually bringing in people and supporting them to get their [first] qualifications which I think is an absolute drain on the organization’.

Later in this focus group session, Mandy felt that her employer’s generosity was perhaps not consistent and that access to training opportunities was in part a reward for good behaviour:

*I think that its, if you’re a good girl, though I think it’s the privileged few as opposed to available to all, so you’re rewarded for good behaviour and its very private so most people probably wouldn’t go that kind of support I’ve had -it’s not something that’s put out there (Mandy).*

Others in this group interview agreed:

*Yeah and certain people would get a yes and certain people would get a no depending on how well they’ve been[seen as performing] and how valued they are.*

**Externalization**

Early reading of the group interview data generated the code ‘externalization’ as a term for naming the tendency of participants to interpret CPE decisions as in the hands of managers and systems, rather than individual choices. The significance of this third broad theme is that it demonstrates that awareness of the impact of the implementation of registration was ‘top of mind’ for many social workers during the period of data collection. This theme emerged from a discussion in supervision about the lack of awareness of practitioners of their own personal professional
responsibilities for their continuing education and the constant linking of this to the impact of other forces.

This had been a subject of comment from quite early in the data collection period. A research note written after one of the group interviews recorded some questions about the extent of bureaucratic focus and the lack of a wider sense of professional identity.

It is hard to get them to focus on their learning- the discussion always goes back to them in relation to others! Externalizing everything, a lot of talk about how things are seen, how they want to be seen, how social work fares in the competitive worldview.

All very bounded by their small locality…not at all easy to get any focus on us as a profession…..in the world…Why are the social workers so stuck in this? Why can’t they answer questions at macro level about their profession? Why can only a small number of people answer the questions where I ask them to comment on social work as a whole, in New Zealand? Seem to be really stuck especially their immediate organizational context (Research Note 25/5/05)

Bringer, Johnston and Brackenridge (2006, p.251) note that qualitative research aims to create an explanatory model that is based ‘in reality, not a social vacuum’. It is important to note aspects of the social milieu at the time and place of the data collection. In this study participants were aware of the changes being brought about by the implementation of the SWRA during the period the interviews were conducted. Their comments demonstrate a clear focus was on the impact of this in their immediate environment. In retrospect and subject to deeper analysis I noted a difference between managers and practitioners. As will be further noted in Chapter Six, the opinion leaders were generally professional and team leaders/managers, and were also people with extensive experience in more than one working environment. They could see CPE with a wider lens; more conscious of changes brought about by policy change in the external environment, and thus were able to articulate this with reference to the profession’s history.

**The impact of the Social Workers Registration Act (2003)**

All participants were offered the opportunity to reflect on the impact of registration in the interviews and group interviews. Most participants expressed clear views that the advent of professional registration via the SWRA (2003) was a good thing and that it would help rather than hinder social workers’ access to resources for
CPE. Bill, a professional leader, was clear that there was a strong link between ‘goodies’ and systems of registration, using the example of the perceived success of nursing in accessing improvements because of long-standing statutory regulation and the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act (2003) which had effectively required employers to fund continuing education and professional supervision.

*Registration, that’s another buzz in the air, as to what the requirements of registration will be, because of course health is very tuned into the importance of registration. All the other professions are registered, and now with HPCA and the whole emphasis on competence and new requirements for annual practicing certificates, social work is really coming in on that stream (Bill).*

Jill also felt that the advent of registration would give professional leaders more power to negotiate with employers for improved resources for CPE:

*My hope with registration is that once we have some clearer benchmarks and the registration process with the requirements for CPE, we will have an ability to negotiate with managers… we will say look this is how it advantages [employers]*

It was important to the health leaders often because it helped social work be better aligned with the other disciplines, and therefore needing resources was less contestable. Bill made a comparison with nursing:

*Nurses have an increasingly complex, sophisticated system for their registration …they are putting together detailed portfolios, and my sense is with that, the training is going to follow and tie in because that is a specific system for registration which the DHB also got on board with. Psychologists are another kettle of fish because they tend to have more advanced qualifications than other allied health and of course their new standard is a clinical doctorate.*

Registration appears to have created a greater sense of entitlement to CPE; it has legitimised social workers’ demands for greater access to professional development. A group participant noted that social workers were used to having to provide evidence of professional development because of the expectation that they would undertake ANZASW Competency assessment. Regular demonstration of competency had been a feature of professional life for many of the participants for over ten years and, to some extent, this has mandated and some of the CPE component of registration. This was seen as a positive as it was something that they were confident about, and an aspect of the impact of registration that was not
problematic, and even seen as providing a rare example of social work being ‘ahead of the game’:

_Actually it is only now, with the health competency act [HPCA Act] coming in are the other professions even looking at actually having to prove that they have done on going education. Registration for them has always been pay your money and get your piece of paper, we have always had to do the competency [process]. That is why when HPCA Act came in a lot of the other professions panicked, freaked out and I couldn’t work out what they were getting so fogged up about cause this is stuff that we have been doing for year so in that respect I think we had the game. Way ahead of the game (Rotorua Group)._}

For many social workers, especially in the health environment, registration brings with it markers of the professionalization of social work that have been missing, or seen as vulnerable because of the lack of a legal mandate. The advent of the benchmark qualification and the annual practicing certificate, linked to continuing education were seen as strengthening the social work case for more resources and support. A legal requirement to hold a practicing certificate was perceived as much better than anything voluntary, because it would bring social work in line with nursing. These external requirements were of great significance in strengthening social workers’ place in the system, especially in health settings.

The focus on external credentialing echoes the findings of Roach-Anleu (1992), who had noted from her research, that credentials and qualifications were significant for health social workers. External professional validation was needed in order to support their claim to a distinctive contribution and maintain authority and expertise in some activities (p. 40). Roach-Anleu noted that ‘ironically, the least professionalised segment of social work – hospital social workers – possess the strongest professional identity’ (p.41).

Claire too echoed this, believing that registration made social work fit better along with other health professions and this might improve CPE resourcing because the need to meet annual practicing certificate requirements was already understood:

_Yeah I think the degree helps credibility- a social worker as another equal health professional. I think registration will help ongoing education people will have to be qualified. I think with registration and the expectation of an annual practicing certificate, which is absolutely similar to nursing, is fine because the organization is already primed about these (Claire)._
Beyond the health sector, participants still expressed positive expectations of the impact of registration. Lucky looked back and felt that continuing education had dipped in importance, he felt during the 1990s; his hope was that registration might drive greater interest in further education.

I think [CPE] has gone through a bit of a lull. I think it will go up with registration. It is an opportunity I guess... if you sort of traced it through the 70s, 80s and it sort of tapered off. I think it will slowly come out of that dip, from what I have seen there has been a definite dip, probably in the 90s... So just relating it to the economic circumstances or political ideology or whatever

Professional leaders commonly held high hopes for the impact of registration, that it would lead to additional resourcing for CPE and be an impetus for development. As Lucky indicated above there is a shared sense that social work has not been resourced as well as it should be and the new registration system was seen to be heralding an opportunity for social work to get what it deserves. This sentiment was expressed vividly by Maggie:

*LIZ: So are you optimistic?

MAGGIE: Absolutely, I think that in the environment that we are going into we will have probably more government support than we have ever had, we have a Registration Act and a body that is solely there to elevate the profession and to give it the kind of professional base that we know it deserves and so that can only be good news.

Qualifications

There are several interlocking aspects of credentialing and qualifications impacting on practitioner accounts of continuing education. The first part, to be examined in Chapter Six relates particularly to the organizational context and the extent to which organizations (particularly corporate organizations) explicitly link HRD strategies to continuing education. The second aspect is linked to the status of social work being recognised as an educated profession. Qualifications are important to the practitioners in this study and are seen to signal status. This is frequently comparative and relates to the perceptions of other professions or employers:

I think that’s the bit about certificate versus competency so that as an employer, that credentialing process - they want to see that you’ve got ten thousand letters after your name, particularly when you work in health and you sign your name
next to a doctor who writes like two lines of his credentials underneath and you just write BSW (Jill).

For Emily, as a manager, qualifications were vital in terms of standards of practice:

>I think it is all about credentialing and the need to meet standards and how do you do that when people aren’t trained. And the fear of the more litigious [environment].

Social workers’ qualifications have been a long standing debate in New Zealand and the participants in this study, though nearly all qualified, demonstrated that the issues are still current. Jill felt that policy was unreliable and worried that there would be further change, even a different government going back….

>For me one of the frustrations is always being on the outside of CYFS -there’s the fact that they went through the big push of getting all their staff qualified and then they kind of relaxed a bit and then registration comes in so they push again. We don’t seem to fight for professionalism in New Zealand at this point; we don’t seem to keep the consistent benchmark… As long as government can’t change it, if government changes I don’t know -I hope they can’t! (Jill).

The SWRB’s setting of the benchmark at an undergraduate degree, but not requiring ‘grand -parented' registered social workers to go beyond a diploma met mixed views. Maggie was pleased that the SWRB had decided to require a degree:

>I think that is with the Registration Act raising the barriers [to a degree] I think that is wonderful because another year's exposure to learning will also encourage people to see it as a lifelong process which it hasn't been. It has been 'you have left school, you have this particular ‘ticket’, [a diploma] now you are out in the wide world and that is all you need

Paul thought that the degree might not matter for people who were registered anyway:

>Yes, but in terms of one of the things that I kind of wonder what will surpass it is that once you’ve got a registered social worker whether people will just forget all the other letters because they’ll just see registered social worker

Most though valued the new benchmark. Jenny expressed a common viewpoint

>I mean, in an ideal world, I think it would be really great if all social workers had more than just a diploma, the minimum should be a Bachelor degree,
and Claire linked this to credibility: *Yeah I think the degree helps credibility as a social worker*, a point echoed by Lucky who felt that people having a masters degrees was increasing as well:

> I think though social workers in the past haven't really had a good qualification and not certainly as a profession. I mean that is changing in terms of lots of people have a masters in social work

Jill felt it was important to let clients know that you are qualified:

> I think clients are more informed about what they can expect. Now I'm looking at setting up private practice, those letters after my name are important, what training I've done. Remembering to find certificates and hang them up on the wall to show people I've actually done it rather than just I dreamt it

Paul held the opposite view, this snippet of conversation illustrating the range of views on credentialising within the profession:

> I mean it doesn't really matter that people see what I've done or anything like that. And it certainly doesn't matter to the client, what matters to the client is whether I know how to use it

There were barriers to gaining qualifications and some particularly affected people who have practised for many years without qualifications. Jill noted that for good reasons some staff had been appointed for their cultural expertise and not really pushed to get qualified:

> Social workers who were not academically qualified were appointed because of the strengths that they brought in as individuals, particularly their cultural strengths, with the clear undertaking that we would pay for them to get qualified. So once they're in the workforce in they are in very isolated roles and ten years later they're getting shunned because they're didn't study and they are not going to be eligible for registration (Jill)

For Sina, who held dual roles as educator/practitioner an issue was the lack of expectations in the community that people would be qualified:

> Yep I think we are lazy. I think perhaps we have this view that social work is something that anyone can do if they are a good person. And you can learn as you go along, and if you are charitable and altruistic maybe that is a good thing. I do think that registration will change that
You wouldn't have someone walk off the street and say well actually I have done a first aid course and I want to work at your medical centre as a GP. Whereas we have had people in social work walk off the street and say well I have done this and that, not a formal social work qualification, but they have been taken on. I think if people are employed on the basis of some personal attributes then I think people perhaps gain a mind-set that is all that is needed (Sina).

We need to put a benchmark in and really stick to it and that's the hope with something like registration that you legislate and then once people have the same benchmark people might be more open to doing ongoing education because we've said these things (Jill).

In Chapter Three it was noted that a consequence of greater demarcation of the workforce in contemporary Western society is the need for clear professional recognition in a competitive environment and for being of being ‘up to date’. Higher qualifications may be pragmatically valued for what they symbolize rather than what they contain and demonstrate about actual competence and knowledge (Jarvis 1996, p.240). In the climate of the HPCA Act managers see that there is a compliance driver of continuing education: ‘they are not even thinking of wriggling out of it, they are assuming that we will have to have [CPE] and it is already accepted’ (Claire).

Recalling social justice: Professionalization and social workers’ commitment to the social work ideal

A central focus of this study was to examine an assumption that professional development policies and practices in social work in the current climate would be strongly linked to strategic aims in corporatized social services and that these aims may not always focus on empowerment or critical inquiry.

Two Australian studies have examined the extent social workers practice matched their principles in terms of the social justice agenda. Hawkins, Fook & Ryan (2001) found that in general ‘patterns of terminology used seemed to indicate a predominance of clinical and traditional professional language’ (p.10). In a study of student supervision sessions, Maidment and Cooper (2002, p.406) searched for incidences of acknowledgement of client diversity and oppression. Their findings indicated that ‘although educators questioned and challenged the students regarding issues of ‘difference’, they made no overt reference to aspects of power, inequity, oppression or exclusion indicative of an anti-oppressive model of practice’. This
suggests that while socially constructed notions of difference (binaries such as male/female, black/white, disabled/able-bodied) are noted in such contexts, the larger structural issues of poverty, oppression, human rights, and social exclusion may be less consciously observed. Anti-oppressive practice, developing in the late 1980s and dominant in the 1990s promoted a focus on identity and difference and contributed to a retreat from class as a means of explaining inequality and injustice. Oppression becomes something ‘seen as subjectively defined, while capital, the state and oppressive structures disappear’ (Ferguson & Woodward, 2009, p. 29-30); the focus of social work commitment to change shifts from changing social structures to changing attitudes and behaviour. Radical social work becomes critical social work.

Key questions asked of the data in the analysis were ‘do they articulate aspects of the social justice mission of social work as they consider the state of CPE’? Is there evidence of critical inquiry featuring in their accounts of their continuing development? The interviews were conducted during a period where there was much emphasis on CPE supporting the aims of achieving levels of registration, especially in larger employing organizations, as will be explored further in Chapter Six. This rather pragmatic focus may have influenced the conversation about the nature of CPE. In large statutory organizations there may be less room for thinking about a broad view of the future development of staff to achieve the aims of social work, as focus, energy and resources were all aimed at achieving greater levels of basic qualification in the workforce.

For educators and students alike, engagement with critical theory has often been inherently paradoxical; in the 1980s and 90s students were educated about oppression (in New Zealand, often while on salary paid by employers) and yet there was little consciousness of our own privilege, as educators and ‘professionals’ (Pease, 2006). As Tobias has suggested, professionalization is not ‘innocent’, and as social work moves toward greater occupational closure, the problem of reconciliation of left leaning values with the trappings of registration becomes more visible. Pitt, for example, clearly identifies this as a concern in her challenge to the SWRB decision to set a bachelor’s degree as the qualification required for registration after 2005:
Setting the standard at degree level appears to reinforce traditional, positivist ideas about what is acceptable knowledge. It supports those with power in society and marginalizes others. …By setting this kind of standard are we as a profession perpetuating the very power structures we challenge in our daily practice? (Pitt, 2005 p.41)

A critical perspective on registration was not often overt in the data gained in this study. There are several likely explanations for this. The timing of the data collection is a crucial factor: to some extent social workers were relieved that registration had arrived, especially those in the health sector, who work alongside more well established professions. Social workers from health settings made up 40% of those interviewed, and the largest field of practice represented in the study. To a large extent, social workers supported registration by the early part of the decade, as increasing levels of qualified workers raised levels of awareness of the profession’s history. The period 2004-6 was perhaps a ‘honeymoon period’ for registration, when social workers held great hopes for the improvement of the position of the profession. It is of course quite possible that some participants in this study were reticent to express strong views on this issue because of the researcher’s roles as both an educator and member of the Registration Board.

Contradictions noted by Dave may reflect some disquiet about the ideological dimensions of professionalization. Dave (who holds a masters degree) commented on the tensions between academic qualifications and credentials and a social work that is well-grounded, relationship based and conscious of issues of social justice:

*We have one person who’s refusing to register. He’s probably got a Diploma actually… but he’s refusing to upgrade. He says, ’look all the people I’ve learnt from and I respect have been unqualified and I honestly don’t think, I think ‘upping the ante’ on academic qualifications is going to make a blind bit of difference to the quality’. I must admit I’m quite sympathetic to that point of view in some ways.*

Dave points to the different focus in education and professional development between ‘upgrading’ qualifications, CPE aimed at improving the status of social work and its organizations and how education impacts on the quality of the work.
Dave took a critical perspective in considering CPE throughout the interview. He expressed a clear analysis of the impact of neoliberalism on practice in NGOs, for example, recognizing how contracting drove this sector’s engagement with government, producing a more conservative approach:

*You see there’s almost no such thing as an NGO sector actually. I mean which is really sad. I mean it’s kind of like the political stuff has got somehow lost, because we’ve been so captured by contracts.*

While certainly valuing education, Dave echoes a common theme of emphasizing relationship skills and ‘groundedness’ as attributes for social work. This idea is always problematic for social work: such a stance portrays social work as a ‘grass-roots’ enterprise, where formal learning is not seen as relevant as having other credentials, more related to personal attributes than qualifications. Social science research can be dismissed by social workers easily as not relevant and objectifying human beings (Shannon & Young, 2004, p.56). This ‘simple’ practice story impacts on social work’s low status of social work as an academic discipline as well, and Green (2006, p.250) suggests that:

*There is a tendency (arguably influenced by vested political agendas) to portray social work as a simple, practical activity rather than as a professional occupation, requiring analytical skills, as well as a value base, to deal with what are complex, volatile and multifaceted social situations.*

This portrayal of social work’s blend of caring values with common sense practicality is a recurring theme in the data as a contradiction between a view of social work as an applied activity where academic ability wasn’t as important as being able to communicate effectively with clients and a more academic perspective. For Alicia, who questioned ‘academic ‘social work as part of ‘justifying the profession’?

*I have seen a lot of people who have become very academic, and they operate out of the book -so immediately the human side is lost.*

Dave also commented on a similar theme- that academic ability may not be matched with the skills to engage with service users:
It's how to match academic ability with effectiveness. There's a real tension because I don’t think the two necessarily go hand in hand. Often when you really get down to it, it is really the ability to engage and get alongside people that the work is about.

The theme of practicality emerges linked to everyday practice with services users. The everyday business of social work is basically about skills being used to get along with people and achieve service objectives. Where does the mission of working for social justice fit with this grounded practicality? Bill perhaps expressed this most clearly while he was considering his responses to the CPE Focus rating instrument:

See I might say that the social justice critical reflection pieces are important because they are ...more left field as it were to the organization and typically to the settings where people are. But I am also saying that the key agency tasks—practical skills have to be there as well, and at times they are exceptionally important, because if you don't do them then whole huge problems open up.

In fact you are in breach of your critical reflection social justice pieces. If you don't do a key task the client misses out, what good is that for critical reflection? (Bill).

Bill found it difficult to rank the items relating to critical reflection (CPE should encourage critical reflection and evaluation of current social work practice) and social justice (CPE should be strongly aligned to social justice and empowerment). He felt that his current role was more focused on supporting social workers to do ‘some practical tasks and make sure they get done’ but he felt he still would ‘push the social justice [angle] but a bit more to the side’. His conceptualization of social justice as ‘left field to the organization ’ suggests that the organizational context is ‘front of mind’ often for persons of influence in social work, at least in the more complex corporate workplaces. Social justice and critical reflection are ‘pieces’ of social work to be considered in terms of ‘measuring up’.

Language: Not much of ‘that sort of talk’

Social work’s legacy of activism has come under some considerable critical scrutiny in recent years. Langan (2002) examined the history of radical social work and concluded that, by the 1990s, while the ‘rhetoric’ of radicalism was
‘ubiquitous’, its spirit ‘seemed to have long evaporated’ (p. 214) extinguished by
the forces of managerialism when business values threatened the traditional welfare
discourse and led us to conduct practice in the market. Gilligan (2007, p.739) goes
further and asks ‘Are social workers trained to say the ‘right’ things more
effectively than to do them? How many have ever been genuinely radical?’
Hawkins, Fook and Ryan’s study of social workers use of the language of social
justice found little usage of social justice terminology:

What are the implications for social work? If we want the profession of social
work to pursue a social justice mission, which our official and espoused
position suggests, then we need to take steps to ensure that the way we frame
and conceptualize our practice is congruent with, and furthers, social justice
principles. It appears that we rarely use social justice terminology to talk
about our work (Hawkins et al., 2001 p.11).

Dave expressed support for this perception of social workers as not actively
conscious of social justice in their everyday workplace conversation. His view was
that:

*DAVE: Once you get into [work] most workplaces are pretty apolitical these
days. I mean I think it [social work] is a political activity in its purest form
maybe and how you grapple with that in terms of ongoing learning and
development is a real challenge really. I mean I don’t see much of that, you don’t
get much of that sort of talk really*

*LIZ: So the social justice agenda is almost invisible?*

*DAVE: Yep and so it’s out there but once you get people working for agencies,
statutory agencies a lot of that seems to go by the by. So I would say from the
profession’s point of view that is an issue I think that [is the] biggest challenge.
In some way I think that the political agenda has been lost.*

Dave was one participant who attempted a deeper analysis of these issues. His
questioning that professionalization would in itself improve the quality of practice
was unique but as Wasserman, Clair and Wilson (2009, p.359) note ‘there is no
such thing as an outlier in grounded theory, in the sense that no data is dismissed
from investigation because of non-central tendencies. Rather, concepts, and the
larger conceptual scheme, are constantly improved by synthesizing new data’.
Dave recognised the lack of overt links between everyday practice and social
change but felt that the profession might recover some of this through greater consciousness of the profession’s natural political inclination. Dave was able to retain a sense of optimism, despite his concerns about contracting; he was able to propose a more progressive way forward for NGOs:

*The opportunity [contracting] does create for us is to say, okay how are we going to do this work in a way that truly is empowering… families; where we will co-author assessments, we’re not going to just do risk management assessments on people …it’s much more a rights based type of thing.*

*We’ll sit down, we’ll do a co-assessment with people, we will either co-write it and if not we will write it, we will get them to sign off on it or disagree.*

Dave was the only participant to specifically use the phrase ‘professional capital’; this concept was utilized in linking ideas of social capital to our discussion of how social work struggles for recognition:

*I think that’s probably where there needs to be some recognition, and when we look at our contribution, our triple bottom line or whatever you want to call it, look—we’re actually contributing to social and professional capital building by doing [this work] and it should be recognised that that’s what we do, but who’s going to recognise it?*

Dave was more optimistic in his longer term view and suggested a role for continuing education:

*People are so sucked into this system and actually everybody is being categorised and ‘done to’, to a certain extent but hopefully there will be some sort of consciousness around that will emerge because in the end there is going to be a political [response] sooner or later. People will say, hang on….what are we doing here and I guess part of that continuing education…. well it is probably over the horizon a little a bit but I guess in terms of how do you plan ahead in terms of what is being offered …I think that is going to be something that people are really looking at, god, how do we influence policy?*

Dave thus seeks an approach to continuing education that raises awareness beyond the day to day. The power of ‘the system’ to suck social workers in was also recognised by Frances, who felt it was a lack of analysis that led to inertia. She expressed this in this passage that was spoken with considerable vehemence:
You know what; we are supposed to be political! We are supposed to challenge systems we are supposed to fight injustice and what happens you get a group of social workers together and say well what do you want?

Alan’s ‘take’ on this issue as that it required training to maintain energy for the advocacy role:

In terms of training in the advocacy role, that is a vital part of what we do. I think it takes a lot to maintain advocacy year in year out. I don’t know whether it is training sort of areas in terms of development of how you maintain being the one that pushes that?

Mental health social workers felt that in their setting it was easy to become part of the clinical system and that might weaken their adherence to those foundational principles of social justice:

I think you are strongly in danger of just becoming another mental health worker. I think we are encouraged to become a mental health worker here: a clinician. A case manager and social worker that is sometimes diluted or lost, and I am very conscious of that myself (Mental Health group)

I think personally ...I have lost sight of some of those other broader idealistic ways of seeing the world (Mental Health group)

I mean the bandwagons tend to be more a social work social justice type thing. I suppose [being in] the cutting edge of mental health treatment it seems a long way off that (Mental Health group)

Maree felt that there was complacency—‘I’m helping people and that’s enough’.
She felt that social workers in health social work could do more, ‘we’re only scraping the surface…we could be so much more out and doing’ on issues such as health funding and health inequalities. There was a great sense that people just feel bogged-down with the day to day and being in the system:

I think that one of the common difficulties that people have is that they are so consumed with the minutiae of their day to day work that they forget why they are here. Why the people are here? They don’t look at clients in context (Frances).

This was echoed by Jill who felt that social workers get swallowed up in the emotional demands of the work:
Because it’s such full on emotional work, the nature of the work that we do, the rescuing that we try not to do but we end up doing. We [need to] actually teach people how to take care of themselves I would like to see time dedicated to that because I’ve not met anyone yet who can actually do it. I’d like to think we could do it far more effectively so we are a healthier profession because we’re dealing with such a lot, we have such potential to ‘do change’ if we energise. We get so caught up in the micro we might have more time for the macro and social justice stuff if we weren’t so cloistered.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the reflections of participants about the relationships between CPE and the nature and standing of their profession. It is interesting that the data presented above indicate that there were several views of why the social justice agenda was muted: first that the ‘clinical’ role becomes dominant; second that social workers become ‘part of the system’ rather than ‘fighting the system’, and lastly that there was a lack of consciousness of a change agenda, or as Dave puts it a critical professional response to policy is still ‘over the horizon’ to re-emerge at some later date. Is this current muteness a sign that, as Hamilton (1974, p.451) suggested:

Social work in search of the status of a profession must forgo any claim to identify with the weak, or as is more usual, to an 'objective' view of the situation. For social workers to achieve …[professional status] does not mean that they fulfil a list of criteria, although they may do that; it means that they have become part of the ruling hierarchy with a stake in keeping the society as it is.

This chapter provides a snapshot of a profession in the grip of the professional project. Most participants, whether managers, professional leaders or practitioners, clearly articulated an awareness of the status of the profession and its engagement in the process of professionalization. In their consideration of CPE, the participants made frequent comparisons of the provision and uptake of CPE activities to that of other professional groups. There is a conscious aspiration to improve the status of the profession and build its professional capital; in particular through the
employment of knowledge, qualifications and credentials to better delineate social work’s role and place in the world. An additional observation is that despite this stated desire to become better qualified, a question remains about whether this is about being better educated, sentiments underpinning Allan’s reflective questions:

Don’t you agree that part of the need for us for ongoing training is knowledge for us to compete against other health professionals, not what we know intuitively? Or what we know at gut level, that something is just not right and people aren’t happy? But you have to fight on the battle field otherwise you, if you don’t fight the same way [through education and credentials] you lose it (Allan).

An emerging sense of discomfort with theory and lack of confidence to articulate the knowledge claims of the profession is notable. These issues will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter Seven, ‘Practitioners’ reflections on careers, learning, scholarship and research’. Chapter Six presents the participants reflections on their experience of continuing professional development within the organizational context.
Chapter Six: Compliance, Service Development, Professional Development- The Focus of CPE in the Organizational Context

I think that there should be a continuous feedback loop. There has to be a match between what practitioners want and what the organization wants, because if there isn’t, that is when we lose people and we get practice that is contrary to the sorts of standards and values that we need … there has to be a joining from the beginning and a continuous conversation (Maggie).

Introduction

Chapter Five has described social workers’ current struggle for status and identity as a profession, particularly where practised in multidisciplinary environments. Social workers, while largely employed within bureaucratic and increasingly corporate environments seek to utilise CPE opportunities to build status and credibility, both as individuals in terms of career (to be explored further in Chapter Seven) and as a profession. In Chapter Three the development of organizational learning was identified as a major component of CPE and examined the significance of some of the concepts from organizational approaches for social workers, particularly for professional leaders and managers. As has been noted in Chapter Three, the organizational context of social work exerts significant influence on social workers’ perceptions of and aspirations about CPE. Roach-Anleu (1992, pp. 24-5) suggests though, rather than conceptualising strong professionalism and employment in bureaucracies as ‘intrinsic and by definition incompatible’, it is more helpful to examine how they work together within different organizational contexts. This chapter addresses the organization as the site in which professional identity, employment, bureaucratic and managerial perspectives intersect. This intersection is complex and practitioners’ accounts reflect these multiple perspectives.

Participant responses are examined in respect of the following broad questions: What do the organizational environments communicate to their social workers,
leaders and managers about learning and continuing education? How do social workers perceive the organizational learning culture? Chapter Six presents describes the nature of social workers’, professional leaders’ and managers’ CPE experience within their employing organizations.

Two major themes emerge from analysis of the data: first, participant accounts confirm the blurring of the boundaries between CPE and human resources development (HRD) (Jeris, 2004), as discussed in Chapter Three and thus management itself. Managerial thinking at many levels tends to dominate many aspects of access and choice in relation to CPE. A second theme emerges as the more idealised learning discourses, described in Chapter Four, are acknowledged in participant accounts but not fulfilled in their everyday experience.

As identified in Chapter Three, the contemporary discourse of lifelong learning creates a powerful rhetoric within social work organizations. This study provides evidence of the influence of this discourse and also illustrate Jarvis’ point that organizations don’t learn, ‘individuals within those organizations learn and then endeavour to implement that learning in their social context’ (Jarvis, 2006, p.65). The experiences of the social work managers and social workers illuminate our understanding of the relationships between the lifelong learning discourse, particularly the idealised learning organization, organizational learning policies and approaches and the way these are translated into action at the front line of social work practice. Both managers and practitioners alike demonstrate an acute awareness of the changes brought about by managerialism in the social services.

The perspective that the human services have been heavily subject to managerialism is clearly articulated in the literature (Duncan 1995; Jordan, 2000; Harris 2003). Harris (2007, p.57) for example, states that 'managerialism has been critical in pushing forward a way of thinking about the social work business that stems from capitalist rationality'. Data presented in this chapter poses social workers’ wants and needs as subject to an unsympathetic managerial regime. Interestingly, managers also expressed this, the most vehement criticism of managerial dominance coming from a person who held the most senior role of any of the participants. Harris’ assertion that the neoliberal agenda was for social work
to ‘be run as far as possible as though it were a private sector company pursuing profits’, (Harris, 2003, p. 57) certainly was evident in some of the talk amongst the practitioners. It is within this location, and at the particular juncture of profound change in the modern welfare state that this study was conducted. Added to this context is the impact of the professionalization project within social work.

Chapter Five has described the professionalization of social work, illuminated by the experiences and understandings of participants in that process. Some participants were acutely aware of the nature and impact of that project; others were carried along in its wake, conscious mainly of constant change in their professional environment. This chapter describes the experience of negotiating CPE within contemporary social work organizations, large and small.

**CPE in the organization: managers’ views**

As has been noted, professionals are increasingly part of corporate workplaces and much learning activity organized is interchangeably described as CPE/CPD or HRD as both concern learning and professional development. There are several interlocking aspects of learning and development in organizational settings; first, credentialing (consequential to increasing regulation of the professions) and second, quality and service improvement, (policy and practice within organizations) and both will be seen to impact on practitioner accounts of continuing education. The first aspect has largely been addressed in the previous chapter, in which practitioners described the impact of professional registration on their experience of CPE. The second relates particularly to the extent to which organizations, particularly corporate organizations, explicitly link CPE to management and HRD strategies to support organizational service quality. The ideal of continuous improvement (Bierema & Eraut, 2004) is a clear feature of the managerial design. There are a number of locations for activity related to continuing education, each characterized by different language and meaning: the collective world of the practitioner community located in workplaces, individual reflective learning in-action, and the managed individual career (both of which will be further examined in Chapter Seven); the organizational policy context (compliance and service development); and the less tangible and more tenuous
world of ‘the profession’ (CPE). These locations lead to some confusion of definitions and concerns about territory (Jeris, 2003).

For professional leaders, there was awareness that the integration of all of these aspects was a major part of their job and this was seen as quite complex:

*From my DHB experience where we are trying to integrate registration requirements, performance management requirements, salary and career developments requirements, to pull that all together. But it’s, I guess, a role in service development in the end. Because again it is not simply adequate that the Registration Board sets up a CPE system without figuring out how that gets integrated with performance management and with salary and career development (Bill).*

Senior people were aware of the linkages between HRD and CPE and the consequent problem of definitions; one participant explicitly identifies three types of training – compliance (health and safety, for example), service development (family violence awareness training) and individual professional development:

*The other thing about it, I suppose it’s the same in NGOs and government sectors, would be how training is divided, like you’ve got compliance training versus service requirements versus profession, at least three divisions within where they put [learning activities](Jill).*

Jill, as a former manager, could see that there were organizational tensions about supporting all these different types of learning activities, especially in terms of how the organization funded such activities. For Jill this provided an opportunity, as despite the financial constraints within her former organization she had found she could manipulate the system to get extra resources:

*[If you] didn’t think you were getting enough for social work you’d try and push it into service requirements or you try and make it compliance somehow. You really push; if you’ve got a really good argument [for] management then it becomes compliance.*

Power was vested in managerial, not professional roles, where resources were needed for training. Practitioners could clearly get access to resources when their learning goals or needs coincided with organizational direction and was not too far off target. This was particularly true in some settings where there was a high degree of congruence between managers’ expectations and staff goals for the undertaking of higher education. In one group interview, practitioners were clear that this had
an impact. One young practitioner suggested he experienced a strong impetus to do postgraduate study right from when he was applying for his current position:

Coming into the job from my interview, I didn't have the impression that it was voluntary, [laughter] and I don't think, not that I regret having done it at all but I kind of found out down the line that it was voluntary rather than compulsory, my impression was that conditional on me getting the job (Phil).

In this particular workplace while individuals were strongly supported to do postgraduate study, there was definitely some steering of the sort of study possible:

Oh I think it would if it was done through either social work, psychology, education, if you wanted, public health, because I just did courses through public health, if you tried to enrol in the engineering department, I don’t think you could do that, but without being silly, they would support you doing a masters or an MBA

*LIZ: What about a law degree?

GROUP: No law degree, but I think they would help you, allow you to do some law papers around family law or the Mental Health Act.

Yes you can to the family law paper, yeah, I don't think they would let you do a master in education, but there would be papers there like human development and that. And the child advocacy course. Yeah so they are a bit broad about it.

In some settings there was less emphasis on postgraduate type study and more on what could be seen as service development or compliance training. For Paul there might have been a disadvantage in being undertaking too much service related training:

Talking about service requirements,. it comes back to the way the manager sees it, and how many training things you've actually had because I became a recovery trainer. I did supervision training... I became the privacy person... all these things were actually about the [needs of the] service. There was nothing in it for me and the minute I put my hand up to go to something for my own professional development, they would say, 'sorry you've done enough training'!

Managers in the study tended to more consistently differentiate between the types of professional development, recognising the tensions identifies in Paul’s experience. This tension required them to balance the limited resources for education between “must do” and “nice to do” spending. Meryl, a manager in the NGO sector commented on the need to manage trade-offs between personal professional development and service development:
When I got there they had no budget at all and so I allocated everybody a training budget. We allocated half of that money to their own personal development to do, within reason, whatever was relevant, but that could be very broadly interpreted; and the other half, if you like, toward more corporate goals, so that we could get somebody in for a day to do team building exercises or something like that.

I think probably organizations have a responsibility in terms of the service development they want their employees to have to [enable them to] do the work. But I also do think they have a responsibility to allow people some choice about what training they want for themselves because that is what people learn best from.

Managers and professional leaders were generally willing to offer balanced views about this trade-off, when asked what she felt her organization could support in terms of individual practitioner choice, Audrey identified clearly the distinction between pragmatic and more philosophical concepts:

*It’s often horses for courses right now, is the practical answer to that so if you’re thinking about the theoretical answer then having well-rounded citizens is of course, but then someone pays.*

Audrey, a chief executive in a small non-governmental organization, conceptualized her personal response to the trade-off as reflecting a personal philosophy, tempered with practicality:

*I think it’s quite a philosophical thing, I think probably a personal view of the world too. It’s practical; if I have someone here at my agency and they need some skills then it’s to my advantage to pay for it. If it’s not something that I need for my organization I probably won’t be so fast to put my hand up to say we want you to do that, we actually need you to have these other skills and we’ll pay for those.*

As an employer she demonstrated the clearest view on the difference between private and public good when it came to the ability of social service organizations being able to assist people to achieve their personal educational goals and learning needs:

*If the education is something that is transferable and makes for a better society, then from personal point of view, the society has a role in encouraging that. If it’s something that is only going to be used by that person then it becomes a private thing, like me learning Spanish, it’s really probably something that I should be paying for myself so, unless I decide to go and work for the embassy in which case it moves to another category (Audrey).*
One clear finding is that managers tended to have a more complex understanding of the impact of the political and managerial environment and the impact of external factors on everyday implementation of policy. The study participants tended to be older, with consequentially greater exposure to changes in the environment and this may explain any bias towards policy-based explanations of organizational approaches to CPE. The younger practitioners generally seemed less conscious of these external factors such as registration and slightly focused their CPE issues in terms of career and employment, though as will be seen in Chapter Seven status is important to most participants.

Managers and professional leaders had a larger field in their sights when approaching the big issues about what could be supported. They talked about the wider environment, the ‘corporate’ entity, the DHB, the sector, the impact of government policy and the political environment. They were able to make the links between these macro issues and the social work environment, for example, the impact of statutory registration, the influence of the professional association and so forth. In general, practitioners operated within a smaller frame of reference, comprising their team, their physical work site, and their region in the larger organizations. Those holding strong and specific opinions on what should be done were generally professional leaders/managers and thus had often held extensive experience in more than one working environment. One manager, who had held a number of senior roles in multiple organizations across sectors, commented on the tendency for organizations to adopt new modes of practice at some cost:

You know education is a pretty precious resource...social work is very keen on what I call ‘fads’, now it is’ strengths-based’ and they have spent God knows how much money introducing strength-based work, there seem to be a few basics they should have got right before spending millions on this... (Meryl).

As such they could see CPE with a wider lens and were more conscious of changes and the developments in the history of the profession itself, beyond the corporate environment. Data from the interviews with managers often stands out as reflecting this deeper analysis of the external environment, particularly the changes in the management of the public service sector in the 1990s, described by Emily:
I think the general management model which came in with the health service reforms, has impacted greatly on the whole of the health profession and it has actually meant that people are reactive more than proactive. It stifled a lot of opportunities in the early nineties; There has been recently been more recognition of the need to invest in the work force. But that comes down from government directives more than boards, so the whole managerial shift to general management away from clinician led hospital boards did affect support for CPE. At one point we had training budgets of $800 for 100 people!

Some NGO managers were aware of trends in contracting in social services has made a difference when organizations made decisions about what CPE could or would be funded. Lucky commented on the adoption of particular approaches to practice in some organizations and how this then determined what the organization was prepared to fund. In the case of one agency, this was quite a commercial decision:

We have training in multi-systemic therapy as evidence-based. The research says it is one of the most effective models working with this particular client group, so it was sort of used as a lever, to gain contracts ......so if you look at it that way you are looking at things from an organizational point of view.

Lucky was clear that this more ‘business’-driven approach directly impacted on individual choices and in fact directed theoretical orientation:

I know when I was working with [agency] some people said ‘well no I don't want to do that training I want to go off and do post traumatic stress disorder training’ and the organization would say ‘well I am sorry that doesn’t fit’. ..That was a tension in [NGO agency] and again in a [second NGO]. There were some people that wanted to go off and do [specific counselling programme] the organization would say ‘well no we are not into psychodynamic models’.

LIZ: And could they do it if they were prepared to pay for it themselves?

If they were prepared to pay for it themselves they could do it...And you would be seen as diverging from the direction that the organization wanted to go in (Lucky)

LIZ: And what do you think the impact of that was on practitioners?

I think it can cause frustration, it can cause unease... workers obviously talk amongst themselves, that informal culture so they will say ‘oh well I want to do this but they won’t let me do it and seems unfair’. So it can create tensions and undercurrents in terms of the organization (Lucky).
Dave who had read widely about learning and development approaches raised the idea of knowledge management and the importance of recognising the knowledge gained in the work itself, constructing the practice from the ground up:

*In the business world they talk about knowledge management … there is a whole field about how you manage knowledge and, where it comes from, how you share it and I guess I am probably looking more deeply into practice as an emerging property as opposed to something that you can go and see about creating. I mean people learn most from hearing stories, sharing stories, sharing experiences as opposed to being instructed or reading…it seems that what seems to get a real buzz is the face- to -face interactive stuff where they are not just sitting and listening.*

Lucky recognised the need to develop practice and keep practitioners excited in the work was a challenge when he himself felt a lack of nurturing:

*I think the question is, how you keep that energy alive in people, and that comes down to the supervisor, the organizational culture but you have got me thinking, yeah I would like to .. but don't have the time and there is nobody nurturing me.*

**Practitioner perspectives**

Lucky’s comments highlight a significant dimension of organizational control and professional aspirations. One criterion for professional status on which there is often general agreement, is the possession of the ‘body of knowledge’ that differentiates the work of the profession at hand: ‘professionalism can be interpreted as a way of controlling knowledge towards occupational advantage and reinforcing claims to autonomous working’ (Waring & Currie, 2009, p.758). Increasingly though, it can be seen that the development of such neoliberal agendas as ‘best practice’ and ‘evidence-based practice;’ threaten the agency of practitioners to select their theoretical orientation within different organizational context, as evidenced above. Lucky’s examples demonstrated the power of employing agencies to determine theoretical orientation and the concomitant expectation that one mode of practice explicitly underpins practitioner action. This is a departure from the sense of professional control over knowledge underscoring the traditional conceptions of professionalism. Waring and Currie suggest that this may threaten professional power and is increasingly a feature of professional
practice in modern organizations: ‘Should this knowledge become uncoupled from professional practice and made amenable to more rigorous codification and sharing, then claims to professional jurisdiction and autonomy may be undermined’ (2009, p.758).

Practitioners and professional leaders were more cynical about the support for personal learning aspirations and less accepting of the control of managers:

No manager is going to say to somebody ‘go and do some social work training. You haven’t done any training lately you should go and do some training’, they like it if you don’t (Frances).

In a similar vein, Sina thought that the statutory agency she had worked for in the past had relied heavily on the experienced people on the staff and those people had missed out because of the focus on training new recruits and managing a serious retention problem:

I think about when I was there that the real focus seemed to be on inducting new people, so training was directed towards…what do we need to give our new people in order that they can go out and do the job, carry a caseload. And I was aware of a number of more experienced workers who did not have any opportunity, and in fact, because they were competent, were just provided with more and more work. High turnover meant that those people were left behind and more relied upon and so they didn’t have the opportunity to attend workshops or conferences or undertake longer periods of study in a specialist area.

In service training
Practitioners were frequently critical of in-service training. Research has found that in-service training is not necessarily an effective strategy as, while it consumes many resources, it is not always valued by practitioners. Smith et al. (2006, p.475) found that social workers attributed lower perceived value to in-service training as it ‘focused on the needs of the organization and not their own personal learning needs’. This was consistent with previous studies (Furze & Peacey, 1999; Clarke, 2001).
One group in particular felt that as experienced practitioners they were underserved. This was to large extent attributed to the situation alluded to earlier by Sina, that registration meant that resources for professional development were almost entirely spent supporting existing unqualified staff to achieve a basic qualification. Two social workers stood out in recognising that they were perhaps comparatively well-resourced and saw this focus as positive and generous:

*I think that the department has been generous about the training and offering study time and paying for outside training. It’s really out of necessity because I mean, really the department employs people with a minimal qualification and the complexity of our work requires something more and I think a lot of problems we face are around people who don’t necessarily have the skills so there are still social workers that don’t have a qualification (Mandy).*

Alison felt that she was lucky to have support:

*I’ve been thinking a lot about study and theory and practice and how they all link up because like well I’m doing [a paper] through the university and I think that Child Youth and Family as an organization has been quite generous in my experience compared to other employers with the amount of training that we get in-house and things that get paid for elsewhere and I think that’s really valuable (Alison).*

Registration Act requirements were seen as forcing employers to spend money and time on getting their staff eligible for registration. Dave saw this from an NGO perspective as a drain on funding:

*I mean I must admit social work registration has got some real fish hooks in the non-statutory sector because I think funding will be linked to it and there is now more off-loading quite a bit of child protection work on to us. So we have a lot of people studying at the moment, not by choice, but to basically be qualified, and eligible for registration.*

Many larger corporate employers strive to offer extensive internal training activity but this seems to get diluted by control issues. Practitioners were cynical about in-service training; particularly compulsory courses that offered packaged learning to all, regardless of entry and other qualifications. Advanced practitioners felt that this ‘dumbed-down’ any application of theory to practice and that it was aimed at the lowest common denominator:
I think the thing that we really noticed was that we were experienced and they treated us like dummies. There was nothing that was challenging or stimulating or that meant you came away feeling fed which for me is what education is about... Well they sure didn’t touch my learning edge (Jenny).

Alison felt there was a gap for more experienced practitioners because of the need to provide basic ‘theory to those who are still studying for their basic qualification’, or even those with qualifications who lacked the essential knowledge for the particular work:

[There is ]a focus on theory and bugger all about how you apply that, what you actually do in practice and that’s been really frustrating for me because I’m not new to the profession but I’m new to child protection...I also think there’s a deficit in terms of the training that can be offered by Child Youth and Family as an employer because it all appeared to me to be fairly focused on people who are new to the profession, who are recently qualified and up skilling them to a place where they can do this work. So if you’ve got some previous experience that’s aligned but not particular to this work, there’s little that helps you to apply that to the knowledge.

The focus on basic up skilling and induction (particularly in organizations with staff retention problems) meant that employers were not able to provide the more advanced type programme that supports what practitioners need. This was echoed by a manager in one organization who commented on compliance training:

Right now we have got this package that is absolutely bloody rigid and it can’t move to accommodate the degree and experience that might actually exist. I have heard stories where the trainers are just literally turning the pages over and they are just reading what is on the script.

Technical rationality

Another theme emerged in the data from participants who were (or had been) statutory social workers who talked about the increasing reliance on risk assessment tools and expressed concern that these were embraced as solutions to complex problems, echoing Littlechild’s comments on such tools:

Essentially, central government appears to have taken a view that in order to reduce the risk of child abuse deaths, the production of mandatory guidance and checklists for professionals will ensure that … professionals … plan their
work in standardized ways, and therefore reduce the risk to children, and risk to the government of negative and critical publicity (Littlechild, 2008, p.663)

One of the consequences of this heightened awareness of risk is that professionals are expected to take particular responsibility for identifying, managing and reducing risks to which service users are exposed. Risk features at all levels. In this environment, social service organizations focus training efforts on risk assessment, intake procedures and monitoring processes. The raised awareness of public accountability and the desire of governments and other health and social care organizations to avoid exposure to reputational and other risks has, in a rather paradoxical manner, led to requirements for greater compliance in employers’ training efforts but this hasn’t always raised the real skills of practitioners. Sina noted the positive and negative aspects of the focus on tools to assess risk:

*I think that there are some workers who were so underdeveloped in their craft that the Manitoba risk estimation system was like a god-send and whilst trainers, presented the estimation system as part of an assessment, there was a bigger assessment that you would do and RES was just one little piece of it. But I think for those workers who weren’t developed in their craft, they latched onto that RES like it was [the answer]*

*LIZ: Do you think that it was a tool that might make managers feel a bit safer?

SINA: Absolutely, I think those things like high turnover with the kind of media interest and speculation about child deaths and so forth …that the department needed to have clear accountable procedures- having a system that every worker in the country used was one way of doing that, and that if you have a tool an instrument that workers used I imagine it is much easier to measure on the computer system.

For Jenny, the influence of the managerial agenda was experienced as a silencing of the voice of practice:

*The whole managerial agenda here, they have removed from site manager up, they have removed a requirement to have any kind of social work background with [recent restructuring] and they aint gonna want to hear what we have got to say about practice and our learning needs around practice.*
Practitioners and managers speak about the ‘learning organization’

Chapter Three outlined an analysis of the impact of the learning organization ideal on conceptualizations of CPE in social services and provided some key points of critique. In essence, this critique is grounded in concerns about power and agency and in particular questions about who sets the learning agenda (Casey, 2003).

Sina’s analysis is borne out in a recent relevant study of internal training policies in child protection agencies where Reich argues that ‘the learning organization’ is a technology used to implement neo-liberalist management through the governing of practice for corporate aims. Reich (2002, p.225) found an emphasis in learning and development policy on the implementation of quality management systems and other aspects of corporate strategic management. In her conclusions Reich suggests the research ‘destabilizes the notion of neutral techniques, such as 'the learning organization', spreading vision and goodness to workers and increased productivity to organizations’ (Reich, 2002, p. 229).

Social work and health care organizations have aimed to become more reflective and Summer felt that her local environment offered some hope for really learning from mistakes:

*I'm not sure how well this organization does learn as an organization but there are a whole lot of mechanisms for picking up mistakes and the quality processes and I am on the quality group and there are lots of reports, wrong medications, all those kinds of things, critical reflection. And I think we do that reasonably well, I think this organization has gone through a lot of learning with big changes.*

Many of the participants in this study were aware of the concept of ‘the learning organization’. Their comments though reveal a lack of confidence that the decision-makers in their organizations are aware of the problems inherent in applying what is essentially a business model to social services organizations. Baldwin (2004, pp.161-2) has noted problems in the profession’s aspiration to create learning organizations within social services, citing a paradigm clash in terms of approaches to implementation. In broad terms, in this study the
participants’ accounts carry a similar story of divergence and misalignment between various policies and layers of control within employing organizations. Corporatist policies, it is suggested by Gonzci and Hager (1998, p.51) have three dimensions of complexity: diversity of ends, diversity of motivation and diversity of process. Added to this in the New Zealand social work context are the complex clashes of perspective brought about by the new environment of registration and, as elsewhere in the world, the constant restructuring in terms of a cycle of devolution, centralisation and decentralisation of organizational control over staff and resources. These (seemingly relentless to workers) cycles of change destabilize the implementation of the kind of policies and, more important practices, that might enable more sophisticated empowered learning environments to develop.

**Learning discourses**

Social workers recognized the lifelong learning discourse as a component of the strategy to professionalize social work; continuing education could also thus become a matter of compliance rather than personal aspiration (Beddoe, 2006; 2009). Managers were more likely to articulate a view that learning has an economic value, in this sense learning is an investment:

*People talk about it, I mean I think it is rhetoric and what is a learning organization? I mean sometimes it can mean many things to many people but... learning is a thing that has to be valued and there has be a sense of shared ownership, learning is an investment, training is an investment (Patrick).*

As noted earlier in this chapter, the dominance of organizational perspectives in determining the continuing education agenda was well articulated. In a practical sense the implementation of the rhetoric was questioned closer to the frontline:

*Managerial philosophy is certainly that everybody should keep on learning and blah blah blah and everybody should keep on working 60 hours a week too! (Megan).*

Professional leaders in the study provided a fairly clear understanding of the general elements of the learning organization ideal, though with some elements of scepticism:
Well broadly speaking, again that is another term that gets thrown around. I mean, my sense of it would be that it is a way of, it’s a model of recognising that learning is important and that it needs to be integrated… especially in a complex organization, absolutely (Bill).

There are several ways you can read it…one is that we educate people and we support education the other is that we supply the organization so that others can learn in it, student doctors [etc] can learn in it, and the other is that when you make a mistake you learn from the mistake, so we are not a punishing organization (Claire)

Well yes we have a policy, we are a learning organization, the [health board] prides itself as a learning organization. We have a learning and development unit and they run a lot of courses, whether that constitutes their commitment to learning and development I am not sure? How it is supplied in each service which is different we have separate services run by different management systems, different budget, different philosophies and actually a different culture…(Frances).

Learning from mistakes

The main goal of those proponents of the learning organization is to improve outcomes for the organization including a well-intentioned focus on critical reflection with the aim of continuous improvement: in reality this may lead to alienation and cynicism (Taylor, 1997). Field’s critique of the concept asserts that workers were cautious about their ‘empowerment’ to be critical about their work, given the power differentials within hierarchical organizations (Field, 1997). Managers clearly accept that they must undertake reviews and recognise the theoretical importance of this process, as this dialogue demonstrates:

The organization’s focus is around compliance and stays with the bad outcomes. They get looked at, so there is always learning around mistakes. With some care, I will always, where I know that a critical incident has happened, review the case and feedback some of those things. What worries me sometimes is I am not sure how much of the learning actually sinks in because it is the same things that come up time and time again… And we still are doing the same things (Bridget)

*LIZ: And maybe it is not a learning issue?

No, no I know I don’t know how much of it is about learning as opposed to … the fact that people with just that sense of huge busyness, that they overlook stuff they, don’t remember.

This manager was conscious of the tendency for processes to focus on failure not success:
*LIZ: What about learning from success?

That is much more difficult. I tried to. This was a few years ago now, back in the early days I tried to find ways that we could do that because the only way that we were doing [reflection] was on compliance stuff and I said ‘how can we find ways of analyzing cases that were going really well and we hear what happened, what went very well there?’ But I never got any leverage with that one at all…and it was I didn’t have enough of the ideas to do it on my own and I didn’t have the time to do it on my own (Bridget).

This contrasts sharply with the ideals of the learning organization and contrasts sharply with Wenger’s assertion that ‘learning is the engine of practice and practice is the history of that learning’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 96.) if the support and time to learn from success as well as practice mistakes is absent at the frontline, where is the history? How does ‘practice wisdom’ develop? In these conversations about learning from practice, front-line managers’ opinions were closely aligned to their practice values, in that they expressed a clear desire not only to empower their staff, but also service users:

For practitioners it also takes that huge mantle of oppression off them in that things are transparent and you are able to articulate and talk and debate it. Why that path? Had you considered this, where had you engaged with this, and where were the family? These questions leaves it open for exploration and for building better practice (Maggie).

Maggie felt strongly that the organization she worked for needed to learn from social workers, who in turn needed to learn from understanding how good practice is underpinned by personal skills:

Absolutely, we should be feeding out that information and doing that analysis and saying ‘here is what the practitioners are saying; here is what our clients are saying’. I mean my wish list would include a whole lot of work with our client group to see what does make a difference when you are intervening in their lives, what was it about the quality of social work that enabled them to be civil, engage with people, make changes.

Dave felt similarly that more reflection and evaluation of practice would reveal deficits that could be addressed by a renewed focus on the skills of engagement with people; he felt that this was a ‘missing dimension’ in the current environment despite all the emphasis on improvement:
We need [to ask] what do I need to do differently and listen, but actually I think as a profession what we tend to do is demonise clients and strategise how to engage them when, well they’re telling us, they’re already telling us.

If we ask what would revolutionise practice tomorrow, if workers knew that they were going to be accountable for how they interacted with people, they’d be more respectful overnight. I mean it’s quite stunning actually that that all we do is replicate an abusive power over people we’re trying to ask to behave differently (Dave)

Bridget similarly raised the theme of relationship and engagement with clients:

It is the little things; it is the recognition that in fact a lot of the stuff isn’t rocket science. It is using the skills we have got and applying them with due diligence and taking the time to just stop and think a little bit. [These] are the really critical factors in terms of a successful person. It is not necessarily about some magical facilitation skills that you have. It might be that in a complex meeting, where people are at loggerheads, and you have said the one thing that turned them around.

Maggie extrapolated from that focus on engagement to conceptualizing a more sophisticated form of practice:

If practitioners can get engagement with those families they can also get information out of those families, so the practitioners as a researcher, as a developer is the kind of organization I would like to see us moving to-recognising from the beginning that practitioners can do this stuff.

Collette favoured more focus on giving practitioners the skills to review cases so that reflective practice became ingrained:

So that that action reflection learning cycle is part of what they do so that when they are working with their individual cases, they hop in the car and driving away they are thinking ‘what happened there? What did I miss? What did they say? What did I pick up? What happened then? And then writing it up in their notes and reflection and then maybe going back to the person and saying on the way back I thought about this …

Collette hoped that new social work graduates would emerge from their training with these skills:

……or if they get that into their heads whilst they are studying [pre-service] it means they have got that [skill] no matter where they end up working …and they glean more information and feedback and reframe and say ‘oh but we have heard this before’ and you, two years ago in the notes…if they see the whole picture they are able to reinforce the learning.
These accounts clearly demonstrate that social work practitioners and managers were committed to the ideal of learning from mistakes but with few exceptions, little support was found for the idea that statements about learning organizations changed the way in which mistakes were viewed and handled by higher levels of the organization:

*At the end of the day if something goes really, really wrong it is the supervisor of the social worker, they would get shot ... But no other bugger but us wants to take a learning factor out of it. It is about critiquing what you have done and absolutely telling you what you haven’t done and where the gaps are. I mean we all make mistakes, but we also have to learn from those mistakes. And hopefully the mistakes aren’t at the cost of the lives of our kids.*

*I mean we just get hammered if there is a mistake and the heads for the chop, nobody else gets hammered, the front line get hammered, certainly management don’t take it on the chin because they make sure it goes down to you. It would be nice to learn from other people’s mistakes as well (Jenny).*

Sina, a practitioner and academic was conscious of the amount of practice review going on and the lack of clear input from practitioners:

*I am thinking about me sitting at my desk at university reading various literature reviews and research that has been done with practitioners ... That is quite sort of demoralising for a practitioner, if research that is conducted is about looking at how systems fail or listening to what the voices of clients and families, where is the practitioner voice in there?*

Fenwick has argued that the organizational appropriation of critical reflection focuses on the individual and puts their practices, beliefs and values up for examination and challenge. In this way ‘critical scrutiny is deflected from the power structures and the learning organization itself’ (Fenwick, 1998, p.149). In social work this can lead to the gaze of critical reflection being focused inwards on to the actions of practitioners and not onto the embedded social structures and power relations that may impact on practice (Beddoe, 2009). Yip suggests that appropriate conditions are needed if individual social workers are enabled to enhance their personal and professional development through reflection: ‘conditions include: a supportive environment, social workers’ readiness to undergo self-reflection, individual space for individual workers to undergo reflective practice, workers’ own reflective practice and awareness of one’s limits and breaking point’ (Yip, 2006 p781).
Practitioners in this study frequently expressed doubts about the safety of the critical examination of practice. Yip (2006, p.784) suggests that in ‘an oppressive environment, social workers may be obliged to disclose their weaknesses and shortcomings or their unpleasant practice experiences to supervisors within the agency; such disclosure may then be used against the worker as an excuse to abuse, to exploit, to undermine and even to dismiss them’. In this study practitioners had few doubts that the focus was on practitioners rather than the practice. As a consequence they were afraid to talk about mistakes

*Because there would be a view that you would be incompetent or you are ineffective (Brian)*

*People have gone into survival mode and think ‘I have to do this, I have to prove [myself] so I cannot speak about my weaknesses and basically I am perfect’, and that has created a lot of problems (Focus group member).*

Field (1997, p.156) argues that to counter the valid concerns of workers in the ‘learning from mistakes’ ideal, there need to be ‘be frank and open discussions between managers and employees that encompass management's need to maintain control; employees’ rights to minimize blame and hostility and to have a reasonable degree of security’. Participants in this research clearly supported this premise; they did not always feel safe and they felt that the organizations they worked in were reluctant to look critically at management while all too ready to focus on worker error. Patrick made this observation from his perspective as a senior manager:

*There has been a tendency to look at people failures rather than system failures because very often it is system failures rather than people failures [that lead to child deaths] but they tend to go to the people failures. The [practice review] was very, very sad and a very good example of how practitioners were in fact vilified and that has a huge impact on the rest of the organization.*

Echoing Bridget’s comments earlier about the constraints of time and skills needed to adequately reflect on practice, Patrick suggests that there was a lack of depth of understanding at the level where reviews were conducted:

*It is quite hard if there aren’t people with organizational influence who recognise that there a systemic breakdown, then there is a tendency for the organization to maintain that sort of that juggernaut type [of approach], and keep doing things the same way rather than taking on board an analysis that perhaps an individual might make.*
A strong sense is gained from the analysis that the profession (and employing organizations) need to learn from practice, and that the focus on mistakes, as indicated in the data presented above, is not what is needed. A number of managers demonstrated a strong commitment to working closely with practitioners to build better practice through reflection.

Reflective practice is a strong theme recurring in the practitioners’ discussion. It seems that there are mixed views about how well organizations manage reflective practice and this is attributed to differing values among workers and others in the organization. Jones argues that ‘in the professional sphere, identity concerns striving for the convergence of practices and espoused values’ (Jones, 2000, p.366). In the main, social workers and managers did not find this convergence of stated values and practice within their organization at large although managers believed that more acceptable reflection was possible at a more local level. The participants in this study did not recognise effective feedback loops within their large organizations; although some felt some success was possible at a team level, as this passage shows:

I mean I think [colleague] will correct me if I am wrong, but I think in our group we certainly try and do it just in our small unit but we certainly wouldn’t be safe enough to do that throughout the organization would we? (1st speaker in group)

Not without a lot of bleeding (2nd speaker)

This conflict reflects a lack of trust and belief that their organizations either wanted to or could learn from workers. Rather it was felt that the organizational culture did not place value on providing these opportunities:

I think one of the things that stood out for me is the lack of human empathy stuff from the top hierarchy, …and in fact there is a lot they could learn from us but they are not inclined to so- poor people skills, poor communication skills, a lot of stuff like that (1st speaker)

It might also cost money (2nd speaker)

And that’s what’s at the front of their minds (3rd speaker)
One social worker felt strongly that the current climate of focus on external auditing and compliance had:

*Created a level of fear on behalf of lot of people that I work with, in other professions too; that you are being watched and scrutinised. So I have probably seen more of a survival thing come out really, and I think when you are in survival mode that is not a good environment for learning, you want learn from each other in that way but everyone is too scared to show that they are stupid (Tonia).*

**The impact of constant change**

The rhetoric of the learning organization exhorts flexibility in strategy, technology and relationships. Social work by nature needs to be responsive to changing environments and constant, often unrelenting change is a feature of most modern social work organizations. The ideal of the learning organization assumes that the organization ‘is in some sense an organic entity’ (Beddoe, 2009, p. 231); in reality of course any organization can only ever be ‘an ephemeral social structure, comprised of a shifting set of policies, practices and individuals held together in that peripatetic dance of change’ so familiar to contemporary professionals (Beddoe, 2009, p. 731). Policies and organizational structure devised at central or national level and are implemented by one group of ‘change managers’ only to be dismantled by another set, often in practitioners’ accounts, just when ‘things were beginning to work’. The rhetoric of ‘learning to love change’ (Peters & Waterman, 1982) may often seem threatening to frontline workers, who have learned in fact to be suspicious of change, it having heralded a bright new dawn only to culminate in another revisiting of and review of the essential synergy of values and practices. As Jarvis (2006, p.65) suggests it is not that organizations learn, rather individuals within them learn and attempt to apply their knowledge in that social context. Social work managers in this study were cynical and clear that in their view constant tinkering with structure, downsizing and redundancies were corrosive of the good intentions of learning and development models:

*They have largely had almost a corporate cleansing, going back a year or two ago. Several years ago there was a body count… Managerialism has of course been rife and managerialism never admits its mistakes, never, managerialism is always right (Patrick).*
One manager felt that the volatile organizational environment left her social work department vulnerable: her approach was to pull back and try to get social work making its own decisions:

*I am not quite sure why this is. I don’t know if it’s to do with the managerial philosophy or it is just to do with the government continuing to shuffle the deck chairs but what we hear in health is: ‘this year we are going to be striving for this particular way of delivering a health service’ and so you might well think okay, we will need to up skill people in blah blah blah and then next year you are thinking about delivering it some other way.*

*This is what leads me to thinking that we need to actually pull back inside the department, and inside the profession, and make some decisions for ourselves about what’s needed. Because if we try and follow the organization’s lead we will be running around like headless chooks, it will be down one blind alley after another in terms of what we might need to learn.*

The idea of pulling back into the professional work group suggests that Megan’s strategy was to find some space for her team to work out their own needs and aspirations and present a clear case to those who form and control budgets. While critics of the learning organization have challenged the dominance of managers in determining learning and development goals and resources, it is clear that social work managers and leaders themselves are often not empowered by organizational policies. Participants in this study who held leadership roles clearly felt as buffeted by changes as their teams. A general theme emerged that proposed more locally led initiatives to meet continuing education needs and this was echoed strongly in practitioner discussion in the focus groups.

*At the moment they are so wound up about this registration stuff and all the flipping crap that is going on around it that they can’t do anything. The goalposts keep changing all the time for us. I really haven’t had much faith in them that they will push for more training in the areas where we believe that we need it, as front line practitioners. But the biggest thing is the fact that we are just not up skilling ourselves. It is community participation that has the biggest impact. That’s where we need to be learning.*

**The flip-side: practitioners’ positive learning experiences within the organizational setting**

One group, made up of social workers from a child and mental health service and another adult mental health service, both in urban settings, stood out as reporting
the most positive organizational environment for the support of continuing education.

In this place we are often participating in the brainstorm of what might be available to a client, maybe you have a lot of vicarious learning I suppose, so I think as a relatively new person in this area I find that really helpful. Just hearing more about what sort of things you would do in different situations is really good. (Mental Health group).

The same participant responded to my prompt that it must be a stimulating environment with a comment that confirms the gains in commitment and retention of positively engaged staff through providing a rich learning culture:

Yes I think that is a good word, yes stimulating and it keeps you hungry which is quite neat. I mean a lot of workplaces...you can be there a year or two and you think, yep it is time to look elsewhere but here I think it keeps you hungry to learn. It is set up to that in a way that people don’t get burnt out (Mental Health group).

Another participant in this group expanded on this idea:

Yeah I think going into a specific social work professional setting after you have done your generic training, to have really good up skilling within that field that is specific. It is relevant; it is much better confidence building.

Again the rich learning environment provided in a multidisciplinary team led to enormous in situ learning through being involved in “consults” and this participant wished there was scope for more:

I think for me the only thing I wish was more accessible, and it is really restricted just by the nature of working in mental health… I just really learn well by watching people do things. I find that fantastic for my learning, and it was really easy in my last job because of that specific nature of that but while you get great information though the multidisciplinary team meetings and consults...you are not actually with the client, I would have loved to be able to see people working therapeutically with clients (Mental Health group).

In this workplace setting learning activities seemed central to the professional life of the organization, rather than peripheral.

I think being here, there is the whole multidisciplinary team so there is a lot of opportunity for people with brains (Mental Health group).
This also seemed to be a feature of mental health generally where there were less disciplinary silos, another colleague in the group added:

> It is one thing to learn theoretically but I find it is often hard to get past using the skills you have got and establish new ones, whereas if I actually see someone using something new, like seeing the psychiatrists work, I think oh okay that is how that works. There is that chance to I guess to co-work, I think it makes for a much faster learning curve.

In mental health strong links were made between the academic involvement of senior staff and this learning culture:

> Social work is very well trained at postgraduate level in the (child and adolescent mental health) area and ...social work features quite highly in the management structure.

> And so you don't get near as many nurses at postgraduate training in this area as you do social work, so it is quite well thought of. In the adult area it is a little bit different.

*LIZ: So do you think that influences how social work is seen in this service?*

*In [this service] it is, yes.*

*LIZ: So that is quite a strong toe hold for social work?*

*Yes definitely. Having worked in adult settings at [another service] and coming here the respect that is given social work here is just beyond. You cannot compare. Beyond! It is just amazing!* (Mental Health).

**Conclusion**

The overall themes in this chapter illustrate social workers’ acute awareness of the complexity of the organizational context. Their perspectives on professional life in organizations where managerialist agendas reign, confirm those features identified in the critical literature; cynicism, lack of trust, feelings of helplessness, disempowerment and a struggle to articulate social work’s needs assertively. What is encouraging, are the positive signs of social work leaders finding ways to creatively manage this: Jill for example, by presenting some requests for funding of CPE she wanted approved for staff, by playing to the service development or compliance rules; Meryl, by identifying parts of the budget to ensure some
practitioner choices; and practitioners using systems to gain access, recognizing that the environment itself could be a rich source of learning, and practitioners seeing themselves in mental health at least, as having some advantages. Those working in health and especially mental health seemed most fortunate in recognizing the benefits of a multi-disciplinary environment and presumably many being in ‘teaching hospitals’ and services, though that was rarely acknowledged as a factor.

Social work is dominated by its ambiguous mandate and is subject to an unpredictable political and organizational climate. Practitioners seem to be searching for control and a sense of personal agency in their learning and these participants displayed considerable cynicism about the common, prescriptive top-down organizational ‘training’ approaches. These were found may be less helpful than choosing professional development opportunities which foster value-based, critical thinking and are grounded in an understanding that social workers operate within a climate of uncertainty. The profession seems too easily manipulated by the next ‘best thing’ as we reel in the face of the latest public scandal. Too often ‘training’ is a response to practice failures and is dominated by attempts to reduce corporate risk (Beddoe, 2005; Stanley & Manthorpe, 2004). The prevailing learning and development approach in social services applies technical responses to what are almost invariably complex social, cultural, emotional and moral problems. While these responses have their origins in Foucault’s concept of a technology of control (Olssen, 2006, p.216) and confirmed by Reich (2002) they seem antithetical to the empowerment ethos espoused by proponents of the learning organization. Participants in this study have expressed scepticism as to whether the essential conditions of the learning organization were in place, particularly the conditions of trust and safety that enabled practitioners, managers and policy makers to learn from mistakes. Continuous conversation, of the kind that might support social work agencies to become learning organizations, requires listening as well as the ‘talking’ which is applied through ‘top down’ through policy directives (Beddoe, 2009). Without the democratization of professional development social workers may continue to feel disempowered, and as Fielding suggests ‘it seems likely that, in the end, the self-induced invisibility of power may well turn out to be the ghost of Banquo at the table of the learning organization’ (Fielding, 2001, p.7).
Note: A substantial component of the content of this chapter has been published as:

Chapter Seven: Practitioners’ Reflections on Careers, Learning, Scholarship and Research

Continuing education is part of my whole life yeah being Chinese; we always say we learn until we die (Zhang)

Introduction

Chapter Six has explored the experience of practitioners in the organizational context. Their reflections on CPE have illustrated how within complex organizations, practitioners are cynical about prescriptive top-down organizational approaches to learning and development. It is important to note that in contemporary society ‘large organizations compete for our allegiances, offer opportunities, and impose constraints (Swartz, 2008, p.48, citing Perrow, 1991). Swartz further notes the usefulness of Bourdieu’s thinking about the complex links between individuals’ trajectories and social forces and the importance of not reifying organizations at the expense of considering the voice of individuals (2008, p.48-9). This chapter reports participant data from the third theme in the analytical framework: an exploration of the personal dimension of CPE. Data will be presented that illuminate the participants’ discovery, construction, application and utilisation of new knowledge and their aspirations regarding scholarship and research. Participants demonstrate a range of understandings of such contemporary ideas as ‘evidence-based practice’ and are not without critical awareness when considering the impact of these ideas.

It was noted in Chapter Three that the lifelong learning discourse disposes participants in professional contexts to make strong links between learning activities, (particularly those that produced or raised personal ‘credentials) and the concept of an individual’s ‘career’. This chapter explores the experiences of participants as they consider professional education in their current milieu: as a product, and a potential contributor to their cultural and social capital. A framework describing the modes of CPE were described in Chapter Two (set out in summary in Tables 2.2 and 2.3) and this framework sought to define a range of types of CPE activity from highly functionalist and organizationally driven in-
service training activities through to change oriented and worker driven activities, including research and scholarly work. Chapter Seven explores the participants’ perceptions of social work research capability in some detail as, although not anticipated in the early development of the interview guide, those interviewed were aware of the wider debates in the profession and expressed considerable frustration at the status of social work research activity in New Zealand. The extent to which this is linked to broader concerns about the profession will be illuminated.

**Social work careers**

As noted earlier Field (1994, p.5, citing Bourdieu, 1984) noted that workers will seek to ‘use’ education services in order to establish and ‘demarcate a distinctive social space’ and in this way, those individuals gaining particular qualifications and credentials seek to signal ‘social position and worth’ in the profession. The participants in this study in the main part attributed the search for this distinction in a more collective manner, as will be illustrated in the data presented in this chapter. Morgan, Cullinane and Pye (2008, p. 235) review the literature on continuing education and note that there are differing approaches to links between individual careers and continuing learning. A number of factors are identified: compulsion or ‘benefits’ based approaches, ‘contradictory philosophies of self development within CPD and compulsory assessment of learning’; approaches that are reduced to ‘points gathering’ (Morgan et al., p.235). Galpin (2009, p.72) argues that the goal of further education in social work should be ‘to educate practitioners who are critically analytical, socially aware, innovative, responsive, reflexive and reflective in practice and challenging rather than accepting of the status quo’. So what did New Zealand social workers in this study think about engagement in further education?

**Practitioner perspectives**

CPE is simultaneously a professional issue, an organizational issue and a matter of personal concern for individual workers.

*I know [my initial training] gave me a grounding to get where I am now. I have a debate with all my friends that went to university about the meal ticket, but they...*
see it differently, but I think I did learn a lot, but it didn't give me a lot for this position, and I couldn't have done this job without doing further education (Christy)

I remember when I finished my degree I said, that’s it! I’m never going back to varsity ever again, thank you very much. So I don’t know whether I picked up that [CPE] message when I did my degree.

I don’t think I realized early in my professional career how important it was. Now I think it is the most essential thing. I think it would be so easy to just get stuck in some kind of routine. One of the things that continuously impresses me in terms of what I get out of continuing education is the things that had dropped out of my consciousness ... So yeah I think it is the cornerstone of good ongoing practice (Megan)

Christy attributed being in a strong learning culture to remaining in the profession, when at an earlier stage she had considered alternative careers:

For me personally it has been one of those really inspirational experiences to actually see social workers who have been in this field of mental health for a period of time and still appear to have some enthusiasm. And to be actually hungry to keep on learning, personally I find that is really neat and inspiring to think, gosh, maybe I didn’t choose the wrong profession. Which at times in the earlier years I did think, hmmm, social work or not?

At the personal level the individual career is in prime focus, and CPE is linked to job promotion and prospect within the profession. In this way, social workers may seek to engage in CPE in order to establish their place in the field and what they have to offer employers. Some younger practitioners clearly demonstrated a perception of competing in a market. Phil and Christy described their decision making about further education in these terms:

I tend to look at colleagues and realize that you are in a market place and to remain somewhat competitive you need to look at what you are going in relation to what other people are doing and what the board wants to purchase and that kind of thing. Which can be a problem because it is never ending then, a few social workers are doing PhDs now and you think ‘where is the end’? (Phil)

I think that is the same for me as well, looking ahead. To be competitive in a profession that isn’t necessarily seen as competitive because we’re all just here to help! But like how to go about to further in the future, looking at your own goals as a professional too (Christy).

There were few references to salary made in the interviews. Bill and other managers and professional leaders had noted links between CPE and the integration with performance management, salary and career development. Practitioners were
more likely to comment on the cost of CPE and the need for employers to offer more support: ‘barriers would be things around that low pay incentive to study’ and a group member comments that it was tough to have graduated and need to pay off your ‘student loan and then having to pay for even part of your professional development costs’. Most agencies, but especially NGOs, had limited ability to pay full fees for university study but many would allow staff the time off for classes. In an Australian study of workers in the non-profit sector, Onyx and Maclean (1996, p.304) found that traditional ideas of career meaning progress towards greater prestige and financial rewards, did not apply to their participants:

Prestige, salary and secure tenure were very low priorities when it came to applying for a particular position…there was a very strong commitment to making the world a better place, either by helping other disadvantaged people or by working toward social change at a broader level.

Phil was one of the few participants who commented on links between CPE and salary:

If social work is a legitimate career, which I think it is, and you do many years of study it should be comparatively rewarded as with other fields. I used to be [in a trade] and if I had stayed there I would have been making more money doing that but it would not have been as satisfying maybe but I wouldn’t have done 5 or 6 years of study to do it either.

These comments from a young social worker reflected the notion that altruism might be thought to be enough for social workers and reported an anecdote:

On the front page of the paper a couple of months ago when CYFS were offering to pay a bit more to pay off a student loan or whatever and opposition MP said then we would only get people that are interested in the money and not helping people…[much laughter] (Mental Health group).

Many social workers expressed a certain sense of personal struggle in their careers, that it was not at all easy to get access to time and resources necessary to develop one’s career.

You actually have to fight for every little bit that you want to do, it has to have an influence on our core business, and you have to fight for it really hard. But on
top of that they expect you to carry [your normal workload] and that was the biggest thing … you do get disheartened because instead of working 50, 40 hours you are working 60 hours. (Veronica)

We seem to have to work harder for some reason, but I think it is also, maybe it is a confidence thing as well, and certainly having done my masters it has helped me to clarify my thinking. I am not talking a whole lot of crap I do know what I am talking about (Tonia).

It can be hard trying to justify certain goals for your professional development as it has to relate back to the core business of the organization (Alicia)

Collette noted that her organization was generous, particularly with experienced workers but more cautious with support for newer workers until their needs were clear:

We’ve got workers who are incredibly experienced and actually wanting to head off in other directions and we are happy to support them because their experience brings with them a whole lot of other things and they are investing in us so we invest in them. The newer ones I am less likely to invest in unless I can see it is going to help.

In another organization it was the more experienced practitioners and supervisors did not feel well served:

The further you go up the chain, the less there is available to you and it is a sink or swim, so you do have to look outside to find out what’s going on outside (Veronica)

I am working 50 hours just to keep up my caseload and I could mention ten things that are practice imperatives that I am not doing. So in that context even having this conversation feels like a huge luxury (Lau)

I don’t want to moan but there’s limited time for reflection on practice (Alison).

Prevention of burnout featured in support for ongoing learning which was conceptualized as enabling professional renewal through refreshing skills and feeding the desire to learn:

Yes it keeps you hungry which is quite neat. In a lot of fields of social work you can be there a year or two and think, yep it is time to look elsewhere but I think it keeps you hungry to learn. It is set up in a way that people don’t get burned out (Mental Health group)

I think a lot of burnout is caused by repetition…because we’re not learning new things or understanding things in a new way and building up so that we feel we’re attaining all the time, moving onward and I think that is good for people’s self-esteem and professionally (Maree)
Unless you have got additional resources you can’t provide the more advanced type programme that supports people’s higher order needs in terms of their own professionalism. It also has an impact on staff retention because I think people are…kept very much at the coalface …where the hard slog is and they never really move beyond that. So there are issues of burnout and I think professional development and training are some of the ways in which you can help sustain and refresh people (Patrick).

For individual practitioners their CPE concerns are tied up with notions of career, though some did indicate that, having chosen social work, their expectations of great personal advancement were not high and some told stories that indicated responses to different aspects of education and career:

*Having not travelled that path, I don’t have a degree …I thought there were some gaps so I did a certificate in counselling and in terms of self awareness it really turned me inside out and upside down (Alicia).*

For Sina, being a Pasifika woman meant she was directed towards relevant training for working with her own communities though she noted that sometimes this was a constraint and reflected some hidden, perhaps racist assumptions:

*The only reason that I extended a little bit was because of my passion for working with Pacific communities. Now because I am Samoan my supervisor and managers thought that would be a good thing so sent me. And we would have a fantastic time but I would always be left with the question, where are the people that I think you could change? What about the Pakeha workers whom I thought it would be really fantastic for them to attend this course?*

**Managers’ views of careers issues**

Managers interviewed were keen to provide the best opportunities for their staff, though many comments were tinged with pragmatism borne of a climate of spending restraint and nervousness about accountability for time and budgets. There was a strong emphasis on the needs of new graduates:

*Probably what would make the biggest difference would be creating some sort of funded internship at the end of a professional qualification. It would be of benefit to an organization, they wouldn’t want to pay a full salary but there would then be some way of actually integrating theory and practice (Dave)*

*[We should] look at more at how we support new graduates so we have worked a lot on forging links with [the university] and encouraging people to do some courses there. And giving people time to learn, space to learn (Christy)*
I’d love to have new graduate induction programmes so that you don’t just come straight out of varsity and think you can change the whole world. You just get into an agency and you’ve got a hundred clients and you’ve got no time for anything (Jill)

Meeting gaps

Managers and professional leaders were asked about gaps, what was missing in the provision of CPE. These participants indicated two areas where there was fairly broad agreement: the first that there was a need for local initiatives to meet gaps; and secondly, that workers needed time away from the frontline for intellectual refreshment.

*That is badly missing in our sector and most organizations really don’t have the wherewithal to put that in place because essentially you take people on and they just get thrown in at the deep end. To a certain extent they either get into bad habits or they really struggle* (Dave).

Managers were keen on the possibilities offered by sabbaticals as they recognised that the stress of the job made continual reflection on practice difficult for most practitioners. Time away from the front line was crucial:

*For me, sabbaticals are really the crux of it because you not only get the intellectual refreshment but you get the actual physical and emotional refreshment of being off the floor for a few months* (Megan)

*We don’t give them enough time to catch their breath, [understand] what it means to be here, and evaluate their practice* (Summer)

*[We need] a total assessment of every social worker to enable them to up-skill, take sabbaticals, whatever it takes to re-energize, refresh, renew and up-skill* (Emily)

*I just think people lose steam and energy. I think it is critical. I question how social workers can remain at the edge of good practice without having that opportunity to continue to develop their knowledge and continue to reflect on what they are doing currently and think about how they can integrate new information* (Sina).

All participants were asked a ‘wish-list’ question: ‘if the world changed overnight and magically, you had a huge bucket of money to spend on continuing education, what would be on your wish-list?’ There was some difference here in the responses of practitioners and managers. Practitioners identified specific learning
opportunities related to the focus of their particular work with clients. Social workers and managers wanted flexibility to act locally to develop professional development opportunities for their teams. A common concern was that good practice was rarely highlighted and that the role of case studies in identifying and building practice wisdom was undervalued. A variety of ideas emerge and a sense that CPE might be addressing gaps that perhaps should have been met in undergraduate education:

*Because I just get really concerned about the general level of education and knowledge, like you talk about the reading. You can’t keep up unless you read. People won’t do a little bit of research for themselves, they’ll go to a course and expect someone else to have done the reading and churned out handouts. We actually want people who will think a little bit more for themselves (Audrey)*

*I would like to develop something targeted for each individual because the needs are so different (Bridget).*

*I would put resources into those beginning social workers so that they had a strong beginning in mental health and not have to spend any of their own money, and they had a small clinical load so they had time to integrate the new learning with their practice and have a really good first year (Sally).*

Claire encouraged postgraduate study in her service as she thought more formal education really was a necessity these days because the environment is:

*So academic so you have got to keep up to speed with the doctors and documentation … you have to be able to argue your case from an academic perspective. It is not good enough to have a feel for social work and a feel for people any more.*

Healy (2009, p.404) writes that the ‘exclusive focus on task performance tends to downplay the value of workers’ capacities to conceptualize problems and solutions within an historical and societal context’. Many senior people identified opportunities to extend practitioners through reflection and learning from good practice, and in the case of Frances, her wish was for practitioners to have opportunities to engage again with critical theory:

*I would send them all to do some critical theory study so that they have got a good critical and constructionist idea of the world and then I would send them all on some narrative therapy training so they would knew how to deconstruct it all in order to be available to help people (Frances)*
People tend to get out of touch with ‘what’s the foundation of my profession?’ So they go looking for solutions to issues that they confront and what often gets lost a lot is those professional foundations particularly the political side of stuff and I think that is really important (Dave).

A theme emerged of senior practitioners’ and leaders’ enthusiasm for distilling ‘stories’ from practice, and a desire to communicate good practice via sharing successful experiences. Veronica made an interesting point about how rare it is for practitioners to present their work, except when making a presentation for a job interview. A consequence of this is that the nature of practice and the ‘real’ work of practice is not valued and rendered invisible:

When you are applying for a new position, climbing up the ladder, there is a process where you get to present a piece of work to a panel and that seems to be the only time that you show what you do. It doesn’t just happen in the day-to-day routine, which is really where it should be. Because the [colleagues] we work with daily, it will probably benefit them more to see those sorts of presentations than a panel who is just judging you.

One manager of an NGO social work agency felt ‘we learn best from hearing stories’ and another in a statutory service echoed this sentiment:

I would love to have the mandate to develop some stories about good practice. We have stunningly good practice in the organization but all we ever hear about is when things go wrong- [it’s the] same story world wide - but the opportunity to capture practitioners’ practice in the form of stories and to be able to use that in reflective supervision (Maggie).

Social workers noted that there were examples of excellent practice that were never given a wider airing because the workers lacked the energy to write them up, even for internal purposes:

There was a piece of work that I thought was exceptional, a really complex difficult piece of work and I would have loved to have supported the social worker and the family to actually do some reflection and write it up but in this place the idea is there, but you have to work 60 hours to just do the life saving stuff (Jenny).

The messages from the frontline signal a desire to close the gap between ways of delivering professional development and the world of practice. Dirkx et al (2004, p.38) argues that current models of development privilege abstract thought, while the development of practical expertise avoids the separation of analysis from
application and develops wisdom from many sources including ‘relevant technical or scientific knowledge, the sociocultural context of practice, and the practitioner’s self’. Practice is ever-changing and several professional leaders clearly identified links from the changes occurring in the practice environment and the nature of services to the need for greater and different skills:

One of the things I have done is develop my service, locating us in a rehab model dealing with the adjustment, the grief and loss, the family stuff and training people to work with people around those issues as well as the complexities of housing, advocacy, some of the old social work stuff but only when there is a difficulty and you need an advocate because there has been discrimination not the simple not the ‘doing for’ (Frances).

Major changes, such as the shift of mental health services from an in-patient focus to a community model produced new opportunities for learning more sophisticated skills as Sally reports:

The big shift was when we developed the community-based services because for the social workers, there was a whole up-skilling in terms of being able to do really comprehensive psychosocial assessments. People got very good at doing assessments and developing treatment plans that also involved a really good knowledge of medications. That was a huge development in terms of being the responsible case manager in the community.

Complexity of the work and changing social work roles

A number of participants felt that the nature of the social work job was changing and becoming more complex, for example, in hospital-based social work, the requirement to be more competent in dealing with grief and loss. Frances thought that practitioners were ill-prepared:

The role of social work has changed dramatically and with the development of the needs assessment and service co-ordination service some of the social work role has been taken over and so social workers are having to do much more psychosocial counselling, therapeutic interventions and I think that there is quite a skills deficit. I think that is why it is very hard to change a system when people are ill prepared to take on a new way of work.

Jarvis (2006, p.65) notes that ‘when individuals were sent on education or training courses, they did not necessarily learn the political or organizational skills necessary to implement new learning within the organization and often they did not
have the power or authority to influence their managers’. Several participants noted the supervisor’s role in ensuring the ongoing support and consolidation of professional learning. Supervision provides a conduit for support for social workers’ engagement in learning. For Maggie, poor support for transfer of learning was a significant risk to practice improvement:

*What worries me sometimes is I am not sure how much of the learning actually sinks in because it is the same things (mistakes) that come up time and time again.*

Dave noted a split between the gains in learning and the application back in the workplace:

*People go off the job, go and learn, they come back, and there really isn’t any tie in back to what they’re learning and how they’re applying it. Our sector is overcome with ‘busy-ness’ and it isn’t very intentional about practice development.*

Maggie felt that practitioners and supervisors were:

*Overwhelmed by the tasks… they don't have a sense of proportion about their own safe practice and part of that being continuing professional education. Unless that is reinforced with reflective supervision.*

Supervision is one aspect of continuing education alluded to many times by participants in this study. It is important to consider the significance of the mediative capacity of supervision and its potential to contribute to of multiple levels and direction of feedback within health and social care. Supervisors can assist through assessing, planning, resourcing and following through on professional development for practitioners, and communicating between the levels of organizations. Jenny had been an acting supervisor of a team of practitioners who were all relatively new to the profession, and noted that

*All had huge learning needs. I’m thinking about how to support that learning in this environment and it has just been really, really difficult because we are constantly just responding to crisis. Where is the opportunity for pause and reflection and reading an article and thinking about how does this article apply to work?*
Busse (2009, p.160) notes that supervision has developed as ‘an instrument towards [social work] professionalization… favoured by the fact that back then there was … hardly any scientific or disciplinary knowledge, while academic education had just started to emerge’. Busse suggests that the development of supervision and the professionalization of social work are parallel processes and with its direct involvement in applying knowledge to practice problems, supervision becomes ‘a midwife of professional social work’ (Busse, pp.160-3). While those links remain, Jenny felt in the current environment that although she could try to foster critical learning within supervision it was difficult as while ‘there is definitely some shift but it is very, very challenging, it is not supported by the wider organization.

Are social workers prepared for the lifelong learning environment?

A conceptualization of continuing education that is one of professional renewal encourages reflexivity, change, innovation and indeed transformation. For Wenger (1998, p.263) education is about the:

opening of identities – exploring new ways of being that lie beyond our current state. Whereas training aims to create an inbound trajectory targeted at competence in a specific practice, education must strive to open new dimensions for the negotiation of the self…. Education is not merely formative – it is transformative.

Daley’s 2001 study of four professions found that each ‘framed their meaning-making process through an understanding of the nature of their professional work’ (p.39). Daley found that social workers had their clients’ needs in mind, needed the best information in order to meet client needs best and sought refreshment and professional renewal to ‘refresh both their mind and spirits…. So they could re-enter their profession with renewed commitment, enthusiasm and energy’ (Daley, 2001, pp.44-5). In this study, participants were asked; did social work education prepare people well enough for practice in terms of managing their own professional development, with Wenger’s transformative aims?

I feel those kinds of ideas around reflexivity and reflective practice and honouring the practice is something that is not taught. I mean in [this agency]
we get captivated by life-saving work; that is different maybe from a health environment, where I think there is definitely more of an opportunity...but it is something Liz, about, don’t you think people needing some practical support for a shift in focus, maybe be taking ourselves seriously, feeling like we do have something to contribute, something important to say (Jenny).

There were frequent mentions of the tensions between ‘wants’ and ‘needs’ and managers and professional leaders felt that it was their role to try to utilise the scarce resources carefully:

To me there is not enough thought given to what really is going to assist practitioners best in the areas they need. There is often a lot of thought given to what they want, which isn’t necessarily the same as what they need and so I fear that a lot of CPE is wasted really because, if it is not what they need, they don’t use it in further practice it and they lose it (Meryl).

Despite this tension, there was recognition of the importance of allowing some individual choice, as part of an individual’s career planning:

There are demands within the organization in terms of what you need to know, but if people can’t actually have some control about the things they want to do, it is an ongoing tension. I guess it’s like people needing to feel they have some control or some choice in terms of developing their own interests or strengths (Dave).

Patrick, in his role as a senior manager, had been involved in developing a training needs analysis and found that practitioners struggled to articulate their needs:

When we conducted a needs analysis, it was really a wish list and still very much at basic practice levels. People weren’t able to project out what they saw as advanced professional development. [It was] very difficult for people to rise above the day-to-day demands, the day-to-day pressures in that sort of survival-mode that people seem to be in.

**Relationships with academia**

In terms of formal study, one consequence of it being located apart from the practitioner’s employing agency is that distance is created between the educational institution and the site of practice. This distance is unhelpful and limiting and does not align with practitioners’ need to contextualize their learning, as Dirkx et al (2004, p.36) argues: ‘learning and change are conceptualized largely as cognitive,
decontextualized, individualistic, and solitary processes’. Academics of course wish to retain their intellectual freedom and independence. While many would want to bridge the theory-practice gap, this would not be at the expense of this intellectual autonomy. For practitioners though this gap can be felt as limiting and Jenny felt that her work as a statutory social worker was rather invisible to the academic world:

My satisfaction with the study has really reduced since I’ve been in a statutory environment. I feel like our work is really invisible, like it’s not privileged, it’s not considered and my frustration level’s really risen since I came into a statutory environment which I think is really interesting

I think there is this really big separation between academics and practitioners like there is this kind of gulf where practitioners perhaps say that academics are really removed from practice and too linked into theory and don’t understand what is going on in the real world and where academics say if only practitioners would integrate some of this theory so there is this kind of gulf (Sina)

Sina, as a participant who identified herself as both an academic and a practitioner could see both sides:

My experience in the education system is that it could be really easy to just get caught up with looking at overseas research and who has written what and sometimes you identify a few key notes in your field of interest and I read everything they write and the practitioner kind of fades off into the distance. And again that reinforces that this is what practitioners are doing wrong rather than listening to them.

Jenny, in a sense talking about the gap she perceived between the reality of frontline practice and the preoccupation of academics with interrogation of practice and theorization:

What I am thinking about for you Liz is that I don’t get the sense that academic institutions are interested in what practitioners have got to say, that is my experience. What people get animated about is the work. They want to know about the work, [practical things like] what does respect look like when you are sitting in a room with somebody, what does it sound like, what does it feel like? How do you run an effective meeting when there is a lot of conflict and strong feelings, and, what does ‘permanency’ mean in practice?
What might bridge the gap?

What would be really neat is a kind of collaboration, [between practitioners and academics] I think that might be quite difficult to achieve, just because the views of one towards the other might be quite negative but I would like to see where people bring those skills together (Jenny).

In New Zealand there are few opportunities for joint appointments where academics retain an active involvement in practice. While this is not unusual in schools of social work internationally, in general, when practitioners move to the academic world, the demands of research and the need to publish means that links become more tenuous, except through research. The most common and frequent link between ‘the field’ and the university is around field placements.

In Chapter Five it was noted that a picture of social work as a mixture of caring and common sense recurs in the data. Those who proposed the more practical view saw academic ability as less important than effective relationships with clients. Jill and Paul expressed some ambivalence about academic benchmarks, hence the pragmatic if cynical comment - ‘whatever it has to do to keep up with the others I suppose’ but clearly differentiating between the holdings of qualifications and having the practical skills:

We’ve got to be kind of really clear on what is happening for our discipline and while they’re our benchmarks, what’s the [benchmark] in five years? We [should keep] our own solid base rather than getting caught up in other people’s bases because if not we’re going to have very academically qualified people who will know all the wonderful theories and they understand why they’re doing it but they can’t speak to the client (Jill)

In terms of coming from a values-based organization we have demonstrated time and time again if we employ people based on our values that they’re far more productive and worthwhile than others. If somebody could have a Masters in social work but if their interview doesn’t demonstrate values in sync with Barnardos values I wouldn’t employ them (Paul).

The interview with Jill and Paul presented an interesting perspective of two quite different social workers: one university educated post school and holding a traditional BSW; the other educated as a mature student with acknowledged
learning difficulties, and holding a polytechnic diploma. Both put considerable emphasis on the importance of values over education in social work. In spite of this both saw other professions being better at getting credit for social work achievements and were concerned that the social work role might be forgotten or minimized.

While preparatory social work education was not a focus of this research, some data have been included, to illustrate the contradictions often present in social workers’ views of theory and practice. Littlechild (2008) has argued that there is a tendency to focus on checklist social work attached to the ‘outcomes’ focus of professional practice in the managerialist regime. Audrey suggests a pragmatic critique of the academic preparation of social workers. For Audrey, the preference was for graduates to have detailed, ‘useful’ knowledge. This comment suggests the pervasive nature of risk-focused social work in the critique of the schools of social work:

I often say social workers come out of social work schools knowing the politics of anger and the politics of poverty but they don’t know what causes child abuse or how to tell the difference between a cigarette burn and a ‘school sore’. I mean they know a whole lot of stuff that the schools of social work are interested in. They don’t understand risk management, for example, which is theoretical but has real practical implications for [practice] but they know a whole lot of other PC stuff.

Maggie also noted that the need to ‘up-skill’ people to work in child protection was using probably about a third of the training resource ‘being put into and rightly so into some specific areas of job readiness around the skills and knowledge that you need to work in this particular environment’.

Practitioners’ attitudes to learning

Lynch (2006) provides a theoretical expansion of reflective practice by adding the requirement for ongoing structural analysis to the foci for continuing education. Lynch (2006, p. 82) notes that the development of reflective practice ‘necessitates striving for educational experiences which acknowledge the social/political contexts of our knowledge…and draw on an analysis which links personal
experiences to the socio-political context’. Lynch argues that reflective practice is encouraged in pre-service education for social work, but not necessarily maintained in situ, largely because of the very nature of immersion in practice and the challenge to look beyond the situated experience of everyday practice. The lack of reflective orientation or even desire to continue learning was a concern expressed by Megan and Audrey:

There is certainly a steady proportion of the social work workforce as far as I can see who don’t think they have got any business doing anymore education whatsoever once they have got their first piece of paper (Megan).

For Audrey, this impacted on basic critical thinking:

I would raise the standard of thinking so that when people are coming into the workforce they’ve already learnt how to think and make decisions.

Keeping practitioners closer to educators was an area of agreement. Professional leaders in health settings noticed that the model used in medicine seemed to serve that profession better. Bill in particular was clear that the utilization of joint health/university positions was good for teaching and practice. It was a two way benefit-in teaching the lectures had the clinical experience and in the health service the clinicians benefited:

It is great, it is a simple model. They have got institutes for research and learning that is what we should have for social work.

As noted earlier, lifelong linkages between formal learning and professional work are becoming more common. The relationship of knowledge to practice is deepened when so many of the offerings in further education are linked to paid work. Jarvis (1999, p.252) suggests that:

What universities teach is not knowledge, but information, which only becomes knowledge when it has been learned, and only becomes legitimate knowledge when it has been found to work for the learners. They do this in the work situation …. So that the legitimisation of their own knowledge is pragmatic.
Social workers do have agency in their social world; they are not total captives of the social service organization and there is not a strong support for organizational factors being the only factors influencing further study decisions. Practitioners’ low expectations of continuing engagement with theory feature in professional leaders’ accounts. It was notable that practitioners did not necessarily see themselves as needing to do the work to better link scholarship and practice. Participants generally seemed to express only a passive engagement with these issues, as will be more apparent in the next section on research and scholarship.

Though professional leaders and practitioners identified differences in professions and organizational settings they also recognized that there were individual choices made, as demonstrated in this response from Jill and Paul. Paul linked strong ‘passionate’ engagement in the profession to greater personal motivation to seek opportunities for further learning:

Some go seeking their continuing and profession education, whereas some get their qualification and that’s it. Some really take ownership of their profession, others they turn up and go to work every day. It’s the ones that are really passionate about what they do, take ownership and they’ll do things for their own education anyway.

Yeah, I think that sometimes you can fall into the trap of believing it’s the employer’s responsibility to give you more but I believe absolutely that it’s up to that individual. I don’t think it all needs to come from them. But I think, some of the harsh reality now is we’ve got young people coming out with huge loans who are still paying for their [first] qualification (Jill).

Research and scholarship

In Chapter Two research activity was noted as one of the types of continuing education activities social workers participated in. Participants presented many perspectives on opportunities and barriers to research activity as they reflected on the significance of research as part of their engagement in professional education. Their discussion illustrates the close links of the research agenda to the drive to ‘modernize’ or professionalize social work. It will also be noted that the organizational context of social work exerts significant impact on social worker engagement with research, as it does with continuing education in general. The
broad themes reported in this section are: the value and importance of research to practitioners; awareness of EBP; organizational factors in research activity; social work culture and confidence to do research; and status and comparisons with other professions.

The value and importance of research

There was a general agreement that social workers needed to be well informed, but often research was seen as ‘a stretch’ or as Bill put it ‘Producing new knowledge or doing research that is the flash bit, but actually updating your knowledge and skills at a sort of a more basic level also has its place’. The most common reaction to my questions about research (often generated by looking at the Cue Statements) was that research was about justifying social workers actions, and indeed roles in institutions.

It would help us to better meet the managerial demands, the demands of effectiveness. We can more effectively answer the what is it that social work brings to this organization, what it brings to its clients, and have answers to those kinds of things that in a way that impresses other people that they understand those things particularly in this kind of organization (Summer)

I came from a nursing background and it’s very much evidence-based practice. Well I don’t see why we can’t do the same in social work. I don’t see why we can’t say we make a difference. If we can’t then do we make a difference? Are we just waltzing round talking to people and trying to make them feel better? (Maree)

One of the reasons I want to go for the Master’s degree is because it will show me how to do the research because I have now been working for more than five years. I have made a lot of very good progress and have data. I just don’t know how to collect it together to show people that what we are doing is good. We have also made some mistakes and [we should] how to show people they don’t need to go through that again (Zhang).

The problems of the right kind of evidence to ‘justify’ social work reflected the concerns about the profession’s uptake of research in the literature:

I think that we do have to evidence or justify why we have done something. I don’t see that we need to be any different from any other disciplines, but even the justification is subjective … if you give somebody the wrong walking frame, they fall over. Well there is evidence to say that it was the wrong walking frame, if you are working with someone and you ask the wrong questions, there isn’t a finite set of questions to ask for us (Frances)
I think that there is the opportunity capture statistically information that social workers need to capture. I have had a huge fight, being challenged by the organization several times (Mental Health group).

It would be great to have someone appointed by the organization to do a project and really looking at what value is social work to the organization and how do we capture what we do? Yeah I had to really argue my head off to get any time [for her project] but it also made me think about what social workers actually do in this organization. How can it be counted? (Claire).

Anne’s motivation to read research was high, despite her isolation as an NGO field officer and limited resources, and she noted that she took what she got straight back to practice:

I think you become quite selective because often when you’re reading a piece of research you’ve got a client group and it just goes ping and you think yes! Because you then can relate the information to real people you kind of soak it up like a bit of blotting paper and it gets in there and you can’t wait to get back out there with that client or that group. Oh, I can look at that from a different angle now. I’ll ask about that differently in future perhaps.

Obstacles for practitioners

The obstacles and constraints that affected social workers were those reflected in the literature. Many talked about how the need for social workers to participate in research was not recognized by managers who were focused on service delivery goals and didn’t see social workers as having valid research activities to pursue:

I mean I talk from personal experience at the moment trying to get a PhD proposal through for a staff member who is absolutely set to contribute back to this organization. [It would be] invaluable research: knowledge and skills about innovative practice in our own organization that could be world leading (Maggie).

Time was a major barrier because of the lack of support for work other than direct responses to casework:

It took quite a lot of work, and tenacity and grit and having to do it in the time that you did your normal work. So to do anything you have to be able to do it as well as your normal workload and that is not fair (Mental Health group).

Some participants were also highly conscious of the need to make some form of inquiry into practice a priority; certainly some managers were advocating that social workers take more of an active role in service development and evaluation.
and this was often linked to the need for raised expectations of social workers’ skills and focus. Maggie felt that greater social worker participation and analysis of data was an investment in the future:

We have to invest in evaluation, learn what is working and what is it we need to change to make things work better. We have to be able to develop strong partnerships which means developing a whole understanding with our practitioners, supervisors and managers as to how they will be developed though time and how they will be recognized … supported …challenged to achieve competent practice and from there to develop best practice (Maggie)

We need to be far more focused on results, why put your money in unless you know are getting a good product?

For Claire there was a feeling that social workers could do more with the information they gain in everyday work:

We do [information] capturing that is absolutely right but I just think we need to do a little more. I think it is about also social workers getting on to the critical analysis bandwagon and being more critical in terms of information capture and what data is already there …Social workers are really at the cutting edge of the between home and the hospital. They know people really well.

Evidence-based practice

The practitioners were almost all aware of the evidence-based practice movement (EBP), though possibly this was more acutely observed in health and mental health services. Bridget and Collette were well aware of EBP, and accepted the ethical need for better evidence of the effectiveness of social work, but were unsure how frontline workers could be involved:

‘Best practice’ –‘today’s practice’ they are all terms that have been floating around for the last couple of years and social workers are starting to see that it applies to them as well. There is not a huge evidence base that social work makes a difference, [or] that early intervention following crisis will prevent post traumatic stress disorder as far as social work input goes (Collette)

In our particular part of social work that we do here, there is such a lack of evidence about what we do. We do it because we have to because we don’t know what else to do. But we don’t actually know whether or not the outcomes are any good? I mean what evidence we have got suggests that it is crappy outcomes actually (Bridget).

All you need to do is ask women some years on whether intervention helped and they will tell you it did it got them thinking and it got them realizing they could have choices. We need to research it longitudinally to see if there difference…
which is time and money and interest and passion would all be required to do this (Collette).

For Collette and Dave there were strong links between such evidence seeking activities and the demands of the new professional environment, and the need for practitioners to meet CPE requirements:

"Part of that is I suppose the links with the health professionals’ competency assurance [legislation] that has taken on a whole new meaning around peoples’ continuing education … ensuring that they are keeping up to date with latest trends and working along some evidence-based model … We’re constantly getting challenged, do we make a difference? (Collette)

The thing that would make the biggest difference is actually looking at effectiveness. I mean we tend to rely more on client satisfaction and I suppose if you’re going to be really honest too, we do have to be accountable for results and that’s something everybody struggles with (Dave).

In the mental health environment, senior clinicians were looking for the ability to articulate the thinking behind interventions:

"What have you based your opinion on? That’s what we are trying to get people to do; actually demonstrate how they have reached that opinion… it may not be right but if you can at least show your reasoning then it protects you as a clinician (Sandy)

Maree felt that evaluation research on social work practice was an imperative but recognised it was not easy to research outcomes in complex work:

"What if we could say that we actually reduced the number of unhappy clients or potential litigation where social work is involved? Or work with families around difficult issue. They say ‘oh it’s too difficult to prove’ and I say ‘but we could start a study where we’d look at where social work is involved and what the outcomes for families are’. We could start with all those things that are too hard to measure. I just feel like there’s not a commitment to it.

Questioning EBP

As noted earlier the development of evidence-based practice has been subject to prolonged debate in the profession. Humphries (2003, p.84) notes that a ‘bemusing’ aspect of the discussion about social work embracing
a version of positivism is that in doing so it ignores the epistemological and methodological debates that have been ongoing for over half a century … The version of positivism, dominant in ‘evidence-based’ practice, is based on the assumption that research in the social sciences is essentially the same as research in the natural sciences, and that the same rules should apply.

Several participants did have some critical questions about the adoption of EBP, reflecting their value-driven desire for participatory approaches to social inquiry. There was an awareness of the debates and some sympathy for a critique of narrow positivist approaches:

*There’s a really strong critique of that, which basically says that evidence-based practice really it doesn’t compare one practice with another. All it does it says with a group of y, it gets x results, and in many ways it’s kind of it’s not meaningless but, it’s not sound and so there’s another school that talks about practice-based evidence which is much more about being informed by the client* (Dave)

*I think there is a lot of value in EBP but at the same time, a lot of therapeutic approaches don’t necessarily lend themselves to being measurable. I think within that framework it needs to be measurable and so you get things that fit really well with a scientific model and they become seen as inevitably the best… The inference is it’s best, whereas I think it entirely possible that these other approaches don’t lend themselves to being broken down …they might be great approaches but maybe the scientific instruments haven’t got to a point there they are able to measure those things yet* (Mental Health group).

Dave also questioned the fit of attempts to codify approaches to working with people and links this to the concerns raised many times in the literature, that research that doesn’t actively work with service users is incongruent with social work values:

*I go back to the psychotherapy side of it, there’s 450 different approaches, research shows that actually none of them can prove any more effective … So as you crunch down and what you do is ‘manualise’ treatment or intervention and you’re just applying a method, you’re not actually even dealing with a person so it’s totally incongruent

*I think that I guess [a key question is] whose research? And what research? The best research is probably at the moment with clients on an ongoing basis. [Research is] always about experts researching on people who don’t always get the feedback or anything like that so it just doesn’t really fit* (Dave)

*At the risk of sounding utterly cynical I think evidenced-based practice is one of those terms that is being thrown around a lot and like everything else you say
you are doing evidenced based practice …but whether that actually happens on the ground I don’t know (Alan).

Group interview members in a mental health setting made links between EBP and practice values:

I’m just thinking about my place of work, working alongside largely nurses and they talk about evidence-based practice a lot, but then it makes me laugh because they’ll do some things that are like expedient, or because of cost and they don’t think ‘hey that’s not what we were saying’ (Mental Health group)

I often think that when we sit in a multi disciplinary team next to the psychiatrist and the psychologist that they are very evidence led. And that we become quite scientific ourselves which at times might actually be a problem I don't know (Mental Health group).

Organizational factors in research activity

The organizational context of social work practice is significant in the broad discussion about research and reflects the findings of the literature on practitioner research. Factors traditionally cited for low levels of activity are lack of a research culture, time, lack of support, research activity not being seen as ‘core business’ (McCrae, Murray, Huxley, & Evans 2005; Lunt, Fouché & Yates, 2008; Mitchell, Shaw and Lunt, 2008; Lunt & Fouché, 2009). Participants in this study cited all these aspects as significant to them. Some managers felt they had some discretion to try to assist, despite organizational issues:

But also the ones that want to carry on and do some sort of post graduate type of study, I have got some staff that have been doing that and while the organization doesn’t necessarily have the commitment to it. I have got a personal commitment at least to try and make the time and space available for staff to do that (Bridget).

The problem of having yet unqualified workers was a limiting factor in one organization as most funding for higher education was being used up in lower level courses, leaving little to support those wanting to do further study or a research degree:

I think that the investment should be taken out of [diplomas] and be put into very experienced practitioners who are able to give back to the social
work field those kinds of practice initiatives and research The potential is there but it is not being captured, it is not being encouraged …it would link so well with our research unit to use our own practitioners to further that kind of knowledge in the organization (Maggie)

Social workers want to do a Masters and want organization support but it is not really seen as something that would come back to the organization in too many ways … it looks like a lot of time out of work and a lot of cost for little return for the organization (Claire).

The social work culture and confidence to do research

This study supports the findings of McCrystal (2000) Joubert (2006) both of who report the lack of social worker confidence and skill in research activity. While generally participants were enthusiastic confidence about research, scholarship and even reading journal articles and professional writing were seen as barriers to participation.

They may not quite of understand their way of thinking or they don’t have the time or maybe the commitment. It’s just a job (Lucky)

I don’t think it is even in the vocabulary of most of the people who work here and I feel a bit powerless to know how to actually bring it into existence … there are some social workers who are good at looking up the evidence and making a personal judgement … but most people don’t even really know how to start the process (Megan)

What we’re doing constantly is just responding to crisis and that opportunity for pause and reflection and reading an article and thinking about ‘how does this article apply?’ Yeah it is not supported by the wider organization (Mandy)

There is just this huge gap and it doesn’t feel like people are interested. But do we contribute to that, I mean do we actually? Are we writing? Are we putting things in journals? Are we involved? (Jenny)

People say you should write it up, I don’t see you publishing in the Social Work Review … but for practitioners we don’t sort of make that our priority (Cindy).

What might help raise confidence?

Participants were asked what resources assist might raise the levels of confidence carrying out these activities:

My guess would be to put more of an emphasis on sociology in the [social work qualifying courses] and research methodology and action research so it isn’t a dirty word or people can’t do it. If students in their [final] year could conduct
some sort of needs assessment and action research. It doesn’t have to be rocket science just teaching them how to question and critically evaluate what they are doing (Collette).

Time is a major factor and participants frequently spoke of the impact of workloads as limiting the follow up of good ideas such as writing up good practice or challenging cases.

We worked with a family who come back from no relationship at all to a relationship and that journey I think was really interesting. I would have loved to have supported the social worker …to write it up and present it. But in this place, the idea is there but you have to work 60 hours and [it’s hard] to do any of that kind of extending of the work or writing about the work, other than just the life saving stuff (Mental Health group)

I was thinking of doing was writing that up and putting it forward to Social Work Review and I could easily do it but what is stopping me is probably the timing and probably energy to a certain degree, but if there was encouragement and some expectation to do it and a little bit of time off, I would have no excuse...

I think there is a need for more social workers publishing; writing up case studies ...creating a culture of learning, a culture of best practice. But what I see in terms of barriers, and there would be many barriers, but yeah one may be just the time or the energy, yeah because social work can be so energy sapping (Lucky).

Mentoring

Mentoring support was noted as offering significant potential for practitioners wishing to write up practice reflections or projects. The comments that follow indicate that there is a lack of confidence amongst practitioners in their ability to write for professional publication. There is also some indication that some of the reluctance also reflects practitioner motivation:

When I have talked to the social workers about’ let’s write about this’, there is a sense that that is something that other people do, that is what people like you do Liz. Not what people like us do? … And nobody has ever said I will give you a hand to write that up? Or can I support you? Or could I reduce your caseload to enable you to do that. There is no space made for it Liz, no space and no support so you have to be hugely internally motivated (Jenny)

What would help? I guess it is people mentoring people to do it. Like people who see people doing things the same way and write that up and then. Like Lynne [clinical leader] is great at doing that. And having role models. Like people doing PhDs and masters and something and publishing from that (Phil)

It would be good to have some professional development about writing about our experiences so that we are supported and encouraged, especially if we are not academics (Cindy)
For some people that it depends on that inner drive again doesn’t it. I mean how much time would you want to set aside working, on your own at the computer. I mean that could be a lot of the reason too, peoples’ personal preferences (Mental Health group)

I often wonder if with social work maybe more than some other professions if it lends itself more generally to qualitative research whether that might be a factor too. Like how much do other professions maybe respect qualitative research? (Mental Health group)

I think one of the biggest problems is people’s attitude. I think its motivation to make it happen and yeah because as I say it’s all there and I just do think that with a little bit, it would only need a tiny resource to bring it all together and it could be great. I think it’s so close at our fingertips (Maree).

Status
As was noted in Chapter Five, many of the participants made comparisons with other professions and this same theme emerged with respect to research and scholarship. Summer and Bill felt that social work was really limited in its engagement with research, even in the health environment where evidence-based treatment is so dominant:

I think research is an area we need to develop but I think that it would be seen in terms of paralleling other professions like particularly doctors it would be kind of a kudos thing really, so that, in that regard I think it would be seen favourably (Summer)

Jeepers look at them, medicine, nursing, they have got a huge research base, and it is well integrated with major providers though joint [clinical and teaching] positions, it has got people on the inside with this focus, in the education setting they have got a strong practice clinical focus, and in the organizations they have got the research bods. Effectively helping the organization and the practitioners to do the research and to be trained in the learning environment ….that is what we should have for social work.

To my knowledge, we do not have a social work institute that has as its job to do research, to construct a research agenda, to undertake training, to research the levels of training, the agenda of training, where is it? That is what we need (Bill).

Bill also made a comparison with the education sector where he noted the strength of the teaching profession’s engagement with scholarship and research:

Look at education where you are, a huge resource going into I mean I don’t know half of what is going on there but my impression is, the institutes, but the level of research, the bodies, the policy that gets developed, the training opportunities.
Claire was conscious of a discrepancy in the way in which social workers were treated in terms of resources and some of this is that social work was just not seen as research active:

*People... who are funded to do research, they get support, they get some time and they get somebody to type everything up for them, somebody to help them. But social work is not seem as an area that needs to do research but I think it really is* (Claire)

*One of our social workers has [developed] EBP around some work with young families but she has been able to do that because it is a specialized area and it is well funded. Whereas in a community team I am sure there would be social workers who would love to do that but that is not really what their role is and they haven't got the time to do it* (Sally)

*But I guess, the profession is only just getting a solid foundation in some respects, once we’ve got that we’ll be in better positions to do the research* (Jill).

Where levels of qualification were higher and there was a culture of postgraduate study, there was greater acceptance of EBP as a fact of life in the professional culture even if there was some cynicism:

*It wouldn't be acceptable to not [be evidence-led] I mean what the hell would you do around here if it wasn't. I mean it just wouldn't survive so whereas in a place like CYFS you don't have those sorts of professions around, you are not surrounded by scientists the whole time* (Dianne).

One group member acknowledged the change in her thinking in her mental health role:

*It is interesting when you talk about evidence-led, now I notice it has become a natural part of my thinking around my work. I definitely think that before coming into this job, if I heard ‘evidence-led practice’ I would think ‘that is not for me; here I stand with my social work values conflicting’. Well sometimes social work and science have conflicted* (Dianne)

*You have got to remember that not everybody has been nurtured in this type of environment. There can be some limiting aspects of evidence-led practice too. Like from here within this environment I can see that there are possibly approaches to therapeutic intervention for which I wouldn't apply for funding, because it probably wouldn't fit with the model* (Mental Health group).

In discussing research and scholarship it is useful to return to Youll and Walker’s finding, that the ‘hallmarks of advanced practice- whether as social work managers, practitioner, educator or researcher – are the capacity for reflection,
systematic review and critical analysis used in the development of responsive and innovative services’ (Youll and Walker, 1995, p. 203). Youll and Walker found an individual motivation amongst their postgraduate students to critically appraise their agency’s practices and policies (p.206). This aspect was not present in the discussions about research and scholarship. New Zealand social workers are so acutely aware of the contextual issues that they frame their interest in research in more pragmatic terms.

Conclusions

The participant experiences and ideas presented in this chapter further aid an understanding of the dominance of the professionalization project of social work. While practitioners and managers recognised importance of CPE in developing individual careers, this was rarely problematized except in terms of access to resources. CPE concerns of managers and practitioners alike were most often pragmatic in nature, seeking learning opportunities to meet immediate needs and build expertise. Despite registration there remain issues related to the profession not having a clearly articulated pathway of professional development. As I wrote in a memo,

It is’ hit and miss’. Jo social worker was lucky enough to land a job here and yet if she went down the road she would find colleagues she trained with and they say ‘oh you are so lucky’! (Research note 26/6/08).

Several practice leaders, Frances and Dave stood out in articulating a concern about weak practitioner critical perspective as they became immersed in the demands of everyday practice and captured by institutional definitions of their role and identity. There is a sense of disjuncture between the professional education environment where Munford (2003, p.50) argues ‘striving for a social work that remains critical and self-reflective, and engaged with many bodies of knowledge,’ and the world of practice where there ‘ is often in conflict with a view that remains focused on the pragmatic and technocratic’. The knowledge claim of social work is weak and this is reflected in the participants’ ambivalent and limited engagement with research
and scholarship. Their conceptualizations of research-mindedness were to large part bound up in reactive responses to the evidence-based practice movement, with only a few critical interpretations differing from the standard rationale of proving’ what works’ and neoliberal ideology of justification of professional activity in metrics rather than humanistic or progressive ideas.

There are many challenges to the social work profession in developing a research culture. Most commonly cited are matters of time, confidence, knowledge and skill (Joubert, 2006), belief in the need for social workers to do more than just process information (McCryystal, 2000; McNeil, 2006; Wade & Newman, 2007) and access to literature and resources (McNeil, 2006, p.153). In New Zealand Lunt et al., (2008, p.39) and Sanders and Munford (2008, p.26) note that it is difficult for practitioners to set aside and maintain time for research as work demands their attention. Workloads, expectations and lack of support from colleagues and managers can add to the challenges. Lunt et al. also noted that management support was crucial both in terms of practical matters and recognizing the value of research. Youll and Walker (1995) and (Mitchell, 2001) both noted that agency culture provides many ways to undermine scholarship through lack of support. There is agreement in the literature that there is a need for strategies to develop research confidence and capacity in the practitioner community (McCryystal, 2000; Lunt et al. 2008; Mitchell et al., 2008; Fouché and Lunt, 2009 Lunt et al., 2009).

Social workers in this study have confirmed these findings. They feel weak in this environment, feel they are seen as less than intellectually robust, and are conscious of their lack of confidence. They seem prone to defend against any challenge by reverting to practical conceptualizations of social work activity. A second and reasonable claim is that social workers largely lack the resources—time, money, access, skills, and confidence- to ensure their work is underpinned by scholarship and research. There is some ambivalence too, as demonstrated by the data on relationships with academia.
Chapter 8: Taking Ourselves Seriously: Professional Capital in New Zealand Social Work

Unless we are continually updating, seeking knowledge, innovating; creating relationships whereby we can have listening conversations and changing our practices to suit, we are done. We are a dead profession. We need to be an alive one (Maggie)

This study has illustrated that CPE for social workers is more than an end in itself: it is part of a strategy to improve the status and position of social work, both within the fields of social work activity and in the public perception. Three major foci have emerged as a potential explanation: first, participant data reveal some contradictory stories and ambivalent engagement of practitioners in the professionalization project of social work, especially the credentialing aspect; second, the considerable impact of the organizational context on practitioners, in particular the enactment of the neoliberal discourse of lifelong learning; and lastly the complex links between expectations of professional development, research and scholarship and aspirations for practitioners within the current environment.

This chapter sets out the implications of the study for the profession and specifically for professional bodies and the schools of social work. First, the conclusions are considered within the construct of professional capital. Second, the features of weak professional capital within social work are explored and thirdly some suggestions are made for a way forward. Finally the chapter will address the limitations of the study and the possibilities for further research.

Overview
Qualitative research is about finding meaning in participants’ responses to the researcher’s questions. From the moment the first question is asked in the first interview, the complex dance of the researcher’s thoughts and the participants’ words begins. Hunches, ideas, interpretations, confirmations and surprises interact with the way the first question is answered and contribute to the decisions about the next question. Early on in the data collection phase of this study, it became apparent that participants could not separate the ‘battle’ to gain resources for CPE from the struggle for professionalization. The resources to support postgraduate qualifications, for example, were needed to gain Bourdieu’s ‘certificate of cultural
competence’ and the social capital gains associated with acquisition of higher education (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245). These early interpretations led back to the literature and, in particular, to critical approaches to the study of the professions. A framework was sought within which to view, analyse and interpret the myriad data collected. Witz (1992) assists in the development of a deeper understanding of the professional project, especially in the helping professions, where gendered thinking accounts for tensions around some aspects of professionalism. Bourdieu provides a theoretical and conceptual map to aid understanding of the fields and social spaces in which social work is constructed as a practice and interacts with social institutions.

Both ‘the profession’ and social service organizations are conceptualised as collective agents in a field in the Bordieusian sense, with the field comprising features and structures of a social welfare system in a developed nation. Social workers construct their understandings and aspirations about CPE within this complex environment of intersecting forces and institutions. For Bourdieu, these institutional and social settings are complex sets of power relations in which strategies are employed by participants to support their aspirations. Agents in the field need to possess some status – or symbolic power – in order to ensure their full participation. Professions utilise forms of codified knowledge to mark out their distinctive space. Knowledge is systematically organized into qualifications and credentials which, from Bourdieu’s conceptual frame, produce cultural capital via ‘social alchemy’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245) as it is agreed that they represent assured knowledge and trustworthiness. Social work seeks to have the recognition of itself as a member of the group of professions who achieve that status, while self-consciously recognising the problems it faces being located in the marginal world between the ‘lifeworld’ and ‘system’. The state and professions are in an uneasy relationship. Inherent in the professionalization project is a hope that social work can reconcile the contradictions.

By the time social work in New Zealand (and other jurisdictions) reached the point of legislated statutory registration in the first decade of the 21st century, major social shifts mean that the profession faces double jeopardy. It has sought to gain traction in a professionalization project during a complex set of social changes.
Olgiati’s (2006) persuasive argument for two contradictory frameworks influencing contemporary professions (‘the risk society’ and the ‘knowledge society’) has been helpful in understanding the contradictions in organizational rhetoric about the importance of learning and development for social work (Olgiati, 2006, p.543). In ‘the risk society’, professions confront the crisis of trust (O’Neill, 2002) that has occurred at the end of modernity while in ‘the knowledge society’, professional and higher education is a consumer object in global markets (Jarvis, 1996). For the professions, status symbols (such as highly regarded qualifications) can’t be seen as:

trustworthy reference points as they were in the past. Broadly speaking, in sum, the dark side of modernity compels either the abandonment of traditional ideas of professions as problem-solving agents, or alternatively the questioning of the premises of the nomic (i.e. ordering and stabilizing) social function of professions in society (Olgiati, 2006, p.543).

Social work in New Zealand (and elsewhere) is a profession currently in the midst of critical self-examination, as its processes of professionalization impact on how the profession wishes to define itself in contemporary society. It makes some small gains in the search for the symbols of modernist professionalism (statutes, attempts at closure through qualifications and protection of title, self-policing and discipline) just at the point when, in Olgiati’s ‘dark side of modernity’; the label ‘professional’ has lost some of its symbolic power. The impact of this disjuncture in many professions is the exertion of pressure to raise ‘the bar’ higher and push for higher qualifications to symbolize even greater assurance of competence. An example of this is found in the current shift in the United Kingdom, towards requiring qualified social workers to undertake further higher qualifications in social work, including a new Masters in Social Work Practice ‘to develop a national and standardised award which will be practice-based, practice-driven and accessible to all social workers’ (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010, p.42).

Here the state is moving to require degree qualified practitioners to take a further degree, which will undoubtedly raise concerns for educators, whose expectations of higher degree students might assume individual motivation, rather than compulsion. Nevertheless, this decision, albeit a response to yet another series of ‘task forces’ on social work, demonstrates the extent to which the state does invest
in social work. A cynical interpretation of this upwards credentialising might be that the neoliberal state is aiming to protect itself from further public opprobrium. Many of the participants in this study would relish the possibility of a mandated, paid opportunity for further education but they might also be cynical about the uptake amongst the broad ranks of their colleagues. While the rhetorical embellishment of the profession may be derived from state or organizational espoused theory of improvement, at the site of the practice such embellishment can be deconstructed, undermined and the limits of external governance revealed. There is a deeper ambivalence about the intellectual foundations of the profession.

Qualitative data analysis has demonstrated how issues of power and influence are found to impact on practitioner participation and this discussion interrogates these circumstances through a critical lens. The contradictory elements that emerge in the study reflect both the complexity of relationships and connections between the many stakeholders within CPE in social work and the contradictions inherent in social work as a phenomenon of modern society. What presents is an account of social work in the grip of the professional project as the impact of the system of registration system is experienced.

Practitioners, managers, and professional leaders have demonstrated an acute awareness of the perceived state of the profession, as constructed in their accounts of their sense of hierarchy and standing. It has been noted that participants made frequent comparisons of the provision and uptake of CPE activities to that demonstrated by other professional groups. There is a conscious aspiration to improve the status of the profession by having access to credentials to better promote the profession’s contribution; to be better understood. There is some ambivalence about whether this pursuit of greater professional capital might distance the profession from its roots. The data suggest several interpretations of the muted agenda for social justice agenda in the profession: first, the dominance of clinical work in a tightly managed environment, in which autonomy is lessened; and second, social workers have become absorbed by the organizational construction of their roles. Professional leaders Frances and Dave noted the weak voice of practitioner advocacy suggesting this was too frequently subsumed by institutional capture. It was noted that several professional leaders noted a lack of
consciousness of a change agenda, expressed clearly by Dave as ‘over the horizon’ to re-emerge at some later date.

Study participants have described the unpredictable political and organizational context in which practice occurs. Despite various shifts, the neoliberal agenda still dominates social policy. A new conservative government in New Zealand is currently cutting public services and Bourdieu’s words resonate:

By associating efficiency and modernity with private enterprise, and archaism and inefficiency with the public sector, they seek to substitute the relationship with the customer, supposedly more egalitarian and more effective, for the relation to the user; finally, they identify ‘modernization’ with the transfer into the private sector of the public services with the profit potential and with eliminating or bringing into line subordinate staff in the public services, held responsible for inefficiency and every ‘rigidity’ (Bourdieu et al., 1999, pp.182-183).

Some of the hopefulness in practitioner comments about how registration would bring greater support for social workers’ CPE will be clipped back as ‘training’ budgets are cut in a recessionary climate. The organizational context has loomed large in participants’ perspectives on professional life where the managerialist agenda of ‘technologies of learning’ (Reich, 2002) dominates, with the concomitant expression of cynicism, lack of trust, feelings of helplessness, disempowerment and a struggle for resources. It has been noted that in response to this some social work leaders found ways of meeting needs by playing the game and linking requests to service development goals. In addition practitioners recognized that the multidisciplinary environment, even though the profession is not dominant, can offer a rich source of learning.

The prevalence of participant comments about ‘the department’ or ‘the organization’ in this thesis reflects the dominance of the context and furthermore, the social workers’ perception of their lack of voice within that context. Practitioners were uniformly cynical about prescriptive top-down organizational
approaches to learning and development. Their views frequently confirmed the prevailing view in the literature; that within the neoliberal regime inadequate technical responses are frequently made to problems social workers perceive as having complex social, cultural, emotional and moral foundations (Ferguson, 2008; Garrett, 2007a, 2007b, 2009). Their responses support Olssen’s utilisation of Foucault’s concept of a technology of control (Olssen, 2006, p.216) and sit uncomfortably with more transformative approaches to adult education. The CPE concerns of participants were often pragmatic in nature, seeking learning opportunities to meet immediate needs and build expertise. Managers and leaders felt unable to exert much influence in gaining resources, but acted where they could to support the aspirations of individuals. Registration was seen by many practitioners as heralding a better time when there might be greater mandate for a more clearly articulated pathway of professional development; at the time the interviews were conducted this was not seen as consistent across sectors, or even within organizations. There was a common view that employers did not value higher education for frontline workers.

Finally, participant accounts have painted a picture of a weak knowledge claim for social work, reflected in the participants’ limited engagement with ongoing research and scholarship. Participants report personal and institutional responses to evidence-based practice movement, largely supporting an interpretation that research should focus on the justification of professional activity in accounting terms. Social workers lacked confidence and were sometimes ambivalent about research and scholarship, defending this with the claim of social work to be essentially practical. Research is not something ‘workers’ do.

In summary then, the key outcomes are thus:

1. In the professional project of social work, the impact of the organizational context on practitioners, and in particular the impact of managerialist practices is highly significant;
2. There are complex links between perceived status within complex institutional settings and the aspirations of individual practitioners in this study, and this reflects a struggle to build professional capital that is ‘felt’ and expressed as a collective struggle;
3. The struggle to gain resources for CPE is a significant part of a strategy to improve the power and status of social work and as such CPE is not an end in itself. In this strategy, the focus is more on the application of knowledge and the desire to produce new knowledge is weak.

Seeking to build professional capital

A further exploration of the usage of the term ‘professional capital’ as an extension to Bourdieu’s concept of social capital is useful here to ensure clarity in the discussion of the pattern of responses outlined in this study.

Defining professional capital

As noted in Chapter Three, Bourdieu’s work on the types of capital has been employed in many different ways in the decades since he wrote ‘The Forms of Capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986). Portes (1998, p.3) has criticised the ‘conceptual stretch’ and later Fulkerson and Thompson (2008, p.540) argued the emergence of two ‘camps’ in the usage of the construct: the ‘normative social capitalists’: those assuming a universal explanation of social development and the ‘resource social capitalists’ who drew on interactionist and conflict traditions. Professional capital is defined here as the aggregated value of mandated educational qualifications, social ‘distinction’ based in a territory of social practice, and economic worth marked by the artefacts of professional status, occupational closure and protection of title. This is the territory in which social welfare, as a significant feature of contemporary society, can be viewed as a field. This field is particularly characterised by ideological standpoints—social justice, challenges to privilege and so forth. It is a site of competing discourses about inequalities and how to address them. The field of health has similar features and again provides a space of struggle and contest over power and resources. It is clear from the data presented in this study, that social workers employed in the health sector were particularly aware of the status of social work and articulated their concerns using the language of competition issues, even the battlefield. Gartman (2007, p. 391) writes that ‘Bourdieu conceives of society not as one big unified struggle for a few common resources, but as a conglomeration of relatively independent struggles for a variety
of resources’. Modern societies include such fields as economics, religion, science, academic institutions and bureaucracies, especially those of the state. Bourdieu has rejected a conceptualisation of the state as one large body manipulated by the ruling class and Garrett (2009, p.7) points out:

The neoliberal state has, in fact, multiple identities and multiple boundaries. So, to extend and complicate Bourdieu’s metaphor, the state may be less a ‘battlefield’ site and more an expansive terrain on which occurs a series of seemingly discrete and unconnected skirmishes.

Many of the places where these skirmishes occur are composed of distinct sub-fields where those individuals who enter, according to Bourdieu, possess class-conditioned dispositions ‘that will determine to a large extent where they will be positioned’ and these enduring ‘predispositions condition how actors perceive the field’s opportunities’ (Gartman, 2007, p.391). In field where professions conduct their work resources, roles and the exercise of power are objects of contest. Shelley (2010) aptly suggests that ‘fields are best understood as fields of forces rather than the concept of a static farmer’s field where the boundaries are demarcated by fences’ (p.44). The boundaries of the field (s) are etched by a complex system of individuals and organizations and the relationships within delineate and tend to reproduce the dominant social practices. Social workers carry out their work within these dynamic ‘fields of forces’ where power is often vested in those occupations with a strong knowledge claim and a demarcated territory (or scope) of practice. Social workers enter social work often with a simple vision, ‘to make a difference’ only to encounter great complexity. The complexity of the field (s) occupied by contemporary social work, and the forces within those fields is set out in Table 8.1 Features of Social Work in the Field of Social Services.
Table 8.1 Features of Social Work in the ‘Field’ of Social Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The field of discourses social policies of health, welfare and social control</td>
<td>The place of social work in society, social ambivalence about social work. Normative nature of social work. Relationship to the state. The neo-liberal regime in western societies. The climate of cynicism and distrust re professions. Service user discourses. The impact of ‘the risk society’. Discourses of knowledge and learning in postmodernity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sub-field of the personal social services</td>
<td>The organizational location of social work practice. Its nature as a bureau profession and a policy dependent profession. Its organizational culture, relationships and interdependencies with other professions. The impact of new public management. The risk-averse climate in social work bureaucracies. The proximity of other models of human services, competition and comparisons. The professional project. Resources for social work and social work education. The intellectual and epistemological foundations of social work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The practitioner’s space: the site of practice</td>
<td>Practitioners’ dispositions: values, attitudes, aptitudes and capacities. Managers’ dispositions: values, attitudes, aptitudes and capacities. Time, commitment, personal ambitions, beliefs and sense of agency and resistance. Capacity and disposition for critical inquiry, practitioner research and scholarship.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The appearance of weak professional capital

In the Bourdieusian sense, social workers’ professionalization project aims to accumulate several forms of capital. The accumulation of this symbolic capital (the collective strength gained from gaining artefacts and signs of economic, social and cultural value) can be theorized as building professional capital. Social work possesses only weak capital in its current condition.

In Chapter Three the absence of strong professional capital was deemed to be demonstrated by these features:

1. Invisibility in the public discourse of professionalism or the profession being associated with negative outcomes;
2. A lack of recognition for the contributions of the profession to society –or this contribution is poorly understood;
3. A passive role in institutions rather than leadership by the profession;
4. A weak or disputed professional knowledge claim.

These four features are explored in turn, with reference to the study outcomes.
The discourse of professionalism

Social work can be understood as struggling in contemporary society to reconcile its low status and influence; despite it often being associated with the powerful apparatus of the state. Social work is often bracketed with teaching and nursing as a ‘soft’ profession. All three occupations emerged in modernity and developed strengths as learning, healing and care became separated from the domestic sphere. It is inescapably a gendered profession, despite my participants not mentioning this, a fact checked many times over because it was a surprising omission. It is still a profession in which women are the majority, if not dominant (McPhail, 2004) despite many decades of social change. In health social work in Australia, for example, 84% of practitioners were female compared with only 39 percent of general medical practitioners and 29 percent of specialist medical practitioners (Schofield, 2009, p. 385-6). In figures published in the same year in New Zealand 40% of medical practitioners were female and 84 % of workers in allied health, the group in which social workers were included (District Health Boards New Zealand, 2006, p.10). As Healy and Meagher note (2004, p. 249) in their critique of opposition to professionalization ‘pervasive gender inequality’ is a significant issue in the social services. Not only is there a gender imbalance but social work also aims to recruit practitioners from minority communities (Harington & Crothers, 2005). In the US context, Schilling, Morrish & Liu (2008, p.113) suggest a debate is needed as to ‘whether a relatively balanced profession is best able to facilitate the profession’s access to decision makers and processes that affect the profession and the clients and communities it serves….Arguably, the fading of men from the profession may reinforce outmoded beliefs that women should be responsible for providing human services’. Internationally, there have been many efforts to increase the numbers of minorities in social work but little emphasis on recruiting males (Schilling et al., 2008).

There are aspects of New Zealand social work’s historical development that are unusual. Social work in New Zealand cycled rapidly though the ‘competency’ phase, initially with a model developed within the professional association and later in a major employing organization. As Nash and Munford (2001, p.29) wrote
It is one thing when a professional body chooses to adopt self-imposed standards of competency. In such a case, professional autonomy can be maintained. It is quite another story when competency standards are developed and assessed by an organization other than the professional association, for then professional autonomy is possibly at risk.

At the point that Nash & Munford’s article was published, the internal competency programme was about to be discontinued. Before this approach had produced much impact, statutory registration was in the planning stages. ‘National’ competency-based programmes were never popular, and the universities successfully resisted their incursion into that sector. The SWRB set a degree as a benchmark in 2004 but has not moved to manage curriculum aspects of programme beyond broad guidance (SWRB, 2009). Competencies are delineated but responsibility for determining these is devolved to universities and other providers. At the time of writing the body representing the schools of social work has a positive relationship with the SWRB.

In spite of the hopes of practitioners reported in Chapter Five, social work’s status as a profession is dubious. Without ‘protection of title’ occupational closure has not been achieved. While registration requires the attainment of ‘benchmark’ qualifications, as long as registration is not mandatory, then there is inherent in this state a lack of acceptance of the knowledge claim considered essential in professions.

**Recognition for the contributions of social work to society**

Research by Taylor, Beckett and McKeigue (2008) identifies social workers as the ‘prime candidates for the projection of society’s anxiety in the form of criticism’ and yet characterized as having less expertise than other professionals. In Olgiati’s (2006) case of the pervasiveness of risk thinking, managing risk is inextricably tied to competency: in a setting where the profession’s attention is focused on risk, technical ‘safety’ becomes a preoccupation.
Social workers suffer the lack of a well-understood public role. In 1982 Brawley and Martinez-Brawley wrote that despite the positive contribution of innumerable practitioners, social workers are often placed in a ‘defensive posture in relation to the media’, because they are seldom recognized unless they're in trouble (Brawley & Martinez-Brawley, 1982, p. 77). More than two decades later, a social worker in research conducted by Taylor et al. said:

I think the courts will look on the doctor, or the psychiatrist or the psychologists report as having more weight . . . than the social worker’s report. Because doctors are really professional aren’t they, it’s one of those careers your parents want you to go into whereas, social work . . . (Taylor et al. 2008, p.25).

Bourdieu (1984, p.251) writes of symbolic power:

The struggle to win everything which, in the social world, is of the order of belief, credit and discredit, perception and appreciation, knowledge and recognition—name, renown, prestige, honour, glory, authority, everything which constitutes symbolic power as recognised power— always concerns the ‘distinguished’ possessors and the ‘pretentious’ challengers.

The social workers in this study are conscious of their indeterminate status and seek to enhance their social capital through education and the achievement of higher credentials. In wishing to do this they feel thwarted by lack of autonomous decision making and lack of resources. They attribute this to socio-economic forces, managerialism and lack of power. The preoccupation with making comparisons between social work and other professions has been illuminated by data in chapters Five and Six and speaks to a profession lacking the confidence of the ‘distinguished possessor’ and more of the anxiety and uncertainty of the ‘pretentious challenger’. This anxiety about comparative status is present in the numerous references by all social workers, not just those in health to other professions and in particular the medical profession, as presented in Table 5.2 The Doctors. There were several mentions of doctors being ‘scientists’ and for those working in multidisciplinary settings there is a clear indication that social workers must speak the language of research in order to have a place at the table. Social
workers’ tendency to favour qualitative research was mentioned with a hint of disparagement, for example, Audrey clearly had been influenced by positivist assumptions that qualitative research lacked rigour.

We tend to really not have had rigour in a lot of what we call research. I’m talking about the sort of things in the international journals, The Lancet or The BMJ or stuff like that, that’s got a bit of rigour behind it and I’m not criticising what we’re doing here but we tend to have qualitative research… (Audrey)

Bourdieu is helpful again as he situated ‘new’ professions such as social work and counselling in ‘the interstices between the teaching profession and the medical profession’ (1984, p.369). Thus perhaps what social work lacks is the ‘distinctive space’ – it may appear in the school and the clinic but it is not so assured of its continuing place in those territories which are unequivocally the space of teachers and nurses. It may have a role in the hospital or the court but it lacks the accoutrements that mark a special contribution – no stethoscope around the neck, no wig and gown. Social work can articulate its knowledge in the courtroom, but the room belongs, without doubt, to the lawyers. Social work may frequently be a rather accidental profession, rather than an occupation aspired to from childhood. Jenkins (1992) cites Bourdieu (1984) in suggesting that petite bourgeois citizens able to access higher education in the 1960s created ‘a disjuncture between their subjective expectations and their objective probabilities’…. became social workers. Those who were unable to find other middle class employment ‘move into the occupational niches between the teaching and medical professions’ (Jenkins, 1992, pp.144 -145). Bourdieu (1984, p.369) describes such a journey as part of the exemplary history of all those who started by professing a faith and ended up making it a profession, especially of all those associations which, in the areas of social work, adult education, cultural organization or advice on child-rearing and sexuality, have moved, in the space of a generation, from the enthusiastic uncertainties of voluntary evangelism to the security of quasi-civil-servant status.

Social work thus remains vulnerable to having to attempt to compete in the field of forces alongside other more powerful professions who have achieved the
distinctive social space alluded to above. Furthermore, its hold on symbolic capital is tenuous, as a creature born of ‘enthusiastic uncertainties’ it is at the mercy of political currents. A shift in territory from a voluntary, charitable role to that of what Bourdieu terms ‘quasi-civil servant’ status is not a shift in terms of the powerful agents in the field, though the impact on service-users is vastly changed with a state mandate. By the time Bourdieu reported the large research project that became the book ‘The weight of the world’; his attitude to social work was more sympathetic. Social workers, and others including teachers, were ‘charged with …compensating, without being given all the necessary means, for the most intolerable effects and deficiencies of the logic of the market’ (Bourdieu, 1999, p.183). As a consequence, Bourdieu saw that social workers felt abandoned and disowned. The participants in this research echoed Clare’s comments that the social workers in her study (Clare, 2006, p.40) were feeling disempowered:

Rather than experiencing a sense of empowered marginality, which enabled them to remain assertive and potent within their practice environment, several participants reported a strong sense of professional disjunction and disaffected marginalization.

Social workers could be doing much more:

but I think it’s easier just to beaver away seeing people, doing tasks and that’s why I feel if people had more training, more confidence, we would get more of a vision, that’s what I feel, that we’re very small (Maree).

Professional Leadership

Brodie (2003), in her thesis on professional capital in midwifery, emphasised leadership as crucial for building processional capital. For Brodie, this was essential to achieve the greater autonomy and job-satisfaction sought by midwives, whose long struggle against medical dominance is perhaps one of the best recorded (Witz, 1992; Abbott & Meerabeau, 1998). What did social workers in this study say about leadership? Practitioners in one mental health setting saw themselves as having some advantages with strong leadership and the importance of leaders’ role-modeling of scholarship and research informed practice. Those working in health, and especially mental health, (despite their awareness of the competitive environment) seemed most fortunate in recognizing the benefits of a multi-
disciplinary environment and presumably many being in ‘teaching hospitals’ and services, though that was rarely acknowledged as a factor. In Chapter Five the frequent use of the language of battle was noted when discussing this struggle (Table 5.1.) Lakoff (1993, p.244) notes that the in the use of metaphors in everyday discourse ‘something real is structured by conventional metaphor, and thereby made comprehensible, or even natural’. Voice is a significant concern, frequent use of the word ‘articulate, noted in Chapter Five, expressed a concern that continuing education should help build the skills needed for a more articulate profession, as captured here in Jenny’s comment:

For me [there is] a tension between that low level learning and what we actually face with having to think and talk and negotiate with other professionals and make our voice heard. If you don’t have a safe environment to develop those skills, it’s much, much harder to develop them when you’re in the deep end of the swimming pool (Jenny).

The pattern of responses indicates clearly that the participants in the study saw CPE as a major component of the professionalization process. It was highly significant (nobody expressed doubts about its importance) because it was meant to advance professionalism, both at an individual level (professional refreshment and renewal, advanced career options, marketability and so forth) raising the individual’s social capital through advancement; and for the profession itself (status, professional identity, interprofessional competition and positioning in society). The latter focus is on raising the professional capital of social work as an occupation, through a series of actions aimed to raise its profile in the field construed as a ‘market’ of social service policy and purchasing.

What is not clear is what those actions might entail and what will work best for the profession. This study has revealed in the participant talk, the depth of the complexity of professions’ status and power in this period. Waring and Currie (2009) have commented on the de-professionalization thesis, in which professions are seen as weakened by bureaucratic control. They are critical of ‘the tendency to portray the reconstruction of professional work as either a top-down managerial strategy of restructuring or a bottom-up phenomenon of occupational resistance’ (Waring and Currie, 2009, p. 756). Citing Gleason and Knights (2006), they suggest rather that ‘professionalism is transformed through the mediation of both
the intent to reorder work from above and resistance from below’ (p.756). Because of the contested and contentious focus of social workers’ work it is unlikely that the tinkering from above will stop, but it behoves the profession to consider which aspects of this tinkering can be utilised to create positive resistance, rather than an enactment of ‘learned helplessness’ sometimes felt in the reading of the data; forceful requests for a place at the table of the policy review and evaluation, for example, along with seizing opportunities to research from practice. There is a significant role for a well-informed leadership, able to challenge the managerialist model so favoured by bureaucracies, or co-opt it for meaningful change (Waring & Currie, 2009).

The knowledge claims of social work

In Chapter Three, Olgiati’s observation that the connection of a profession to a particular type of academic knowledge was a common factor in defining professions (Olgiati, 2006, p. 541) was considered. Olgiati notes further that the links between this fact and the sociological analysis of the production of knowledge, or the sociology of science are less developed (p.541). He notes, for example, that Freidson does not underestimate the application of science:

but the focus is on the social embodiment of professionalism as an already formalized body of knowledge….In fact, professions are conceived as carriers of their embodied knowledge, acting not so much in relation to the degree of indeterminacy that science implies, but rather within the limits and according to the procedural framework (chances and constraints) set up by political and institutional settings (Olgiati, 2006, p. 541).

Olgiati notes that for Larson (1979) technology, science and an expanded education ‘are at the core of the rise of professionalism. Yet a political strategy of professional closure is the leading rationale of professional action’ (Olgiati, 2006, p. 541). Perhaps this is where social workers are located at this time: using the best strategy available to them in this current era. The impact of the risk society and the associated rise of intense public scrutiny, plus concomitantly less trust in professions, means that the best political strategy may be to seek the safety of
occupational closure. As Healy (2009, p. 402) points out within the current ‘new public management’ regime, professions who can prove ‘their capacity to manage risk through reference to a scientific evidence base’, hold credibility while those who employ ‘interpretivist or critical approaches to knowledge development…are vulnerable to devaluation’. Chapter Seven has confirmed the awareness of the drive for EBP amongst practitioners and managers but little evidence of the interrogation of this as a feature of the managed environment. Rather it is, as one person put it a ‘bandwagon’ but also another aspect of life in the ‘battlefield’ for most. In an earlier research note (2/9/07) the question was posed—is this reticence about knowledge and discovery part of a lack of confidence or, does it reflect a lack of readiness and sufficient cadre of scholars? As one professional leader put it—‘doing research, that is the flash bit’. There is also a desire to value practice-based knowledge, derived from our understanding of what clients value in our practice but sensing that in this drive to professionalize (and the EBP environment) this is not necessarily valued. Despite these observations, it was encouraging to note managers’ enthusiasm for finding opportunities for intellectual refreshment.

Changes in the nature of knowledge, the influence of mass media and the vast access to knowledge offered by the internet have altered some aspects of the previously held as ‘unbreakable tie between knowledge/expertise and power’ (Coburn, 2006, p.438). Professions have been found wanting in the past four decades and the claim of specialist knowledge is no longer sufficient to guarantee autonomy, suggests Coburn. The acceptability of evidence-based practice challenges the potency of an exclusive knowledge claim for any profession. While participants in this study might view EBP as symbolising the power of medical expertise, some deconstruction of this suggests it represents a weakening of power. EBP aims to evaluate practices against other practices, using so called gold standard methods. The result of these projects creates codified knowledge packaged as ‘Best Practice’. Through technologies of control such as ‘clinical governance’, bureaucratic agents assert control of professions. Coburn (2006, p.439) points out that while medical scientists contribute to the production of this codified knowledge it removes the intellectual activity further way from clinicians. In the neoliberal regime it empowers bureaucratic agents to apply ‘science’ to rationing. Medical dominance (Willis, 1983) is thus weakened in the last two
decades. For social work, the dominance gained by the capture of specialist knowledge has never been achieved and programmes have always been mediated via third parties. The weak knowledge claim of social work is in a circular relationship with considerable organizational limitations. Even in statutory social work, where it faces no real competition for territory, the research participants speak of a social work restricted by a tenacious, nervous managerialism that resists professional autonomy.

The participants in this study demonstrated considerable conscious understanding and a critical perspective of the impact of the major discourses about learning on social work organizations. While they understood the inevitability of an organizational learning agenda, they were passionate advocates for inclusion of practitioner voice in policy and decision making. Practitioners needed to tell their stories and be able to voice their needs and meet more flexible institutional responses—only through this interchange of ideas would there be a match between worker and organization aims for learning.

**Social work futures: ‘Over the horizon’?**

Hamilton (1974, p.451) was cited earlier as suggesting social work ‘must forgo any claim to identify with the weak’, and that professionalization will see social work become part of the ruling hierarchy with a stake in keeping the society as it is’. A Bourdieusian perspective suggests that it were always so; social work is a feature of modernity, constructed via a series of contracts with governments, since it moved from the voluntary sector. Social work has had good times and bad. It is important to maintain perspective that states are ‘not all powerful, they are undergirded by a reliance on the power of dominant classes’ (Coburn, 2006, p 435). Furthermore, Coburn points out that ‘States and professions are interactive and permeable institutions. They influence and shape one another’.

It is yet to be revealed whether the New Zealand government will follow the UK modernization agenda and the role of the state in micro-managing social work. Many writers currently make a strong case for social work to retain a strong engagement with social theory, particularly critical social theory (Ferguson &
Woodward, 2009; Allan, Briskman & Pease, 2009). While this might not be easy in a world still dominated by the neoliberal agenda, it is an engagement with theory which when applied to practice and in the employ of social critique and social change agendas does mark out a distinctive space for social work.

The profession largely still espouses a social change orientation. The IFSW definition was finally approved in 2001 following a long and wide-reaching consultation and it will continue to exert considerable influence on the education and governance of the profession. To some extent, the language may reflect some of the contradictions of the era; social justice may be replaced with citizenship and full civic participation. The Aotearoa New Zealand Association (ANZASW) is the professional association for social work in New Zealand. ANZASW Constitution includes among its objects, ‘to advocate for social justice in Aotearoa New Zealand and address oppression on the grounds of race, gender, disability sexual orientation, economic status and age’ (Clause 2 [c]). The Code of Ethics requires members to ‘reveal unequal, socially unjust and repressive political / social structures’.

Regardless of the debates and disagreements on the current nature of social work and its role, the ideal of social justice is still prominent in the bodies and codes of the profession. Harington suggests that, while the IFSW definition does not mention civic participation, ‘the essence of this statement is about civic change. Social work is an occupation emboldened by its commitment to transform the civic culture of the environments where people live their lives’ (Harington, 2006, p. 92). Harington suggests that practitioner scholarship may offer a way forward, utilizing the skills of observation, analysis, intervention and review to provide a window on ‘some of the most intransigent and intractable issues confronting society’, (p. 92). Practitioner scholarship and research can assist the profession to build its professional capital by fostering a more public intellectual debate about the current shift back to a minimalist welfare state in New Zealand.

Lifvendahl (1998) sought research that focused on the critical analysis of CPE, asserting the need to revisit the ‘ethical or foundational reasons for the existence of CPE’ (Lifvendahl, 1998, p. 11). This study has attempted to do this: results have been reported and interrogated and recommendations regarding possible directions
for action and future research are now offered and summarised in Table 8.2. Addressing the Problems, and Table 8.3 A Way Forward: How CPE can Contribute. Social work will probably persist as a practice, at least in the medium term, in its marginal spaces but is never likely to be funded to make revolutionary change. It will likely continue to occupy the marginalized place at the border between the ‘lifeworld’ and ‘the system’. How can continuing learning contribute to the profession’s promise to work for social change and social justice? The ‘light at the end of the tunnel’ is that the profession can employ some of the trappings of the professionalization project to leverage the intellectual growth needed to develop the articulate, progressive profession revealed as wanting in participants’ accounts. Registration has preoccupied the profession’s leadership and shifted attention away from clients and practice on to processes and power relations within the profession. Solutions may be found in explicit opportunities for learning about social justice issues or via O’Brien’s (2005, 2009) conceptualization of social work standing alongside consumer groups as partners or advocates.

An alternative is to be better placed in a more active praxis approach as suggested by Harington (2006) via the utilization of practitioner research strategies to conduct critical inquiry. This would equip practitioners to distil information gained from practice to better inform the community and the state and thereby build what Harington terms ‘civic literacy’ amongst social workers and their communities of interest. This may build on the attempt to find collaborative approaches. Healy (2004, p.101) suggests that there is a ‘new professionalism being articulated, built on recognition of the potential for professional knowledge to be used in the interests of service users, while at the same time maintaining wariness towards elitist knowledge claims’. Knowledge ‘production’ and ‘utilisation’ doesn’t happen in vacuum and service users’ values, preferences and expectations can be expected to influence choices of what and how inquiry is conducted. Wenger’s concept of communities of practice may be useful here and there is a distinct role for professional associations, in partnership with academics to help practitioners create communities of practice. Sergiovanni (1998) argues that professional capital can be created through the notion of communities of practice, where leadership creates an environment in which a spirit of inquiry, rather than the development of rules,
drives inquiry and innovation. Wenger neatly points out those organizations are about ‘practice’ not about structure:

Organisations are social design directed at practice… Communities of practice are thus key to an organisation’s competence and to the evolution of that competence. I have argued, however, that communities of practice differ from institutional entities along three dimensions…. they negotiate their own enterprise. They arise, evolve and dissolve according to their own learning, though they may do so in respect to institutional events they shape their own boundaries though these may, at times, be congruent with institutional boundaries (Wenger, 1998, p. 241).

So can social work find a way to ensure that in its support and continuing education of its practitioners CPE is better aligned to its aspirations to social justice? There is an important role for professional associations here as they can exert considerable influence in their links to some of the key stakeholders and in holding fast to key aims and values (Lonne, 2009; Lonne & Duke, 2009). Jeris and Armacost suggest that the choice of emancipatory knowledge construction approaches to the study of CPE can assist us to explore this question. We can seek to make ‘differences in gender, race, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation become central to the concerns of the professions’; ‘examine the ways in which political, cultural and institutional practices support or injure various groups’; examine how the use of professional knowledge housed in institutional structures is associated with expert knowledge; and lastly explore and point out the obstacles erected by power, authority and membership of professions (Jeris & Armacost, 2002, p. 95) and the impact of class position and privilege (Pease, 2006). Lonne (2009, p.2) asserts that ‘for too long social work has responded to the wider factors it confronts through a combination of ignoring them, critiquing from a distance, and concentrating on the job at hand’, and professional bodies must lead more thoughtful, critical and articulate responses.

The following recommendations emerge from this discussion and are shown in Table 8.2 Addressing the problems of weak professional capital. It is vital that the profession raise the intellectual base of the profession by fostering deeper
engagement with critical theory and developing resistance to all attempts to micro-manage the profession’s knowledge base. There is pressure to focus energy on technical rationality-based responses to social problems. More engaged partnerships between schools of social work and practice leadership are required but not at the expense of the intellectual development of the profession.

Growing a stronger research culture is vital but with the aim of improved advocacy and greater practitioner involvement, not to slavishly mimic ‘the doctors’. A constant engagement with the tools of critical inquiry is a core condition of balancing the lure of professionalization and the profession’s espoused mission.
Table 8.2 addressing the problems of weak professional capital

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weak professional capital</th>
<th>Strong professional capital</th>
<th>Proposed solutions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invisibility in the public discourse of professionalism or being associated with negative outcomes</td>
<td>The profession is visible in the public discourse of the contributions professions make to society. Mutually rewarding relationships exist within the profession with some cohesion between members and congruent values.</td>
<td>Looking to grow a bigger voice for the profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of recognition for its contributions to society or poorly understood</td>
<td>The profession is recognizable for its distinctive contribution to social well-being. The profession is trusted by others including users of professional services as well as other key stakeholders and other professions.</td>
<td>Telling our stories. Speaking of success. Developing media skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A passive role in institutions rather than leadership</td>
<td>Mutually rewarding relationships exist with other professional groups; Members of the profession are able to occupy and perform well, roles of leadership, being invited or empowered to provide such leadership. Reciprocal social relationships exist, with some form of exchange.</td>
<td>Developing strong intellectual leadership. Developing collaborative relationships with other professions, especially in clinical governance and practice research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A weak or disputed knowledge claim</td>
<td>The members of the profession are able to make a clear and understood knowledge-claim for and in practice and this requires both the application and production of knowledge. Opportunities are available for ongoing and fresh learning within a profession that adds to the benefit of the wider multidisciplinary team and the service environment.</td>
<td>Growing our own-practitioner research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lack of ‘professional’ collective identity</td>
<td>Members hold some sense of collective identity and ‘self-esteem’; The profession and its members hold a clear and well differentiated territory of practice.</td>
<td>Seizing opportunities to promote counter-stories to challenge dominant accounts of service users’ lives.</td>
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Revitalizing theory: Critical social work education

It is clear that there is a role for academia in rebuilding and developing a critical practice agenda for social work that includes a strong spirit of inquiry. This does not mean falling uncritically for the superficial seductions of the EBP movement, but nor should it involve the hasty rejection of strong, rigorous research approaches. Excellent research assists practitioners to become capable of delivering strong, well argued messages to governments.

Galpin (2009, p.73) suggests that practitioners are at risk of adopting an uncritical approach to policy and practice if they focus on standards and regulation and participate in competency-based education and training alone. A critical stance is therefore vital and yet rarely consistently present in the accounts in this thesis. In considering this feature of contemporary social work it is worth exploring the privileged position of the researcher. Gartman (2007, p.395) cites Bourdieu’s ‘The Logic of Practice’ (1990) in an argument worthy of consideration in this concluding discussion. Here, Bourdieu considers the privileged position of academics and the risk of this privilege obscuring the reality of the subject of their scrutiny. Gartman (2007, p.395) summarises Bourdieu’s argument thus:

The scholar substitutes her own relation to the object under investigation, a relation of removed contemplation and understanding, for the actor’s own relation of contingent accomplishment of practical necessities. Not only is this a distortion of reality; it is also a motivated distortion that hides the economic foundation of scholarly life—the privileged access to independent resources that allows disinterested contemplation to begin with.

While academics and researchers may feel less privileged in 2010 having experienced two further decades of the neoliberal regime and its impact on universities, the academic retains both time (albeit problematic) and a clear mandate to carry out inquiry and to subject practice to the scholarly gaze. It would be easy in a study such as this to simply critique the practitioners who have participated in this research, as people captured by the neoliberal agenda, depoliticised and with weak intellectual capital. MacKinnon (2008, p. 523) notes
that ‘the invisibility of social work intellectuals and the narrow focus of some professional associations on regulation, licensing and matters of more clinical concern, have caused many social workers to feel abandoned by their profession’ and this is reflected in much of the more critical comment from practitioners.

There is a fundamental tension in social work between accounts that provide an intellectual focus and those that call up a practical focus. There is a need to find effective mechanisms for capturing and validating practice knowledge—finding out what clients value. The frontline workers in this study confirm the argument that practitioner stories ‘suggest that lifelong learning … reflect(s) an ongoing struggle to keep the rational deeply connected with the richly felt experience of practice’ (Dirkx et al., 2004, p.38). There is a need to explicitly work with the levels of learning activities and their respective locations, including ‘compliance’ and ‘service development’ learning as delineated by Jill in Chapter Six—and to work with this rather than fight it. The profession also needs to claim its own territory for research and innovation; answers may lie in Weick’s claim that:

Hidden beneath the trappings of scientific respectability and social approval are the heart lines of the profession. These lines have existed from the beginning and have remained strong within the recesses of daily practice. Like veins of ore in bedrock, they glimmer quietly for all who are willing to see. Because the material lodged in these rich veins is not the official coin of the realm, it forms the guilty knowledge of social work’ (Weick, 1999, p.328).

Roles for professional bodies: The ANZASW and the Social Workers Registration Board

In 2005, following the first research project related to CPE undertaken, Beddoe & Henrickson (p.75) classified the following differing approaches to CPE in the international context:

- A compulsory CPE system directly tied to competency;
- A mandatory CPE system implemented by a professional association or a regulating body;
A laissez-faire system, where professional development is left to choices made by individual workers and their employers;

The development of advanced practitioner awards or qualification issued nationally, delivered by approved providers to practising social workers via normal tertiary education funding mechanisms (as per the Post-Qualifying awards in the United Kingdom);

The development of a system of post-qualifying ‘induction’ programmes aimed at beginning practitioners, sometimes linked to competency or registration requirements.

In New Zealand there has been a long period of adjustment as all stakeholders (educators, practitioners, employers, professional bodies and service users) adapt to registration and the shifting power relations (Beddoe & Duke, 2009). There is a key role for ANZASW to take the lead in developing the profession in a manner aligned with its national and international missions. ANZASW like many professional associations, began its life as a voluntary organization with a number of aims— to promote the profession, to raise standards, develop code of ethics, and encourage professional qualifications and to provide some on-going educational opportunities for members (Hancock, 1998). When professional associations have taken on ‘regulatory and accrediting roles, they have both removed themselves from civil society and taken on the asymmetrical power relations and technical rationality of the economic sector, argue Jeris & Armacost (2002), p.103).

In New Zealand while ANZASW is not the regulator, it has still been quite preoccupied with matters of regulation, competency and professionalization for several decades (O’Brien, 2005). CPE provides an excellent opportunity for the Association to focus on public campaigns that bring practitioner knowledge and research developed from academic/practice partnerships. Public campaigns are required on diverse issues such as continuing health inequalities and the impact of changes to taxation and benefits systems (O’Brien, 2005; 2009). Table 8.3 A way forward, summarises some practical suggestions, based on the practitioners’ and managers’ ‘wish-lists’ and which parties might participate in on a way forward to achieve these aspirations. These reflect the participant’s suggestions of gaps and potential solutions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Focus for action</th>
<th>Advocacy responsibilities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making awareness and action central in all social work activity</td>
<td>Developing confidence in working with public issues.</td>
<td>Professional associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing media awareness and confidence.</td>
<td>Regulatory boards</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Developing service user participation.</td>
<td>Practitioners</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Professional leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering practice-led inquiry and writing</td>
<td>Developing a writing culture.</td>
<td>Academics</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Developing community of practice groups to share writing from practice ‘stories’</td>
<td>Professional leaders</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Practitioners</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Professional publication editors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering critical scholarship and practitioner research</td>
<td>Developing a research culture.</td>
<td>Academics</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing community of practice groups to share</td>
<td>Professional leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>writing from practice ‘stories’.</td>
<td>Employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examining institutional and professional practices in social work</td>
<td>Examining practices</td>
<td>Professional associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>institutions</td>
<td>Developing robust evaluation.</td>
<td>Regulatory boards</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing service user participation.</td>
<td>Practitioners</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Professional leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examining the utilization of theory, expert knowledge and research</td>
<td>Researching practitioner reading and utilisation of research.</td>
<td>Academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>findings in social work practice</td>
<td>Developing community of practice groups to share</td>
<td>Professional leaders</td>
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<td></td>
<td>research.</td>
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**Reflexivity and interpretation in the study**

Reflexivity requires the researcher to continually reflect upon their own participation in the process and their epistemological and theoretical congruence. For Bourdieu, states Swartz (1997, p.276), reflexivity is ‘first and foremost a field analysis of the practice of science. It does not focus on the person of the individual researcher. Bourdieu’s emphasis, rather, is on the position of the sociologist in the field of struggle for scholarly recognition’. The choice of methods, the ordering of questions, the inclusion/exclusion of any given question in each interview, the choice of words used in instruments used in the study, the tools of analysis, the
choices made about which data to present in the reporting of the study — all change the final story that is told.

Reflexivity as described by Green and Thorogood (2004, p.194) is ‘the recognition that the researcher is part of the process of producing data and their meanings’. The multiple roles of the researcher within the milieu being studied included educator, academic manager and an active member of professional organizations. During the conduct of the study, significant roles were held including being a member of the Social Workers’ Registration Board and head of school of social work. A potential methodological problem for this sort of study ‘is the risk of triggering social desirability, or professional correctness’ (Bradley & Hojer, 2009, p. 77) in the responses and this may create a distorted impact within small scale studies (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995).

These professional roles, memberships and basic stance on major issues may well have been known to many participants. Riach (2009, p.361) describes ‘sticky moments’, understood as ‘participant-induced reflexivity, to represent the temporary suspension of conventional dialogues that affect the structure and subsequent production of data…. these [are] often triggered by the research theme itself’. In this study several such moments arose for me in these interchanges in a two focus groups:

*There is a sense that that is something that other people do you know that is what people like you do Liz it is not like people like us do and there is an idea that it about you have to talk about the theory as opposed to what you actually doing* (Jenny)

*And you know at conferences I have been to, that is what those researchers Mary Nash or Liz Beddoe say to us. You should document, we don’t see you publishing in the Social Work Review blah de blah but for practitioners we don’t make that our priority* (Cindy).

Riach (p.362) comments that such moments raise ‘challenges in mediating these comments within a larger analytical framework, since ‘the researcher’, appeared to be used as an artefact that affected their production and communication of knowledge’. Discussions of reflexivity generally focus on the researcher’s process, and generally on researcher assumptions influence designing the study and in carrying out the analysis rather than within the interviews. Riach (p.358) suggests
that ‘conceptualizing reflexivity as something that is practised within (rather than upon) the interview and consequently emerging through socialized activity opens up a new avenue of reflexive consideration in relation to all participants involved in the research process’.

The study participants, while responding freely to a call for people to participate in the study, generally had some attributes in common. They were mainly degree-qualified and many were members of the professional social work association. There was a majority of managers and leaders in those who came forward to participate in the research. Many held some leadership roles, whether as team leaders or in professional groups. Those in leadership roles were more likely to hold postgraduate qualifications. As such the participants perhaps do not reflect the same average breadth and depth of experience which might have been achieved had the study utilised a randomly selected group of social workers. With only 40 participants, it is not a large study, but it does include a range of agency contexts and ‘ages and stages’ in careers. All participants were strongly motivated to talk about CPE, held strong views and were well informed.

It was noted in the data collection phase that there was some skew toward health sector social workers, early on in the process of setting up interviews. This is most likely due to the researcher’s practice background in health. The decision to seek out participants employed in the NGO sector was motivated by a concern that the health context might bias the data towards social workers who would be highly conscious of comparisons between themselves and other professionals, health social workers’ context being one in which they are in close relationships with other disciplines. Many of the individual interview participants were known to the researcher and thus the research ‘conversations’ were among many personal and professional contacts. The participants did not appear to be uncomfortable in the interview process although a number did comment before or after the taping that they hoped they ‘would be interesting’ or ‘have said something useful for you’, or, ‘is there anything you can use in there?’, indicating to that they were aware of their key part in a production that was of value to the researcher. These comments also signalled their consciousness of the difference of this particular conversation, in relation to many other conversations as colleagues, fellow committee member,
teacher or past student, as per Riach’s ‘sticky moments’ (Riach, 2009). In balance, this sensitivity to knowledge and familiarity enabled rapport to be easily established with the interview participants. The researcher shared sufficient common experiences to be an ‘insider’, not withstanding that in these encounters the role was different (Miller & Glassner, 2004). The resultant accounts provided rich data.

**Conclusions and further research**

This is a small study, capturing participants’ experiences and opinions at a time of considerable change. Guba & Lincoln’s (1982) delineation of the four obligations of trustworthy research, as outlined in Chapter Four, are worthy of reconsideration here. Truthfulness is intrinsic to the value of research findings. This study has sought to faithfully give voice to the feelings, thoughts and aspirations of the participating social workers during a brief pause for reflection in a busy day. It is noted that the interviews were undertaken four to five years ago and organisations change. There is no compelling evidence however, that practitioners, especially those in large organisations, demonstrate any greater participation in further education. Nevertheless, the findings have limited applicability to other contexts because they capture only 40 voices at a time of change, when there were many competing professional and organisational discourses. Consistency across the interviews was achieved by following an interview schedule and using questions such as the ‘wish-list’ question. While there were many differences amongst the participants, they shared many common histories, and as Tables’ 5.1 (Battles) and 5.2 (Doctors) have shown, similar themes emerged time again across the practice contexts.

Neutrality is perhaps the most challenging of the obligations for trustworthy research. Representation of respondents’ views is accurate and aims for balance, assuming always that no research is neutral, or ‘innocent’. Each act in a study such as this one is the act of an agent enmeshed in a web of both divergent and shared meanings. The qualitative researcher’s job is to apply her best effort to bring
forward from the mass of ‘talk’ a coherent voice for those who have shared their
time and thoughts in a process that is not an everyday event.

Time has also ‘marched on’ and since the data was collected over 2004-5 there has
been a period of further change as registration of social workers has ‘bedded in’.
Organisations employing social workers have changed and applied new wisdom to
the problems they face in best meeting the needs of their service users. On the other
hand there has been a change of government and a recession, both leading to a
likely period of retrenchment for social services, as money previously destined for
social development moves instead to meeting the demand for financial assistance.

The last quantitative study of CPE amongst social workers (Beddoe & Henrickson,
2005) needs to be repeated and it would be useful to survey the qualifications held
in the social work workforce, and assess the level of activity in continuing
education in major employing organisations. At this time the Social Workers
Registration Board is conducting the first audit of registered social workers CPE
logs. Participants in this study felt optimistic that registration would lead to greater
support for CPE, and in fact felt that registration would pressure employers to
provide greater funding for study in order to satisfy rising expectations. Has this
happened?

Further research is needed to explore professionalization in social work in New
Zealand. It would be interesting, for example, to contrast the use of social justice
language and conceptualizations amongst two groups of social workers: the post-
registration generation and those in the profession for ten years or more. The
assumption is that registration leads to less activity focused on advocacy but there
is little empirical research to support this. New Zealand social work has a unique
bicultural code of ethics and research is required to explore continuing education
for this aspect of practice.

And so this final chapter ends with a comment from Frances, whose ‘wish list’
choice was to train members of her team in critical analysis because ‘This is not
social work; we need to be working within the system to change the system –but we
become part of the system and we don’t have enough analysis to fight (Frances).
This study reveals major challenges for the profession and there is a great deal to do to ensure the aims of the profession can be realised, but it also demonstrates that practitioners do not lack the will to move forward. Greater intellectual confidence and strong leadership combined can strengthen elusive professional capital; and that capital may be invested into renewed commitment to social change and social justice.
References


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Munford, R. (2003). And then there was social work. *New Zealand Sociology* 18(1): 46-54.


Owenby, P. H. (2002). Organizational learning communities and the dark side of the learning organization. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 95(Fall 2002), 51-60.


Appendices

A. Participant recruitment advertisements
B. Information Sheet and Consent form
C. Interview schedules
D. Key codes in data analysis
APPENDIX A Advertisement

Towards social transformation or a means to corporate ends? A study of the perceptions of continuing professional education (CPE) in social work in New Zealand

You are invited to take part in this study by offering to participate in a focus group or individual interview that will take no longer than two hours at a location convenient to participants.

ABOUT THE STUDY

I am undertaking this study for a PhD in the School of Social Administration and Social Work at Flinders University. The aim of the study is to identify and describe the current understandings about CPE and analyse these in relation to policies and approaches to training and professional development within the social services in New Zealand. I wish to explore the common (and uncommon) perceptions of CPE amongst social work managers and practitioners, through an analysis of their views and experiences gained during guided focus groups and individual interviews.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee.

If you are interested in participating in this study please contact me and I can send out further information.

Researcher:

Liz Beddoe
Auckland College of Education
Private Bag 92-601 Symonds St Auckland
9 623 8899 Extension 8559 or e-mail e.beddoe@ace.ac.nz
INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher:
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Supervisor:
Professor Lesley Cooper,
Head of Department,
School of Social Administration and Social Work
61 8 8201 2242 or e-mail lesley.cooper@flinders.edu.au

Title:
Towards social transformation or a means to corporate ends? A study of the perceptions of continuing professional education (CPE) in social work in New Zealand

Introduction:
You are invited to take part in this study by agreeing to an interview / participation in a focus group / that will take approximately one and a half hours at a location convenient to participants.
ABOUT THE STUDY
This study is being undertaken to fulfil the requirement for the degree PhD in the School of Social Administration and Social Work at Flinders University. The aim of the study is to identify and describe the current understandings and ideas in CPE and analyse these in relation to the stated policies for and approaches to training and professional development within the social services in New Zealand. The researcher wishes to explore the common (and uncommon) perceptions of CPE amongst social work managers and practitioners, through an analysis of their views and experiences gained during guided focus groups and individual interviews.

Participants for both interview and focus groups have been selected through invitation. Permission has been sought where approaches have been made through employing agencies. In each focus group 5-6 people will be involved. The researcher has a schedule of questions and participants may be asked to rank prepared statements about CPE via discussion. The focus groups will be taped and the researcher will take notes.

The individual interviews will also be taped and a schedule of questions will be used as a guide. Participants may be asked to rank some pre-prepared statements about CPE.

BENEFITS RISKS AND SAFETY
The results of the study will inform the field of CPE and in particular, within the profession of social work. There are no risks to participants in the study and maximum of 90 minutes time is all that is required. Your participation is entirely voluntary (your choice). If you do agree to take part you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.

CONFIDENTIALITY
No material which could personally identify you will be used in any reports on this study. Assistance will be sought from professional secretarial support to prepare transcripts. These persons will be required to maintain full confidentiality. If you give an individual interview the transcript will be sent to you for checking and amendment. Records will be stored in a locked cupboard to ensure details are kept confidential throughout the duration of the study, and will be stored at Flinders University after completion of the study.
RESULTS
The thesis will be available to read by participants and publication of the results will be sought in peer reviewed academic journals. There will be a delay between data collection and publication.

STATEMENT OF APPROVAL
This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee. The Secretary of this Committee can be contacted on 61 8 8201-5466, fax 61 8 8201-2035, e-mail Lesley.Wyndram@flinders.edu.au

Please feel free to contact the researcher or the Supervisor if you have any questions about this study.
Consent Form

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION in RESEARCH

By interview

I …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

being over the age of 16 years hereby consent to participate as requested in the Interview
for the research project on Continuing Professional Education in Social Work

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
3. I agree to my information and participation being recorded on tape/videotape
   4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form
      for future reference.

5. I understand that:
   • I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
   • I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline
to answer particular questions.
   • While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I
will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
   • I may ask that the recording/observation be stopped at any time, and that I
may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without
disadvantage.
   • I understand that participation in the interview or focus group will not
impact on my employment.

Participant’s signature……………………………………Date……………………

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he
understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher’s name: Liz Beddoe
Researcher’s signature…………………………………..Date……………………
## Current practice
What are the main aims of the learning and development policy in CYF?
What are the main strategies for CPE in CYF?
What are the CPE opportunities available for you through work?
What other strategies do you use to support your development as a social worker?

## Current thinking
What are the main differences (if any) between the internal training and what you are able to access externally?
Is CPE aimed towards improvement of your knowledge and skills in specific fields of practice within CYF (e.g. child protection, youth services, residential, adoptions).
Is further social work education supported? e.g. post-grad, specialist, supervision.

## Barriers, constraints and influences
Is the CYF organizational culture supportive of professional development in broader fields e.g. mental health, counselling?
Are CPE resources tightly targeted towards particular aims?
Who most strongly influences decision making about CPE and choices?
What are the barriers and constraints operating in respect of CPE?
Are there significant specific professional development needs that are not being met?
Are there resources (including support) available for doing research, writing conference papers, presentations?
What is missing in CPE opportunities?

## Ideal world
What is your wish list for CPE for CYF social work if you had access to greater resources?
What would you do?
### Individual Interview Schedule

**Current thinking**

*Does CPE matter from your perspective?*

What are your perceptions of how CPE is faring in the current social work environment in New Zealand?

How would you rate commitment to CPE in social work in New Zealand:
- in relation to other countries?
- in relation to other professions?

What are the kinds of educational activities you believe are the most easily available to NZ social workers?

**Stakeholders**

Who do you consider to be the main stakeholders in the provision of CPE opportunities?

Which of these stakeholders is most powerful in influencing the CPE choice of practitioners?

Do you have a personal view about who should influence practitioners the most?

Is there learning or training philosophy in your setting?

Should CPE be mandatory?

Should there be a standard setting body for CPE activities?

**Barriers, constraints and influences**

Are training resources tightly targeted towards particular aims in your organization?

Are there differences between resources available for different disciplines?

Are there significant specific professional development needs that are not being met?

What is missing in CPE provision?

**Ideal world**

What is your wish list for CPE for you and your social work colleagues if you had greater resources?

What would you do?
# APPENDIX D  Key codes developed in data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad Theme</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Level 1 codes</th>
<th>Level 2 codes</th>
<th>Level 3 &amp; 4 codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The perceptions of practitioners and persons of influence and their awareness of the role of CPE within the profession</td>
<td>Analyse power and knowledge in relationship to social work’s agency, sense of identity, claim to expertise, construction and dissemination of expertise and the societal structures it interacts with</td>
<td>Professional identity &amp; confidence</td>
<td>People don’t understand us</td>
<td>Articulate \   Strengths \   Telling our story \   Humble cringe</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Humility</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comparative status Knowledge claim</td>
<td>Access Resources Other professions Expertise Generosity</td>
<td>Struggle Battle Fight</td>
<td>Territories Fields Distinctive social space</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Externalization-Professionalization</td>
<td>Registration Credentialing Social capital Cultural capital</td>
<td>Qualification Ambivalence Credentials Doctors</td>
<td>Professional capital Building capital</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>Clients Philosophy</td>
<td>Not much of that sort of talk Over the horizon</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioners and other stakeholders’ perceptions of the influence of managerialism in social work organisations and impact on CPE</td>
<td>Examine how the contextualized individual, the profession within its sites, and relationships and intersects with societal structures government, organisations, academia, other professions</td>
<td>Pre service education &amp; induction</td>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>Theory Critical theory</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Managers Appraisal Performance Management</td>
<td>Link to HRD Organisational strategy Neoliberal policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Learning discourses</td>
<td>The Learning organisation Lifelong learning Evidence-based practice</td>
<td>Wish-list Learning from stories Cynicism Learning from mistakes Inquiry Blaming Hammered Continuous conversation Telling stories</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
<td>Managers Funding</td>
<td>Leadership Role models</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practitioners' perceptions of professional learning in social work careers</td>
<td>Recognise the importance of social, political and personal dimensions of professional learning and how concepts, understandings and aspirations may be influenced</td>
<td>Practitioners Specialization Career and promotion</td>
<td>Competition Market Promotion</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Attitudes Barriers Influence</td>
<td>Practitioners Choice Cost- who pays? Agency Individual responsibility Ownership of career Trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning dimensions</td>
<td>Critical reflection In-service training</td>
<td>Collaborative learning Dumbing down</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research, knowledge &amp; scholarship</td>
<td>Academia Weak knowledge claim Research</td>
<td>Gaps Not visible Tired/energy Theory Evidence-based practice Writing and reading Write it up People like you Leadership Success stories</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal development</td>
<td>Renewal Retention</td>
<td>Sabbatical Study leave</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection, learning and supervision</td>
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