Evaluation of a Comprehensive Interactive Training System for Investigative Interviewers of Children

by

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# Table of Contents

List of thesis publications ................................................................. ii  
Acknowledgements ........................................................................ iv  
Table of contents ........................................................................... vi  
List of figures ................................................................................ x  
List of tables ................................................................................ xi  
Abstract ......................................................................................... xii

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION ......................................................... 1

CHAPTER 2 – INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE OF THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ................................................................. 8  
Introduction and Ground Rules ....................................................... 10  
Episodic Memory Training ............................................................. 18  
  Choosing and Event for Episodic Memory Training and  
  Establishing the Frequency of the Event ...................................... 20  
  Eliciting the Narrative ................................................................. 23  
The Substantive Phase ................................................................. 27  
  Establishing the Frequency of the Abuse .................................... 30  
  Eliciting Information About Specific Episodes ......................... 31  
The Break ..................................................................................... 34  
Further Questioning ................................................................. 36  
Closure and a Neutral Event ....................................................... 40  
Summary ..................................................................................... 41
CHAPTER 3 – A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON TRAINING OF INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWERS

Prior Evaluations of Interview Training
Measuring Best Practice Interviewing
Adherence to Best Practice Interview Guidelines
Essential Elements of Training Programs
Individual Training Exercises Associated With Increased Performance
Summary

CHAPTER 4 – OVERVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN RESPONSE TO CASES OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Definitions of Child Sexual Offences in Australia
Notifications of Child Abuse
A Joint Response to Notifications of Child Abuse
Investigation and Prosecution of Child Sexual Abuse Cases
Prior Procedures for Training Child Investigative Interviewers
Summary

CHAPTER 5 – AUSTRALIAN PROSECUTORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE UTILITY OF CHILD INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS (STUDY 1)

Method
Results
Discussion
Conclusion
CHAPTER 6 – ORGANISATIONAL CHALLENGES TO DELIVERING CHILD INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWER TRAINING VIA E-LEARNING (STUDY 2) .......................................................... 96
Method ................................................................. 98
Results ................................................................. 105
Discussion ............................................................ 113
Conclusion and Implications ................................. 117

CHAPTER 7 – EVALUATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE INTERACTIVE TRAINING SYSTEM FOR INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWERS OF CHILDREN (STUDIES 3 AND 4) ........................................... 118
Study 3 Method ..................................................... 119
Study 3 Results ...................................................... 123
Study 4 Method ..................................................... 128
Study 4 Results ...................................................... 130
Discussion ............................................................ 134
Summary and Conclusion ...................................... 137

CHAPTER 8 – THE EFFECT OF THE TRAINING REFORM ON CASE OUTCOMES (STUDY 5) .................................................. 138
Method ................................................................. 142
Results ................................................................. 144
Discussion ............................................................ 148
Summary ............................................................... 151
CHAPTER 9 – GENERAL DISCUSSION……………………………….. 153
Implications of the findings and directions for future research……….. 155
A holistic approach – the new benchmark for training evaluations……… 158
Concluding comment…………………………………………………… 165

References……………………………………………………………….. 167
Appendix A……………………………………………………………….. 202
### List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.</td>
<td>Overview of evaluation of reform process</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.1.</td>
<td>The Standard Interview Protocol: Introduction</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.2</td>
<td>The Standard Interview Protocol: Ground rules</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.3.</td>
<td>The Standard Interview Protocol: Episodic memory training</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.4.</td>
<td>The Standard Interview Protocol: Choosing an event</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.5.</td>
<td>The Standard Interview Protocol: Useful prompts for eliciting a narrative</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.6.</td>
<td>The Standard Interview Protocol: The substantive phase</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.7.</td>
<td>The Standard Interview Protocol: Identifying multiple incidents</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.8.</td>
<td>The Standard Interview Protocol: Eliciting information about specific events</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.9.</td>
<td>The Standard Interview Protocol: The break</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.10.</td>
<td>The Standard Interview Protocol: Further questioning</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.11.</td>
<td>The Standard Interview Protocol: Closure and neutral topic</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1. Summary of major training evaluations conducted between 1999 and 2014 ................................................................. 43

Table 2. Overview of the ‘Specialist Vulnerable Witness Forensic Interview Training’ system ......................................................... 101

Table 3. Mean proportion of question types asked in subsamples ........... 125

Table 4. Mean proportion of question type, preferred behaviour exhibited, protocol elements correctly administered, and categories of essential information sought by the interviewer .......................................................... 131

Table 5. Descriptive information about pre- and post-reform cases using Chi-Square analyses ................................................................. 143

Table 6. Logistic regression predicting the likelihood of offenders confessing ................................................................. 146

Table 7. Logistic regression predicting the likelihood of cases being referred to Prosecution ................................................................. 147
Abstract

It is well documented throughout child investigative interviewing literature that a gap exists between best practice interviewing guidelines and actual interviewer practice. Research has shown that prior evaluations of individual interviewer training programs have been ineffective at minimising this gap. Interviewers’ lack of adherence to best practice interviewing is due (in part) to the structure and delivery of traditional training programs, which do not adhere to the principles of human learning. In an attempt to minimise the gap, the current thesis presents an evaluation of a reform to improve investigative interviewing of children. The reform consists of a new interview protocol and a new training system with a unique structure and delivery method.

Five studies are presented in this thesis. The first study addressed the first component of the reform – the new interview protocol. To date, protocols that are used to guide the interviewing process have been developed by experts in child development and eyewitness testimony. However, as children’s investigative interviews are used as evidence-in-chief for those cases that proceed to trial in Australia, prosecutors’ perspectives for how interviews are structured should also be considered. Study 1 sought prosecutors’ perceptions on the utility of interview protocols and recommendations for how these could potentially be improved from an evidential perspective. Focus groups were conducted with 13 Crown prosecutors representing every jurisdiction of Australia. Thematic analysis of the focus group discussions revealed that prosecutors were supportive of the structure of interview protocols; however, concerns were raised about four of the interview elements. These elements included the oath and truth-lie competency test, the ground rules, the practice narrative and eliciting a disclosure.

Studies 2 to 4 of this thesis addressed the second component of the reform to improve child investigative interviewing – the new training system. Prior to the broad-scale
implementation of the new training system, a pilot was conducted with a small sample of trainees. Study 2 examined the organisational challenges that arose during the implementation of the pilot training. Thematic analysis was conducted of (a) trainees’ anonymous written feedback submitted to an online discussion forum on the training system’s website, (b) trainees’ responses to face-to-face questions during semi-structured qualitative interviews and (c) correspondence between trainees and trainers regarding the training. Despite unanimous support for the new training system, three challenges were identified which included the following: limited allocated work time to complete the training, conflicting work practices arising from staggered course enrolment, and difficulties associated with computer and technical skills.

After the challenges that arose in Study 2 were resolved, the training was implemented in three large organisations, across two jurisdictions in Australia. The purpose of Studies 3 and 4 was to evaluate the effectiveness of the new training in improving interviewer performance. Study 3 examined the effect of the training on trainees’ \( N = 92 \) performance, using mock interviews where an actor played the role of the child in a highly controlled manner. Study 4 examined the effect of the training on field interviews \( N = 156 \) conducted prior to and after the training. Five measures were analysed: (i) proportion of interviewer question types, (ii) proportion of desirable interviewer behaviors, (iii) adherence to the interview protocol, (iv) interview length, and (v) the quality of evidential information sought. Overall, the findings provide clear support for the utility of the training system. Irrespective of the type of interview or measure, adherence to best practice interviewing increased from pre- to post- training, with some evidence supporting sustained performance 12 months after there had been no intervening training or supervision. The implication is that there is now an evidence-based alternative to the traditional classroom-based training system for investigative interviewers.
The fifth and final study in this thesis examined the impact of the new reform on investigative outcomes. The case proceedings of 380 cases of reported alleged child sexual abuse - investigated prior to and after the implementation of the reform - were examined. Three measures were analysed: (i) offender confession rate, (ii) rate of cases referred to prosecution, and (iii) investigation length. Support for the reform was evident in increased confession rates and shorter investigations after the reform was implemented, however, the case referral rates remained stable. Possible explanations for the lack of change in case referral rates include the need for investigators to be trained in the utility of child interviews as an investigative tool.

Overall, the results of the current thesis provide support for the new reform to improve child investigative interviewing, but highlight the need for ongoing evaluation. Significant improvement in interviewer performance and prosecutors’ support for the structure of child interviews presents good news for the investigative interviewing arena. However, Study 5 highlighted the lack of transfer of these interviewer skills to the investigation process. The implications of these findings for police and child protection organisations, trainers and researchers are discussed.
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Investigative interviewing of children and other vulnerable witnesses is a complex task in which the outcome – the evidential quality of the witness statement - is determined by a wide range of factors. One of the most important determinants of good interview outcome is the format of the questions asked by the interviewer. Decades of controlled research in both field and laboratory settings has led to international agreement that interviewers should maximise the number of non-leading open-ended questions (Cederborg, Alm, Lima da Silva Nises & Lamb, 2013; La Rooy, Nicol, Halley & Lamb, 2012; Lamb, Hershkowitz, Orbach & Esplin, 2008; Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Esplin & Horowitz, 2007; Powell, Fisher & Wright, 2005). Open-ended questions are classified as those questions that encourage an elaborate narrative response without stating what specific information is required (Powell & Snow, 2007). These include questions such as “What happened when…” and “Then what happened?” This definition of open-ended questions is adhered to by most child investigative interview researchers across the globe (Cederborg et al., 2013; Dion & Cyr, 2008; Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Esplin & Mitchell, 2002a). The advantage of these questions is that, when used effectively, they maximise the interviewer’s ability to elicit a coherent narrative account, minimise errors and create an environment where the witness feels heard, understood and not judged (Lamb et al., 2007; Poole & Lamb, 1998; Powell & Snow, 2007).

Scientific consensus about the importance of using non-leading open-ended questions with vulnerable witnesses has not, however, ensured that interviewers in the field typically ask these questions. Although most investigative interviewers across the globe receive specialised training that emphasises the importance of these questions, evaluations of interviewer performance have consistently revealed a mismatch between recommended and actual interview practice (Cederborg & Lamb, 2008; Cederborg, Orbach, Sternberg & Lamb, 2000; Korkman, Santtila & Sandnabba, 2006; Lamb et al.,
2009; Powell & Hughes-Scholes, 2009). Interviewers typically commence the interview with a broad open-ended question (e.g., “Tell me everything that happened when you went to the park with Matthew”) but soon resort to specific and leading questions (e.g., ‘What was the man wearing?’, ‘When did this happen?’, ‘Did you see anyone else there?’; ‘Was it his left hand or his right hand?’). Such questions limit the witness’ response options, elicit less accurate information and are more prone to error than open-ended questions (Cederborg et al., 2000; Lamb & Fauchier, 2001; Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Horowitz & Abbott, 2007; Orbach & Lamb, 2001; Sternberg et al., 1996).

In Australia, the investigative interview of a child has multiple purposes. First and foremost, the interview is used as an investigative tool to assist detectives in the direction and focus of the investigation into the alleged crime. Second, child protection workers use the interview to assess the child’s safety and well-being and to assist in informed decision-making about the appropriate response to the child’s disclosure. Third, for cases that proceed to court, the investigative interview is presented as the child’s evidence-in-chief. This prevents the child from having to provide an account of the abuse in a trial that is conducted approximately 18 months after the crime. Given the high importance of investigative interviews, promoting adherence to best practice interviewing has become one of the most critical and challenging issues facing academics and practitioners in the investigative interviewing arena (Powell, 2008).

The current thesis presents an evaluation of a new reform that was implemented to improve the investigative interviewing of child victims of sexual abuse. The reform consisted of a new interview protocol and a new interactive training system for investigative interviewers, which aimed to minimise the gap between recommended interview technique and actual practice. Further, several key stakeholders were involved in the development and implementation of the reform. The training system was developed by drawing on global and long-standing concerns about the efficacy of mainstream
Interviewer training programs and on the broader research into how practical skills are learned and sustained (Cederborg et al., 2013; Lamb et al., 2002b; Powell, 2002, 2008; Powell, Wright & Clark, 2010; Rischke, Roberts & Price, 2011). The structure and delivery method adopted in the new training system differed from most traditional training programs, which are delivered in a classroom over a two- or three-week period. Specifically, delivery of the new training was standardised and controlled via an online learning site, and learning was spaced across a number of months. Further, the interview protocol delivered in the training was unique to the new training system.

The overriding focus of the new training system was to increase understanding of sufficient evidential requirements and how to elicit this information in narrative format. In brief, the training consisted of fifteen modules covering a wide variety of topics, such as child development, defining the various question types and techniques on how to elicit a disclosure. Many different experts and stakeholders were consulted during the development of these modules, including prosecutors, detectives, social workers, speech pathologists, eyewitness testimony experts, child development theorists, clinical and forensic psychologists, and experts in intellectual and developmental disabilities. The modules engaged the learner through interactive exercises, short film clips, exemplars of best practice, narrated presentations, virtual simulations, self-initiated practices and quizzes with immediate feedback and explanations of the answers. Further, all trainees participated in numerous mock interviews with actors trained to play the role of abused children, and received immediate, in-depth feedback. Trainees progressed through the course at their own pace, typically one module per fortnight.

Prior attempts to minimise the gap between recommended and actual interview practice have involved implementing individual training programs to improve interviewer performance. These training programs have typically been evaluated by measuring interviewers’ adherence to open-ended question usage (e.g., Cederborg et al., 2013; Cyr
& Lamb, 2009; Dion & Cyr, 2008; Lamb et al., 2002a). The current thesis evaluates more than an isolated training program; it examines the implementation of an entire reform aimed at improving investigative interviewing. This is reflected in the evaluation, where each major component and stage of the reform is examined. Figure 1 provides an overview of each stage of the evaluation.

First, Study 1 presents the perceptions of prosecutors from across Australia about the utility of child interview protocols. One of the benchmarks of success of the new training system was trainees’ adherence to an interview protocol in interviews with child witnesses. In Australia, investigative interviews with child witnesses are visually recorded and presented in court as evidence-in-chief (should the case progress to court). As end users of the interviews, it is important that prosecutors are satisfied with the structure and the guidelines provided in interview protocols (Burrows & Powell, 2014a). To date, no research has evaluated the efficacy and applicability of child interview protocols from a prosecution perspective. Further, a lack of communication between researchers and stakeholders is a major criticism of previous reforms implemented in large organisations and a fundamental reason for why many reforms have been ineffective (Powell & Wright, 2012; Zweig & Burt, 2003). An evaluation of the utility of interview protocols and whether they meet the requirements of evidence-in-chief from a prosecution perspective was therefore conducted.

Second, prior to the full implementation of the new training system across large organisations, a pilot study was conducted with a small sample of trainees to test the delivery and structure of the training. Previous research has indicated that adherence to best practice interviewing is impacted by factors other than the quality of training, such as heavy workload and poor collaboration with key stakeholders (Powell, Wright & Clark, 2010). Further, an abundance of research has shown that attempting to change procedures and policies in large organisations is a difficult process (Kitson, 2009; Van de Ven,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AIM OF STAGE</th>
<th>METHOD</th>
<th>THESIS CHAPTER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examine the utility of the interview protocol, in terms of the presentation of evidence</td>
<td>Qualitative interviews with Crown prosecutors from across Australia</td>
<td>Chapter 5 – Australian prosecutors’ perceptions of the utility of child investigative interview protocols (Study 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot training system to trial e-learning as a delivery method and overcome any organisational issues</td>
<td>Anonymous online feedback from trainees; correspondence between trainees and trainers; qualitative interviews with trainees</td>
<td>Chapter 6 – Organisational challenges to delivering child investigative interviewer training via e-learning (Study 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examine the effectiveness of the training system in improving interviewer performance in large organisations</td>
<td>Comparison of quantitative measures of best practice interviewing pre- and post-training</td>
<td>Chapter 7 – Evaluation of a comprehensive interactive training system for investigative interviewers of children (Studies 3 and 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examine the broader impact of the new reform on the investigation of child sexual abuse</td>
<td>Comparison of the rates of confessions and cases referred to prosecution, and investigation length in pre- and post-reform cases</td>
<td>Chapter 8 – The effect of a reform to improve investigative interviewing on investigative outcomes (Study 5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1. Overview of evaluation of reform process*
Polley, Garud & Venkataramun, 1999). The implementation of e-learning training also faces many additional challenges of its own (Akar, Öztürk, Tunçer & Wiethoff, 2004; Anderson, 2014; Leeds, 2014; Ng, 2007; Shepherd, 2012; Xu & Jaggars, 2011). To promote the success of a new e-learning training system, any factors that may influence or undermine the effect of the training must be identified and addressed. An evaluation of the organisational challenges that arose during the implementation of the new training system and recommendations of how to resolve these challenges are provided in Study 2.

Third, after the challenges that arose during the pilot stage of the training system (presented in Study 2) were resolved, the training was implemented in three large organisations. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the new training on interviewers’ performance was then conducted. Multiple performance measures were analysed across two different assessment contexts, including open-ended question usage, adherence to interview protocol elements and interview length. To conclude that training is effective, improvement in performance must be demonstrated across a range of measures and the improvement in performance needs to be maintained over time. This evaluation is presented across Studies 3 and 4.

Finally, the last study of this thesis (Study 5) considered whether the new reform had any broader impacts on the investigation process. As previously mentioned, the investigative interview of a child has several purposes. In Study 5, the impact of the new reform on one of these purposes was examined: the use of the interview as an investigative tool. It is important to evaluate whether a new style of interviewing can a) be used more effectively by detectives to elicit more admissions of guilt from offenders, and b) influence whether detectives refer a case to prosecution, and the length of time required to do so. A positive effect on the use of interviews at the investigation stage may reduce the time and resources spent on cases that are not in the public interest to pursue, and/or may result in more cases progressing to prosecution.
The structure of this thesis is as follows. Chapter 2 presents the structured protocol that was delivered in the new training system and discusses research addressing the utility behind each strategy employed in this protocol. Chapter 3 provides a brief overview of research that has evaluated the effectiveness of prior training programs in investigative interviewing. Chapter 4 outlines the model of responding to cases of alleged child abuse in Australia. The training for specialist child interviewers that was previously offered in the two jurisdictions in which the new reform was implemented is also discussed. Original research (i.e., Studies 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) is presented in Chapter 5 through 8. Chapter 9 summarises the contributions of this thesis within the broader interviewer training literature and provides recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2 - INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE OF THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

In this thesis, a new reform to improve investigative interviewing of child witnesses is under evaluation. The reform consists of a new training system for child interviewers, which has a unique structure and delivery format, and a newly developed interview protocol. While these components are interrelated, each must be examined in turn to ensure a comprehensive evaluation and to identify where challenges to the reform – if any - lie. The current chapter focuses on one of these elements – the interview protocol. An introduction to and rationale for the structure and elements of the Standard Interview Method (SIM) protocol are presented in this chapter. Adherence to the SIM protocol by trainees represented one of the benchmarks of success in the training system.

The aim of an interview protocol is to assist interviewers in eliciting the best possible statements from child witnesses, with as little specific prompting as possible (Lamb, Hershkowitz, Orbach & Esplin, 2008; Wilson & Powell, 2001). Interview protocols allow interviewers to structure their interviews, formulate questions and guide the elaboration of evidential details. This in turn provides all children with equal opportunities to recall their experiences, whilst immune to any biases or prior beliefs of the interviewers (La Rooy, Brown & Lamb, 2013). An abundance of research has shown that adherence to an interview protocol increases the use of open-ended questions, which are known to elicit longer, more detailed and more accurate accounts than specific questions (Cyr & Lamb, 2009; Dent & Stephenson, 1979; Lamb & Fauchier, 2001; Lamb et al., 2009; Orbach et al., 2000; Orbach & Lamb, 2001; Sternberg, Lamb, Orbach, Esplin & Mitchell, 2001). The beneficial effects of open-ended questions have been found for all witnesses (Agnew & Powell, 2004; Brown, Lewis, Lamb & Stephens, 2012; Hershkowitz, Lamb, Orbach, Katz & Mitchell, 2012; Lamb et al., 2003).
There are a wide variety of child interview protocols utilised across the globe, the majority of which follow the same structure. One of the most commonly used protocols is the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) protocol (Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Esplin & Horowitz, 2007), adopted in various countries such as Israel, Sweden, Norway and Canada (La Rooy et al., 2015). The Stepwise Approach (Yuille, Cooper & Marxsen, 1999), the CornerHouse Forensic Interview Protocol (Anderson et al., 2010) and the State of Michigan Forensic Interviewing Protocol (2011) are all used in various jurisdictions across the United States and Canada, while child interviewers in England and Wales tend to adopt the Guidance for Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings (Home Office, 2011). In Australia, there has been a gradual progression towards a new framework, referred to as the Standard Interview Method (SIM; Powell, 2014). The SIM, reviewed in the current chapter, is the protocol that was delivered in the new training system.

Despite the existence of numerous child investigative interview protocols, the structure and format of the protocols are quite similar. Minor variations exist in relation to the precise wording of prompts, reflecting differences in local customs across jurisdictions and the fact that investigative interviewing is still a developing scientific field. However, the protocols all share several core elements. These include: (i) Introduction and Ground rules, (ii) Episodic Memory Training, (iii) the Substantive Phase, (iv) the Break, (v) Further Questioning, (vi) Closure, and (vii) Neutral Topic. Throughout this chapter, the examples provided (to illustrate the various elements) are those from the SIM protocol. For an overview of examples across various protocols, refer to Appendix A.
Introduction and Ground Rules

Interview protocols usually commence with a brief introduction, in which the time, date and names of individuals present in the interview room are stated. This is a legal formality to allow the child’s interview to be used as evidence-in-chief should the case proceed to court (La Rooy et al., 2013). The collection of phrases provided in Figure 1 is just one example of an introduction. This text will vary across jurisdictions, according to the different legislation. The introduction is concluded with a verbal confirmation from the child of his/her intention to tell the truth in the interview. This will be discussed later in this section.

1. INTRODUCTION

(In formal voice, not directed at the child)

I’m sitting with ............. (interviewee’s full name and preferred name, if different), who is ...... years old and whose date of birth is on .........................

My name is ................................. (If anyone else is present in the room, please have them introduce themselves and their role for the camera).

We are at ................................. (state location of interview).

Thanks for coming to talk to me. My job is to talk to children [people] about things that have happened, so they can tell me the truth. Will you tell me the truth?

Figure 2.1 The Standard Interview Method: Introduction

Following the formal introduction, the interviewer provides an explanation of the conversational rules (hereafter referred to as ground rules) that the child should adhere to throughout the interview. This is an important step for children, who require instruction
2. GROUND RULES

I have a few things to tell you before we start.

You may take a break when you need to.

You may use any words you want.

I will write things when you talk. It helps me remember what you said.

I might ask something you don’t understand. Just say ‘I don’t understand’.

I might ask something and you don’t know the answer. Just say ‘I don’t know’.

And I might say things that are wrong. You should tell me, because I don’t know what’s happened.

So if I said you’re a boy [girl], what would you say?

If child doesn’t respond verbally, say: Are you a boy [girl]?

If child denies but does not correct, say: Right, you’re not a boy, so you say, ‘No, I’m a girl’.

If child correct, say: That’s good, you told me the truth. You’re not a boy, you’re a girl.

Figure 2.2 The Standard Interview Method: Ground rules

around what is expected of them in the unfamiliar interviewing style of interaction (Siegal, 1991). Children often assume that adults are more knowledgeable than themselves and may fail to understand that interviewers are naïve to what they have experienced (Brown, Lamb, Pipe & Orbach, 2008; Demorest, Meyer, Phelps, Gardner &
Winner, 1984). Children therefore often fail to provide sufficient information for an accurate account and are likely to guess when the answer is unknown or the question not understood (Brown et al., 2008; Hughes & Grieve, 1980; Pratt, 1990). Children are also usually taught from a young age that it is impolite to correct adults in most circumstances, as adults are regarded as the authority figures. In investigative interviews, however, such beliefs often lead children to acquiesce to interviewers’ suggestive comments and provide inaccurate information (Hughes & Grieve, 1980). Ground rules are designed to minimise error arising from children’s misunderstanding of the interview process and maximise the amount of accurate and relevant information provided by the child (La Rooy et al., 2013; Lyon & Saywitz, 1999; Sternberg et al., 1997).

The most common ground rules that are included in the majority of interview protocols are: the importance of correcting the interviewer if s/he makes a mistake, the legitimacy of saying “I don’t know” and the importance of the child indicating if s/he does not understand a question (Home Office, 2011; Lamb, La Rooy, Malloy & Katz, 2011; Lyon, 2005; the State of Michigan Forensic Interviewing Protocol, 2011; Yuille et al., 1999). The SIM protocol includes these rules, and instructs the child to request a break at any time and to use any words s/he wishes. These ground rules aim to inform the child of the interviewer’s naiveté and provide the child with a sense of control, whilst allowing the interviewer to scaffold the conversation (Lamb & Brown, 2006; Mulder & Vrij, 1996; Roebers, Moga & Schneider, 2001; Wang, 2013). Other ground rules that have been examined in research include, “If you cannot remember everything, that’s okay. Please don’t guess”, “It’s important to only talk about things that really happened”, “If I don’t understand what you say, I’ll ask you to explain”, “Please remember that I was not there when it happened. So tell me everything you remember, even the things you don’t think are important”, and “I promise I won’t get angry or upset at you for anything you say”. Such ground rules have been included in a number of different protocols (e.g.,

Although ground rules have been incorporated into most of the major protocols across the globe (Achieving Best Evidence, 2011; NICHD protocol, 2011; State of Michigan Forensic Interviewing Protocol, 2011; Ten Step Investigative Interview, 2005), the nature, precise impact, and best method of implementing the ground rules is an issue of contention among researchers (Brubacher, Poole & Dickinson, 2015; Ellis, Powell, Thomson & Jones, 2003; Teoh & Lamb, 2010). For example, similar to the SIM protocol, the NICHD protocol delivers three ground rules to the child after completion of the formal introduction (Lamb et al., 2011). Interviewers who have adopted the Stepwise Interview Protocol or CornerHouse Forensic Interview Protocol, on the other hand, are not required to explicitly state the ground rules at the beginning of the interview for the majority of child witnesses, but rather are instructed to reinforce the rules when the opportunity presents itself in the interview (Anderson et al., 2010; Yuille et al., 1999).

There are also conflicting results within research about the utility of ground rules and their effect on children’s narratives and the interview overall (e.g., Cordón, Saetermoe & Goodman, 2005; Nesbitt & Markham, 1999; Saywitz & Moan-Hardie, 1994).

Some studies examining the impact that ground rules have on the child have concluded that there can be a negative impact associated with the inclusion of ground rules in the interview process (Gee et al., 1999; Moston, 1987; Saywitz & Moan-Hardie, 1994). These studies argue that the delivery of ground rules deplete children’s cognitive resources, which are valuable given children’s limited attention span (Anderson et al., 2010). Further, ground rules that warn children not to guess at an unknown answer may decrease the confidence that children have in their knowledge of what happened during the target events. Children may become overcautious in using this ground rule, failing to
respond to questions when the answer is known (Gee et al., 1999; Moston, 1987; Saywitz & Moan-Hardie, 1994). A child’s reluctance to answer questions results in investigators having less information with which to follow up and corroborate the child’s account (Powell, Garry & Brewer, 2009). Research on the cross-examination of children in court has also found that provision of ground rules decreases children’s accuracy of accounts during cross-examination (Righarts, 2009).

Contrary to the above-mentioned findings, other studies have shown that the provision of ground rules has several benefits in interviews. One such benefit is that ground rules can explain to the children that they are valued informants, who will be heard and not judged (Agnew, Powell & Snow, 2006). Understanding the interviewer’s naiveté about the target event and that they (i.e., the children) are unique sources of information may empower child witnesses and potentially elicit a more comprehensive and accurate narrative (Orbach et al., 2000; Sternberg et al., 1997). Indeed, in two studies that examined the effect of explaining the interviewers’ naiveté, children who were given explicit instructions to correct the interviewer’s mistakes were less suggestive to the interviewer’s misleading questions than those children who received no instructions (Krackow & Lynn, 2010; Saywitz & Moan-Hardie, 1994). Similar positive results have been shown with other ground rules, such as telling the child to say, “I don’t know” or “I don’t understand” (Endres, Poggenpahl & Erben 1999; Nesbit & Markham, 1999; Peters & Nunez, 1999; Saywitz, Snyder & Nathanson, 1999). For example, after being told about the negative consequences associated with answering questions that are not understood, the likelihood of children requesting that questions be reworded increased (Peters & Nunez, 1999; Saywitz et al., 1999). These children also provided more accurate responses than children who were provided with no instruction (Peters & Nunez, 1999; Saywitz et al., 1999). Interestingly, it has also been shown that in order for ground rules
to be effective, children must be provided with more than one instruction (Cordon et al., 2005; Saywitz & Snyder, 1996).

Despite the varied findings on the utility of ground rules, one overriding conclusion from research is apparent: in order to make ground rules effective, children must be allowed some form of practice to demonstrate their understanding of these rules (Ellis et al., 2003; Geddie, Beer, Bartosik & Wuensch, 2001; Nesbitt & Markham, 1999; Peterson & Grant, 2001; Saywitz & Moan-Hardie, 1994). By providing a simple example of the ground rule - unrelated to the target event to be discussed in the interview - children can demonstrate their understanding of the instructions with practice questions and verbal responses (Brubacher et al., 2015; Dickinson, Brubacher & Poole, 2015; Powell et al., 2009). However, young children tend to have short attention spans and practising all of the ground rules expends valuable interview time and risks fatiguing children before they are able to make an abuse-related disclosure (Powell et al., 2009). To balance expending valuable interview time with the benefits of practising ground rules, the SIM protocol incorporates a practice example of one ground rule.

When engaging the child in the practice of a ground rule, it is essential that the example used is developmentally appropriate so that all children have the ability to complete the practice correctly. For this reason, the example used in the SIM protocol involves the interviewer incorrectly stating the child’s gender and asking the child to confirm or correct the statement. Research has shown that children as young as two to three years understand the difference between genders and can identify their own gender (Stennes, Burch, Sen & Bauer, 2005; Thompson, 1975). Using gender in a practice example of a ground rule is therefore an easy example for children, which focuses on their understanding of the ground rule (and not their developmental ability).

While the SIM protocol includes a select few ground rules and one practice example, it is important to highlight that interviewers are encouraged to continually
utilise ground rules throughout the interview, as the need arises (e.g., “Remember, I wasn’t there when… so tell me everything that happened when…”). The provision of ground rules has been found to be more effective when continually used throughout the interview, rather than restricted to the introductory phase of the interview (Russell, 2006). Further, interviewers should also acknowledge when children adhere to the ground rules with positive reinforcement. An immediate and positive response to the child’s adherence to a ground rule will make the instruction more salient to the child and increase the likelihood of the child repeating this behaviour in the interview (Russell, 2006).

Clarification of the interview process usually concludes with interviewers seeking confirmation from the child that (s)he will tell the truth throughout the interview. This promise is also often accompanied with a test (hereafter referred to as the truth-lie test) of the child’s understanding of the meaning of the words ‘truth’ and ‘lie’; a requirement in some jurisdictions for the child to qualify as being competent to give evidence (Bala, Lee & McNamara, 2001). The truth-lie test is typically conducted through a series of questions and practice examples which ask the child to define, explain the difference between, and/or identify examples of the truth and a lie (Lyon & Saywitz, 1999).

Literature suggests that truth-lie tests are confusing and intimidating for children and add unnecessary complexity to the interview process (Bala, Lee, Lindsay & Talwar, 2010; Department of Justice, Canada, 1999). While children are capable of lying from three years of age, this is also the age at which they learn that it is morally wrong to do so (Lyon, Carrick & Quas, 2014). Young children are no more likely to lie than older children or adults, who are not required to go through the same process when being interviewed (Bala et al., 2010). The truth-lie tests are also developmentally inappropriate for young children with whom they are used. Young children are unlikely to have the ability to answer cognitive questions about abstract concepts (such as providing a definition of “truth”; Bala et al., 2010; Lyon, 2011; Talwar, Lee, Bala & Lindsay, 2002;
In particular, children who have suffered neglect or abuse often show seriously delayed vocabulary skills, making successful completion of the truth-lie test to qualify as a competent witness even more difficult and unlikely. Research has indicated that the ability to define truth and lies does not predict honesty in subsequent interviews, as expressive language skills may not be adequate to define a concept that the child understands (Lyon, 2011; Lyon & Dorado, 2008; Talwar et al., 2002).

Truth-lie tests that involve identifying examples of truth and lies have been found to be easier for children to successfully complete (including maltreated children) than tests that ask children to provide a definition of the truth (Lyon & Saywitz, 1999; Pipe & Wilson, 1994). However, tests that use examples usually require children to label the interviewer as someone who has told a lie. As interviewers are perceived as authority figures, children may be reluctant to label interviewers as liars, creating a motivational barrier for children to demonstrate their knowledge of a lie.

Some protocols (e.g., SIM protocol) have therefore expelled the truth-lies competency test from the interview and instead simply ask the child to promise to tell the truth. By five years of age, children have the ability to demonstrate an understanding of the concept of keeping a promise and the significance of making a promise (Lyon, 2000). A number of studies have shown that eliciting a promise to tell the truth from children significantly increases the likelihood of truth-telling in subsequent interviews (Lyon & Dorado, 2008; Talwar et al., 2002; 2004). Lyon and Dorado (2008) examined the effect of eliciting a promise to tell the truth from children on subsequent reports of a misdemeanour during the target event of the study. Child participants were shown a toy and instructed not to touch it while the interviewer was out of the room. During the interviewer’s absence, a confederate entered the room, interacted with the child and engaged the child in mutual play with the toy. The confederate then informed the child that they may get into trouble if anyone found out that they had played with the toy.
When the interviewer returned, children were either instructed (i) to promise to tell the truth, (ii) reassured that they would not get into trouble if any transgression had occurred, or (iii) were given no instructions. Results indicated that eliciting a promise to tell the truth increased the rate of children’s disclosure that they had played with the toy, more so than the other conditions.

Similarly, a study by Talwar et al. (2002) examined the effect of children promising to tell the truth on their subsequent tendency to lie. Children aged three to seven years participated individually in a guessing game and were given the opportunity to cheat (by looking at the answer) when the interviewer exited the room. When the interviewer returned, children were assessed on their conceptual knowledge of truth and lies and/or asked to promise to tell the truth. The interviewer then asked the children if they had peeked at the answer to the game. Results from this study indicated that eliciting a promise to tell the truth significantly reduced the likelihood of children lying about the target event, compared to children who were assessed on their comprehension of truth and lies.

**Episodic Memory Training**

3. EPISODIC MEMORY TRAINING

Begin by saying: Let’s get started. First I’d like to get to know you better.

If the child discloses abuse early (prior to this stage), listen to what child has to say and don’t interrupt, and acknowledge what (s)he has said. If you believe the child will disclose again after this stage, say: *Thank you for telling me that, it’s important and I do want you to tell me about that, but first I’d just like to spend a few minutes getting to know you better. Is that alright with you?*

*Figure 2.3. The Standard Interview Method: Episodic memory training*
The next phase of most interview protocols is referred to as the episodic memory training phase, or the practice narrative. In the SIM protocol, the child is prompted to recall a neutral or pleasant event that was recently experienced. This phase has three main benefits. First, it allows the interviewer to build rapport with the child and attempt to create a relaxed, trusting and supportive environment (Lamb et al., 2007). A child who is in an unfamiliar setting with an unfamiliar interviewer may be reluctant to describe traumatic, embarrassing or intimate experiences (Saywitz, Goodman, Nicholas & Moan, 1991). Studies that examined the impact of rapport building have shown that children who have familiarised themselves with their interviewer and are less anxious around them tend to be less suggestive later in the interview than children who remained apprehensive towards their interviewer (Hershkowitz, et al., 2006). Children’s responses also tended to be longer and more accurate when they were familiar with their interviewer (Hershkowitz, 2009).

Second, the practice narrative phase prepares children for their role later in the interview. As with ground rules, the child is taught throughout the practice narrative that s/he will be doing the majority of talking during the interview. The practice narrative is the first point in the interview where the control is transferred to the child. This empowerment can motivate the child to provide more detail when the abusive event is discussed later in the interview, as s/he feels listened to and valued (Roberts, Brubacher, Powell & Price, 2011).

Finally, the practice narrative phase prepares the child for the interview process and allows the interviewer to establish the conversational flow that will continue for the rest of the interview (Davies et al., 1996). The interviewer uses open-ended questions in this phase, mimicking the style of questioning that will later be used if the child discloses abuse. Research has shown that children who are prompted to engage in an open-ended practice narrative provide a greater number of details during the substantive phase of the
interview than children who engage in a practice narrative characterised by fewer open-ended questions, or children who receive no practice at all (Price, Roberts & Collins, 2013; Sternberg et al., 1997). The most likely reason for this effect is that use of the non-judgmental and supportive open-ended questioning style in the pre-substantive interview phase helps to build rapport, primes the child to the task demand (i.e., the mental processes underpinning elaborate responding) and orientates the interviewer to the child’s level of narrative language competency (Lamb et al., 2008; Price et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2011; Roberts, Lamb & Sternberg, 2004; Sternberg et al., 1997).

Choosing an Event for Episodic Memory Training and Establishing the Frequency of the Event

3a. Choosing an Event

Tell me something fun you’ve done recently.

If the child does not respond: Tell me something you like to do.

If the child still does not respond, offer two suggestions (preferably provided by the caregiver prior to the interview) with a suggestive tone, and then repeat the prompt again. E.g., “Sport? Fishing? Tell me something you like to do.”

3b. Prompting details about a specific occurrence

Have you (done/gone to) X one time or more than one time?

(If repeated event) Tell me all about the last time you did [EVENT].

If the child refers to a specific occurrence of event (e.g., I did ballet last Tuesday), go with that occurrence, as opposed to ‘the last time’.

(If single event) Tell me all about when you did [EVENT].

Figure 2.4. The Standard Interview Method: Choosing an event
The practice narrative in the SIM protocol commences with a broad open-ended question inviting the child to recall a ‘fun’ recently experienced event. It is important that the topic children are prompted to recall is considered appropriate for all of the diverse cultures across Australia and internationally. In most other protocols, interviewers are directed to ask children about their last birthday, or a recent holiday celebration (e.g., NICHD protocol, 2011; State of Michigan Forensic Interviewing Protocol, 2011). However, children from some cultures may not celebrate birthdays or specified holidays in a special way, so they may struggle to provide a narrative around such events. Maltreated children may not wish to recall particular events, as these may be when the abuse occurred. This may lead to feelings of shame, embarrassment or other negative emotions from children and result in a breakdown of rapport with interviewers. Prompting recall of a ‘fun’ event in the SIM protocol ensures than an appropriate event for each individual child will be nominated. The SIM protocol also recommends particular questions for interviewers to use with children who struggle to nominate an event for their practice narrative. Although there is no published research on the utility of these questions, they were developed after years of observation of both field interviews and laboratory studies (Brubacher et al., 2011).

In cases where the child is still unable to nominate an appropriate innocuous event to discuss, most interview protocols direct interviewers to ask the child about what happened yesterday or today, that is, before the child arrived at the interview. Interviewers should only question the child about what happened yesterday/today as a last resort, as it can present problems in the interview. First, directing the child to recall what happened yesterday/today might elicit negative feelings or thoughts for children. That is, the child may have encountered something unpleasant that s/he does not wish to discuss, or s/he may have experienced an episode of abuse yesterday/today that will prompt an early disclosure in the interview. Second, when recalling what happened yesterday/today,
children tend to use language that indicates that they are describing a specific occasion. However, even though children may be referring to a specific event, the information itself is usually generic (e.g., ‘I woke up, I had breakfast, I brushed my teeth, I got dressed,’ etc.). Eliciting generic information is problematic, as when discussing the abusive event later in the interview, children are required to describe one occurrence with a reasonable degree of precision and distinguish it from other occurrences (Guadagno, Powell & Wright, 2006; Roberts, 2002, S v. R, 1989). Whilst there is no definitive research to support the limited utility of questioning children about yesterday/today, general feedback and observations from interviews in the field have indicated that it is less beneficial than discussing a ‘fun’ event nominated by the children themselves.

After confirming the event to be recalled in the practice narrative, the SIM protocol directs interviewers to ask the frequency question to establish whether the child’s nominated event is one that has been experienced once or on more than one occurrence. Best practice interviewing guidelines state that the frequency of an event should be determined by asking the question, “Have you done/gone to [EVENT] one time or more than one time?” (Brubacher, Powell & Roberts, 2014; La Rooy et al., 2015; Lyon, 2005; the State of Michigan Forensic Interviewing Protocol, 2011). A child’s answer to this question allows the interviewer to direct children to recall one specific incident (or the only incident), rather than narrate about the event in generic terms.

Prompting children to recall episodic information (i.e., details about one episode of a repeated event) about a neutral or positive event is extremely beneficial for the substantive stage, later in the interview. Allowing children to practise episodic recall increases the amount of incident-specific information they report when interviewed about the abusive event (Brubacher, Roberts & Powell, 2011; Roberts et al., 2011). One study that examined the effect of episodic or generic recall during children’s practice narratives on subsequent recall of an experienced event was that by Brubacher and colleagues. Child
participants experienced a sequence of activities on either one occasion or on four separate occasions. On the last (or only) session, children participated in an interview, which included a practice narrative phase. The practice narrative phase consisted of a) generic prompting, where children were asked to describe what usually happens during a repeated activity in their daily lives (e.g., weekly swimming lessons), b) episodic prompting, where children were asked to recall one time they remembered best, as well as one other occasion, of a repeated event in their daily lives, or, c) asking children to recall a one-time experienced novel event. The interviewer then questioned the children about the sequence of activities that they had participated in, using open-ended, non-leading prompts. Results indicated that children who practised using episodic prompting (recalling the time they remembered best of a repeated event) provided more incident-specific details about the sequence of activities than those children who had practised using generic prompting or were prompted about a novel event (Brubacher et al., 2011).

The frequency question also exposes children to a style of question, which will be asked later in the interview in relation to the abusive event, and provides them with an opportunity to respond. Practice at responding to questions throughout the practice narrative has been shown to have a positive effect on children’s performance when they are subsequently questioned about their abusive (or target) events (Price et al., 2013).

**Eliciting the Narrative**

The final instruction provided in the SIM protocol regarding the practice narrative is a list of suggested open-ended questions that the interviewer may use to prompt for a narrative account. Open-ended questions encourage elaborate, spontaneous descriptions and details (Saywitz & Snyder, 1996; Sternberg et al., 1997; Sternberg et al., 2001). When given the opportunity to familiarise themselves with open-ended questions during
the practice narrative phase, children produce longer and more informative responses in their subsequent interview about the abusive, or target, event (Price et al. 2013; Sternberg et al., 1997). For example, Sternberg et al. (1997) showed that children who were exposed to open-ended questions when providing a practice narrative included two and a half times as many details and words in response to the first open-ended question regarding a target event later in the interview than children who were asked specific questions. In a similar study by Price, Collins and Roberts (2013), children discussed a neutral event, prompted by either a high or low proportion of open-ended questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3d. Useful prompts for eliciting a narrative:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use any of the following prompts to encourage the child to talk about the event for 3-5 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What happened then?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What happened next?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What happened after that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tell me more about…?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What else happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• And then what happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tell me everything that happened from the time (portion of event)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What happened when…?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tell me more about the part where…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You said X. Tell me more about X.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Encourage the child to report what happened, as opposed to descriptive information.

Figure 2.5. The Standard Interview Method: Useful prompts for eliciting a narrative
Children who were exposed to more open-ended questions during this practice provided significantly more information in their subsequent reports of alleged abuse than children who received fewer open-ended questions in the practice narrative stage. The more informative children were also willing to talk for longer in response to each of the interviewer’s prompts. An additional benefit of the practice narrative, identified in Price et al.’s study, was that interviewers who asked more open-ended questions during this phase asked fewer questions overall in the interview about alleged abuse, therefore providing the space and time for the children to do the talking.

Extensive research has been conducted to examine the effect of various types of questions asked in investigative interviews with child witnesses. Lamb and colleagues, in particular, have published several studies that have continuously indicated that over half of the informative and forensically relevant details provided by children during investigative interviews of alleged abuse were in response to open-ended prompts. Such questions have also been shown to heighten the accuracy of children’s accounts (Dale, Loftus & Rathbun, 1978; Dent & Stephenson, 1979; Hutcheson, Baxter, Telfer & Warden, 1995; Lamb & Fauchier, 2001; Orbach & Lamb, 2001), and to increase the rate of spontaneous disclosure of sexual abuse (see Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Esplin & Horowitiz, 2007 for review).

The list of suggested prompts provided in the SIM protocol was developed after considering the research surrounding what constitutes a ‘good’ open-ended question. A ‘good’ open-ended question is summarised by the acronym S.A.F.E. – (i) simple language, (ii) absence of specific detail, (iii) flexibility in allowing the child to choose what to report, and (iv) encourages an elaborate response (Powell & Snow, 2007). ‘Good’ open-ended prompts should also avoid inclusion of pronouns, where possible. Although most children have a basic understanding of common pronouns such as ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘he’ and ‘that’ by three or four years of age, full comprehension of pronouns, and the ability to
use them correctly, develops slowly over time (Walker, 1999). Children may not fully understand, or be skilled at correctly identifying, pronouns until the pre-teenage years (Walker, 1999).

Finally, a ‘good’ open-ended question should elicit story grammar, which is the structure and components of a narrative that ensures a story is logical (Feltis, Powell, Snow & Hughes-Scholes, 2009; Stein & Glenn, 1979). Feltis et al. (2010) examined 34 police interviews with children aged between five and 15 years who disclosed alleged abuse. Children’s responses to interviewer prompts were classified according to the proportion of story grammar details that they contained. Open-ended questions that ‘cast the net wide’ for the child, or asked the child to expand on a previously disclosed detail were identified as the most effective open-ended questions for eliciting story grammar. Questions that invited the child to clarify a previously mentioned concept (e.g., “What do you mean by touched?”) or sought a description of the next detail within a sequence elicited less story grammar.

One unique aspect of the SIM protocol that differs from other child interview protocols is that it provides guidelines around the length of time that the practice narrative should last. As previously mentioned, it is essential for interviewers to ensure that sufficient rapport building is conducted with children. However, because young children have short attention spans and limited cognitive resources, provision of an extensive narrative may become counterproductive (Davies, Westcott & Horan, 2000; Hershkowitz, 2009; Teoh & Lamb, 2010). Excessive use of children’s cognitive resources when providing a practice narrative may result in inattentiveness during questioning about alleged abuse (Hershkowitz, 2009; Roberts et al., 2004). For example, Davies et al. (2000) found that rapport building sessions that lasted longer than eight minutes resulted in a decrease in children’s attention later in the interview. Sessions that were less than eight minutes elicited longer answers from children in the substantive stage of the
interview. Similarly, Teoh and Lamb (2010) found a negative correlation between the length of the practice narrative and children’s communication when questioned about their alleged abuse. In order to keep children as focused as possible throughout the interview, while still providing time to build rapport, the SIM protocol advises restricting the practice narrative phase to between three and five minutes.

The Substantive Phase

The next stage common to most interview protocols is the substantive phase, where the topic of concern is discussed. First, in the SIM protocol, a neutral prompt (“Tell me what you have come to talk about”) is given to gauge the child’s understanding of the interview. This non-leading prompt allows children to spontaneously report their topic of concern (Poole & Lamb, 1998; Wilson & Powell, 2001). Indeed, such a prompt typically elicits information about the alleged abuse, particularly from children whose disclosures of abuse led to the interviews being conducted (Powell & Snow, 2007). It also reminds children that they will be talking for the majority of the time as the interviewers are naïve about what has occurred and must be informed.

Although research has indicated that the majority of children who have previously disclosed abuse (i.e., to an informant) understand the purpose of the interview (Sternberg et al., 2001), some children may be unaware of the purpose, or choose to withhold such information for a number of reasons (e.g., fear of disclosing, a desire to protect the perpetrator, or a lack of understanding that the abuse is wrong). In such cases, the majority of protocols, including the SIM protocol, direct interviewers to use more specific prompts to introduce the abuse whilst avoiding reference to the offence or alleged offender (e.g., “I understand something may have happened to you. Did something

4. THE SUBSTANTIVE PHASE
Thank you for telling me about [EVENT]. Now let’s talk about why you’re here today. Tell me what you’ve come to talk about.

**Step 1. Establish the interviewees understanding of the process of the interview.**

**Interviewer:** “Tell me what you’ve come to talk to me about today.”

**Child:** “To tell you about...”

**Interviewer:** Ask open-ended questions.

**Child:** “I don’t know.”

**Step 2. Use back-up questions to establish whether the child knows s/he is being interviewed about.**

**Phase 1.** Seek acknowledgement from the child about whether the interviewer’s information is true.

**Child:** “Yes.”

**Phase 2.** Ask open-ended questions.

**Child:** “No.”

**Phase 2.** Use further back-up questions.

**Step 3. Techniques to elicit a disclosure of abuse.**

Ask a series of non-specific, relevant questions linked to the circumstances that led to the referral.

**Step 4. Proceed to closure phase of the protocol.**

*Figure 2.6. The Standard Interview Method: The substantive phase*
happen to you? Tell me everything that happened to you from the beginning to the end”; La Rooy et al., 2013).

Introducing details that were previously not mentioned by the child can risk eliciting a false account and could jeopardise a potential court case (Powell, 2003; Powell & Snow, 2007). Children who are suggestible may incorporate inaccurate information provided by the interviewer into their own accounts to please the interviewer or because they view the interviewer as an authority figure and feel compelled to agree with him/her (Lamb, Sternberg & Esplin, 1994; Wilson & Powell, 2001). The risk of children complying with misleading information is heightened when the information is introduced in the form on an open-ended question. Open-ended presumptive questions (e.g., “Tell me all about what happened when the man hurt you at the pool,” if the child had not previously mentioned being hurt by the man at the pool) are one of the most harmful question types (Agnew & Powell, 2004; Henry & Gudjonsson, 2007; Sharman & Powell, 2012).

There are scenarios, however, in which it is necessary for interviewers to introduce previously undisclosed information. For example, if a child is unaware of the purpose of the interview, introducing mildly leading information could save valuable time by focusing the child onto the topic of concern and may prevent the interviewer from having to ask further leading questions. It is important in these cases that open-ended presumptive questions are avoided and that new information previously not disclosed by the child is confirmed as accurate, before prompting for a narrative (Powell & Snow, 2007).
Establishing the Frequency of the Abuse

4a. IDENTIFYING MULTIPLE INCIDENTS

Once the child has produced an abuse-related utterance, ask:

Did X [abuse as disclosed by the child in his/her words] happen one time or more than one time?

(‘Did that happen...’ is appropriate in circumstances where a child’s initial disclosure has been very complex and using the child’s words would produce a very lengthy and awkward prompt).

Figure 2.7. The Standard Interview Method: Identifying multiple incidents

After a disclosure of alleged abuse has been elicited from a child, the SIM indicates that the interviewer should establish the frequency of the abusive event by asking ‘Did [the abuse] happen one time or more than one time?’ This question is a standard element of all forensic interview protocols (Lamb et al., 2007; Lamb et al., 2008; Orbach et al., 2000; Wilson & Powell, 2001) and must be asked as soon as the child has finished their initial disclosure to the interviewer. There are three reasons for this. First, eliciting a statement from the child about whether the abuse occurred one time or more than one time will minimise any interpretation from the interviewer of ambiguous statements made by the child around the frequency of the event. Second, by asking the frequency question, the interviewer will have a greater understanding of how many incidents the child’s narrative may include. This in turn will afford the interviewer better time management throughout the interview, so s/he can plan how much time should be
spent questioning the child on each abusive incident accordingly. Finally, by identifying whether the abuse has occurred one time or more than one time, the interviewer can direct the child away from generic recall about the abuse and elicit information about one specific incident at a time. Incident-specific details (e.g., the severity of the abuse, the age of the victim) are necessary in child sexual abuse cases to determine the charges that can be laid against the offender(s), give an opportunity for the alleged offender(s) to provide an alibi and defend themselves, and can also impact sentencing of the offender(s) if found guilty (Powell, Roberts & Guadagno, 2007).

**Eliciting Information About Specific Episodes**

As discussed previously, when children report that an abusive event has occurred multiple times, the SIM protocol directs the interviewer to elicit information about specific episodes of the abuse. Distinguishing between separate episodes of the same event is sometimes difficult for children and often results in details from other occurrences drifting into the occurrence being recalled (Brubacher, Glisic, Roberts & Powell, 2011; Powell, Roberts, Ceci & Hembrooke, 1999; Powell & Thomson, 1996; Roberts & Powell, 2001). As with most other interview protocols, the SIM protocol instructs the interviewer to initiate a child’s narrative about a specific episode by asking a non-leading open-ended question about the last time the abuse occurred (i.e., ‘Tell me about the last time’). After this narrative has been exhausted, the interviewer should then prompt the child to recall the first time that the abuse occurred.

There are several reasons as to why children should initially be questioned about the first and last episodes of abuse. First, it has been established that if the abuse has occurred on more than one occasion, the only episodes that the interviewer can safely refer to (without first eliciting more information from the child) are the first and last times
(Brubacher, Malloy, Lamb & Roberts, 2013; Powell & McMeeken, 1998). It would be incorrect for the interviewer to assume the abuse has occurred on more than two occasions. Asking children to recall the first and last occurrences is therefore the least harmful phrasing an interviewer can use when questioning about multiple episodes. Second, research indicates that children develop the ability to use and understand the meaning of ‘first’ and ‘last’ as young as three years of age (French & Nelson, 1985; Friedman & Seely, 1976). The majority of children being interviewed will therefore understand the concepts of ‘first’ and ‘last’. Third, the primacy-recency effect, whereby information that is presented first or last in a sequence is most memorable, is also evident at a young age (Brown, Brown & Caci, 1981). The short time delay between the last episode of abuse and the interview (in most cases) allows children to access information about the last occurrence more easily than other occurrences (Flin, Boon, Know & Bull, 1992; Poole & White, 1993). When children experience abuse for the first time, it is a salient event, which is encoded in children’s memory and which again, allows the episode to be retrieved more easily from other memories of the abuse (Lamb et al., 2008; Powell, Thomson & Ceci, 2003). Therefore, the first and last episodes of abuse are most easily recalled compared to other occurrences.

Questioning children about the first and last occurrences of abuse can, however, pose some problems for children. The first episode of repeated abuse, for some children, may have been a long time ago. If the child was young at the time of the first incident, this experience may not have been encoded properly or stored well in memory. Recall of the last episode of abuse also risks decay, as the recency effect (i.e., the finding that information presented last in a sequence is most memorable) is sensitive to the time interval between the event and the interview (Bjork & Whitten, 1974). The accuracy of children’s memories of the first and last episodes of abuse is also vulnerable to post-event
4b. Eliciting information about specific episodes

Immediately ask for information about specific times using open-ended prompts to elicit narrative detail about the abuse.

i. Tell me about the last time.
[Use open-ended prompts to exhaust recall for the last time.] Once the child cannot report any more narrative information:

ii. Tell me about the first time.
[Use open-ended prompts to exhaust recall for the first time.] Once the child cannot report any more narrative information:

iii. You’ve told me about the first time and the last time. Can you tell me about another time?*
[* If the child says no, but has spontaneously mentioned another time, use the prompt, ‘Earlier you said there was a time X (e.g., in the basement). Tell me about the time X.’]

[If yes] Tell me about (that/X) time.

Continue to use open-ended prompts to elicit narrative detail about this time until recall has been exhausted. Then say:

iv. Can you tell me another time?
[If yes, repeat steps above. If no, move to the break]
contamination if the abuse ceased and the child delayed disclosure (Lamb et al., 2008). Finally, children may find it challenging to identify unique features of any specific occurrence of abuse, if the abuse has been repeated frequently and was similar on each occasion.

The final component of the substantive phase of the interview is when the interviewer asks the child whether there is another occurrence of abuse that the child can recall. In the SIM protocol, it is recommended that this question is phrased, ‘Can you tell me about another time?’ Although phrasing open-ended questions in a yes/no manner (i.e., ‘Can you…’) does not adhere to best practice interviewing guidelines and is generally not encouraged, in this instance, it is essential. Without the phrase ‘can you’ at the beginning of the question, asking children to recall another occurrence of abuse suggests to the child that there is another episode of abuse that s/he should disclose, which may not necessarily be the case. The interviewer’s assumption could potentially elicit a false narrative about another occurrence of abuse from a suggestible child.

If a child spontaneously reported that the abuse occurred more than two times, the child must still be asked in a yes/no fashion if s/he can remember another episode of abuse, to confirm this information. While children are moderately good at judging relative frequency (e.g., it has happened once/more than once/lots/a few times), they appear to be less skilled at judging numerical frequency and identifying the specific number of times an event has occurred (Sharman, Powell & Roberts, 2011). Therefore, even if a child reported that the abuse occurred a number of times, it is important to clarify this and not presume that the child was correct in their estimation.

The Break

After exhausting the child’s narrative(s), the SIM protocol specifies that the
5. BREAK

Breaks may be initiated at any point throughout the interview, but must be taken prior to asking specific questions.

**I’m going to the next room to check some things.** If you know you will only be a few minutes, say: **I won’t be long. It’s important not to talk to anyone about what we have been talking about in here.**

If you anticipate being out of the room for more than a few minutes, allow the child to return to their carer in the waiting room. Emphasise to the carer that they should not discuss the details of the interview with the child.

*Figure 2.9. The Standard Interview Method: The break*

Interviewer suspends the interview and takes a break. A break is taken irrespective of whether the child indicates that they are happy to continue until the interview is finished. Enforcing a break during the interview is beneficial for both children and interviewers. Throughout the interview, children are required to comprehend questions, and to retrieve and describe memories (Roberts et al., 2011). The cognitive skills that are required in these processes can involve considerable mental effort and can be taxing on children’s attention. A break from questioning will allow children to recuperate. During the break, the interviewer is given the opportunity to review the information gathered from the child and consult with the interview monitor (who has been observing the interview from another room through audio and visual equipment) to establish which (if any) details should be followed up (Lamb et al., 2008). Allowing the interviewer time to reflect on whether any forensically important information is missing from the child’s free narrative account may reduce the number of specific questions...
asked in the next stage of the interview. Here, as before, specific prompts are potentially more harmful than open-ended questions, as they tend to elicit less accurate information (Lamb et al., 1994; Lamb et al., 2003) and therefore should be kept to a minimum.

**Further Questioning**

At this stage in an interview, most protocols acknowledge that although specific questions are not ideal prompts for children, they are sometimes necessary to elicit specific details that children have otherwise not reported. The general format of questioning suggested in the SIM protocol is to follow any specific question with an open-ended question, which will allow the child to report information in his/her own words (Lamb et al., 2008; Powell & Snow, 2007; Saywitz, Lyon & Goodman, 2011; Sternberg, Lamb, Esplin, Orbach & Hershkowitz 2002).

The ability to identify what forensically relevant information is missing from children’s narratives is an important skill for interviewers to learn. Studies examining question types utilised in investigative interviews with children have found that interviewers typically have an overreliance on specific questions (Lamb et al., 1997; Powell, Fisher & Hughes-Scholes, 2008a; 2008b; Sternberg et al., 1997; Wright & Powell, 2006). An interviewer who depends on specific questions too much when interviewing children can reduce the chance of successful prosecution of children’s cases (Pipe, Orbach, Lamb, Abbott, & Stewart, 2013).

One study by Burrows, Powell & Anglim (2013) has identified that there are six categories of information deemed essential to elicit (or attempt to elicit) from children during investigative interviews about alleged sexual assault. These include identifying what offence occurred, when and where the offence occurred, who the alleged offender was (including a description if the offender was unknown), the identity of any witnesses and information that
6. FURTHER QUESTIONING

If some central details of the allegation are still missing or unclear after exhausting the open-ended questions, further questioning is needed. First focus the child's attention on the detail mentioned and the specific occurrence you are referring to, and then ask the focused question. Discuss the occurrences in the same order as during open questioning and exhaust each before moving on.

General Format of Specific Questions:

You mentioned [person/object/activity] [occurrence], [completion of the focused question],[Child response][Open-ended prompt].

Table of examples:

The table below provides a list of examples of questions that you may need to ask at this stage of the interview. The number of these questions required will depend on what the child has reported in their free narrative, your jurisdiction, and your skills as an interviewer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What to follow up on</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To confirm location of event</td>
<td>You mentioned you were at the farm last time. Where exactly were you? [Wait for response] Tell me what happened at the farm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To confirm people present at</td>
<td>Earlier you mentioned that a friend was there the time it happened in the shed. What is her/his name? [Wait for response] Tell me about the part where X (person’s name) was there, the time it happened in the shed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an event</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To confirm where touching</td>
<td>You mentioned that he touched you the last time. Did he touch you over your clothes or under your</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


| To confirm body part identification | Do you have another name for [child’s term]?  
Where is your [child’s term]?  
What do you use your [child’s term] for? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To confirm details of prior disclosure</td>
<td>I heard that you talked to X at [time/place]. Did you talk to X at [time/place]? [Wait for response] Tell me everything that happened when you talked to X at [time/place].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To confirm medical evidence of physical abuse</td>
<td>I see/heard that you have [marks/bruises] on your [body part]. [If you have not seen the marks Do you have marks/bruises on your [body part]?] Do you remember how you got those marks/bruises? [Wait for response] Tell me about how you got those marks/bruises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To find out what the child said during first disclosure</td>
<td>[After confirming who the child disclosed to] Tell me everything that you talked about.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2.10.** The Standard Interview Method: Further questioning
could uncover potential DNA evidence (e.g., a description of bedding that the child and/or the offender lay on during a recent offence). To assist interviewers in understanding how much information around each of these categories is required, further guidelines have been developed by Burrows and colleagues from a prosecution perspective. First, if the child uses a colloquial non-anatomical term for genitalia that a layperson would understand, the term does not need to be clarified. If the term is not immediately comprehensible to a lay person, the interviewer should determine whether someone else (e.g., a non-suspect guardian) could explain the child’s meaning for the term. If the term cannot be explained through any other means, the child should be asked to clarify the term through simple questioning, (e.g., “Do you have another name for your mini?”; Burrows & Powell, 2014b).

Second, prior to prompting the child for more information through specific questions, the interviewer must consider whether the nature of the evidence to be elicited requires identification or recognition by the child. That is, if the child is familiar with the aspect to be clarified (e.g., the identity of the offender), the interviewer should seek only so much information as is required to demonstrate the child’s basis or grounds for recognition. If the aspect is unfamiliar to the child, (e.g., a foreign location as the site of the alleged abuse), then further information, such as descriptive detail, would be necessary to facilitate the police investigation and enable identification (Burrows, Powell & Benson, in press).

Another line of questioning provided in the SIM protocol during the further questioning stage is around the child’s initial disclosure (i.e., to the informant). This is not necessary in all jurisdictions across Australia. Information on the child’s initial disclosure allows evidence to be gathered around what the child disclosed, whom he/she disclosed to and the child’s demeanour during disclosure. This information can be presented in court for prosecution in order to corroborate the child’s account. Disclosure information is particularly important in cases of sexual abuse, where ‘hearsay’ (i.e., where the child told someone else about what happened during the abuse) can, in certain circumstances, be used as evidence in the trial.
Closure and a Neutral Event

7. CLOSURE (Lamb et al., 2007)

You have told me lots of things today. Thank you for talking to me today, you have been very helpful in answering my questions.

i. Is there anything else I should know?
   [wait for an answer]

ii. Is there anything you want to tell me?
   [wait for an answer]

iii. Are there any questions you want to ask me?
   [wait for an answer]

iv. If you want to talk to me again, you can call me at this phone number. [Hand the child a card with your name and phone number].

8. NEUTRAL TOPIC

Close on a neutral topic – perhaps something the child or guardian mentioned they would do afterwards, or the rapport-building event (whichever is more fun) – for a minute or two. The purpose of this is simply to get the child thinking about something else.

It’s [specify time] and this interview is now complete.

Figure 2.11. The Standard Interview Method: Closure and neutral topic

In the SIM protocol, the interview is concluded by asking a number of questions that provide a therapeutic transition for children from discussing their abuse to finalising the interview. At this stage, children are asked if they have anything further that they wish to report. Although the majority of children who are asked this question will respond that they
have nothing more to report, a small percentage of children will have more information that they wish to provide. It is therefore critical to ask this question to all children, in order to obtain more potentially forensically relevant details from the minority. The SIM protocol then directs the interviewer to complete the interview by asking the child about a neutral topic. This is soothing for children after discussing the abusive event.

Summary

Providing a structured protocol is critical for the success of any reform that aims to improve investigative interviewing of child witnesses (Cyr & Lamb, 2007; Lamb et al., 2009; Orbach et al., 2000; Sternberg et al., 2001). Using a framework throughout interviews can help interviewers to maximise the accuracy and detail of information elicited through children’s narratives. The SIM protocol, as with most other commonly used protocols, is comprised of various prompts designed to enhance children’s accounts. These prompts have been widely supported throughout the literature. However, the provision of a structured protocol is just one element that has been identified as essential for a successful reform of the investigative interviewing of children. The following chapter provides an overview of the other element required for success: an effective interviewer training system.
CHAPTER 3 – A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON TRAINING OF INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWERS

Over the past two decades, research surrounding the training of child interviewers has been a major focus in the investigative interview arena. This research was considered and drawn on when developing and implementing the new reform, which this thesis evaluates. The purpose of the current chapter is to present an overview of the investigative interview training literature, which can be summarised under four domains: (i) measuring best practice interviewing, (ii) adherence to best practice interview guidelines, (iii) the essential elements of a successful training program, and (iv) individual training exercises associated with improved performance. Each of these domains will be discussed in turn. Prior to this, the chapter commences with an overview of the major evaluations of training conducted over the past 15 years.

Prior Evaluations of Interview Training Programs

The majority of past research on training of investigative interviewers has consisted of evaluating different training programs. A brief overview of the major evaluations of child interview training programs over the past 15 years is presented in Table 1. The table presents information on what the training program within each study consisted of, how the success of the training program was measured and the main findings of each study. The table will be referred to throughout the chapter.

Measuring Best Practice Interviewing

In chapter 2, an introduction and justification for best practice interviewing, translated into the SIM interview protocol, was provided. This included the delivery of ground rules,
Table 1. Summary of Major Training Evaluations Conducted Between 1999 and 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Training program</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Price & Roberts (2011)            | Two days of face-to-face instructional modules and practice with colleagues, whilst receiving feedback  
Weekly written and verbal (20-30 minutes) feedback on interview transcripts  
Two-day refresher course two months after face-to-face  
Bi-weekly written & verbal feedback for six months. | 12 | Yes |
|                                  |                                                                                 |    | Yes                          | Pre-training:  
Open-ended questions- .10  
Specific yes/no questions- .74  
Post-refresher:  
Open-ended questions- .19  
Specific yes/no questions- .60 | |
| Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Espelin & Mitchell (2002a) | Five days of face-to-face training, which included roleplaying with a confederate  
Written feedback provided on interview transcripts  
Individual and group training was conducted every 4-8 weeks on adherence to the protocol, and a review of problematic cases and how to address these. | 8  | Yes |
|                                  |                                                                                 |    | Yes                          | Feedback condition:  
Open-ended questions- .34  
Specific questions- .59  
Leading questions- .07  
No feedback condition:  
Open-ended questions- .2  
Specific questions- .7  
Leading questions- .11  | |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Training Methodology</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Significant Increase</th>
<th>Pre-training: Open-ended questions</th>
<th>Pre-training: Specific questions</th>
<th>Post-training: Open-ended questions</th>
<th>Post-training: Specific questions</th>
<th>Leading questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rischke, Roberts &amp; Price (2011)</td>
<td>Two days of face-to-face lectures and practice in using open-ended questions</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.46</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Two months of weekly written and verbal (20-30 minutes) feedback on interview transcripts</td>
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<td>Two-day refresher course two months after face-to-face session</td>
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<td></td>
<td>For the following two months, feedback lessened and was given on a by-request basis. Trainees were provided with peer reviews.</td>
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<td>Two-months refresher course two months after face-to-face session</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lamb, Sternberg, Ohrbach, Herskowitz, Horowitz &amp; Esplin (2002b)</td>
<td>Two-days of seminars, simulated interviews &amp; discussions Verbal and written feedback received on field interviews Individual and group sessions held every four weeks, which discussed adherence to the protocol, and a review of problematic cases and how to address these.</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cederborg, Alm, de Silva Nises &amp; Lamb (2013)</td>
<td>Three days of training every month for six months, where question types and interview structure were taught Participation in simulated interviews (with fellow participants playing the role of the child) and field interviews, whilst receiving extensive supervision and feedback.</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freeman &amp; Morris (1999)</td>
<td>Three two-hour workshops across three weeks, which consisted of lectures, role-playing, and discussions.</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.37</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pre-training: Open-ended questions- .2</td>
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<td>Specific questions- .58</td>
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<td>Refresher training: Open-ended questions- .37</td>
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<td>Specific questions- .46</td>
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<td>Significant increase on knowledge quiz.</td>
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<td>Open-ended questions: Pre-training- .08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Training Details</td>
<td>Pre-training</td>
<td>Post-training</td>
<td>Follow-up</td>
<td>Specific Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aldridge &amp; Cameron (1999)</td>
<td>One-week intensive training course with lectures, role-plays &amp; interviews with</td>
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<td></td>
<td>children about innocuous events</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Half-day follow-up training session every three months.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warren, Woodall, Thomas,</td>
<td>Ten-day course of lectures and how to self-assess.</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>Nunno, Keeney, Larson, et al.</td>
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<td>(1999)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Powell, Fisher &amp;</td>
<td>Two days of training, which involved lectures and simulated practice interviews,</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>Hughes-Scholes (2008a)</td>
<td>with either an actor or a fellow trainee.</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Powell, Fisher</td>
<td>Six hours of training, in one of three conditions</td>
<td>84</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Aldridge & Cameron (1999) No significant difference on interviewer performance or question types after training.

Warren, Woodall, Thomas, Nunno, Keeney, Larson, et al. (1999) Pre-training: .17 open-ended questions .24 ‘wh’ questions .74 yes/no questions Post-training: .25 open-ended questions .32 ‘wh’ questions .66 yes/no questions

Powell, Fisher & Hughes-Scholes (2008a) Open-ended questions with a trained actor: Pre - .16 Post - .83 Follow - .66

Open-ended questions with an untrained colleague: Pre - .16 Post - .73 Follow - .49

Powell, Fisher & Open-ended questions pre-training: Post - .35
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Feedback Type</th>
<th>Duration and Description</th>
<th>Feedback Description</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hughes-Scholes (2008b)</td>
<td>Intra/Post/No Feedback</td>
<td>Ten-minute interview with three minutes of feedback post-interview</td>
<td>Intra group: Thirteen-minute interview with six 30-second blocks of feedback throughout the interview No feedback group: Thirteen-minute interview with no feedback.</td>
<td>Intra-.29 No feedback-.36 Open-ended questions post-training: Post-.73 Intra-.83 No feedback-.64 Open-ended questions at follow-up: Post-.56 Intra-.52 No feedback-.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyr &amp; Lamb (2009)</td>
<td>One week training session, with lectures and role-playing</td>
<td>Written feedback on field interviews conducted with children about alleged abuse.</td>
<td>Pre-training: Open-ended questions-.12 Specific questions-.78 Suggestive questions-.10 Post-training: Open-ended questions-.48 Specific questions-.45 Suggestive questions-.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dion &amp; Cyr (2008)</td>
<td>Five-day intensive program with lectures and participation in five increasingly difficult role-plays</td>
<td>Written feedback on field interviews conducted with children about alleged abuse.</td>
<td>Pre-training: Open-ended questions-.13 Specific questions-.74 Suggestive questions-.13 Post-training: Open-ended questions-.44 Specific questions-.50 Suggestive questions-.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myklebust &amp; Bjørklund (2006)</td>
<td>Specialist investigative interviewing of children training is offered at two subsequent levels at the Norwegian Police University College: Level 1- theoretical and practical training, including lectures and role-playing with group feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td>Level 1 proportion of questions asked: Open-ended questions-.09 Specific questions-.91 Level 2 proportion of questions</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Level 2- more formal instruction and expert individual feedback.

| Powell, Guadagno & Benson (2014) | Twelve three-hour modules delivered through computer-based learning activities. The modules involved readings, interactive exercises and conducting mock interviews. | 68 | Both | Open-ended questions: Pre-training - .47 Post-training - .79 3 month follow-up - .73 |
the eliciting of a practice narrative, and the use of non-leading open-ended questions, which encourage an elaborate response without dictating the specific information required. While chapter 2 provided the precise wording that is included in the SIM protocol, elements within most common child interview protocols are similar. These elements are usually quantified to provide measures of an interviewer’s adherence to best practice interviewing. For example, the incidence of question types is tallied and the presence of interview components - such as ground rules and the eliciting of a practice narrative - are usually noted in evaluations. Some previous evaluations have also examined the number of forensically relevant details provided by the child (Dion & Cyr, 2008; Lamb et al., 2002a, 2002b; Luther, Snook, Barron & Lamb, 2014; Price & Roberts, 2011; Warren et al., 1999). However, a more recent measure of best practice interviewing relates to the evidential information sought by the interviewer.

The measure of evidential information, relevant in jurisdictions where the witness interview is presented as evidence-in-chief, evolved from a new generation of research, which focused on prosecutors’ concerns about long and poorly focused interviews with irrelevant questioning about specific details (Burrows & Powell, 2014a; Cashmore & Trimboli, 2005; McConachy, 2002). Prosecutors have argued that coherency and relevance of the information elicited is more important than the quantity of detail. With longer interviews there is more detail that could be used by the defence to undermine the reliability of the child’s account during cross-examination (Burrows & Powell, 2014a). As such, some recent measures of best practice interviewing document whether the interviewer recognised what evidential information was required from both an investigative and prosecution perspective. Important details included the identity of the offender, and the nature, location and timing of the offence. Whether the
interviewer attempted to elicit these details in an appropriate manner while refraining from the pursuit of irrelevant minutiae (e.g., a description of the offender, when he has been identified as the child’s biological father) is also considered (Burrows, Powell & Anglim, 2013).

**Adherence to Best Practice Interview Guidelines**

Best practice interview guidelines suggest that interviewers should employ non-leading open-ended questions as much as possible. As illustrated in Table 1, the biggest issue facing evaluators has been closing the gap between recommended interview technique and actual practice. While the prevalence of leading questions is typically low, investigative interviewers tend to ask specific (rather than open-ended) questions, which risks contaminating children’s accounts. Most evaluations show an increase in the use of open-ended questions during training, however the overall proportion of open-ended questions tends to remain low, even after training. Half of the evaluation studies presented in Table 1 report average post-training open-ended question usage as 25% or less. Further, for the training programs that included a follow-up assessment, a decline in performance was generally evident within 12 weeks after training ceased (Lamb et al., 2002a, 2002b; Orbach et al., 2000; Sternberg et al., 2001; Price & Roberts, 2011; Rischke et al., 2011). In fact, one study found that trainee interviewers who showed good open-ended question usage immediately post-training, were at one month post-training no better at adhering to open-ended questions than trainees who had received no formal training in interviewing at all (Smith, Powell & Lum, 2009).
So why do interviewers fail to adhere to best practice guidelines? Research has indicated that there are a number of possible answers to this question. First, investigative interviewers may have beliefs that differ from those of eyewitness memory experts around what constitutes a ‘good’ child interviewer (Wright & Powell, 2007). Research by Wright and Powell elicited police officers’ perceptions of what makes a competent investigative interviewer in the area of child abuse, by conducting in-depth interviews with 23 police child interviewers. Results indicated a widespread belief that personal attributes, such as being relaxed, warm, easy-going, sensitive and attentive to the needs of others, are the most important characteristics of a competent interviewer. Such personality traits were deemed to be more important than knowledge of legislation and child development, and of interviewing techniques utilised. Conflicting views of what constitutes a ‘good’ interviewer could potentially help to explain the lack of adherence to best practice techniques by interviewers in the field (Wright, Powell & Ridge, 2007).

A second reason that may explain the gap between recommended and actual practice is that interviewers may have different perceptions about how to achieve expertise in interviewing (Wright & Powell, 2007). Research conducted by Powell and colleagues has suggested that interviewers believe that the highly specialised skills required for conducting an investigative interview with a child can be learnt ‘on the job’. ‘On the job’ learning consisted of practising field interviews and observing more experienced interviewers (Aarons, Powell & Browne, 2004; Guadagno, Powell & Wright, 2006; Wright & Powell, 2007). However, research has established that even those interviewers who are highly experienced do not predominantly rely on open-ended questions (Cederborg et al., 2013; Cyr & Lamb, 2009; Dion & Cyr, 2008; Lamb et al., 2002a; 2002b; Price &
Therefore a novice interviewer who attempts to learn the skill of interviewing by observing a more experienced colleague may acquire less desirable questioning techniques than those set out in the best practice interviewing guidelines.

Another reason that may explain interviewers’ lack of open-ended question usage is that there is widespread confusion amongst interviewers regarding the amount of specific detail required from a child’s narrative for successful prosecution. As explained in Chapter 2, there are six categories of information that Australian prosecutors have agreed should be followed up on in an interview with a child victim. The categories include the identity of the offender, what offence occurred, when and where the offence occurred, the identity of any witnesses and information that may lead to forensic evidence (Burrows, Powell & Benson, in press). Many interviewers believe that the detailed information required for each of these categories can only be elicited by asking highly specific questions (Guadagno et al., 2006; Wright & Powell, 2007). However, one concern of prosecutors about child interviews is that interviewers elicit too much minutiae detail through highly specific questions (e.g. ‘Where in the bedroom were you? How was your body? Which way was your body facing? What could you see when you were in that position? What did the wall look like? Describe the wallpaper’; Burrows & Powell, 2014a). A misunderstanding about what information and the level of specificity required for successful prosecution of child abuse cases, and how to elicit this information, may therefore contribute to interviewers’ reliance on specific (as opposed to open-ended) questions.
**Essential Elements of Training Programs**

Much research has been conducted in the investigative interview field around what makes a successful training program. Four elements have now been identified as essential in increasing and maintaining interviewing skills. First, an abundance of research has identified the need for trainees to be provided with a structured interview protocol, such as that outlined in Chapter 2 (Sternberg et al., 1997; Lamb et al., 2007, 2009; Orbach et al., 2000). The first study that examined the effect of introducing a structured protocol when training investigative interviewers was that by Sternberg et al. (1997). Sternberg et al.’s study demonstrated that by adhering to a protocol during the rapport-building phase of an interview, interviewers’ performance (with children aged five to 12 years) improved considerably. Improvement in performance, however, was only maintained during the rapport-building phase and quickly declined in the substantive phase of the interview (where there was no protocol to adhere to). In an extension of Sternberg et al.’s study, Sternberg, Lamb, Esplin and Baradaran (1999) instructed trainees to adhere to the protocol throughout an entire interview with children. Results showed that interviewers’ adherence to a structured protocol throughout the full length of investigative interviews with children significantly increased the use of open-ended questions and decreased the use of specific and suggestive prompts. Numerous studies have since replicated these results, indicating that when an interview protocol is provided, interviewers adhere to recommended practices more than interviewers who do not use a protocol (Cyr & Lamb, 2009; Lamb et al., 2007; Orbach et al., 2000; Sternberg et al., 2001).
The second element of a successful training program that may address the gap between recommended and actual practice is the delivery method. Most training programs involve one or two internal instructors (and the occasional academic expert) providing face-to-face lectures, during which trainees are largely passive participants. Learning is confined to one intensive block of time (e.g., the training time in the studies listed in Table 1 range from 6 consecutive hours to 10 consecutive days). This format potentially hinders trainees’ progress by restricting the degree to which individuals can progress at their own pace and take an active role in their learning. High student to teacher ratios provide limited opportunities to learn and practice interview skills and to receive immediate individualised feedback. Successful training programs therefore need to allow for learning to be spaced over time, with frequent rest intervals (Rohrer & Pashlet, 2007; Sisti, Glassi & Shors, 2007; Son, 2004).

The last two elements identified as key in a successful training program relate to the provision of expert feedback and the opportunity to practice. These elements are interrelated. Most training programs are compiled and delivered by practitioners who are assigned from within organisations, rotated regularly and have little opportunity to immerse themselves in the large volume of eyewitness memory, child development and human learning literature (Powell & Barnett, 2014). Without full understanding of that literature, there is usually dilution and miscommunication of the content (Clark, Kirschner & Sweller, 2012).

Knowing how to teach interviewing is a complex and rapidly evolving area of scientific research, as the skill must be deconstructed into various components to make optimal use of trainees’ cognitive resources. For example, interviewing children requires an understanding of what constitutes best practice interviewing (e.g., Cederborg et al., 2013; Myklebust & Bjørklund, 2006; Orbach et al., 2000;
Price & Roberts, 2011), the ability to identify various questions types (Powell, Benson, Sharman, Guadagno & Steinberg, 2013; Yii, Powell & Guadagno, 2012) the ability to remember various question stems (Price & Roberts, 2011; Powell, 2008; Rischke et al., 2011), and knowledge of what information should be elicited in an interview (Burrows et al., 2014; Mugford, Corey & Bennell, 2013).

Provision of expert feedback without a good understanding of the scientific human learning literature can be ineffective (or even detrimental) for trainee learning (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Feedback must involve active trainee participation (e.g., encouraging the trainee to generate solutions and put them into practise immediately) and be targeted at specific behaviour (Powell et al., 2008a). Actors who play the role of the child in mock interviews must be skilled at providing standardised responses to certain prompts and tailoring the difficulty level to the individual trainee interviewer to minimise potential rehearsal of errors (Forgey, Badger, Gilbert & Hansen, 2013; Sharman, Hughes-Scholes, Powell & Guadagno, 2012). Overall, the skill required in teaching child witness interviewing has been underestimated by most organisations.

Several studies have shown that when practice is combined with individual expert feedback, interviewer performance is maximised (Powell et al., 2008a). Further, different types of feedback can demonstrate varied effectiveness when training child interviewers, as demonstrated in a study by Powell and colleagues (2008a). Seventy-two interviewers, who had been trained in the use of open-ended questions, conducted mock interviews in one of three conditions: feedback was provided during practice exercises (i.e. interrupting practice at various stages), feedback was provided immediately after practice exercises, or no feedback was provided. Results indicated that interviewers who received feedback during their interviews demonstrated greater improvement in performance post-
training than interviewers who received feedback after the practice exercises, or no feedback at all. Feedback that is provided during practice exercises allows trainees to immediately address any negative behaviours that they are exhibiting. This in turn may potentially prevent trainees making the same errors in subsequent practices (Stewart, Katz & La Rooy, 2011).

The need for a structured protocol, ongoing spaced learning, practice and expert feedback was established through research that compared the performance of interviewers’ after receiving these elements with interviewers who did not receive them (Cederborg et al., 2013; Orbach et al., 2000; Powell et al., 2008b; Sternberg, Lamb, Orbach, Esplin & Mitchell, 2001; Sternberg et al. 1999). For example, Lamb et al. (2002b) trained 21 interviewers using one of four training methods: a week-long didactic format, which included lectures and exemplars of best practice interviewing; a two-day workshop, which instructed interviewers in the use of highly structured rapport-building tools to be utilised in the pre-substantive phase of an interview; a two-day session, which explained a structured protocol (the NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol) followed by practice on a simulated interview with feedback; or monthly sessions that explained the NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol followed by group feedback on exemplars of best practice interviewing. When examining interviews with children alleging sexual abuse, it was evident that interviewers who were provided with a structured protocol, practice and feedback utilised more open-ended questions than those who received less desirable training methods.

Lamb and colleagues have also shown the adverse effect on interviewers’ performance when ongoing practice and expert feedback is terminated (Lamb et al., 2002a). Eight interviewers, who received feedback and supervision during regular interview practice, interviewed 37 alleged victims of child abuse using an
interview protocol. Six months after feedback and supervision ceased, another 37 interviews conducted by the same interviewers were examined. Results indicated that the use of open-ended questions decreased from a mean proportion of 0.34 during training to 0.20 after training ceased. Instead, interviewers relied on specific closed and suggestive questions, which elicited less accurate information from the child interviewees (Lamb et al., 2002a).

Over the past five years, researchers have started to incorporate the four essential elements into training programs in an attempt to successfully reduce the gap between best practice guidelines and actual interview practice. Specifically researchers have increased the intensity and frequency of feedback, prolonged the length of time during which trainees received feedback, staggered face-to-face training sessions over an extended period of time, and incorporated subsequent ‘refresher’ sessions after training completion (Cederborg et al., 2013; Price & Roberts, 2011; Rischke et al., 2011). While such attempts have led to better success in open-ended question usage, the maintenance of skills over time (from immediate post-training to several months follow up) is still problematic.

Another attempt to address the gap between recommended and actual practice has involved the incorporation of e-learning technology (Powell et al., 2014). E-learning technology has transformed workplace learning across a number of domains in terms of accessibility, flexibility in delivery, cost-efficiency and the fact that trainees can progress through activities in their own time and at their own pace (Donavant, 2009; Gayton & McEwen, 2007; Gikandi, Morrow & Davis, 2011; Oullette, Westhuis, Marshall & Chang, 2006). E-learning allows for active participation from trainees and places more responsibility for professional development on the individual learner. Another benefit of e-learning is that it can incorporate a wider array of media elements into the learning environment, such
as text, narration, animations and film clips, as well as empirically supported instructional strategies, which promote long-term retention and transfer of skills and knowledge into practice (Mugford et al., 2013).

The first study to test the utility of e-learning in investigative interviewer training was that by Powell, Guadagno and Benson (2014). They delivered a series of computer-based activities over several months to 68 professionals (social workers, police and psychologists) located across five jurisdictions. The computerised learning was organised into 12 modules, each of approximately three hours duration, focusing on skills such as identifying question types, eliciting a disclosure of abuse, assessing and evaluating one’s own performance, and enhancing the accuracy of children’s accounts of repeated abuse. Immediate feedback on quizzes, exemplars of best practice interviewing and spaced practice were featured throughout the activities. The results revealed a significant improvement in interviewer performance from pre-training to immediate post-training. The mean proportion of open-ended questions increased significantly from 0.47 at pre-training to 0.79 post-training. For 25 participants who also completed a six-month follow-up assessment, adherence to an open-ended questioning style was sustained.

The results of Powell et al.’s study provide support for the utility of e-learning. This method of training delivery incorporates the four essential elements of a successful training program: a structured interview protocol can be provided, learning can be spaced, and practice and expert feedback can be continually provided at a relatively low cost. It is yet to be determined, however, whether this format is useful on a broad organisational scale and whether the gains in this type of training generalise to the field. The sample of trainees in Powell et al.’s study was relatively small, and the participants were self-selected and potentially highly motivated (i.e., the training was a voluntary addition to the core organisational-
based training). Further, the assessment was limited to examining open-ended question usage in mock interviews.

**Individual Training Exercises Associated with Improved Performance**

As exhibited in Table 1, the majority of previous training evaluations in the investigative interview arena have examined the effectiveness of individual training programs. However, recent research has started to identify that different types of practice vary in their effectiveness at improving interviewers’ adherence to open-ended questions. A number of studies have shown the benefit of isolated training activities in improving interviewer performance when interviewing children.

One activity included in many training programs is the simulated or mock interview. This activity typically involves either a child recalling an innocuous staged event (e.g., a magic show), or a colleague or trained actor playing the role of an abused child (Freeman & Morris, 1999; Powell et al., 2008b; Warren et al., 1999). In a study that examined trainee interviewers’ perceptions of various training activities, Powell and Wright (2008) identified that mock interviews were perceived to be one of the most beneficial interviewee training exercises. Mock interviews were perceived as important because they enable expert feedback during practice, which (for ethical reasons) cannot be provided during field interviews with children recalling abuse.

The actual effectiveness of different types of mock interviews using objective measures of performance has been explored in prior research as well. Powell et al. (2008b) delivered instruction on open-ended question usage to 50
trainee interviewers, who then practised their skills with either a trained actor\(^1\) or an untrained colleague. As evident in Table 1, open-ended question usage in post-training interviews was significantly higher with trainees who participated in mock interviews with an actor, than with those who practised with a colleague.

A subsequent study by Powell and colleagues examined interviewers’ performance across three different interview contexts using a within-subjects design. The three interview contexts included a mock interview with a trained actor, an interview with a child recalling an innocuous staged event and a field interview with a child recalling alleged abuse (Powell, Cavezza, Hughes-Scholes & Stoove, 2010). Interviewers’ performance was found to be relatively stable across all three contexts, however there was greater similarity between performance in the field and mock-actor interviews than between field interviews and interviews with a child recalling an innocuous staged event. The finding that mock interviews with trained actors are superior to mock interviews with actual school children is consistent with trainee interviewer anecdotal feedback. While child interviews about innocuous staged events expose trainees to the potential communication difficulties that arise when engaging with young children, it is the ability to elicit important evidential information about abuse from a non-disclosing child that seems the most crucial skill to master (Powell & Wright, 2008). Such a skill can really only be practiced with a trained actor recalling alleged abuse.

A second activity that appears critical for the success of mastering an open-ended questioning approach is practice at identifying different question types.

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\(^1\) Actors were specifically trained to play the role of the child in the standardised manner, and in a way empirically known to provoke deviations from best practice interviewing in the field [see Powell et al. (2008b) for more detail]. The procedure related to the amount of information to report, behaviours and mannerism typical of young children, and appropriate language to use in interviews.
Before having the ability to generate open-ended questions, trainees must be able to recognise open-ended questions and identify how they are distinguished from other question types. In demonstrating the importance of this activity, Yii et al. (2012) examined the association between interviewers’ ability to identify various question types and adherence to best practice guidelines in a mock interview. Forty interviewers were trained to label questions types and to generate open-ended questions. A positive association between skill in identifying different question types and open-ended question usage was revealed. That is, interviewers who performed better in coding tasks were better at using open-ended questions in mock interviews.

**Summary**

One of the most robust findings in the investigative interview training literature is that despite international consensus on best practice interview guidelines, interviewers do not adhere to these. Research has identified four components related to the structure, delivery and content of training programs that may be key in increasing adherence to best practice guidelines. These elements are a) distributed learning, b) expert supervision and feedback, c) ongoing practice opportunities, and d) a structured interview protocol.

Research has also progressed to identify individual training activities that are essential in improving interviewer performance. The only study to date that has included these training activities as well as the four essential elements of a successful training program is that by Powell, Guadagno and Benson (2014). The authors trialled the training of investigative interviewers through e-learning and found positive preliminary results. While the research conducted by Powell and
colleagues demonstrated that training interviewers through e-learning is possible, the study had a small sample of trainees and was restricted to mock interviews. Thus, the results may not be generalizable to a broader range of trainees or across assessment contexts (e.g., field interviews). The reform being evaluated in the current thesis expanded on the Powell et al.’s (2014) study by implementing an e-learning training system into a large scale organisation and evaluating its effectiveness across both mock and field contexts. Because the thesis adopts a whole-system approach, it is necessary to understand the context in which the reform was implemented. The following chapter therefore provides an overview of the process of investigating and prosecuting child sexual abuse in Australia.
CHAPTER 4- OVERVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN RESPONSE TO CASES OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

As stated in prior chapters, the current thesis adopts a whole system approach in order to evaluate a new reform. To fully understand the context in which the reform was implemented, it is important to review the existing procedures in place around responding to child sexual abuse. These response procedures differ between jurisdictions, organisations and countries. The current chapter therefore provides an overview of the general procedures for investigating and prosecuting child sexual abuse in Australia. A brief summary of the training procedure adopted across Australia, prior to the implementation of the new training system, is also provided. Prior to this, a summary of the legal definitions of child sexual offences that can be prosecuted in Australia is presented.

Definitions of child sexual offences in Australia

In Australia, child sexual abuse is broadly defined as, “any act which exposes a child to, or involves a child in, sexual processes beyond his or her understanding or contrary to accepted community standards” (Broadbent & Bentley, 1997, p. 14). This includes, for example, sexual penetration, indecent acts (e.g., fondling of breasts), and procuring, inciting or encouraging a child to engage in a sexual behaviour (e.g., masturbation). A person who sexually abuses a child may be charged with a sexual offence. Sexual offences are commonly expressed in terms of the victim’s age, however this differs across jurisdictions. For example, an offence against a young child (defined as under 10, 12 or 13 years, depending on the jurisdiction) would typically incur a higher punishment.
than the same offence against an older child (defined as 16 or 17 years; Australian Law Reform Commission, 2010). Offences can also be characterised according to the victim’s relationship with the offender. For example, some jurisdictions have identified separate offences that apply to a defendant who is a family member or a person in a position of trust or authority (e.g., sports coach, teacher or employer; Australian Law Reform Commission, 2010).

Consent is also an issue that differs across jurisdictions. The age of consent varies between 16 and 17 years across Australia. However, in some jurisdictions (e.g., Victoria) a child of twelve years or older can consent to sexual intercourse with a partner who is no more than 14 or 15 years old. In contrast, other jurisdictions (e.g., Tasmania) only permit consent as a defence if the child is over 16 years and the partner is under 17 years (in jurisdictions where the age of consent is 17 years).

**Notifications of child abuse**

Between 2013 and 2014, there were 304,097 notifications of child abuse, involving 198,966 children across Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015). This included reports of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and neglect. Notifications of suspected child abuse can come from a number of different sources, including family members, friends, child protection employees or the subject child self-reporting. Reports are generally made to the jurisdictions’ police organisations or child protection departments, or are lodged anonymously through a Crime Stoppers website. The majority of notifications, however, are a result of mandatory reporting.
Mandatory reporting is the legislative requirement of certain classes of people to report suspected cases of child abuse (Mathews & Scott, 2014). While all eight Australian states and territories have enacted mandatory reporting laws, these laws differ between jurisdictions. The main differences that exist are around who is mandated to report and what types of abuse have to be reported. For example, in the Northern Territory, any person who believes on reasonable grounds that a child is the victim of physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse, exposure to domestic violence, or neglect is legally required to report their beliefs (Mathews & Scott, 2014). In contrast, in Western Australia, only those professionals who are most likely to come into contact with children and their families are mandated to report their suspicions and beliefs about child sexual abuse. These professionals include doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers and police officers (Mathews & Scott, 2014). Across Australia, mandatory reporters can direct their concerns to their respective jurisdiction’s mandatory reporting department or submit an online notification.

**A joint response to notifications of child abuse**

After a report of suspected abuse is made, an initial assessment is conducted and the report is referred to the relevant response agency. Of the 304,097 notifications of suspected child abuse made in Australia between 2013 and 2014, 45% (137,585) of these required further investigation (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015). The notifications that were not investigated were referred to other victim support services (e.g., counselling).

Within each jurisdiction in Australia, a multi-disciplinary response is applied to the investigation of child abuse. This involves specialised police units,
child protection departments and any other relevant organisations (e.g., health, education). Together, the organisations provide an integrated response in an attempt to improve the outcomes for child victims and their families. Co-operation and consultation between police and child protection departments is critical in responding to reports of child abuse (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2010). It allows for the legal and evidential aspects of an investigation into child abuse to be sought while considering, first and foremost, the safety of the child. A joint response has the potential to provide a sense of continuity to the victim and minimise re-traumatisation by decreasing the number of individual service providers the child is exposed to, whilst increasing the support available (State Government Victoria, 2012). Further, it allows information and resources to be shared amongst agencies.

The first step of the joint response to a report of child abuse is to assess the priority of the report. Reports are assessed on two levels. First, the welfare of the child is considered, based on the severity of the alleged abuse. Second, the urgency of collecting physical evidence (if any) is judged. While the levels of prioritisation (usually three) vary across jurisdictions, generally a child who is believed to be in immediate danger is assessed as top priority and an immediate response to manage the child’s safety needs is enacted. Reports given the lowest priority involve children who are not at risk of being subjected to further abuse, that is, where there are no extenuating circumstances present and no concern exists for the child’s safety or wellbeing. Children in such cases are responded to within two to five days.

Information is then collated about all relevant persons in the case. Any suspected risks to the child are highlighted, as well as strengths of the case (e.g., if the allegation is against the child’s father, a strength may be that the child does
not live with his/her father). In some jurisdictions, an interview referred to as a ‘child assessment interview’ or an ‘initial disclosure interview’ is conducted if the child has not made a clear verbal disclosure to any person. Child assessment interviews are conducted by trained child protection personnel and have the sole aim of eliciting a clear disclosure of criminality. The interview is terminated immediately after a disclosure has been made, or if the interviewer is confident that no abuse occurred. A visually recorded forensic interview with the child complainant is then conducted.

**Investigation and Prosecution of Child Sexual Abuse Cases**

Over the last decade, legislative reforms have been introduced across all Australian jurisdictions to permit children’s investigative interviews to be visually recorded and presented in court as part or all of their evidence-in-chief during criminal proceedings (Corns, 2001). This prevents child victims from having to retell their account to different service providers and minimises re-traumatisation during the investigation and prosecution process (Burrows & Powell, 2013). Further, electronically recording the interview can maximise the quality of the child’s evidence, by capturing the child’s recall of the abuse while it is ‘fresh’ in the child’s mind and minimising the potential of contamination of the child’s memory (Corns, 2001). Recording the child’s testimony electronically also provides the jury with an accurate representation of how the child looked and communicated when recalling the abuse. To enable visual recording, child interviews are therefore usually conducted in purpose-built interview suites, with discretely placed cameras and microphones.
Prior to commencing the interview, the child spends some time becoming familiarised with the environment and the interviewer. The interviewer, who in most jurisdictions is the investigating officer, explains the nature of the criminal investigation and possible court process to the child’s caregiver, to ensure that the caregiver fully understands the impact that the investigation and prosecution may have on the child. It is important for victims’ caregivers to have realistic expectations before entering their child into the judicial system.

In most jurisdictions one interviewer questions the child, and a second interviewer observes the interview from a concealed monitor room. This observer also takes contemporaneous notes of the child’s account, to provide feedback to the lead interviewer during an interview break about what further information is required. In jurisdictions where the interviewer is not the investigating officer, the investigator, where possible, may also monitor the interview. This allows the investigator to gather information around what evidence may need to be obtained and how to proceed with the investigation. The investigator may also offer advice to the interviewer regarding details or clarification that is required from the child. At this point, interviewers who are not the investigating officer hand the case file and interview over to the investigator and their involvement in the case ends. These interviewers rarely receive feedback about case outcomes.

After the interview is concluded, the investigating officer’s role is to gather all available evidence, such as photos, DNA, medical evidence and witness statements. After determining whether a criminal law has been violated, the alleged offender is apprehended and interviewed. The offender is presented with the charges that are anticipated, and the specific details surrounding the abuse (for example, the date and location where the abuse allegedly occurred) and provided with an opportunity to dispute the charges with an alibi. All of the evidence is
then compiled into a brief of evidence, which is used to aid the investigator in deciding whether to refer the case to prosecution. In particular, the amount and type of useful information that the child can communicate is used to assist the investigator in deciding whether to file charges and refer the case to prosecution (Government of South Australia, 2013). For cases that are referred to prosecution, the Magistrates Court receives the evidence and commits the defendant to trial at the most appropriate court.

At this point, the case is referred to a prosecutor who decides whether to prosecute the alleged offender. Prosecutors exercise considerable discretion when deciding whether to continue the prosecution of alleged offenders (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2010). Essentially, they decide which victims will be granted access to the criminal justice system (Lievore, 2004). Prosecutorial policies around decision making vary across jurisdictions, however, there are two resounding principles that guide prosecutors’ decisions: whether there is sufficient evidence to support a conviction and whether it is in the public interest to prosecute the alleged offender (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2010). The latter principle takes into consideration the seriousness of the offence, any aggravating or mitigating circumstances, the age, intelligence and mental health of both the victim and the offender, and the degree of culpability of the offender (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2010).

In Australia, across all jurisdictions, an adversarial trial procedure is adopted in which advocates represent the opposing parties and an impartial judge or jury decides the case outcome. After providing an outline of the case against the alleged offender, the prosecutor commences by presenting the evidence of the charge(s), including the child’s investigative interview. However, a number of rules exist that dictate what evidence can be permitted in court. These include
whether the evidence is relevant, whether it is hearsay or opinion-based evidence, and whether the probative value of the evidence outweighs the prejudicial effect it has for the defendant (Quadara, 2006). A consequence of these rules is that children’s recorded interviews are often edited to remove prejudicial comments and irrelevant information.

After the electronically recorded forensic interview is presented in court, the prosecutor and defence may question the child further. In some jurisdictions, both the supplementary questioning by the prosecutor and the respective cross-examination are completed at a pre-trial hearing where only the judge, prosecutor and the defendant and his/her counsel are present. During the pre-trial hearing, or in jurisdictions where the child is cross-examined at the time of the trial, technology may be used to allow the court to see, hear and communicate with the child. The child would usually be located in a remote secure witness room offsite, or a CCTV room within the court building. This attempts to ensure that the child will not see, or be confronted by, the alleged offender (Judicial Commission of New South Wales, 2014). The evidence-in-chief and cross-examination of the child complainant is followed by evidence and cross-examination of any other prosecution witnesses. The accused may then give evidence in his/her defence, before the prosecutor and the defence lawyer give their closing addresses, summing up their respective evidence. After the jury has come to a unanimous decision, the verdict is read out and the prosecutor informs the child and his/her family of the case outcome.
Previous procedures for training child investigative interviewers

In Australia, any person who is authorised to conduct child investigative interviews must have successfully completed a specialised interviewer training program. While minor variations exist between jurisdictions, most training programs in Australia are similar in content and structure to the traditional training structure utilised across the globe. A summary of this traditional structure (which was previously used in the two jurisdictions that took part in this reform) is as follows. Child protection and police employees attend a two- or three-week face-to-face course to become a qualified specialist child interviewer. Internal police and child protection trainers jointly manage the courses. Prerequisites for attending the training range from submitting a written application and psychological assessment for police, to having two years of social work experience for child protection workers. Successful applicants are then prioritised according to location across both jurisdictions.

The training programs consist of lectures by internal trainers and guest speakers, and written examinations on legislation, child welfare and development, legislation, cultural awareness and the interview framework. A lecture explaining the ‘narrative approach’ interviewing technique (i.e., the use of open-ended questions to elicit a free narrative from the child) is also provided. Interviewing skills are practised through mock interviews with actors, which trainees are then assessed on using broad criteria. The training programs are held between two and four times a year, with approximately 15-20 people in each course.
Summary

The current chapter has detailed the context in which the new reform, evaluated in this thesis, was implemented. Despite subtle differences in policies and legislations between Australian jurisdictions, the process of investigating and prosecuting child sexual abuse is similar across Australia. First, a multidisciplinary response to reports of child sexual abuse, involving police and child protection organisations, is promoted in all jurisdictions. Second, the child’s investigative interview has multiple purposes, including ensuring the child’s safety from a child protection perspective, as well as eliciting sufficient evidential detail to establish a charge. Finally, in an attempt to increase the reliability of children’s evidence, recently applied legislation now permits presentation of the child’s interview as evidence-in-chief during criminal proceedings. Thus, the investigative interview is critical not only for the investigation, but also for successful prosecution. The current evaluation of the new reform (aimed at improving investigative interviewing) must therefore consider the multi-purpose use of the interview and include prosecutors, investigators and interviewers in the evaluation process.
The current chapter presents the first study in this thesis, and the first step in evaluating the new reform to improve investigative interviewing of child sexual abuse victims. The first step in the reform is to evaluate the utility of interview protocols, such as that provided in the new training system. Given that prosecutors are the end-users of child witness’ investigative interviews (when presented at court as the children’s evidence-in-chief), it is essential that prosecutors are satisfied with the structure and framework of the interviews. A lack of communication and collaboration has been a major criticism of previous ineffective reforms (Powell & Wright, 2012; Zweig & Burt, 2003). Further, one indicator of the success of the new reform is interviewers’ adherence to the interview protocol provided in the training. It was therefore essential to confirm the utility of the interview protocol during the pilot of the new training system, and execute any modifications to the protocol prior to full-scale implementation of the training system. The final (modified) SIM Protocol that evolved from this study was the one used in the subsequent training evaluation. For ease of presentation, this was also the protocol that was presented in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

As described in Chapter 2, most commonly utilised child interview protocols adhere to the same elements and structure (these are summarised in Appendix A). These protocols have been designed, for the most part, from the vantage point of a single discipline - child developmental psychology (the area of memory development in particular). The accessibility of the academic eyewitness memory literature has ensured that there is broad awareness among both child
eyewitness testimony experts and interviewers regarding what constitutes current best practice interviewing from a child developmental perspective. Uncertainty remains, however, as to whether the protocol structure is useful from a prosecution perspective as well.

Despite the dual use of the electronically recorded child interviews as investigative and evidentiary tools, there has been little feedback from prosecutors about the utility of interview protocols for the purpose of providing evidence-in-chief. The protocols were developed with the aim of maximising accurate and detailed responses, yet from the prosecution perspective, consideration must also be given to how the witness and the witness’ account present in the eyes of the jury, and to the admissibility of questions in the court (Burrows & Powell, 2014a). Apart from evidence to show that an open-ended narrative-based approach enhances the likelihood of successful prosecution (Burrows & Powell, 2014a; Pipe, Orbach, Lamb, Abbott & Stewart, 2013), little is known about the impact of the interview phases at the trial stage or whether prosecutors are even aware of what constitutes best practice interviewing at all.

The need to elicit prosecutors’ perceptions about the phases outlined in Appendix A was highlighted by Westera, Powell and Milne (2014), who examined prosecutors’ perceptions of the utility of an interview protocol used for interviewing adult victims of assault. The prosecutors’ feedback was elicited in a jurisdiction where the electronic recording of interviews, and their use as evidence-in-chief, provided independent evidence that interviewers were actually adhering to the protocol. The prosecutor feedback revealed major concerns with the protocol such that the recall instructions and emphasis on pursuing detail were severely undermining the credibility of the complainant. Further, the study highlighted some discrepancies between prosecutors’ perceptions of what
constitutes best practice interviewing and the perceptions of experts in the eyewitness testimony arena. On the basis of their findings, Westera et al. recommended that the protocol be urgently revised to accommodate the prosecutors’ concerns.

The strength of the Westera et al. (2014) study, in terms of identifying the potential role of prosecutor feedback in interview protocol design, was its focus group methodology. The focus group process was useful in facilitating considerable debate, problem solving and in-depth discussion (Robinson, 1999; Watts & Ebbutt,1987; Wilkinson, 1998). In the current study, the same methodology was applied to address the gap in literature on the evidential usefulness of child witness interview protocols from a prosecution perspective. Although prior work has elicited prosecutor feedback about the type of evidential detail required in child investigative interviews, this is the first study to elicit feedback about the elements represented in Appendix A from a representative sample of Australian Crown prosecutors who specialise in the area of child sexual assault. Importantly, this feedback was restricted to the prosecutors’ expertise regarding the utility of the elements in terms of admissibility and impact on the jury as opposed to the impact of the techniques on the detail and accuracy of the accounts.

Method

Participants

Two separate focus groups were held, with nine and seven prosecutors attending each focus group respectively. Prosecutors were recruited with the assistance of managerial staff, who were required to base their selection on prosecutors’ seniority,
experience and availability to attend the focus group day. Each focus group had at least one representative from each Australian state and territory, with the exception of one small state. All prosecutors specialised in child sexual assault with group means of 13.9 years of prosecution experience (range = 5 - 20 years) and 208 child sexual abuse cases (range = 50 – 300). An experienced police investigator attended each focus group to observe and to answer any questions on police investigative procedure. More specific information regarding the profile of these professionals is not provided, to ensure anonymity.

While there are minor differences in legislation across Australian jurisdictions, the process of conducting and using recorded interviews is consistent. Soon after a disclosure or report of abuse is made, prescribed persons from specialist child abuse units (police, psychologists or social workers) conduct an interview, which is audio-visually recorded. In cases that proceed to trial, the prosecution chooses to admit one or more recorded interviews as evidence-in-chief and leads any additional evidence from the child, if required.

**Procedure**

The project was approved by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee and the Director of Public Prosecutions in each jurisdiction. The focus groups were held in a private room in Melbourne, Australia. Each participant was flown in the night before the event and an informal dinner was held so that the participants could familiarise themselves with each other. At least one week prior to the focus group a package of reading material was mailed to the prosecutors. This package included a description of each of the interview elements, at least three exemplars to represent each element from across various interview protocols, and a description of the task required in the focus group. Feedback from prosecutors about these elements formed the basis of the
focus group discussion. For each element, the prosecutors were required to comment on its utility and on concerns (if any) about how the elements are generally implemented. Where the need for modifications was expressed, the prosecutors were asked to specify how (if at all) the element could be administered in a way that ensures a fairer justice process. The facilitator was, largely, a passive participant in the conversation, asking only broad open-ended questions to encourage further elaboration and clarification of comments, and providing prompts for the prosecutors to discuss.

Analysis

The focus group discussions (190 minutes and 180 minutes respectively) were audio taped and transcribed. Thematic analysis (allowing for rich and detailed discussion) was conducted. This involved the identification of themes or ideas within the discussion (Gifford, 1998). Specifically, the authors independently completed a line-by-line analysis of each transcript and identified concepts (relating to each interview element) within statements. Statements with similar concepts were thus grouped together. The transcripts were then re-examined for statements that supported the identified categories. Identified concepts and categories (and sub-categories) were then grouped according to core themes. Thus, the core themes identified helped to reduce the large volume of data into meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis (see Miles & Huberman, 1984).

After reading the transcripts, the met and discussed emerging themes. There was little disagreement in their interpretations of the focus group content. The key themes that emerged during the focus group are described in the following section. Quotes have been edited for grammar and readability and to de-identify all parties. To ensure anonymity, prosecutors were represented on the transcripts by a number from one to 13.
Results

All of the prosecutors spoke freely about the challenges they faced when using child complainant interviews as evidence-in-chief and were aware of the complexities surrounding the need to accommodate both the child developmental and prosecution perspective. There was strong unanimous support for the focus on using open-ended questions because statements in the form of a clear and organised narrative account (as opposed to brief responses to specific questions) are most persuasive to a jury. As such, the prosecutors had no specific comments or concerns to make about the structure and type of questioning in the substantive interview phase (after the child’s disclosure of the event). The focus of discussion was around four of the interview phases or elements: the truth-lie competency test and promise to tell the truth, the ground rules, the practice narrative and eliciting a disclosure. The prosecutors were (in most part) aware of these elements prior to reading about them for this study, as they had seen them administered (in various forms) in field interviews. The themes related to each element will be discussed in turn.

The truth-lie competency test and promise to tell the truth

The issue of whether, and how, to test the child’s understanding of the concepts ‘truth’ and ‘lie’ generated intensive and lengthy debate within both focus group sessions. This debate was underpinned by the different experiences and expectations around the use of the test within and across the jurisdictions. Interestingly, none of the prosecutors appeared to perceive any real value in the test in terms of ensuring the veracity of the child’s testimony. Rather, their concerns related to the fact that some form of competency testing for qualifying child witnesses was expected and that there would be negative consequences arising from not meeting these expectations.
You can’t remove the truth-lie test because they [judicial officers] are used to this process. When it doesn’t happen they think something is wrong and all this debate opens up to determine whether they can be satisfied that the child is telling the truth. I don’t necessarily agree with the test. It’s a hangover from the days when children were seen as unreliable witnesses and it was up to the judge, rather than the common people, to establish whether the child was telling the truth. (Prosecutor 4)

Discrepancy in opinion also arose as to whether the test needed to be in the investigative interview or solely administered at the trial. Two prosecutors were adamant that because the truth-lie competency test is required at the time of the trial, the process is unwarranted in the investigative interview (i.e., it was perceived to be duplicating the process). However, others argued that even when it may be possible to establish whether the child understands the concepts of truth and lies at the time of the trial, the significant time lapse between the investigative interview and trial stage could pose a problem. It made it questionable whether the child actually understood the terms at the time of the interview, when the child was considerably younger.

To ask a 13 or 14-year old child who was interviewed as a little kid, “Were all your answers in your interview truthful?” is meaningless. The answer will be meaningless. There’s been too big a time lapse since the interview for the child to answer that. (Prosecutor 5)

Another area of intense discussion relates to the issue of how the test should be conducted. The use of a story (example c in Appendix A) posed considerable problem for the prosecutors because it was longwinded (i.e., used up valuable time in the interview), made the interview sound like a test (which potentially damaged rapport with the child), and could potentially lead to confusion. Even if it was apparent that the child could not complete the task correctly for developmental reasons, the misunderstanding could still undermine the jury’s perceptions of the child’s competency. However, none of the techniques were considered satisfactory for determining understanding of a lie. The
technique of making an incorrect statement about a physical object in the interview room (example a) was perceived inadequate because it tests ability to detect inaccurate information as opposed to intent to deceive (a lie). The hypothetical scenario involving a child liar (example b) was considered problematic because children may associate the implication of wrongdoing by the child in the story with their own case (i.e., that they are to blame for the abuse). It was also argued that none of the techniques elicit conception of whether lying is wrongful and should be avoided in the interview.

We had this ridiculous question about explaining a lie that I hated so much; “If I told you that we came in today by bus, but we really came in a taxi, is that the truth or is that a lie?” What has that got to do with warning the child about the right and wrong of lying? Nothing! It’s so dysfunctional. (Prosecutor 6)

As a way of resolving the discussion, all prosecutors agreed that it was better for interviewers to err on the side of caution and omit the truth-lie assessment in the investigative interview, unless there is any benefit from a child developmental perspective. The consequence of having to address any potential objections associated with the omission of the truth-lie test in the interview (if raised in the courtroom) seemed preferable to having to explain an ambiguous or undesirable response to the truth-lie test.

Aside from the issue of the truth-lie test, there was unanimous agreement among the prosecutors on the importance of establishing the child’s intention to tell the truth in the interview. The prosecutors argued that since the recorded interview constitutes the child’s evidence-in-chief, and in the court process the child would be sworn in or affirmed and required to make a promise to tell the truth, then it was appropriate for the interviewer to do some kind of a ‘quasi swearing-in’ process even if it was not explicitly established (via testing) that the child understood the meaning of truth.

This is evidence that was taken outside of court. We need to distinguish it from sitting on a couch having a chat. (Prosecutor 2)
The prosecutors perceived that one resolution to the truth-lie competency test was to avoid the term “truth” and provide wording that was deemed less problematic from a developmental perspective. Simplicity was deemed paramount and the question “Will you tell me what really happened?” was considered just as acceptable as “Will you tell me the truth today?”

The issue of where the child’s promise to tell the truth should be located in the interview was an area of concern as well. There were two opposing views on this issue. On the one hand, placing the child’s promise at the end of the interview (e.g., “Has everything you told me been the truth?”) was deemed beneficial as it provided a definitive way of concluding the interview and left a positive lasting impression of a truthful child with the jury members. The child may also interpret a promise to tell the truth at the outset as an assumption by the interviewer that the child is a liar. If placed at the end of the interview, the impact of any such interpretation cannot affect the narrative, which is provided first. On the other hand, if the child’s intention to tell the truth was not confirmed before any reporting of abuse, a defence lawyer may argue that the interview may not have represented a truthful account of what had occurred. It was also considered that if the question was located at the end of the interview and the child did not acquiesce to it (i.e., did not confirm his/her intention to tell the truth) due to misunderstanding, this would damage the jury members’ perceptions of the child, beyond repair.

What if the truth question was at the end and a child who had given an intelligible account of abuse stumbles on this question because he didn’t fully understand it. In the jury’s mind the last thing that they see of the child’s evidence is the child struggling with what the truth is. (Prosecutor 7)

Let’s face it, if the truth question was asked at the end, the defence will turn around and say that for the entirety of the interview, up until that point, the jury can have no idea of whether the child’s story was a truth or lie. (Prosecutor 4)
After reflection of the pros and cons, it was unanimously agreed that the child’s promise to tell the truth was best elicited at the start of the interview. The need to ensure that the entire interview was accepted as formal evidence was more important than any benefits associated with delaying the promise until the end of the interview.

**Ground rules**

The discussion about the ground rules phase of interview protocols raised similar issues to those that arose in relation to the truth and lie tests. Primarily, concerns focused on the use of wordy preambles. Lengthy instructions that the child had to absorb and practical tests that the child had to actively complete not only compounded victim fatigue but also inadvertently undermined the jury’s perceptions of children as capable witnesses. Irrespective of the actual utility of the ground rules tests in minimising error from a developmental memory perspective, extensive prompting could appear (to a lay person) to be condescending and artificial. In the eyes of the jury, competent witnesses (irrespective of whether they are adults or children) are perceived as witnesses who should not need extensive and longwinded warnings not to make errors.

Considerable debate also arose about the best place to position the ground rules in the interview. Extensive ground rules instruction at the beginning of the interview appeared somewhat out of place, as this is where the interviewer and child are trying to establish a relationship. However, if the instructions were given later (i.e., after the practice narrative), this would potentially disrupt the flow of the interview. Unlike the promise to tell the truth, the prosecutors did not see any real benefit to having the ground rules phase on camera. Hence it was speculated that, if extensive instruction was necessary from a developmental memory perspective, it may be possible to cover these instructions off-camera, prior to the interview, using a standardised book or film which could be easily shown to defence counsel (for scrutiny) on request. In this way, reference
to ground rules instructions could be briefly made in the interview, but the interviewer
would only need to seek acknowledgement from the child that they remembered doing the
off-camera exercise. The overriding message in this discussion was that simplicity and
brevity of any preambles during the interview was essential.

It’s important that the child has been told the ground rules in the
interview, but it needs to be done in a way that caters for all different
learning styles so they can hear it, they can see it, they can read it –
some way that the message gets across to kids that learn in different
ways. But keep it as simple as possible. (Prosecutor 4)

I think a generic book for age groups would be a good idea. How is
it different to those storybooks they have about going to the doctor
or going to the dentist? They’re used to storybooks. It’s easy for
them to understand and they’ll absorb the information more easily.
(Prosecutor 1)

**Practice Narrative**

Prosecutors were unanimous in confirming the importance of including a practice
narrative phase. They felt it was of benefit and that the exercise could be easily edited out
of the interview record if individual prosecutors or defence lawyers did not want it shown
to the jury. Aside from any mnemonic advantage, the exercise enhanced jury members’
ability to relate to the child, which assisted in assessing the veracity of the child’s account
of abuse. Specifically, the practice narrative gave juries a chance to perceive the child
witness as any other child - with individual mannerisms, interests and abilities. Seeing the
child relate a typical and enjoyable childhood event assisted the development of empathy.
Further, it provided a benchmark upon which to assess credibility. Juries expected that a
child who experienced abuse should show an obvious change in demeanour when talking
about that abuse compared to an enjoyable event. When the child behaves in a way that
conforms to the jury members’ expectations, it enhances their confidence in the child’s
account.
I think the practice narrative can be important in terms of getting empathy from the jury. If a child talks about soccer and the jury member’s got a child that plays soccer it creates a form of pseudo-attachment. And the change of demeanour between when the child is talking about an enjoyable thing that they do and then talking about the offender can be really powerful. (Prosecutor 4)

The practice narrative also provided the jury with a little mental buffer time. The child’s account of abuse is likely to arouse intense emotion in members of the jury and it requires considerable concentration to watch and understand these accounts, particularly when the audio and visual quality of the recording is not clear. The practice narrative provided time for the jury to accommodate to the child’s speech and the presentation format before having to process the substantive evidence.

The jury is being asked to make a pretty big call on this kid. They’re being asked to look at this child’s evidence and decide whether the child is telling the truth or not. For a jury, [a practice narrative] is the only way they get to know a child. Could you imagine a child just sitting down and going straight into what happened during their abuse? It’s artificial - the jury needs to get an idea of what the child is like. (Prosecutor 5)

As with all the other introductory interview components, the prosecutors emphasised that brevity is essential. Not only would a lengthy practice narrative potentially deplete the child’s cognitive resources, it could also create fatigue in the jury as well.

I think three to five minutes of practice would be sufficient. If it’s longer then it starts getting distracting for the jury and tiring for the child. For the jury it’s like, “Why have we been watching this for 10 minutes?” Even a few minutes in a courtroom can appear a really long time. (Prosecutor 8)

The natural limit for most of these conversations is three to five minutes. When you drag it out, and you get the interviewer trying to probe for every minute detail, the exercise can backfire. That’s the last thing we want! (Prosecutor 3)
Another caveat raised about the practice narrative related to individual differences in children’s need to disclose the abuse at the outset of the interview. Sometimes children disclose the abuse during or immediately prior to the practice narrative, either because they misunderstand the interview process (the request to disclose an innocuous event) or because they just want to get the disclosure over with. All prosecutors agreed that in a situation where a spontaneous disclosure arose early, the interviewer should abandon the practice narrative and move straight to eliciting a full narrative account of the abusive event. The prosecutors perceived that the alternate option (i.e., the interviewer stopping the child and redirecting the focus to a practice narrative about an innocuous event) would likely damage rapport with the child and irritate the jury. Importantly, the perceived benefit of completing the practice narrative under these circumstances was not perceived to outweigh the disadvantages of interrupting a spontaneous disclosure.

When a child starts telling about the awful thing that happened to them and the interviewer says, “Wait, let’s go back so we can talk about something fun you’ve done”, it’s truly excruciating to watch. It’s just plain wrong. (Prosecutor 3)

**Eliciting a disclosure**

All prosecutors agreed that the first step in eliciting a disclosure of abuse should involve asking the child what they have come to talk about. The benefit of this technique (even though it is not likely to be effective in all instances) is that it is non-leading. The prosecutors also unanimously agreed that if that initial step was not successful, it was better for the interviewer to raise prior information that led to the concern while avoiding (where possible) issues of contention (i.e., alleged offence and offender). This is provided that the interviewer seeks acknowledgement that the prior information occurred before eliciting a narrative. Without such acknowledgement, the interviewer would be presuming that the prior information was true. Underlying themes throughout the discussion were
that prior facts surrounding a disclosure (irrespective of their source) must not be presumed as true and that a cascading approach was needed such that the least leading approaches should always precede the more leading ones. Even raising words that implied wrongdoing (e.g., someone hurt you) would be considered leading, by implying that something has happened to the child. Similarly, overly empathetic phrases were viewed negatively, as they reduced the perception of professional sincerity and could be mistaken as the interviewer assuming the abuse occurred and coercing the child into a disclosure.

Empathy is fine. There’s nothing wrong with that. It’s the interviewers’ open expressions of ‘good’, ‘oh you’re so brave’ or ‘thank you for that’ every five minutes, and the attitude of ‘good answer’ that I don’t agree with. The interviewer can say it once but they don’t need to repeat it 16 times. No one is asking the interviewer to be a robot or some formal personnel sitting back with their file and just firing questions, but this is still a professional situation. (Prosecutor 3)

The non-leading techniques that involved discussion about routines, family members, secrets or inappropriate touch (see example q in Appendix A), although admissible, were not favoured by any of the prosecutors. Such questioning was criticised for being ‘longwinded’, ‘confusing’ and unlikely to lead to a disclosure of abuse. Responses about innocent acts could easily be mistaken (in the hands of an inexperienced interviewer) as allegations of abuse, while suggestive implications by the interviewer could be imbedded into the child’s narrative and result in a false allegation. Further, such questions were perceived to provide insufficient structure to encourage a disclosure from inhibited children who have been groomed by the offender. Striking the right balance between minimising interviewer influence on memory and ensuring that frightened or intimidated abused children receive the necessary assistance to report the crimes was deemed the most challenging task for interviewers and one that required considerable expertise. Irrespective of their skill level, interviewers sometimes needed to accept that the initial interview might not be the right time for the child to disclose, and that attempts
to push for a premature disclosure in these cases could be damaging. Some prosecutors had the impression that interviewers perceived themselves as failures if they concluded an interview without a disclosure. In contrast, the prosecutors perceived that the purpose of these interviews was first and foremost to ensure the safety of the child as opposed to securing a conviction.

Even if the interviewer, as a last resort, has to ask questions that would not be admissible in court, the resulting evidence might still be useful in stopping the offending. Both child protection as well as criminal justice personnel share the results of these interviews. They can’t all be driven by the goal of convicting a person. (Prosecutor 1)

The remainder of the discussion related to issues that need to be considered when raising prior information that led to the concern. Specifically, while raising prior information was the preferred technique, there were three areas that warranted considerable caution. These included (a) raising the name of an early complainant, (b) raising evidence of a sexually transmitted infection, and (c) introducing the act or alleged offender. The prosecutors’ concerns in each of the areas are discussed in turn.

**Raising the name of an early complainant.** An early complainant is someone that the child made a previous disclosure to. In cases where the interviewer knows about an early complaint, this can be useful in eliciting a disclosure of abuse (e.g., “I heard you told your friend Sally about something that happened at the park. Is what I heard true?”). Some jurisdictions would consider the above question leading and render it inadmissible as evidence. Other jurisdictions would render it acceptable only if what the child said to the early complainant was recent (i.e., the child disclosed the abuse to the complainant soon after the abuse occurred when it was still ‘fresh’ in the child’s memory).

I understand the desire to bring up a cue that will trigger the child’s previous disclosure and I can understand that it might have benefit. But it’s also bringing up evidence that may not be recent complaint
evidence and therefore it might not necessarily be admissible. How the abuse comes to the attention of the authorities is irrelevant unless one is leading the child’s previous disclosure as evidence to bolster the credibility of the witness. (Prosecutor 1)

Another complication that could arise is that an early complainant would normally be interviewed by the investigating police officer in an attempt to corroborate the child’s account. The case prosecutor would then be compelled to submit the early complainant’s police interview to court as evidence. If the child’s account of the conversation with the early complainant differed in any way to what the early complainant recalled of the child’s disclosure, the defence lawyer would highlight these discrepancies, arguing to the jury that the child’s memory of the entire abusive event was inaccurate. This problem is most evident in cases where the child had several early complainants (i.e., where the child disclosed to a group of people), whom, in some jurisdictions, would all be required to provide evidence of their recollection of the child’s disclosure, creating greater opportunity for discrepancies in accounts of the conversation to arise.

It happened on one occasion where a girl told her entire class, so we had 22 complaint witnesses. It was terrible because they all told different versions of the one conversation! (Prosecutor 4)

It’s fine if the first person that the child reported the abuse to is an adult or a police officer, but when you have three of four child complaint witnesses who all have to elaborate on when the child disclosed to them, it can be diabolical! You have to explain to the jury how the offending came to light as well as explain all of these inconsistencies. (Prosecutor 11)

Potential complications arising from mentioning an early complainant are exacerbated when that complainant is the child’s major caregiver (e.g., mother or father) and also the informant. The prosecutors believed that in such a case, a defence lawyer would argue that the informant was the driving force behind the allegation and had coerced the child into reporting the abuse. If the informant did have ulterior motives and was coercing the child into making a false report in order to have the alleged offender
charged, and the allegation is introduced into the interview, the child may feel obligated to falsely confirm the informant’s report for motivational or emotional reasons.

I would avoid starting with the pejorative ‘Mum’s told me’ or ‘Dad’s told me that you get upset’ because then the child feels like they’re locked into that story. They know that the interviewer has already spoken to Mum or Dad. (Prosecutor 3)

And if the interviewer says ‘Mum told me…’ then they are introducing the defence statement that Mum is the driving force behind the child’s complaint. (Prosecutor 4)

Raising the issue of a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Raising an STI was perceived to be fraught with potential problems. For example, a child may not have the developmental capacity to connect the symptoms of an STI with the abusive act and may be unaware of what information the interviewer is seeking. One prosecutor highlighted the importance of remaining open towards the possibility that the STI could have been transmitted through non-sexual means. Further, given the heightened sensitivity to changes in their own bodies, older children may be so humiliated and embarrassed about the infection that talking about it could result in further traumatisation. While it may be necessary in cases with no prior disclosure to raise this issue, the prosecutors advised that it was best left as a last resort.

Obviously if the child has an STI, it’s very powerful evidence that sex has happened and it’s beneficial for the case to have that evidence. However, what the child can provide in terms of linking that evidence with the abuse might be problematic. Or a child could have immense humiliation and distress around an STI and be reluctant to discuss it. So whilst on one hand the interviewer has the evidence and has more latitude to ask leading questions to get further disclosures from a child witness, it might be something that the interviewer should leave alone. (Prosecutor 6)
Introducing the act or alleged offender. The prosecutors acknowledged that in some situations, the interviewer has no choice but to raise the alleged act or offender. If a choice had to be made, it was their preference for the alleged offender to be raised in the interview. Introducing an allegation of abuse was considered risky as it provides detail upon which to fabricate a narrative. However it was important not to imply any wrongdoing by the alleged offender, even inadvertently. For example, it would be appropriate to say, “I heard that you sometimes go to Joe’s house. Do you sometimes go to Joe’s house? Tell me about the last time you went there,” provided that the issue of going to Joe’s house did not constitute an offence. Once the alleged offender’s name was mentioned, it would not be possible to raise the abusive event or the injury that resulted from alleged abuse in the same interview, even if the two were not directly linked.

So what you’re saying is for the interviewer to try to stay away from the emotional content - the child being upset, or in trouble and that sort of thing - and to introduce it via an event or an action, like ‘going to the house’. (Facilitator)

Yes, but only if the event or action introduced is neutral and is not in contention. Introducing something like ‘going to Uncle Joe’s house’ doesn’t make any assumptions about abuse that has occurred- Uncle Joe is not going to be charged with having a child at his house. (Prosecutor 4)

One caveat to introducing the offender’s name into the interview is the possibility that the child has a positive relationship with the offender. Children may find it difficult to differentiate between the person (who they like) and the abusive act. Portraying the offender in a positive light can damage the prosecution’s case. On the other hand, if a positive relationship did exist, the child would be motivated to protect the offender (and relationship) and less inclined to make a false accusation, reinforcing the truthfulness of the child’s account to the jury.
The child doesn’t know how to say, ‘I like him, but I don’t like what he does’ and starts giving the interviewer all this information about how great he is, how he gives her lollies and presents. (Prosecutor 12)

That’s okay. I have no problem with the child saying, in essence, ‘He gives me lollies and presents and I have absolutely no motive to lie. He’s great to me, he just happens to stick his penis in my vagina’. (Prosecutor 4)

**Discussion**

The main conclusion to emerge from this study is that current child investigative interview protocols are largely structured in a way that is beneficial from both a child developmental as well as prosecution perspective. Irrespective of their jurisdiction, the prosecutors in this study supported the protocol elements, including the use of open-ended questions, the practice narrative, the use of ground rules and the promise to tell the truth. Further, the prosecutors supported the procedure of eliciting disclosures by asking the child what s/he has come to talk about, and then (if the response is ‘don’t know’) raising prior information that led to the concern. These findings provide good news for the applicability of the SIM protocol delivered in the new training system, especially in light of the prior study by Westera, Powell and Milne (2014), which revealed major problems from a prosecution perspective with the current protocols used for adult sexual assault victims. Given that the trial process in Australia is highly similar to other Commonwealth countries, these findings would be relevant to other jurisdictions where child abuse interviews are recorded and used for investigative purposes as well as evidence-in-chief.

An additional contribution of this study is that it revealed ways in which the SIM protocol could potentially be improved prior to the implementation of the new training
system in large-scale organisations. The first area of improvement relates to the truth-lie test, in which the child is required to exhibit an understanding of the meaning of truth and lies through identification of story characters that are lying or through identification of truthful statements made by the interviewer. The prosecutors raised concerns about such tests in that they were longwinded (i.e., took up valuable time, exacerbating witness and jury fatigue) and that they had little actual utility in demonstrating witness competency. Interviewers are under immense time pressure to engage the child in an open-ended supportive manner and in a way that does not place too much cognitive load on the child in the pre-substantive phase of the interview. These truth-lie tests clearly undermine this process, but even worse, they potentially undermine the credibility of children who are actually competent to testify (i.e., who understand that a lie denotes inaccuracy and are able to provide an accurate account of their abuse) but fail the test because of insufficient executive functioning skills needed to answer the truth-lie test questions correctly. Although children who fail competency questions may still be allowed to testify, prosecutors were concerned that their credibility would still potentially suffer.

Historically the truth-lie test has been a requirement in Commonwealth countries, although many jurisdictions are now starting to eliminate the test as a prerequisite to testimony (Bala, 2014; Lyon, 2011). The prosecutors in the current study (representing every jurisdiction in Australia except one) reported that while the test was still expected at the trial stage, the expectations around whether it needed to be in the investigative interview were not explicit. After considerable debate it was concluded that the test should be omitted in the investigative interview. The promise to tell the truth would still be requested but the need to establish understanding of the term could be avoided by replacing it with the phrase ‘what really happened’. Arguably, this is more developmentally appropriate.
Importantly, the research related to young children’s competence to take the oath entirely supports the prosecutors’ proposal to omit a truth-lie test. The evidence shows that the child’s ability to answer truth-lie questions affects jurors’ ratings of child witness credibility (Connolly, Gagnon & Lavoie, 2008) and yet the test bears little relation to the accuracy of the testimony (see Talwar & Crossman, 2012, for a review). In reality, children who are more likely to fail these tests (i.e., younger compared to older children) are less capable of lying (Bala, Lee, Lindsay & Talwar, 2010; Lyon & Saywitz, 1999; Talwar, Lee, Bala & Lindsay, 2002). Lying is a complex skill that develops with age (Bala et al., 2010; Lyon & Dorado, 2008; Talwar & Lee, 2002). Yet even with older children who are capable of lying, these tests have not been found to reliably predict which children will be accurate informants (Goodman, Aman & Hirschman, 1987; Pipe & Wilson, 1994; Talwar et al., 2002). When children misreport events in investigative interviews, it is usually due to the nature of the questions asked and/or because the child misunderstands the purpose of the questions. In other words, inaccurate testimony in child witnesses is usually accounted for by unintentional memory errors (due to complying with the perceived demand of the interview situation or with inappropriate questions), rather than by intentional deception per se (Poole & Lamb, 1998). Focusing on the questioning strategies of the interviewer is a more useful indicator of the reliability of children’s accounts than brief tests that require them to prove their competency.

As the prosecutors acknowledged, it is yet to be determined what issues (if any) may arise from omitting the truth-lie test in the investigative interview. These tests are clearly problematic from both a developmental and prosecution perspective, but there is little scope to make them any simpler. Less cumbersome tests, which merely ask children to define truth and lies and to explain the difference between these concepts were once used, but researchers were forced to move away from these because they were
not developmentally appropriate (Lyon & Saywitz, 1999; Pipe & Wilson, 1994) and have little predictive value (Talwar & Crossman, 2012). Overall this research highlights the urgent need to reassess the necessity for the competency requirements in jurisdictions that use them. For example, Canada established a presumption that children under 14-years-old are competent to testify and abolished the use of the oath (in interviews and in court) for children in 2006. They are simply asked to promise to tell the truth (see Brubacher, Bala, Roberts, & Price, in press, for a review). The concerns raised by the prosecutors are likely to be relevant irrespective of whether the truth-lie test is conducted in the investigative interview or at the trial.

The second recommendation arising from this study relates to the practice narrative. Although the prosecutors unanimously confirmed the importance of this interview phase, they were concerned that the practice narrative was too long in some of the interviews they observed at trials, and emphasised that brevity was essential. These comments highlight the need for greater specificity in the protocols’ instructions related to implementation of the practice narrative. Currently there is no definitive mention of how long the practice narrative should take and there is little research around this issue. The only studies that relate to timing indicate that practice narratives as short as two minutes are just effective as those that last ten minutes (Brown et al., 2013), although Davies, Westcott, and Horan (2000) found that introductory phases lasting longer than 8 minutes (i.e., introductory comments, ground rules and practice narrative) were associated with children providing less information in the substantive phase. Further, research has highlighted that fatigue resulting from time spent engaging in a practice narrative is likely to be exacerbated in field – as opposed to experimental – interviews because child abuse is associated with delays in language functioning (Lum, Powell, Timms & Snow, 2015; Mills et al., 2011). All in all, these findings support the prosecutors’ perceptions about the benefits of keeping interviews brief.
The need for simplicity and for greater specificity around the implementation of the protocol is applicable to other sections of the interview as well. For example, concerns about lengthy preambles and instructions were echoed in discussions about the ground rules as well as truth and lies. Encouragingly, Dickinson, Brubacher, and Poole (2015), found that in a sample of 501 non-maltreated 4- to 12-year-olds the average time to complete ground rules instructions with practice attempts (to ensure comprehension) was 2 minutes, and 98% took under 4 minutes.

Finally, in relation to the disclosure section, prosecutors supported the technique, recommended in protocols, of raising prior information that led to the concern that the child had been abused, when children cannot state in their own words what they had come to talk about. For example, the State of Michigan Forensic Interview protocol advises interviewers to ask the child whether something is bothering him/her, or to introduce the topic of problems (e.g., “I understand that there are some problems in your family. Tell me about them”). The NICHD protocol advises use of the phrase “something happened” (see example p in Appendix A). The SIM protocol (presented in chapter 2) suggests introducing the context of an earlier complaint made by the child or a known injury caused by the offender, as long as the interviewer seeks acknowledgement from the child as to whether the information is true, before eliciting elaborative detail. While these instructions were supported, the prosecutors highlighted the need for greater specificity to be provided to interviewers around the contexts in which implications of wrongdoing and references to early complaints might be problematic. Although minor variations exist in relation to what is considered admissible across jurisdictions, areas of general consensus were formed that may greatly assist protocol development in specific localities.
Conclusion

This study supported the broad structure of current interview protocols, such as the SIM protocol that forms part of the reform being evaluated in this thesis. However, this study also highlighted the need for further protocol refinement to strengthen the utility of protocols from a prosecution perspective. As such, the original SIM protocol was modified prior to it being utilised in the second stage of the current reform - the pilot of the new training system. The modifications related primarily to the need for greater simplicity in questioning and more explicit instruction for interviewers around the admissibility of leading questions. Specifically, the changes to the original SIM protocol were as follows. First, clear guidelines were inserted instructing interviewers to elicit a practice narrative from children for three to five minutes. Second, the question, “Will you tell me the truth today?” was favoured over the truth-lie test. Third, a diagram of the process of eliciting a disclosure was included and descriptive information about what prior information to introduce was incorporated into the new training system.

The modified - and final - version of the SIM protocol was presented in Chapter 2. The next stage of the reform was to pilot the new training system (which included this modified SIM protocol) with a small sample of trainees. The results of this pilot are presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 6 – ORGANISATIONAL CHALLENGES TO
DELIVERING CHILD INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWER TRAINING
VIA E-LEARNING (STUDY 2²)

This chapter presents the second study of this thesis, and the second step in the reform to improve investigative interviewing of child sexual abuse victims (see Stage 2 in Figure 1). The second step of the reform involved piloting the new training system with a heterogeneous and representative cohort of trainee interviewers in two organisations (police and child protection), to identify the organisational challenges (if any) that arose. The new training system represents a radically different approach to the traditional classroom-based model of interviewer training. As large organisations are notorious for having rigid internal structures and policies that promote worker resistance to change (Bradley & Nixon, 2009; Heath & Heath, 2010), the implementation of a new training system would likely raise a number of issues. Such issues must be identified and relevant modifications enacted prior to broad scale implementation of the training throughout entire organisations. Modifications to create an optimal working environment are needed to ensure that any future evaluation of the program on skill performance provides a true indication of the program’s impact on skill development. The current chapter provides a qualitative evaluation of the challenges that arose and identifies strategies to resolve these. The strategies were implemented prior to the full implementation of the new training system, to maximise the accessibility and completion of the training.

² This study has been accepted for publication. The full reference is Benson, M. S., & Powell, M. B. (in press). Organisational challenges to delivering child investigative interviewer training via e-learning. Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management.
To date, only one study has evaluated the effectiveness of e-learning in the investigative interviewer training arena. Powell, Guadagno and Benson (2014) demonstrated the potential utility of a sequence of e-learning activities (i.e., a course delivered over several months) in promoting and sustaining best practice child interviewing. While the results of Powell et al.’s (2014) study were promising, it is premature to conclude that e-learning technology can be used effectively to improve interviewer performance in all contexts. Powell and colleagues’ (2014) sample of trainees was relatively small, they were self-selected (i.e., potentially highly motivated) and the course was a supplement to their initial (internal organisational-based) training. Further, the course completed by trainees in the study did not impact in any way on existing workplace structures because it was not conducted in work time and was not a requirement of the trainees’ organisational role.

Prior literature on the utility of e-learning technology within the tertiary education arena is replete with examples of the challenges that undermine course access and completion when e-learning is implemented within organisations and on a broad scale. Such challenges include workload and time pressures (i.e., difficulties in scheduling time to log on and complete online assessments in the face of work and other commitments), inadequate interaction time between trainees and instructors, and insufficient technical support and network transmission (Akar, Öztürk, Tunçer & Wiethoff, 2004; Anderson, 2014; Leeds, 2014; Shepherd, 2012; Ng, 2007; Xu & Jaggars, 2011). It is therefore questionable as to whether the positive results of Powell et al.’s (2014) study could be replicated when e-learning training is implemented in large organisations.
Given the paucity of prior evaluation research on e-learning in the investigative interviewing context and the fact that the e-training reform was such a significant change to the previous classroom-based model of training, a non-directive and elaborate method of inquiry was deemed appropriate for this study. Rather than seeking a list of challenges and concerns, elaboration was sought on the reasons underlying trainees’ problems and concerns (if any) and the organisational and systemic factors that underpinned them. Participants’ feedback, perceptions and experiences were collated using a variety of qualitative data collection methods (i.e., supervisor diaries of minuted phone calls and meetings, anonymous feedback to course developers posted online and individual semi-structured interviews). Further, feedback was collated across a broad time period as experiences transpired, and in a context where there were no perceived negative repercussions from the feedback (in terms of the outcome of the training). By casting the feedback net wide, and eliciting elaborate and comprehensive detail about concerns, the study ensured that recommendations would be framed in a way that was mindful of the organisational context in which investigative interviewers work.

**Method**

**Trainees**

The trainee investigative interviewers included 33 police officers and social workers across one Australian jurisdiction, who participated in the new training between February and September 2013. Trainees were enrolled into one of two cohorts, which commenced the training at different times to provide manageable groups to monitor. Only one trainee dropped out during the process
of the training. The sample was comprised of four males and 29 females, 17 of whom were employed by the police (in the position of police constable or detective) and 16 were employed by the child protection department as specialist child interviewers, caseworkers or team leaders. Prior experience of interviewing children varied between trainees, ranging from no experience to five years. Trainees also differed in their location: 14 trainees were located in the central investigative interviewing unit, nine worked in other metropolitan areas and ten were located in regional offices.

**Procedure**

The project was approved by Deakin University’s Human Ethics Advisory Group. Support for the project was also provided by the Academic Research Administration Group for police and the child protection department’s Information, Research and Evaluation Board.

**Description of training program.** Prior to commencement of the program trainees were provided with a ‘welcome package’, which contained information about trainers’ expectations of trainees enrolled in the program, justification of the new format of training delivery, a clear outline of the software required to run the training program, step-by-step help-sheets with instructions on how to navigate the training website, the contact details of trainers and individualised usernames and passwords to be used for admission to the training program.

The overriding focus of the training was to increase understanding of sufficient evidential requirements and how to elicit this information in narrative format. The training took a number of months to complete and consisted of 15 modules, covering a wide variety of topics: defining the various question types, child
development, techniques on how to elicit a disclosure, how to interview about repeated abuse, identifying relevant legislation, recognising grooming behaviour, and interviewing cross-cultural children and other witnesses with complex communication needs. The SIM protocol (presented in Chapter 2) was also introduced. See Table 2 for an overview of the training system’s content and structure.

The modules were predominantly delivered over a secure web-based program and engaged the learner through interactive exercises, short film clips, exemplars of best practice, narrated presentations, virtual simulations, self-initiated practices and quizzes with immediate feedback and explanations of the answers. All trainees participated in numerous mock interviews, which were conducted over telephone or Skype with actors trained to play the role of abused children (see Powell et al., 2008a, for more details). In-depth, individualised expert feedback was provided immediately during these practices. Further, trainees received regular one-on-one interaction and guidance from the organisations’ internal trainers and engaged with other trainees.

Management in both organisations was advised to allow trainees five hours of work-time per week to complete training. Individual trainees progressed through the course at their own pace, typically one module per fortnight. However, in-house trainers tracked the progress of trainees through the management system and restricted trainees from advancing through the course too quickly. The recommended time frame was a maximum of one module per week. This recommendation (adhered to by all trainees) enforced spaced practice and ensured that trainees demonstrated fundamental skills before progressing to more advanced modules.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module title</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Description of activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing what constitutes best practice interviewing</td>
<td>Understand the impact of various question styles and identify the elements of an effective training program in interviewing children, along with its benefits</td>
<td>Interview with colleague to experience different question styles and rationale for course structure and focus. Commentaries and film clips of children being interviewed about an innocuous event, highlighting the effects of various questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining the various questions</td>
<td>Distinguish between open-ended versus specific questions and non-leading versus leading questions</td>
<td>Learning of coding protocol, mock interview transcripts used to identify question types. Quiz on various question types.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding memory and language development</td>
<td>Have a clear definition of various skills and abilities that develop throughout childhood and understand how they manifest in the interview setting. Have an awareness of the implications of developmental limitations in memory and language for the interview process.</td>
<td>Narrative PowerPoint explaining language development in maltreated children. Commentaries and film clips of children being interviewed about an innocuous event, highlighting developmental concepts. Quizzes on developmental concepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing the most effective open-ended questions</td>
<td>Recognise the most appropriate open-ended question among several possible alternatives.</td>
<td>Reading and film on eliciting a free narrative recall. Interview virtual child on computer-simulated program. Commentaries and film clips of children being interviewed about an innocuous event, highlighting the benefits of open-ended questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting the right questions into practice</td>
<td>Automatically retrieve the various types of open-ended questions that can be used in an interview. Insert ground rules in appropriate places throughout the interview. Incorporate minimal encouragers into interviewing technique.</td>
<td>Rote learning exercise to practice open-ended question stems. Mock interviews with colleagues. Commentaries and film clips of children being interviewed about an innocuous event, highlighting the effects of various open-ended questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing the topic of concern and eliciting a disclosure</td>
<td>Identify which techniques are most useful in eliciting disclosures of abuse from children. Generate questions that may be useful (in certain case scenarios) for eliciting disclosures of abuse from a child.</td>
<td>Exercise in developing questions to introduce the topic of concern. Quiz on techniques to elicit a disclosure. Commentaries and film clips of children being interviewed about an innocuous event, highlighting effects of disclosure techniques. Interview with actor playing the role of an abused child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing your progress</td>
<td>Identify how performance has improved in this course to date.</td>
<td>Electronically recorded interview with actor playing the role of an abused child. Exercise to transcribe, code and reflect on own interview.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Introducing the interview protocol | Re familiar with the new interview protocol and its various elements
Competently administer the interview protocol in a mock interview setting | Reading of the interview protocol and the rationale behind the development of this
Interview with actor playing the role of the abused child, using the interview protocol |
|---|---|---|
| Interviewing about repeated abuse | Understand the effect of repeated experience on children’s memory and suggestibility
Discriminate between temporally- versus content- leading questions
Understand the meaning of episodic and generic information and how to recognise these in a transcript
Identify how individual occurrences of a repeated event are distinguished in an interview
Identify interview procedures for enhancing the accuracy and detail of children’s accounts of occurrences of a repeated event | Reading and quizzes on:
- common problems when interviewing about repeated abuse
- concepts related to repeated abuse
- how to interview about repeated abuse
Interview with actor playing the role of a repeatedly abused child, using the interview protocol |
| Evidentiary requirements | Understand the local legislation around child abuse
Judge when to follow up on specific terms and details | Readings, PowerPoints and quizzes on legislation around child sexual abuse
Reading and quizzes on prosecutor requirements of particularisation
Exercise in identifying what further information should be followed up on
Interview with actor playing the role of an abused child, using the interview protocol |
| Understanding relationship evidence | Understand the dynamics of sexual offending and counter-intuitive behaviour
Understand the effect of the offending ‘relationship’ on victims
Understand the application of the ‘Whole Story’ concept in taking statements and conducting interviews with victims of sexual offending, both child and adult | Film showing case example of grooming
Exercise on understanding the grooming evident in the film
Readings on:
- the ‘Whole Story’ framework
- theories of offending
- victims’ responses to trauma |
| Considering cross-cultural issues | Identify the essential elements of an interview with witnesses from cultural minority backgrounds
Understand how to use interpreters appropriately and know how to assess their need | Readings and quizzes on interviewing children from different cultures
Exercise on interviewing Aboriginal children and how to adapt the interview process appropriately
Interview with actor playing the role of an abused child, using the interview protocol |
| Interviewing witnesses with complex communication support needs (CCN) | Identify elements of an effective interview with witnesses who have complex communication support needs
Understand the key features of one type of communication impairment and how to accommodate the interview process for a witness with that impairment | Reading and quiz on interviewing witnesses with CCN and how to adapt the interview process
Film of adults and children with CCN being interviewed about an innocuous event, highlighting the effect of various questions
Exercise researching the features of a communication impairment group and... |
### A guide to recording the interview process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How to adapt an interview for a witness with this impairment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify several techniques designed to improve verbatim note taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading on how to take contemporaneous notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full interview with actor playing the role of an abused child</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Putting it all together

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How to adapt an interview for a witness with this impairment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate understanding and knowledge of the information presented in the previous modules</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrate adherence to best practice guidelines of interviewing child witnesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full interview with actor playing the role of an abused child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes on coding and previous modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written evaluation of an interview transcript</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Method of eliciting feedback. Trainees were invited to provide feedback about the course through three methods of data collection. First, trainees were provided with the opportunity to submit written feedback at any time throughout the training, expressing concerns, queries or observations. Within each module, trainees were presented with a link to an online forum on the training system’s website, with the phrase “Please post any comments or questions that you have about this module” attached. Comments were submitted anonymously and were visible to other trainees. Reminders of the opportunities to provide feedback were regularly sent to trainees and the majority of trainees chose to participate.

Second, correspondence between the organisations’ internal trainers and trainees, which related to feedback about the training system, was collected. Part of the role that the organisations’ internal training team (which consisted of one child protection department trainer and two part-time Police Sergeants) played was to monitor trainees’ progression through the training system, offer support and guidance, answer queries from trainees and invite feedback about trainees’ perceptions and experiences of the training. Correspondence included emails and notes based on telephone or face-to-face conversations.

Finally, following preliminary analysis of the written feedback and correspondence collected from trainees when key themes were identified, trainees were asked to participate in individual interviews with the researcher through an email invitation sent from each organisation’s trainers. The interviews were conducted by telephone. Trainees were asked to provide their overall impression of the training and if they had experienced any difficulties or limitations. If trainees indicated that they had experienced difficulties, they were then prompted to provide further elaboration using broad open-ended questions. All interviews were voluntary and trainees were informed that participation would not affect
their final grades for the training. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

**Data management and analysis.** Feedback was provided about both the content and structure of the training system; however, the analysis in this study is restricted to focusing on the organisational challenges. All data was collected and de-identified prior to analysis. A total of 148 pages of transcript were compiled. Thematic analysis was conducted on the data, which involved the identification of common themes and patterns across the data (Gifford, 1998). The first author read the entire transcript to identify and understand the key themes that emerged. These were then discussed with the second author. Key themes that emerged throughout the data are described in the following section. Quotes have been edited for grammar and readability and to de-identify all trainees.

**Results**

The individualised online method of learning was a novel experience for the majority of trainees, who commented on its stark contrast to the traditional classroom-based format of training. While many of the trainees reported being sceptical about the new format of training prior to commencement of the course, and were initially resentful of having to complete further training, the feedback in relation to the method of learning delivery was overwhelmingly positive. All trainees commented that the online approach had been an effective method of improving interviewing skills and teaching adherence to the new interview protocol. This finding was particularly salient among those trainees who had been working in the child interviewing field for some time (i.e., those who were completing the new course to update their skills), who noticed a distinct change in
their interviewing technique in favour of the more open-ended narrative style of questioning that was taught in the new training.

It’s been really, really positive. I think [the course] has changed the way we interview but in a really good way. I think that it’s made the focus be more on the child and the child telling their story rather than us knowing what information we want the child to give us.

My interviewing style has changed a lot as a result of this course. Previously I would get the narrative and then I would go through every detail, some of which was totally irrelevant. Now I will elicit a narrative and then ask the child to tell me more about particular parts that are important and it’s brilliant. It’s more to the point, quicker to administer and less traumatic for the child.

Two reasons were identified for the effectiveness of the online format. First, the constant contact with interactive technology and digital media was emphasised by all trainees. Trainees commented that the variety of engaging educational materials and exercises enabled deep learning of the material. The virtual learning experience not only encouraged absorption of knowledge but also allowed trainees to demonstrate the application of skills in a private learning environment. Regular contact with instructors was also achievable through personalised digital media sources such as videoconferencing, email and interactive online forums. The second benefit of the online format was the flexible, staged approach to learning (where trainee interviewers could learn at their own pace but were obliged to complete activities within a module in sequential order and could not progress until the module was completed).

I really liked the online course because it was always there and you could do it whenever you were ready; you didn’t have to wait for a scheduled date or time, or go to a certain place, or wait until a trainer is free. I just found it so easy to work through.

The idea of withholding information in the module until you have completed each task in a specific order is a good way to allow me
to stay on task and not get ahead of myself. It allowed me to focus on the information at hand.

Despite the many benefits of the online method of delivery used in the training system, trainees reported several challenges. Overall, the challenges associated with completion of the new training system had three themes. These themes included the following: limited allocated work time to complete the training, conflicting work practices arising from staggered course enrolment, and inadequate computer equipment and technical skills. Each of these themes will now be described in turn.

**Limited allocated work time to complete the training**

The challenge most frequently mentioned by trainees was the considerable time required to complete the training (and inadequate space within their normal workload to do so). All trainees raised this issue at least once, irrespective of their location or background. While some trainees acknowledged that the course was lengthy, no trainee felt that any of the content was irrelevant or could feasibly be removed. Rather, the trainees commented that there had been a mismatch between their initial expectations of the time required to complete the training and the actual time they spent on it, as well as the practical difficulties in quarantining work-time to study. Due to high workload, the urgent nature of working in child abuse investigation and open-plan work environments, dedicating time to the training system during work-time was reported by trainees to be exceptionally difficult, particularly for those who had been instructed by managers to complete the training around existing casework. The training system developers had advised that the course required 17 weeks to be completed; however, the constant interruptions, phone calls, emails, paperwork and urgent clients’ demands resulted in most trainees taking considerably longer to complete the course.
I found some of the training difficult to complete as I was at work and was interrupted due to work commitments. I completed exercises with a degree of difficulty; I rushed through quizzes and this showed in my scores. I have yet to find the balance between work and study.

When I started the training I was given half a day a week that I would allocate to study and it made it much, much easier to get through. But then everyone else in the office started the training too and they cut my study hours. Everyone was told to do the training when they have time. We are so busy with interviews and paperwork, how are we meant to find the time? The course is lengthy but at the same time I don’t think I know what to cut out either. I think the length is integral to its effectiveness.

I’m a workaholic so I was keen to get it started and went on it about a million miles an hour. But then I had to go out on an operation, and when I came back it took me a while to get my head back around it. I think it’s just the pace of the office. My casework comes first and the learning process inevitably takes a secondary role. It shouldn’t be like that.

Some trainees managed the issue of limited study time by completing the training from home. While this decision was voluntary and the trainees who reported doing this did not appear to resent this outcome, some highlighted that completing the work at home posed other difficulties such as a lack of collegial support, which subsequently slowed progression through the program.

I was allocated one day off per month as study leave. I also studied a few hours per week in my own time. I was aware before I started the course that I would need to put in my own time and I was happy to do that. I feel that professional development requires workers to be willing to put this personal time in.

I found some of the course difficult to complete because it required resources external to myself. I was doing a lot of the training workload at home or in my own time. I live by myself so I didn’t have anyone immediately on hand to do face-to-face interviews or exercises with.
The importance of being granted the physical and mental space to complete the training was stressed by trainees. Quarantined time and workspace was essential and must be negotiated with managers prior to commencement of the training. A number of trainees also believed that the timeline for the completion of each module should be provided as an incentive for trainees to complete the training program in a timely manner, by creating deadlines that must be adhered to (and respected by trainees’ managers). Timelines provide trainees with the opportunity to request time off from normal duties in order to adhere to deadlines, manage their time more productively, provide managers with a better sense of trainees’ study workload when allocating case files and offer goals for trainees to motivate themselves to achieve.

**Conflicting work practices arising from staggered course enrolment**

As explained in the Method section, there was staggered enrolment in the new training system (i.e., periodic enrolment of trainees in small, manageable cohorts) such that a child being interviewed about alleged abuse could be interviewed by a professional adopting the new interview technique while another child attending the same unit could be interviewed by professionals who had not yet commenced the new training and were therefore adopting the interview technique that preceded the new course. This situation (where two interview techniques were being used concurrently in the same office) was a source of stress for some trainees because of the highly collaborative environment in which investigative interviewers work. Investigative interviewers within these units routinely provide each other with support, advice and feedback. Thus, when two colleagues worked on the same case and had different views about how an interview should be conducted, it created conflict and tension within the unit.
Trainees complained that valuable time was sometimes being spent arguing over which interview technique to use, instead of discussing issues related to evidential details or how the interview should be progressed. It was also frustrating to observe interviews where old techniques were being utilised, which trainees felt were inferior to the techniques they had been taught in the new training.

I found that I would often look for people to be my monitor\(^3\) who were at that same point in the course as me because the untrained monitors weren’t really providing that same feedback. I would often spend the entire break explaining why I wasn’t going to ask certain questions rather than talking about what I should be asking.

I watched somebody who had only just started the course do an interview the other day and there were quite a few cringe moments where I just knew that she didn’t need to ask those questions. When she came to her break we confirmed that she had all the relevant information, albeit she had got way more than what was necessary, and we just talked about what the difference would be in an interview using the new interview protocol. Other people haven’t responded well to me comparing their interview style to the new protocol. If I tell them that they don’t need to ask all these specific questions about some irrelevant detail, or I query them about why they would want to further pursue something that you can easily obtain from another source, they get frustrated. Some people have been here a long time and don’t want to be told that they could be doing their job better.

Concern was also raised for newly qualified trainees who become the only interviewer in their region qualified under the new training system. Trainees believed that newly qualified interviewers might be criticised by their colleagues who had not experienced the new training system and who therefore employed different interview techniques. Confusion may arise for trainees who are provided with information about how to proceed with an interview that contradicts information provided in the course. This may decrease confidence and result in a

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\(^3\) The role of the interview monitor is to observe the interview whilst taking verbatim notes, control the visual and audio recording equipment and to provide support to the interviewer during the break of an interview by discussing points of clarification required from the child.
decline in newly acquired skills. One solution to this predicament would be to enrol all interviewers qualified under the previous training course into the new training at the same time. However, with over 250 qualified interviewers across the state, that would be impractical.

**Difficulties associated with computer and technical skills**

The third challenge that trainees raised related to technical issues. Computers provided to trainees by their organisations were reported to be slow and out-dated and presented a major challenge with the online training medium. Examples of common technical issues faced by trainees included difficulty submitting documents to the training website, limited access to some areas of the training and external websites (due in part to security restrictions on work servers) and difficulty playing training DVDs due to insufficient software of the organisations’ computers. Other difficulties related to trainees’ limited experience in navigating the Internet, uploading materials and completing online learning exercises. While technical difficulties did not appear to be a motivation for attrition during the training, they were a source of delay and considerable frustration for many trainees.

The module was interesting but due to technical issues, it took me a long, long time to complete. I wasted a lot of time trying to learn how to navigate the site. Learning that has been harder than the actual course! I just became more and more frustrated with it.

Because of our slow Internet system at my workplace I was unable to download some of the readings and instead I had to do it at home. It would be easier if our work computers weren’t from the last century. How can I complete an online training course when it takes ten minutes just to load up a website?

Trainees predominantly dealt with technical difficulties by seeking support from trainers, changing computers (i.e., using home computers that had sufficient
software) or postponing completion of exercises that posed difficulties in the hope that the problem would have been resolved when they logged onto the training website at a later time.

Some trainees acknowledged that technical support could be obtained from trainers over the phone or by email; however, there were sometimes delays in communication and receiving assistance. Many trainees therefore felt that with the high frequency of technical difficulties, more preparation and support was warranted from trainers. However, the onus of seeking such support should not be on the trainee. Trainees preferred regular contact (for the purpose of identifying common problems and developing global solutions) to be initiated by trainers via weekly emails or phone calls (to “check-in” with trainees) or live web-tutorials (to allow trainees to discuss their experiences in the training). The benefits of increased contact and support were numerous: it would decrease procrastination by trainees when waiting to resolve computer software issues, reduce the sense of isolation among trainees, assist trainers in monitoring trainees’ progress, motivate trainees to maintain the suggested study pace and help trainees with any difficulties that arose.

There was the odd time when I would go looking for trainer support and there was no one available and that was frustrating, but that is the nature of the beast. You can’t expect to have support waiting there 24/7. And I’m sure I could have used forums and emails and things like that but I just wanted an answer then and there. I think it was more about my frustration and being halted in the course and my style of learning.
Discussion

The current study adds support to the growing body of literature attesting to the potential utility of e-learning as a way of teaching adherence to best practice investigative interviewing of vulnerable witnesses (Powell et al., 2014). While the focus of this study was on the challenges associated with completion of e-learning training programs, the feedback in relation to this method of learning delivery was overwhelmingly positive. Specifically, the trainees who participated in the pilot perceived that the training had been effective at improving interviewing skills and teaching adherence to the new interview protocol. In the years preceding this evaluation, training in child interviewing has been reported to be an undervalued area of police work, with poor morale and organisational support being two of the most common complaints of child abuse investigative interviewers (Aarons, Powell, & Browne, 2004; Wright & Powell, 2006; 2007; Wright, Powell, & Ridge, 2007; Powell & Wright, 2008). Against this backdrop, all of the trainees in the current study felt they were in a privileged position to be specialising in this field of investigation, and that the training had assisted them in achieving the skill level they needed to do the job well.

From a practical perspective, however, several challenges were identified in this study that undermined successful completion of the training in a timely manner. These challenges related to allocation of work-time to complete the program, conflicting work practices arising from staggered course enrolment, and inadequate computing equipment and technical skills of trainees. Each of these challenges is hereby discussed with consideration of the broader literature, and recommendations for management are provided with regard to how organisations
can facilitate a smoother transition from the traditional classroom-based to e-
learning training frameworks with maximum success.

First, consistent with the prior qualitative research investigating the daily 
challenges faced by child abuse investigators, a primary theme raised in this study 
was workload. The high volume of casework, and the urgency with which it must 
be completed, undermines the completion of professional development activities 
(Powell & Wright, 2012). Restricting of the time allocated to training and 
supervision has been reported in almost every investigative interviewer training 
evaluation (e.g., Clarke & Milne, 2001; Clarke, Milne & Bull, 2004; Davies, 
Marshall & Robertson, 1998). However, with e-learning, where the core training 
must be completed within the work environment, the challenge associated with 
professional development is exacerbated. The implication for management is that 
clear structures and agreements need to be made with regard to how, where and the 
speed at which the course is to be completed and management needs to ensure 
that these agreements are adhered to.

The literature on human learning and study habits provides a broad 
framework to guide negotiations with management. This literature suggests that 
learning needs to be spaced over time (Rohrer & Pashlet, 2007; Sisti, Glassi & 
Shors, 2007; Son, 2004), study blocks need - ideally – to be at least a few hours 
long (Kunal, 2008; Ukpong & George, 2013), and the format and study 
environment need to accommodate individual learning preferences (Dunlosky, 
example, some students are able to study effectively in open-plan environments 
whereas others need minimal distraction (Fostervold, 2012; Kaarlela-Tuomaala, 
Helenius, Keskinen & Hongistro, 2009). Some students learn better in the 
morning and others later in the day (Hillier, Alexander & Beversdorf, 2006;
Mehta, Zhu & Cheema, 2012). Access to, experience and aptitude in using the Internet and related e-learning technology varies considerably among people (Jonassen & Garbowski, 2012; Lai, Wang & Wang, 2011). These individual differences were clearly evident in the responses of trainee interviewers in the current study. The implication is that, in addition to careful planning and monitoring of study activity, flexibility on the part of management is needed to ensure that work plans are created that maximise opportunities for efficient learning and course completion.

The second issue raised by trainees was that the staggered enrolment of trainees in the training system led to different interview techniques being employed by professionals working in the same unit, depending on whether they had undertaken the new training or not. This resulted in conflict between professionals when each believed their own interviewing technique constituted best practice. As with the challenge associated with high workload, conflicting practice between newly trained and more experienced staff is not unique to e-learning. Indeed, it is a challenge inherent in most child abuse investigation environments due to the rapid turnover and varied experience levels of staff. Collaboration and highly integrated community culture among service providers is the keystone of an effective system for responding to sexual assault: it is critical for sustaining professional wellbeing, commitment and engagement (Robinson, Hudson, & Brookman, 2008; Wright et al., 2007). The weakness of the system is not the differing views per se but the absence of proactive intervention processes to facilitate professionals’ ability to identify and resolve differences in expectations or opinion. The implication is that corporate management needs to take a strong role in ensuring that proposed reforms are widely understood, actually implemented in the manner expected, and that staff have the skills to deal with conflicts arising from collaborative work relationships.
Strategies reported in the literature for facilitating strong collaborative relationships fall into three broad areas. First, experts have emphasised the value of regular inter-agency meetings to establish open lines of communication, to solicit feedback and to enable consistent responses to concerns (McCallin, 2001). Second, the literature has emphasised the value of formal expert mediation and provision to staff of training in conflict prevention and resolution (e.g., open communication, assertiveness, team building). Third, ongoing evaluation and monitoring of work-based practices is important for examining the efficacy of the reform and resolving professional tensions before they become insurmountable problems (Powell & Wright, 2006).

The final challenge raised by trainees was related to difficulties with technical and computing skills. These included difficulties with online document submission, access to external websites and software, navigation of the e-learning training website and unstable Internet connections. The perception of technical difficulties as a stressor is understandably magnified in an e-learning environment, where trainees’ main interaction is online (MacDonald & Thompson, 2005; Shimoni, Barrington, Wilde & Henwood, 2013). The impact of these difficulties, which are compounded in government organisations with restricted funding, cannot be underestimated as they can delay completion, compound workplace stress and lead to attrition (Sitzmann, Ely, Bell & Bauer, 2010). Apart from further development of the training website to improve user experience, and further monitoring and support from team leaders, meeting this challenge requires increased provision of computing resources (at the least a few designated and fully equipped workstations for staff to utilise), or more flexibility for staff to work from home, where security restrictions on Internet usage are
likely to be more lenient and computing facilities superior to that in the workplace.

**Conclusion and Implications**

The current study provides qualitative evidence of the utility of e-learning as a method of training investigative interviewers, and support for the implementation of the new reform. As with any major change, the introduction of the new training system posed several challenges, but none that were insurmountable or particularly unique to e-learning. Further, the study allowed opportunities for further improvement to be identified and applied prior to a broad scale implementation of the training system across entire organisations.

The major changes to the training system were as follows. First, clearer guidelines were given around the duration of the various training activities and their requirements, to assist trainees and their managers in scheduling time to complete the course. Second, trainers were instructed to explain the new reform to all staff members involved in the administration or supervision of child investigative interviews, in an attempt to encourage support of newly qualified trainees. Third, a major overhaul was made to the training website to increase usability and the monitoring of trainees performance. Finally, trainees were encouraged to work from home where possible. The next stage of the reform to improve investigative interviewing was to implement the new training system into three large organisations.
CHAPTER 7 - EVALUATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE INTERACTIVE TRAINING SYSTEM FOR INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWERS OF CHILDREN (STUDIES 3 AND 4)\footnote{The two studies in this chapter have been accepted for publication. The full reference is Benson, M. S., & Powell, M. B. (in press). Evaluation of a comprehensive interactive training system for investigative interviewers of children. Psychology, Public Policy and Law.}

This chapter presents the third and fourth studies in this thesis and the third stage in the new reform to improve investigative interviewing (see Stage 3 in Figure 1). The previous two studies evaluated the new reform by examining prosecutors’ perceptions of the utility of the interview protocol, which is the ultimate end product of the training system, and identified organisational challenges that arose during a pilot of the training. The current chapter presents an evaluation of the main objective of the reform - the effectiveness of the new training system in improving and sustaining interviewer performance.

At the time data collection for the current study had ceased, the training system had been fully implemented and had been in operation for 18 months across two jurisdictions in Australia. The current chapter reports two studies, each using a different assessment interview. The first study (Study 3) examined the effect of the training on mock interview assessments, using a standardised measure of performance for all trainees where the context and difficulty level could be easily controlled. The second study (Study 4) examined the effect of the training on field interviews. Across these two studies, several measures of performance were analysed, including open-ended question usage, adherence to interview protocol elements, interview length and the quality of information sought by the interviewer. A range of other measures tested trainees’ abilities to effectively engage with children in a developmentally appropriate manner and in a
way that satisfied the needs of prosecution. To conclude that the program is
effective, improvement in performance must be demonstrated across a range of
measures and performance needs to be maintained over time.

**STUDY 3 (MOCK INTERVIEWS)**

**Method**

**Participants**

The current study was approved by the Deakin University Ethics
Committee and the managers of the participating organisations. Although
completion of the training was a job requirement, participation in the evaluation
component was voluntary. Any trainee who had consented to participate and had
completed the training by November 2014 was eligible. The final sample included
92 trainees (73 female, 19 male), which is highly representative of all the trainees
who had enrolled in the training. Eleven trainees withdrew from the training due
to various circumstances. This drop out is typical across training courses due to
staff turnover and unexpected leave. One trainee declined to participate in the
research component.

The sample of trainees was highly heterogeneous in terms of location,
experience and job role. Trainees resided in two jurisdictions in Australia,
spanning 15 different locations, both metro and rural. Sixty-four of the trainees
worked for their respective jurisdictions’ police force as detectives and constables,
and 28 were child protection workers. Of the 92 trainees who participated, 52
were already qualified as specialist child interviewers from previous
organisational training, with between 6 months and 10 years of experience ($M = 1.86$ years, $SD = 2.41$), and continued to interview children whilst completing the new training. Forty trainees had never interviewed a child in a forensic setting before and according to legislation, were only permitted to interview children about alleged abuse in a field setting after successful completion of the training.

**Interview assessment**

All trainees completed two mock interview assessments: one prior to commencing the training system (hereby referred to as *pre-training assessment*) and one immediately after completing the training (referred to as *post-training assessment*). Thirty-nine trainees also conducted a mock interview between three and six months after completion of the training system (referred to as *follow-up assessment*). This subsample was heterogeneous; it encompassed both novice and previously experienced interviewers, from police and child protection organisations across the two jurisdictions.

The mock interview assessments involved trainees interviewing adult actors playing the role of five-year-old male and female children reporting alleged abuse. Several actors were used, all of whom had been trained to adhere to the same guidelines that dictated how to respond in a developmentally appropriate manner to various questions. Prior to conducting a mock interview, trainees were provided with a case scenario, which provided brief background case information. There were twelve different scenarios in all, which reflected a range of abuse types. The background information for each scenario was phrased in a manner that suggested, but did not explicitly state, that abuse had occurred. Trainees were aware that each scenario could have an innocent (i.e., non-abusive) explanation. Trainees were instructed to commence the interview with the prompt, “Tell me
what you have come to talk about,” and to then elicit as detailed and accurate information as possible about the alleged abusive event. The case scenarios were fully counter-balanced across assessment phases and across participants such that no trainee received the same scenario twice. Trainees were advised that they could terminate the interview at any point, or when they felt all necessary information had been elicited. All of the interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

**Measures**

There were two categories of measures: interviewer questions and interviewer behaviour.

**Interviewer questions.** Three question types were coded. Open-ended questions were defined as any question that encouraged an elaborate response, but did not dictate what specific information was required (e.g., “What happened then?”, “Tell me more about the part where [activity or detail previously reported by the respondent]”). Specific questions were defined as questions that focused the child’s attention on pre-disclosed details or aspects of the event and specified what precise information should be reported. These included cued-recall ‘Wh-’ questions that elicited information on who, what, when, where, why or how (e.g., “What’s John’s last name?”), yes/no questions and option-posing questions (e.g., “Was it his left hand or his right hand?”). Leading questions were those questions that presumed or included a specific detail that was not previously mentioned by the child. The number of open-ended questions asked before the first specific question was also tallied, as was the number of minimal encouragers (often referred to as facilitators; Lamb et al., 1996). These were utterances that
encouraged the child to continue talking, without disrupting the flow of conversation (e.g., “Uh huh”). Because minimal encouragers often serve the same function as open-ended questions (Powell & Snow, 2007), they were included in the open-ended question category for some of the analyses.

**Interviewer behaviour.** A checklist was created that defined 14 interviewer behaviours representing best practice interviewing. These behaviours addressed the ability to: launch a narrative with an *appropriate* open-ended invitation, correctly implement ground rules, use a *variety* of minimal encouragers, stick to one occurrence at a time, exhaust each narrative, identify the child’s use of generic language, allow the child to talk without interruption, ask a *range* of open-ended questions, use simple language, avoid the use of pronouns, stick to past tense, use developmentally appropriate language, avoid complex concepts and avoid “Can you” questions\(^5\). For each behavior exhibited by the interviewer, and where it was possible for the interviewer to demonstrate that behavior in the interview, one point was awarded. Note that a single point was awarded irrespective of how many times the behavior was observed in the interview.

All transcripts were coded by one person and 20% were also coded by a second researcher who was not otherwise involved in this research. Coders were blind as to whether the interview had been conducted prior to, or after, training. Inter-rater reliability analyses using the Kappa statistic were performed to determine consistency among raters for both measures. Landis and Koch’s (1977) classifications of 0.0 – 0.2 as a slight agreement, 0.21 to 0.40 as a fair agreement, 5 The pairing of a follow-up specific question with an open-ended question (as introduced in Chapter 2) was also included in the initial checklist; however, this was removed from the final measure. The specific questions that interviewers were employing after exhausting the child’s narrative were of a nature that did not require a complementary open-ended question (e.g., “What was his name? Do you call anyone else ‘Daddy’?”).
0.41 to 0.60 as a moderate agreement, 0.61 to 0.80 as a substantial agreement and 0.81 to 1.00 as an almost perfect agreement were used for interpretation.

Agreement between coders was found to be high for interviewer questions (Kappa = 0.96), substantial for the use of simple language and an appropriate open-ended invitation (Kappas = 0.80), and moderate for the use of “Can you” question (Kappa = 0.42). There was complete agreement between coders for the twelve remaining interviewer behaviors (Kappas = 1.00).

**Analyses**

A series of paired samples *t*-tests were used to compare performance across the pre- and post-training conditions. Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to examine performance across the pre-training, post-training and follow-up assessment conditions. Effects sizes were calculated as eta-squared (\(\eta^2\)), and Cohen’s classifications of 0.01 as a small effect, 0.06 as a moderate effect, and 0.14 as a strong effect were used for interpretation (Pallant, 2013). For data that was not normally distributed, non-parametric tests (Wilcoxon signed ranks and Friedman, respectively) were conducted. Effect sizes were calculated as *r* for non-parametric tests and Cohen’s classification of 0.1 as a small effect, 0.3 as a medium effect, and 0.5 as a strong effect were used for interpretation (Pallant, 2013).

**Results**

**Interviewer questions**

For each question type (open-ended, specific and leading) a proportion score was calculated, representing the number of questions out of the total number
of questions asked (pooled across all categories). Paired samples $t$-tests revealed that for open-ended questions proportion scores increased from pre-training to post-training, $t(91) = 10.88, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.57$, and declined over time for specific questions, $t(91) = 8.67, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.45$. Wilcoxon signed ranks test indicated that the proportion of leading questions decreased significantly from pre- ($Mdn = 0.11$) to post-training ($Mdn = .05$), $Z = -4.8, p < .001, r = 0.5$.

The analyses for open-ended questions were repeated with (a) minimal encouragers included, (b) absolute rather than proportion scores and (c) the number of open-ended questions asked before the first specific question as the dependent variable. For all analyses, the pattern (significant increase in performance at the post-training assessment interval) remained the same ($p$s $< .001$). The analyses were also repeated separately for the 52 trainees who were experienced in conducting investigative interviews with child witnesses and the 40 trainees who were novice interviewers. At the pre-commencement assessment, experienced interviewers asked significantly more open-ended questions than novice interviewers, $t(90) = 1.96, p = .03, \eta^2 = 0.04$. The difference between groups had diminished by the post-training assessment and was not significant, $t(90) = -0.41, p = .28, \eta^2 < 0.01$. Further, the analyses were repeated on participants within each jurisdiction separately. For all analyses, the pattern of findings was consistent. There was a significant increase in the use of open-ended questions coupled with significant decrease in the use of specific and leading questions across the two time intervals ($p$s $< .01$). Table 3 displays the mean proportion of each question type utilised within each subsample.

Thirty-nine of the trainees were available (at the time of this evaluation) to participate in a follow-up mock interview. These follow-up interviews were all scheduled three to six months after the completion of the training program. For
Table 3. *Mean Proportion of Question Types Asked in Subsamples*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Pre-training interviews (SD)</th>
<th>Post- training interviews (SD)</th>
<th>Follow-up interviews (SD)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Open questions</td>
<td>Specific questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jurisdiction 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>.27 (.18)</td>
<td>.57 (.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jurisdiction 2</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>.33 (.21)</td>
<td>.57 (.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novice trainees</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>.26 (.17)</td>
<td>.58 (.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced interviewers</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>.34 (.22)</td>
<td>.56 (.20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the open-ended and specific questions, one-way repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted to compare performance across all three assessment sessions (i.e., pre-training, post-training and the 3-6 month follow-up). The proportions of leading questions across the three sessions were compared using a Friedman test. Overall, these analyses showed that the improvement in performance (i.e., increase in proportion of open-ended questions and decrease in proportion of specific and leading questions) was maintained over time. Significant effects were found for all three questions types [open-ended questions, \( F(2, 37) = 14.56, p < .001 \), partial \( \eta^2 = 0.44 \); specific questions, \( F(2, 37) = 10.5, p < .001 \), partial \( \eta^2 = 0.36 \); leading questions, \( \chi^2 (N = 39) = 9.19, p = .01, r = 0.32 \)]. Post-hoc Bonferroni tests indicated that there was a significant difference in the proportion of open-ended questions asked at pre-training (\( M = 0.34, SD = 0.23 \)) and post-training (\( M = 0.58, SD = 0.15 \)), \( p < .001 \). However, there was no significant difference between post-training and follow-up interviews (\( M = 0.56, SD = 0.15 \), \( p = 1.0 \)). Similarly, there was a significant difference in specific questions utilised from pre-training (\( M = 0.56, SD = 0.22 \)) to post-training (\( M = 0.36, SD = 0.15 \), \( p < .001 \), but no significant difference from post-training to the follow-up assessment (\( M = 0.40, SD = 0.14 \), \( p = .66 \). The decrease in the proportion of leading questions asked from pre-training (\( Mdn = .07 \)) to post-training interviews (\( Mdn = 0.07 \)) was significant, \( Z = -2.19, p = .03, r = 0.35 \). Interestingly, the decrease in the proportion of leading questions asked from the post-training to the follow-up interview (\( Mdn = 0.04 \)) was also significant, \( Z = -2.99, p = .003, r = 0.48 \), indicating that performance continued to improve even after the training ceased.

**Interviewer behaviour**

The second set of analyses determined whether the new training was associated with improvement in the interviewer behaviours (e.g., use of developmentally appropriate questions). The absolute proportion of preferred behaviours was calculated for each trainee (i.e., the proportion of behaviours exhibited out of all possible behaviours that could have
been demonstrated in that interview). The absolute proportion of preferred behaviours increased significantly ($Z = -8.33, p < .001, r = 0.87$) from pre- ($Mdn = 0.39$) to post-training ($Mdn = 0.85$). A Friedman test indicated a significant effect in the proportion of preferred behaviours exhibited at pre-training, post-training and follow-up interviews for 39 trainees, [$\chi^2 (N = 92) = 53, p < .001$]. Post-hoc Wilcoxon tests indicated that post-training interviews ($Mdn = .85$) had a significantly higher proportion of preferred interview behaviours displayed than pre-training interviews ($Mdn = .42$), $Z = -5.37, p < .001, r = 0.43$. Further, a significant difference was found between post-training and follow-up interviews ($Mdn = .92$), $Z = 2.69, p = .007, r = 0.31$, indicating that trainees continued to improve even after the training ceased.

**STUDY 4 (FIELD INTERVIEWS)**

Two types of analyses were performed on field interviews, all conducted within the same jurisdiction. First, to examine whether the benefits of the training had transferred to the workplace, independent sample $t$-tests and non-parametric Mann-Whitney $U$ tests assessed the degree to which interviews conducted at pre- versus post-training were aligned with best practice interviewing on five different measures. Secondly, to determine the degree to which fluctuations in performance had occurred prior to this intervention, a correlational analysis was conducted on adherence to open-ended question usage in each of the five years that preceded the new training. If interviewers’ use of open-ended questions remained stable across the five years, it provides additional support for any effects observed from pre- to post-training.
**Method**

**Interview assessment**

Fifty interviews from each of the five years prior to the training implementation (2009-2013) were randomly selected from a database that held thousands of archived child interviews. All the interviews had been conducted by qualified specialist child interviewers. From this pool of 250 interviews, 78 interviews (approximately 15 per year across a total of 45 interviewers) were randomly selected for comparison with 78 post-training interviews. These post-training interviews represented (at the time of this evaluation) all possible interviews conducted by 26 graduates of the new training system. The inclusion criteria for interviews were that the child was being interviewed about an allegation of sexual abuse by one offender and had not previously been interviewed about the offence. In total, the 328 interviews (250 pre-training and 78 post-training) involved 51 males and 277 females, aged four to 17 years ($M = 10.57$, $SD = 3.08$). All interviews were transcribed verbatim and de-identified prior to being included in this study.

**Measures**

Five measures were adopted: (i) interviewer questions, (ii) interviewer behaviour, (iii) adherence to the interview protocol, (iv) interview length, and (v) investigative questions. Interviewer questions and behaviour were measured in the same way as in Study 1. The other measures are outlined below.

**Adherence to the interview protocol.** A list of 19 interviewer behaviors was created, representing the various elements of the interview protocol. These behaviors assessed ability to: administer ground rules, involve the child in practice of a ground rule, identify a practice
narrative event, elicit an episode of the practice event, maintain open-ended questions in the practice narrative, elicit the child’s understanding of the interview purpose, identify the topic of concern, confirm prior information, establish whether the abuse was repeated, identify the number of abuse occurrences, exhaust each occurrence, initiate a break before utilising specific questions, identify what was said to any early complainant, and explore any further offences. For each behavior that was administered appropriately, and where it was possible for the interviewer to demonstrate that behavior in the interview, one point was awarded.

**Interview Length.** The total length of interview was calculated in minutes, excluding breaks. As interview length was associated with the number of occurrences of abuse discussed, a second measure of interview length was calculated by dividing the total length of the interview by the number of occurrences discussed. This measure represented the average time (minutes) spent talking about each occurrence.

**Investigative questions.** A group of prosecutors and a detective were consulted in two face-to-face sessions, to create a list of details deemed essential for the successful investigation and prosecution of a child sexual abuse case. The details fell into six categories: the identity of the offender, the approximate date of the offence, the location, the offence type, possible witnesses and possible physical evidence. Interview transcripts were examined to identify whether all categories were addressed in the interview, either through open-ended or specific questions. One point was awarded for each category where the interviewer attempted to elicit a response. For each category, it was then noted whether the interviewer’s request was appropriate (i.e., reflected developmentally appropriate language and concepts and refrained from questioning about irrelevant, minutiae details).

One person coded all transcripts and a second researcher coded 20% of these. Coders were blind as to whether the interview had been conducted prior to, or after, training. Inter-
rater reliability analyses were measured using Cohen’s Kappa to determine consistency among raters for each measure (excluding interview length). As with Study 1, Landis and Koch’s (1977) were used for interpretation. Reliability was found to be substantial for investigative questions (Kappa = .77) and five behaviours related to adhering to the interview protocol [maintain open-ended questions in the practice narrative (Kappa = 0.62), confirm prior information (Kappa = 0.71), establish whether the abuse was repeated (Kappa = 0.71), identify the number of abuse occurrences (Kappa = 0.83), initiate a break before utilising specific questions (Kappa = 0.74)]. There was complete agreement between raters for the remaining 11 behaviors that related to adherence to the protocol (Kappas = 1.00).

**Analyses**

A series of independent samples $t$-tests were conducted to compare performance of pre- and post-training. ANOVAs were performed to compare interviews across pre-training, post-training and at the 3-6 month follow-up. For data that was not normally distributed, non-parametric Mann-Whitney $U$ and Kruskal-Wallis tests (respectively) were conducted. Five analyses were conducted, one for each separate measure of performance.

**Results**

Table 4 presents the mean proportion of each of the measures (excluding interview length).

**Interviewer questions**

For the open-ended questions, a significant improvement from pre- to post-training was evident, $t(154) = 20.54, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.73$. A significant decline across the assessment conditions was found in the proportion of specific questions, $t(154) = 17.93, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.68$. A decline in the proportion of leading questions from pre- to post-training was also
Table 4. Mean Proportion of Question Type, Preferred Behaviour Exhibited, Protocol Elements Correctly Administered, and Categories of Essential Information Sought by the Interviewer

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Open questions</strong></td>
<td>78 .10 (.04)</td>
<td>78 .40 (.12)</td>
<td>27 .40 (.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific questions</strong></td>
<td>78 .83 (.05)</td>
<td>78 .56 (.12)</td>
<td>27 .55 (.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leading questions</strong></td>
<td>78 .08 (.05)</td>
<td>78 .04 (.03)</td>
<td>27 .05 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preferred behaviours exhibited</strong></td>
<td>78 .46 (.09)</td>
<td>78 .81 (.14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Correctly administered protocol elements</strong></td>
<td>78 .32 (.10)</td>
<td>78 .94 (.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Investigative questions</strong></td>
<td>78 .94 (.10)</td>
<td>78 .95 (.09)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
evident, \( Z = -5.05, p < .001, r = 0.04 \). An additional analysis was conducted to confirm that pre-training interview performance had remained stable prior to the implementation of the new training. Fifty transcripts from each year between 2009 and 2013 (inclusive) were analysed for question type. The relationship between the mean proportion of open-ended questions and year was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, revealing no statistically significant relationship between these two variables, \( r = 0.05, N = 250, p = .45 \).

To investigate whether the improvement in performance in the post-training interviews could be maintained, two one-way between-groups ANOVAs (one for open-ended questions and one for specific questions) were performed to compare the three groups (pre-training, post-training and follow-up interviews). This included interviews conducted up to four months post-training (hereby labelled as ‘post training’, \( M \) months = 1.25, \( SD = 1.29, N = 51 \)) and all remaining interviews (hereby labelled as ‘follow-up’, \( M \) months = 7.37, \( SD = 3.74, N = 27 \)). These analyses revealed significant effects at the \( p < .001 \) level in the proportion of questions asked across the three interview types [open-ended, \( F(2,131) = 152.66, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.7 \); specific, \( F(2,131) = 113.7, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.63 \)]. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean proportion of each question type asked at pre-training [open-ended (\( M = 0.10, SD = 0.04 \)); specific (\( M = 0.82, SD = 0.06 \))] was significantly different from post-training [open-ended (\( M = 0.40, SD = 0.13 \)), \( p < .001 \); specific (\( M = 0.56, SD = 0.13 \)), \( p < .001 \)]. However, there was no significant difference between post-training and follow-up assessment [open-ended (\( M = 0.40, SD = 0.11 \)), \( p = 1.0 \); specific (\( M = 0.55, SD = 0.11 \)), \( p = .94 \)]. For the leading questions, a Kruskal-Wallis test was performed and also found to be significant, \( \chi^2(N = 156) = 24.05, p < .001 \). A post-hoc comparison using the Mann-Whitney \( U \) test indicated that the proportion of leading questions decreased significantly from pre-
training to post-training, $Z = -4.65, p < .001, r = 0.37$. There was no significant different between post-training and the follow-up assessment, $Z = -0.95, p = 0.34, r = 0.07$.

**Interview behaviour and adherence to protocol**

There was a significant increase in the proportion of interviewer behaviours from pre-training to post-training, $Z = -10.18, p < .001, r = 0.82$. The same pattern was found for an analysis on the proportion of correctly administered elements from the protocol included in each interview transcript. There was a significant increase in adherence to the interview protocol from pre-training to post-training, $Z = -10.84, p < .001, r = 0.87$.

**Interview Length**

For seven post-training transcripts, the interview times were not recorded and thus these transcripts were excluded. For the remaining 71 post- and 78 pre-training interviews, a significant decrease in interview length was revealed after training [$M$ pre-training = 65.49, $SD = 29.68$; $M$ post-training = 41.30, $SD = 22.75$, $t(147) = 5.54, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.17$]. The time spent discussing each occurrence also significantly decreased from $M = 46.86$ minutes ($SD = 20.31$) pre-training to $M = 22.91$ minutes ($SD = 9.98$) post-training, $t(147) = 8.99, p = < .001, \eta^2 = 0.36$.

**Investigative Questions**

A Mann-Whitney $U$ test indicated no significant difference in the information sought by interviewers from pre- to post-training, $Z = -0.81, p = 0.42, r = 0.06$. In other words, despite the changes in other measures, the interviewers were equally diligent in pursuing the key evidential details. However, when the appropriateness of
questioning techniques was analysed, a significant difference between pre- and post-training was evident, $Z = -10.9, p < .001, r = 0.88$, indicating that the techniques utilised to elicit important evidential information were more appropriate after training.

**Discussion**

The current findings provide clear support for the utility of the training system evaluated in this study. The most important indicator of best practice interviewing is adherence to open-ended questions, and this training was associated with a significant increase, along with relatively high post-training rates, in the use of these questions. For the mock interviews, the mean proportion of open-ended questions increased from 30% at pre-training to 58% at post-training. For the field interviews, the mean proportion of these questions increased fourfold from 10% pre- to 40% post-training. These strong results need to be considered in light of the fact that a highly conservative measure of open-ended questions was used. Whereas some researchers define open-ended questions as any question that invites an elaborate response from the child, the definition used in the current study included questions that encouraged a narrative response but without dictating what specific information was required. Thus, questions that prompt the child to provide a description of a person (e.g., “Tell me all about Dan”) or ask how the abuse occurred (e.g., “Tell me how he touched you”) were assigned to the specific – rather than the open-ended - question category.

Importantly, improvements in performance were sustained at the 3-6 month follow-up mock interview assessment and for up to 12 months in the field. Most interviewer evaluation studies have demonstrated some post-training improvement, yet few have shown long-term maintenance of interviewer skills after training or supervision has ceased (Cederborg et al., 2013; Cyr & Lamb, 2009; Dion & Cyr,
For example, Lamb et al. (2002a) found that trainees’ adherence to best practice interview guidelines decreased significantly six months after supervision and feedback was terminated. Smith, Powell, Fisher & Hughes-Scholes (2008b) showed that officers who had graduated from their interviewer-training course with good open-ended question usage were at one month post-training no better at adhering to open-ended questions than officers who had received no formal training in interviewing children at all. What the current studies showed is that long-term maintenance of interviewing skills is not just dependent on the prevalence of feedback and supervision in the months after the training ceases. The structure of the training program itself also impacts skill maintenance.

In addition to the follow-up assessments, the strengths of this design were the large and heterogeneous sample of trainees, and the use of multiple performance measures and assessment contexts. Prior studies have tended to use experienced interviewers and have focused primarily on open-ended question usage. When examining the effect of the new training system across different sub-samples and measures, the findings were robust. Specifically, the improvements from pre- to post-training were observed across two independent jurisdictions, for experienced and novice interviewers, for both mock and field interviews, and irrespective of how open-ended questions were measured. The improvement in open-ended question usage after training was also associated with an improvement in all of the measures of best practice interviewing. The proportion of positive behaviours demonstrated by trainees (e.g., appropriate choice of open-ended questions and use of developmentally appropriate language) significantly improved from pre- to post-training in the mock and field interview settings. Further, compared with pre-training interviews, post-training field interviews displayed greater adherence to the interview protocol, and
were significantly shorter in length even though there were no changes in the amount of critical evidential information pursued. Collectively, the findings have addressed key concerns raised by different players in the justice system; concerns from eyewitness memory experts about insufficient opportunity for narrative detail as well as complaints from prosecutors and witnesses about longwinded, interrogative and overly complex interviewing (Burrows & Powell, 2014a; Cashmore & Trimboli, 2005; McConachy, 2002; Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Esplin & Horowitz, 2007; 2008; Lamb, Hershkowitz, Orbach & Esplin, 2008; Lyon, 2010; Powell & Snow, 2007; Saywitz, Lyon & Goodman, 2011; Sternberg et al., 1996).

So what contributed to the success of the current training system over previous evaluation studies that showed a more rapid drop off in performance, and over the previous training in these jurisdictions that had produced low base rates? No definitive answer can be offered because the current training system differed from other programs in two key dimensions; namely, the content and the nature of the training delivery. Nonetheless, given that some previous studies (using classroom-based models) have shown improvements in open-ended question usage during their courses, the sustained improvements may be due in large part to the distributed learning style (involving incremental development of skills) and the multiple opportunities for deliberate, short-intensity practice. One of the most robust and best-documented findings in memory research is that training yields longer retention if practice opportunities are spaced over a long period of time (Baddeley & Longman, 1978; Bahrick, 2000; Bjork & Allen, 1990; Bruce & Bahrick, 1992; Dempster, 1990; Schmidt & Bjork, 1992). Learning that occurs across multiple, strategically spaced training sessions allows deeper and more conceptual learning, more robust encoding of information, and better long-term memory (see Son & Simon, 2012 for review). Massed practice, on the other hand, prevents learners from processing information as
thoroughly as is required for long-term retention of knowledge (Schmidt & Bjork, 1992).

Summary and Conclusion

In conclusion, the two studies presented in the current chapter provide robust quantitative evidence of the utility of e-learning as a training delivery method. Past evaluation research in the area of investigative interviewing has focused primarily on determining whether individual training programs can promote adherence to best practice guidelines and whether improvements can be sustained many months after training has been completed. While prior research has had limited success in skill maintenance, this evaluation has shown excellent results across a range of measures and time frames. These findings potentially mark the beginning of a new era in interviewer training delivery and research.

Overall, the findings of the two current studies indicate that the current training reform has been successful in improving interviewing performance. The next (final) step of this evaluation, which is presented in Chapter 8, is to examine whether these positive results have had any impact on the broader child abuse investigation process.
CHAPTER 8 - THE EFFECT OF THE TRAINING REFORM ON CASE OUTCOMES (STUDY 5)

In the previous chapter of this thesis, robust evidence was presented for the training reform’s success in improving interviewers’ long-term adherence to best-practice guidelines. These results, along with the availability of police data related to case outcomes provided an opportunity to examine a new and important issue related to the interviewing of child complainants of sexual assault. The new issue, which will be addressed in the current chapter, relates to whether improved questioning is associated with lower case attrition.

Sexual assault victims suffer the lowest prosecution rates of all indictable offences (Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System, 2009; Criminal Justice Sexual Offences Taskforce, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2006). While eyewitness testimony researchers have argued for many years that an open-ended questioning style should improve case outcomes (e.g., see Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Esplin & Horowitz, 2007; Pipe, Lamb, Orbach & Esplin, 2008), most of the evidence for the downstream effects of interviewer performance has been anecdotal, arising from qualitative interviews with criminal justice stakeholders. The paucity of analyses using hard indicators of case outcomes is due to several factors. This includes prior difficulties in accessing reliable data for the purpose of retrospective system evaluation, as well as the fact that few jurisdictions have been able to demonstrate enough sustained improvement in open-ended question usage to compare the downstream effects of different interview formats (Cederborg, Alm, de Silva Nises & Lamb, 2013; Leach, Baksheev and Powell, in press; Myklebust & Bjørklund, 2006; Price & Roberts, 2011).

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6 Due to the lengthy time frame between a child’s investigative interview and a case proceeding to trial, the effect of the training reform on trial outcomes could not be examined in the current thesis.
When examining anecdotal evidence for the downstream effects of children’s interviews (via qualitative interviews with stakeholders), the effect of specific questions on witness credibility and the evidential utility of responses to specific questions are prominent themes. This was well illustrated in the study by Burrows and Powell (2014) where thirty-six in-depth qualitative interviews were held with 19 trial prosecutors shortly before and after the delivery of verdicts of trials involving child complainants of sexual abuse. For each case, prosecutors were asked to provide feedback about the strengths and limitations of the child witness interviews. The prosecutors emphasised that evidence is perceived as most credible and persuasive when it is elicited in narrative format through carefully selected open-ended questions, particularly questions that direct the child to focus on the offending (i.e., what happened and who did it). When interviewers place excessive emphasis on eliciting finely tuned details using highly specific questions - which was the typical style of interviewing prior to the current training reform - it fatigues the child, making him/her more prone to errors and inconsistencies. These errors and inconsistencies are subsequently used by defence to cast doubt on the reliability of the child’s entire account.

The issues driving low prosecution rates are complex, reflecting limitations in child witness capabilities, interviewer performance and the high level of detail required by law to prove charges. Nonetheless, there is preliminary hard evidence to show that interviewer adherence to best-practice guidelines can improve trial outcomes. Specifically, Pipe et al (2013) trained 16 US-based child forensic interviewers in a single county in how to interview according to best-practice guidelines (i.e., the use of open-ended questions) with the aid of the NICHD interview protocol. The authors then compared the trial outcomes of cases in which interviewers had been trained in the use of the protocol and cases in which they had not. Analyses
showed that cases involving NICHD protocol interviewers had a higher rate of prosecution than non-protocol cases and among those cases that proceeded to prosecution, the rate of conviction was higher. Overall, Pipe et al’s findings provided support for the downstream benefits of using open-ended questions; however, as the first and only study to examine this issue, further empirical research is warranted.

The current study used a pre-post design in an attempt to replicate the striking association between open-ended question format and case outcome that was reported by Pipe et al (2013). The current study included several distinctive features, which collectively provide a good test of the generalisability of the prior results. First, in the jurisdiction where the current study was conducted, the interviewers (either a social worker or police officer) were different in the pre- and post-training conditions and the interviewers were independent of the investigators. Specifically, the interviewers handed children’s electronically recorded interviews over to the investigation unit and had no subsequent involvement with the cases. By contrast, in Pipe et al’s study the same detectives conducted the pre-training and post-training interviews, and these professionals were all detectives who investigated the cases for which they conducted the interviews. As the investigating officers who took part in the current study had not been trained in the new reform, this study provides an opportunity to examine the association between interviewing and police investigation outcomes while keeping investigator attitude and performance constant.

Second, the focus of the current study was on the pre-trial (as opposed to trial) stage of the justice process, where attrition of cases is most likely to occur (Christensen, Sharman & Powell, under review; Parkinson, Shrimpton, Swanston & O’Toole, 2002). The role of the police at the pre-trial stage is to be, in effect, the ‘gatekeepers’ to the criminal justice system because they are responsible for making decisions regarding whether cases of potential abuse will proceed to the courts for
prosecution (VLRC, 2004). While investigators, like jurors, are heavily influenced by victim credibility and the persuasiveness of the accounts (Alderden & Ullman, 2012; Bouffard, 2000; Campbell, Menaker & King, 2015; Powell, Murfett & Thomson, 2010; Spohn, Beichner & David-Frenzel, 2001; Tasca, Rodriguez, Spohn & Koss, 2013), expectations around the sufficiency of the evidence that is needed to make a charge play a major role in the decisions. Here, there seems to be a discrepancy between interviewers’ and prosecutors’ perceptions of the legal requirements of interviews (Guadagno, Powell & Wright, 2006; Burrows & Powell, 2014a).

Investigators tend to have higher expectations around the need for specific details (such as the location, date and time of the offence) when particularising offences and substantiating the account. With the current training reform, minutiae concerning the location and date of the abuse and the description of the offender were markedly reduced. Unless the investigators understood and supported the change in interview style, it may be that improvements in interviewing quality were not associated with improved investigation outcomes, as investigators may have been less likely to refer cases for prosecution if they doubted the evidential quality afforded by the new format.

Consistent with the prior studies in this thesis, a range of measures was used in this study to evaluate the effectiveness of the training reform. The measures of case outcome included the percentage of all offenders who confessed to the alleged abuse, the percentage of all cases that led to a charge being made by the police, and the mean length of time it took for the police to decide whether or not a charge should be made.
Method

The current study was approved by Deakin University Ethics Committee and the jurisdiction’s police force and child protection organisation. The data for this study was collated through a police case management database. The database records information about every crime committed from the initial report of abuse until case closure. Information on every case of alleged child sexual abuse that was investigated after implementation of the new reform (hereafter referred to as post-reform cases), between 2013 and 2015, was extracted. Two hundred and seven cases were collected in total. The information was reviewed to ensure that each case met the criteria of the study, which was a) prima-facie evidence of child sexual abuse, b) the victim was between three and 16 years of age, c) the child had participated in a visually-recorded investigative interview and, d) the case was no longer under investigation at the time of collection (February 2015). Seventeen post-reform cases were identified as not meeting the criteria and were excluded from the current study.

The database was then searched for all cases of suspected child sexual abuse that were reported in 2011 (hereafter referred to as pre-reform cases). From these results, pre-reform cases were randomly selected and reviewed to ensure they matched the criteria as above. A total of 190 pre-reform cases were collected.

There were 15 variables collected about each case. Case characteristics that were collected included: the child victim’s age (at the time of the report) and gender, the suspected sexual offence, the victim/offender relationship, if the child had made a previous disclose of the abuse and if there were any known custodial issues with the child’s caregivers. Information related to the investigation of the report was also collected. This information included: if the child disclosed in the investigative
Table 5. Descriptive Information about Pre- and Post-Reform Cases Using Chi-Square Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Case</th>
<th>Pre-reform cases</th>
<th>Post-reform cases</th>
<th>Total cases</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female victims</td>
<td>157 (82.6)</td>
<td>148 (77.9)</td>
<td>305 (80.3)</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims under 10 years</td>
<td>74 (38.9)</td>
<td>90 (47.4)</td>
<td>164 (43.2)</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender known to victim</td>
<td>190 (100)</td>
<td>171 (90)</td>
<td>361 (95.0)</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of offence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual penetration offences</td>
<td>65 (34.2)</td>
<td>74 (38.9)</td>
<td>139 (36.6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-sexual penetration offences</td>
<td>78 (41.4)</td>
<td>65 (34.2)</td>
<td>143 (37.6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No offence identified</td>
<td>47 (24.7)</td>
<td>51 (26.8)</td>
<td>98 (25.8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim previously disclosed</td>
<td>169 (88.9)</td>
<td>157 (82.6)</td>
<td>326 (85.8)</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custodial issues with victim’s caregivers</td>
<td>34 (17.9)</td>
<td>41 (21.6)</td>
<td>75 (19.7)</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders interviewed</td>
<td>149 (78.4)</td>
<td>116 (61.1)</td>
<td>265 (69.7)</td>
<td>13.58</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence present in case</td>
<td>7 (3.7)</td>
<td>11 (5.8)</td>
<td>18 (4.7)</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnesses to corroborate child’s narrative</td>
<td>134 (70.5)</td>
<td>73 (38.4)</td>
<td>207 (54.5)</td>
<td>39.49</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
interview, if the offender was interviewed and if s/he confessed, if there was any medical or forensic evidence, if there were any witnesses to corroborate the victim’s narrative⁷, and whether charges were filed or not. The dates of the child’s investigative interview and when the case was closed or charges laid were also noted.

The final sample included a total of 380 cases - 190 pre-reform cases and 190 post-reform cases. Each case involved one victim, one alleged perpetrator and a maximum of one suspected offence (i.e., some cases had no suspected offence). The range of offences included sexual penetration, indecent dealing, indecent recording, and procuring, inciting or encouraging a child to engage in sexual behaviour or do an indecent act. There was no significant difference between the gender \[\chi^2 (1, N = 380) = 1.35, p = 0.25\] or the mean age \[t(378) = 1.32, p = 0.18\] of child victims in pre- and post-reform cases. Of the 380 cases, 305 of the child victims were female and the mean age was 9.97 years. Table 5 presents descriptive information for all cases, separated for each of the two reform phases.

**Results**

The first set of analyses compared the percentages of offenders who confessed in pre- and post-reform cases. These percentage scores were calculated by dividing the number of confessions by the total number of suspects who were interviewed by the police (i.e., those who had the opportunity to confess). This measure incorporated both full and partial admissions of guilt (e.g., if the offender admitted to an offence of lesser severity). A Chi-Square analysis revealed that there was no significant difference between the percentages of offenders who confessed in pre- (30%) and post- (40%) reform cases \[\chi^2 (1, N = 265) = 2.98, p = 0.08\].

⁷ Witnesses included any persons who could corroborate any part of the child’s narrative (e.g., the child was present at a location on a specific date). The persons were not (usually) eyewitnesses to the alleged abuse.
Prior research has indicated that confessions are influenced predominantly by the perceived strength of a case’s evidence. (Beauregard & Mieczkowski, 2011; Deslauriers-Varin, Lussier & St-Yves, 2010; Moston, Stephenson & Williamson, 1992). A Binary Logistic Regression analysis was therefore performed to control for any other evidence against the offender. Other evidence included forensic and medical evidence, or witnesses to corroborate the child’s account. The full model containing all predictors was significant, $\chi^2 (3, N = 265) = 7.93, p = .047$, indicating that the model was able to distinguish between cases where the offender did and did not confess. Overall, the model explained between 2.9% (Cox and Snell $R^2$) and 4.1% (Nagelkerke $R^2$) of variance in the percentage of cases referred to prosecution, with 66% of cases being correctly classified. The odds ratio for pre- versus post-reform cases was 1.95, indicating that when other evidence was controlled for, an offender was approximately twice as likely to confess in the post-reform cases than in pre-reform cases. See Table 6 for a detailed description of the analysis results.

Next, a series of analyses were conducted to explore the relationship between pre- and post-reform cases and the percentages of cases referred to prosecution. The percentage scores for each group were calculated by dividing the number of cases referred to prosecution by the total number of cases. A Chi-square analysis indicated that the relationship between percentages of referrals and whether a case was investigated at pre- or post-reform was significant $\chi^2 (1, N = 380) = 7.14, p = 0.01$. Cases were more likely to be referred prior to implementation of the new reform (53.7%) than post-reform (40%).

A Binary Logistic Regression analysis was then performed to control for any confounding variables that impacted the percentage of cases referred to prosecution. The model used the predictor variables ‘child’s disclosure in the investigative interview’, ‘evidence present’ and ‘witnesses’. By controlling for additional evidence
Table 6. Logistic Regression Predicting the Likelihood of Offenders Confessing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S. E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>OR*</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre_Post reform</td>
<td>-.67</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence present</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnesses available</td>
<td>-.62</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.33</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*OR represents the odds ratio
Table 7. Logistic Regression Predicting the Likelihood of Cases Being Referred to Prosecution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S. E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>OR*</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre_Post reform</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnesses</td>
<td>- .19</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure in interview</td>
<td>-1.98</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>21.92</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>16.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>- .21</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* OR represents the odds ratio
(including that collated from other witnesses) and whether the child disclosed abuse in the investigative interview, the analysis should allow the impact of the new reform on the percentage of cases referred to prosecution to be evaluated. The full model containing all of these variables was significant, $\chi^2 (1, N = 380) = 38.84, p = < .001$. Overall, the model explained between 9.7% (Cox and Snell $R^2$) and 13% (Nagelkerke $R^2$) of variance in the percentage of cases referred to prosecution, with 60% of cases being correctly classified. However, only one variable (‘child’s disclosure in the investigative interview’) was significant in this model (see Table 7). These results suggest that when the above influencing variables were controlled for, there was no significant difference between the rate of cases referred to prosecution filed across pre- and post-reform cases.

Finally, an independent samples $t$-test was conducted to explore the difference in mean length (days) of investigation between pre- and post-reform cases. The investigation length was measured by calculating the number of days between the child’s investigative interview and when the case was closed or police charges were filed against the offender. The mean length of post-reform cases ($M = 80.84$; $SD = 71.99$) was significantly shorter than pre-reform cases ($M = 102.54$, $SD = 108.8$), $t(378) = 2.29$, $p = .02$.

**Discussion**

Overall, the findings of the current study provide support for the proposition that better interviewing (i.e., adherence to the SIM interview protocol that was introduced in Chapter 2) is associated with improved case outcomes. Specifically, this study showed that the mean length of the investigations decreased after the implementation of the narrative interview technique. Further, when other evidence,
such as forensic or medical evidence and corroborating witnesses, were controlled for, the percentage of cases that led to a confession increased significantly after implementation of the reform. While caution must be exercised when drawing conclusions from retrospective field data where all potentially influential factors cannot be identified and controlled for, the pattern of results is consistent with the fact that the protocol’s reported strengths (rather than the skills of the investigators per se) changed the case outcomes. The investigators in this study had been isolated from the new training, and there had been no major changes in procedure or policy around case authorisation from the pre- to post- reform assessment phases. Further, the qualitative evidence presented in Study 2 suggested that there was no expectation among these investigators that the new technique should affect case outcomes.

The findings of the current study provide good news for organisations and trainers of investigators who invest in training to facilitate the adoption of a more narrative based model. Nonetheless, further research is required because the mechanism by which best practice interviewing increased rates of confession could not be identified. Conclusions about interview impact can only come from close analysis of suspects’ interviews and detectives’ reasoning processes for not pursuing cases. For example, it may be fruitful to examine the way in which evidence obtained in the child interviews was used in their respective suspect interviews. Understanding the precise relationship between narrative interview style and the investigation process may also evolve from controlled laboratory studies using mock briefs (based on actual cases), where the interview method is manipulated across briefs while controlling for evidential information.

The importance of follow up research related to the police case assessment process is highlighted by the intriguing finding that while investigation length decreased and confession rate increased, the percentage of referrals to prosecution
remained stable from pre- to post-reform. This finding suggests a possible shift from pre- to post reform in the criteria or threshold for charging offences. It may be that the narrative detail elicited when adhering to the SIM protocol enabled clearer identification of false allegations arising from either deliberate lying, coaching or poor prior questioning. Indeed, the narrative format provides greater opportunity to understand the surrounding context in which disclosures are made and to identify possible sources of memory contamination (Hershkowitz, Lanes & Lamb, 2007; Malloy, Brubacher & Lamb, 2013). Further, the increased cognitive demand of the open-ended interview process, which requires deeper, elaborate memory processing compared to the short-answer questioning approach, exposes the interviewer to more cues of intentional deceit (Vrij, Granhag & Porter, 2010; Vrij, Granhag, Mann & Leal, 2011).

Another possible explanation related to the lack of increase in referrals to prosecution from pre- to post-reform is that the police investigators may have perceived that the reduction in overall detail in response to the ‘who, what, when, where’ question pattern undermined the evidential quality of the interviews. The SIM protocol was developed in collaboration with prosecutors to eliminate ‘unnecessary’ questions about finely tuned descriptive details such as the colour of clothing, bedding and furniture at the scene of the offence because they heighten opportunity for errors and inconsistencies in witness accounts (Burrows & Powell, 2014a; see Study 1). Investigators, however, perceive that highly specific details (such as the location, date and time of the offence) are essential for particularisation to occur, and that maximising the number of separate offences and specific details about each offence increases the chance of successful prosecution (Burrows & Powell, 2014a; Guadagno et al., 2006). This well-documented clash in perspective between prosecutor and
police investigators may have led to a decline in willingness to charge in those cases where the suspect did not confess.

There are several implications of the results of the current study. First, this study has shown that the downstream effect of interviewing evident in Pipe et al.’s (2013) study may not necessarily be attributable to the NICHD protocol, but rather to the elements common to most major child interview protocols (i.e., the open-ended structure and the narrative detail). Further downstream effects can occur at the investigation as well as the prosecution stage. Second, these findings indicate that analysis of the cost of any new interviewer training program must be weighed against the broader cost savings of decreased investigation and interview times and increased guilty pleas. The financial burden of sexual abuse trials is staggering, especially when considering the psychological impact on children of long wait times for trials and gruelling cross-examination (Fang, Brown, Florence & Mercy, 2012; Taylor et al., 2008). Third, the fact that increased confession rates did not lead to increased referrals illustrates the importance of a whole system approach, addressing the impact of the interview protocol on police and prosecuting lawyers’ decisions and the processes of consultation that take place in making these decisions. To date, these factors have been poorly understood (Cossins 2010; Muldoon, Taylor & Norma, 2013; Taylor & Gassner 2009; Tinsley 2011).

**Summary**

Research is still in its infancy but there is now a growing body of evidence to suggest that adherence to an open-ended interview style has broad benefits for the investigation and prosecution of child sexual assault cases. The high rate of attrition of these cases is one of the major challenges faced by our criminal justice system.
What this study has shown is that improved interviewing may create a fairer process for the victim. Furthermore, a whole system approach may lead to increased rates of prosecution, and, potentially, conviction.
CHAPTER 9 – GENERAL DISCUSSION

Scientific knowledge about what constitutes best practice interviewing of vulnerable witnesses has burgeoned over the past two decades, yet practice in the field has lagged behind. As indicated in the review chapters of this thesis, there is clear consensus about how interviews should be conducted (Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Esplin & Horowitz, 2007; Wilson & Powell, 2001; Yuille, Cooper & Marsxen, 1999). Best practice interview protocols across the globe are similarly structured around evidence-based techniques known to elicit the most accurate and detailed accounts of events. However, despite the wealth of academic knowledge, there has been a nagging gap between recommended technique and actual practice. Most interviewer evaluation research has found that interviewers do not interview in a way that is known to elicit the most useful accounts (Cederborg, Orbach, Sternberg & Lamb, 2000; Korkman, Santtila & Sandnabba, 2006; Lamb et al., 2009).

To address the need to improve interviewer competency, the current author took on the role of co-developing, implementing and evaluating a new training system designed to overcome several limitations of prior training programs. The new system, delivered predominantly through computer-assisted learning activities, had several distinctive features. These features included regular, ongoing and spaced practice activities, immediate expert feedback on interactive learning exercises, provision of exemplars of best practice, an incremental learning approach (where students progress at their own pace) and detailed instruction in the application of open-ended questions. The trial of the new system was held over an 18-month period and included trainee professionals at one child protection organisation and two police organisations.
The evaluation of the new training focused largely on measuring key performance indicators using a pre- versus post-training evaluation design. Specifically, one study examined the effect of the new system on trainees’ \((N = 92)\) performance, using mock interviews in which an actor played the role of the child in a highly controlled manner. Another study examined the effect of the training on field interviews \((N = 156)\) conducted prior to and after the training. Collectively, several standard ‘best practice’ measures were assessed and compared across the time intervals. These measures included proportion of interviewer question types, proportion of desirable interviewer behaviors, and adherence to the interview protocol. Overall, the analyses revealed robust evidence to support the success of the reform. Irrespective of the type of interview or measure, adherence to best practice interviewing increased from pre- to post-training. Indeed, the proportion of open-ended questions in mock interviews nearly doubled to 60% post training, while in the field interviews it increased fourfold from 10% at pre-training to 40% at post-training.

The strong results in relation to open-ended question usage need to be considered in light of the fact that a highly conservative measure of open-ended questions was used. Further, they need to be considered in light of several other findings that would be considered beneficial to organisations and the investigation process. The training was associated with a marked reduction in the length of the interviews without reducing the amount of critical evidential information that interviewers pursued. At 12 months post-training, performance was maintained without intervening supervision, formal refresher training or follow-up. Further, when other evidence, such as forensic and medical evidence and the testimony of corroborating witnesses, was controlled for, the percentage of cases that led to a suspect confession increased significantly after implementing the reform.
The overriding conclusion from the above-mentioned findings is that training via an e-learning approach can be highly effective in promoting adherence to best practice interviewing of vulnerable witnesses. The contribution of this thesis, however, extends beyond the effectiveness of the particular training system per se. The purpose of the current and final chapter is to discuss the contributions of this thesis within the broader interviewer training literature and to provide recommendations for future research.

Implications of the findings and directions for future research

The main conclusion arising from the current thesis is that, within the field of investigative interviewer training, there is now an effective evidence-based alternative to the (largely ineffective) traditional classroom-based training system that has been standard across the globe. It is exceptionally challenging to create successful classroom-based training (where an instructor teaches large cohorts of trainee interviewers within a defined block of time). Gains made in the classroom are generally short lived unless there is intensive ongoing supervision and feedback following the cessation of the training program. For example, Lamb and colleagues (Orbach et al., 2000; Sternberg, Lamb, Esplin, Orbach & Hershkowitz, 2002) found that substantial improvements in the quality of forensic interviewing of child witnesses occurred with short-term classroom-based training, but only when the training incorporated continued intensive individual supervision and feedback (set in the context of the trainees’ practice) and was accompanied by monthly daylong ‘refresher’ training sessions. In the refresher training sessions, written feedback was directly related to simulated and actual forensic interviews and immediate feedback was given in role-plays. Despite the evident benefits of such supervision and
feedback, they rarely accompany classroom teaching models because of the high cost. This is particularly true in large geographic regions such as Australia where the majority of budgets are spent on transport and accommodation so that trainees can meet face to face with instructors. As Powell (2002) concluded, when reflecting on Lamb et al.’s findings, practicality and cost are (unfortunately) important considerations for government organisations:

“Many trainers are concerned that the degree of supervision that was offered in research by Lamb and colleagues is too time consuming and costly to administer on a global scale. Indeed, one-to-one supervision by experts and detailed line-by-line feedback of field interviews is clearly beyond the bounds of many large-scale police services with high turnover rates of staff. Further, access to field tapes by experts is restricted in some jurisdictions by legal restraints surrounding the use and distribution of tapes for evaluation and research purposes. The focus of future research, therefore, should be to isolate effective options for promoting skill change that fit within the context of the existing financial and legal constraints of training teams”. (Powell, 2002, p. 48)

Now, more than a decade after Powell’s call for a better model, this thesis has shown that there is indeed a way to assure victims a consistent service at the forefront of developments in the field and to deliver this without increasing the immense burden on taxpayers.

Specifically, when excluding the costs of writing and developing the materials, the training system evaluated in this thesis was no more costly to implement than the previous short-term classroom-based model where most of the budgets were spent on travel, accommodation, and other requirements associated with the gathering of large numbers of trainee interviewers into the classroom. The main costs associated with the e-learning course were technological support, the hiring of actors, the maintenance of the management system, and the evaluation of interviewer performance. A robust economic analysis of the cost of the training may actually reveal that it is cheaper for the organisation as a whole. Shorter interviews
are associated with lower interview transcription costs. The provision of ready-made training activities and resources allow in-house trainers to focus on supporting trainee interviewers, as opposed to writing and delivering course content. The electronic delivery of training assessments allows for automatic marking and instantaneous feedback to trainees, reducing the resources spent on grading assessments manually and monitoring individual skills over time.

Further, the effect of the computer-based training model on continual improvement and worker morale should be considered by stakeholders. There are many case examples in the organisational psychology literature of the massive sense of freedom and creativity experienced by professionals when they are released from the burden of repetitive face-to-face administrative tasks (Heath and Heath, 2010). In the investigative interviewing arena, this release comes as organisations move away from the reliance on individual instructors and routine face-to-face lecturing, by centralising state of the art resources and services and streaming these directly to industry doorstep. When world-class resources are delivered directly to internal organisational trainers, this frees time for these professionals to provide strong leadership, support and management of individual trainee staff.

From a research perspective, the current results also bring freedom. Researchers in investigative interviewing training can now move beyond the longstanding problem of whether best practice questioning skills can be taught in a way that transfers from the training curriculum to the field. Rather than focusing research questions on whether online training programs work, hypotheses should now be shaped around the question of what makes individual online courses effective and how they can be further improved.

Overall, three suggestions for future research arise from the findings of this thesis. First, it would be useful to know which activities in the current training
system account for most of the post-training variance in performance. The aim of such research would be to determine whether the course could be shortened with no loss of effectiveness. Second, it would be useful to know the individual factors associated with better post-training interview performance and faster course completion. The gains made throughout the training system were not equivalent for all individuals, as evident in the variance in performance scores in Studies 3 and 4. A focus on individual, as opposed to group, stability in performance over time may be a fruitful avenue to pursue. Group stability focuses on the intra-individual stability over time, assessed by measuring the relationship between two measures of a construct at a given point (Roebers & Schneider, 2002). In contrast, individual stability focuses on variation in stability between individuals (Wohlwill, 1973).

Examining which determinants mediate differences in individual stability could be useful for guiding decisions about which employees to recruit into the training and for anticipating which employees will need the closest monitoring. Staff selection is a critical issue for organisations plagued with high staff turnovers and multiple applicants vying for specialised units.

A final suggestion for future research relates to the frequency and nature of support (if any) that should be offered to trainees after completion of the training system. Although Study 4 of this thesis provided some evidence that interviewer performance was maintained at 12 months post-training, this should not be taken to imply that performance would continue to remain stable if no further intervention was offered after the 12 month period. The issue of ongoing support is likely to be complex, determined by a wide array of organisational and individual factors as well as trainees’ exposure to, and support of best practice interviewing within the broader workplace context. Given the current global financial climate where government organisations are under increasing pressure to minimise costs, it may be
wise to move away from ‘one-size fits all’ post-training supervision models. The learning management system – reviewed in the current thesis – that is used to track individuals during the training program could potentially be used to present brief follow-up assessment activities and to identify individual trainees most in need of either face-to-face or remote supervision.

A holistic approach - the new benchmark for training evaluation

Prior to implementing the full training evaluation (Studies 3 to 5 of this thesis) two preliminary studies were conducted to ensure stakeholder readiness for the new approach. These studies involved working with prosecutors and with police and child protection organisations to ensure that the interview protocol, the training delivery and the method of assessment addressed the range of complexities and challenges in the field. This type of groundwork has typically been absent from prior training evaluations. Prior evaluations have also been somewhat restricted in the measures used to evaluate interviewer performance. Most past training evaluations have adopted a pre- versus post-training design using one or two measures of interviewer performance, such as open-ended question usage or adherence to the ‘best practice’ interview protocol. Further, the evaluation measures have typically been formulated from the vantage point of a single discipline - psychology (memory in particular). Being discipline-centric is a problem because the issues are multi-faceted. Prosecutors, in particular, have had little involvement in the process of interview protocol development despite the inherent tension that arises from the dual use of the visually recorded witness interview as an investigative and an evidentiary instrument. When an interview is used as evidence-in-chief, it is not just about the details, but the way in which the witness and the
story present in the eyes of the jury. More detail is not necessarily better (Burrows & Powell, 2013; 2014a). Consistency and coherency of the story are paramount, and memory researchers have in large part bypassed these issues (Burrows & Powell, 2013; 2014a).

Overall, there were three features associated with the current training evaluation that define its holistic approach. These features included prosecutor engagement, addressing the organisational challenges prior to the training, and the adoption of a multi-measure evaluation approach. Each of these features is now discussed along with their implications for trainers and researchers.

**Prosecutor engagement**

Most research on investigative interviewing of children has been conducted by academics working in isolation from police forces, policy-makers and executives. In the current thesis, industry stakeholders played a major role in the evaluation. Study 1, in particular, addressed the need for constructive feedback from prosecutors by eliciting prosecutors’ perceptions about the utility of the interview protocol that would (in Studies 3 and 4) provide the benchmark of best practice interviewing. Overall, the findings of Study 1 indicated that prosecutors were supportive of the protocol and (in most part) believed that it met evidentiary requirements. This finding is good news for child investigative interview researchers as the elements of the protocol presented to prosecutors are common to most child interview protocols.

Importantly, the prosecutors in Study 1 also provided constructive feedback about how to improve particular elements of the proposed interview process. First, the prosecutors recommended removal of the section where the child’s
understanding of the ‘truth’ and a ‘lie’ is tested. The test was perceived to be long-winded and confusing for children and was considered to undermine the credibility of children as witnesses. Further, the test was deemed unnecessary in the investigative interview, as members of the judiciary performed it anyway at the trial stage.

Second, while all prosecutors saw the value in eliciting a practice narrative from children (i.e., where children provide a narrative account of an innocuous event), they emphasised the need for this stage to be restricted to a few minutes. To date, there has been little focus on the duration of the practice narrative and while the current researcher conceded to the prosecutors’ concern for brevity, this is an issue that warrants full investigation to ensure that the utility of the task is not compromised by brevity. Third, prosecutors provided advice on how to introduce the topic of concern for children who were not aware of the purpose of the interview. The prosecutors agreed that a cascading approach should be adopted, where increasingly specific questions were asked. These questions should focus, where possible, on the issue that led to the concern, rather than issues of contention, such as the offender or the abusive act.

Overall, Study 1 of this thesis showed that deep collaboration and cross-pollination of ideas between child development experts and prosecutors is needed if we are to develop witness statements that are accurate, detailed and coherent (the child developmental focus) as well as useful in proving the charges and persuasive to juries (the prosecution focus). Interview protocols are sometimes referred to in the literature as if they are one-size-fits-all (La Rooy et al., 2015); however, tailoring inevitably occurs within jurisdictions. This is because each province and organisation has its own culture, legislation, processes, peoples and system of operation and inter-agency agreements. Tailoring is not problematic if it is guided
by scientific enquiry. But more often, the ‘tailoring’ is conducted by persons with limited expertise in interviewing frameworks (e.g., internal police trainers trying to accommodate anecdotal criticism from prosecutors). This results in the dilution and tainting of recommended best practice. A defining feature of the current evaluation was academic experts and industry partners working together to ensure that the protocol meets industry needs but is also developmentally appropriate.

**Addressing organisational challenges**

Another unique feature of the current training evaluation is the pilot testing of the training system with a small representative sample, to identify and address organisational challenges prior to the large-scale implementation and evaluation. The need for this preparatory research was clearly evident in the training evaluation literature. Prominent themes in training evaluations have been the inadequate time to complete professional development activities in the workplace and difficulty managing conflicting staff expectations (Clarke & Milne, 2001; Dando, Wilcock & Milne, 2008; Kebbell, Milne & Wagstaff, 1999; Powell, Wright & Clark, 2010). For example, when evaluating the impact of the new PEACE interview training package introduced in England and Wales, Clarke and Milne (2001) noted that high case loads and the pressure to finalise interviews and investigations in a timely manner impeded trainees’ abilities to practise the newly learned (open-ended) questioning and to incorporate it into their work regime. Research in Australia by Powell and colleagues found that high workload and poor conflict resolution – in situations where untrained supervisors have misunderstandings about how recent trainees should be interviewing – were major problems (Aarons, Powell & Browne, 2004; Wright, Powell & Ridge, 2007). The intensity of the e-learning course, the fact that
it relied on self-directed time management skills, and the staggered course enrolment meant that there would likely be challenges associated with timely completion.

Prior work on the implementation of e-learning models also gave good reason to expect that considerable new challenges would arise that had not featured in prior face-to-face classroom training models. The majority of the learning barriers identified in prior e-learning training evaluations related to technical issues such as poor Internet access and employees’ negative attitudes towards e-learning (Kitson, 2009; MacDonald & Thompson, 2005; Shimoni, Barrington, Wilde & Henwood, 2013; Sitzmann, Ely, Bell & Bauer, 2010; Van de Ven, Polley, Garud & Venkataramun, 1999).

Overall, the organisational challenges identified in the pilot phase of the current interviewing training were categorised under three themes. These themes were largely consistent with those identified in prior research. First, limited allocated work time to complete the training was a major issue for trainees. Second, conflict arose from the fact that people in the same office (previously and newly trained professionals) were using different interviewing approaches. Third, out-dated and inadequate computer equipment and Internet servers, and poor technical skills were identified. Importantly, solutions were quickly put in place to ensure that the new training would operate under optimum workplace conditions when rolled out to a larger cohort. These challenges (reported in Study 2) provide a useful resource for organisations contemplating taking on the reform. From a methodological perspective, the process of resolving challenges was necessary in order to rule out organisational barriers as an issue in explaining any null effects.
Adoption of a multi-measure evaluation approach

As described in the earlier chapters of this thesis, open-ended question usage is the most common measure of best practice interviewing of children. Changes in the incidence of these questions have formed the focus of training evaluations using pre- versus post-training designs. Some evaluations have also examined changes in the presence of key interview protocol components, such as ground rules and the eliciting of a practice narrative (Dion & Cyr, 2008; Lamb et al., 2002a, 2002b; Luther, Snook, Barron & Lamb, 2014; Price & Roberts, 2011; Warren et al., 1999).

The current thesis used the above-mentioned measures, but it also incorporated a range of other measures deemed important in establishing the effectiveness of the program. One particular measure related to whether the interviewer sought important detail (e.g., the location and timing of the offence) while not pursuing extraneous detail such as a description of the offender when the offender has been identified as the child’s biological father (Burrows, Powell & Anglim, 2013). While some evaluations have calculated the number of forensically relevant details provided by the child (Dion & Cyr, 2008; Lamb et al., 2002a, 2002b; Luther, Snook, Barron & Lamb, 2014; Price & Roberts, 2011; Warren et al., 1999), the current evaluation was the first to build in a measure of evidential quality based on interviewer performance alone, independent of question structure or interviewee response style. Having a measure of evidential quality was important because one of the aims of the new training was to address prosecutors’ concerns about long and poorly focused interviews that contained irrelevant questioning about specific details (Burrows & Powell, 2014a; Cashmore & Trimboli, 2005; McConachy, 2002). Prosecutors have long argued that the coherence and relevance of the information elicited is more important than the quantity of detail (Burrows & Powell, 2013;
Guadagno, Powell & Wright, 2006). With longer interviews there is more detail that could be used by defence to undermine the credibility of the child’s account during cross-examination (Burrows & Powell, 2013). While the current training was successful in reducing the length of the interviews, it was critical to show (through the evidence measure) that this reduction in length did not compromise the potential usefulness of the interview from a prosecution perspective.

In addition to measuring evidential quality, the current thesis considered the broader translation and potential downstream effects of the interviewer training within the criminal justice process. The downstream measures included the incidence of offender confession, referral of cases by police to prosecution and the duration of investigations. The high rate of attrition of child sexual assault cases (relative to other indictable offences) is one of the major challenges faced by the criminal justice system, and while it is implicitly understood that adherence to best practice interviewing is associated with better justice outcomes, only one prior study (namely, Pipe et al, 2013) had actually shown this using hard outcomes. Like Pipe et al’s study, the current thesis, which focused on the investigative rather than trial stage, found some evidence to support that interview style could lower attrition and investigation times. Work is still in its infancy and more research is needed to understand the precise association between interview and case outcome; nonetheless inclusion of downstream measures has been an important step in creating a new benchmark for interviewer-training evaluation and for affirming the role of training in promoting fairer vulnerable witness outcomes.

Concluding comment

There has been a longstanding gap between the style of vulnerable witness
interviewing that is recommended by experts and that which is practised in the workplace. This gap, which has revealed itself in almost every prior interviewer performance evaluation across the globe, is best understood in the context of organisational and jurisdictional isolation. The current thesis has provided strong evidence to show that it is indeed possible to close the gap when stakeholders and academics work together in driving reform. Researchers still have a long way to go in understanding what constitutes effective investigative interviewer training, and, in relation to the vulnerable witness interview training system evaluated in this thesis, there is considerable room for improvement. Nonetheless, this thesis has provided an important step forward in showing that good interviewing can arise through innovation and a holistic approach. The philosophy underpinning the current evaluation approach is that good interviewing – and, subsequently, fairer outcomes – does not evolve from isolated elements such as the adoption of a particular protocol. Good interviewing arises from the network of experts and service providers working together to guide development and innovation.
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Appendix A. The Core Elements Common to Child Investigative Interview Protocols and Examples of Their Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Truth and Lies   | The child’s understanding of the difference between the truth and a lie and the importance of telling the truth is tested. This is accomplished by asking the child to label statements as the truth or a lie. | a. Before we begin, I want to make sure that you understand how important it is to tell the truth. If I say that my shoes are red, is that true or not true? (Wait for answer). That would not be true, because my shoes are really [true colour]. And if I say that I am sitting down now, would that be true or not true?  
b. I need to make sure you know what the truth is. If you told me that you arrived here today by aeroplane, when you really arrived by taxi, would that be the truth or a lie?  
c. Amy is playing with a ball in the lounge room when she accidentally breaks her mum’s favourite vase. Mum later asks ‘Did you break my vase, Amy?’ Amy says ‘No, Mum’. Was Amy lying or telling the truth about breaking Mum’s vase? What would the truth be? |
| Promise to tell the truth | Verbal instruction about the importance of telling the truth is provided and/or confirmation from the child of his/her intention to tell the truth is elicited. | d. I see you understand what telling the truth means. It is very important that you only tell me the truth today. You should only tell me about things that really happened to you.  
e. While we are talking today it is important to tell me the truth- what really happened. Will you tell me the truth today?  
f. My job is to talk to children about things that have happened, so they can tell me the truth. Will you tell me the truth? |
| Ground rules    | Conversational rules are explained the child participates in practice of at least one of them to demonstrate understanding of, and adherence | g. If I ask a question and you don’t know the answer, just tell me, ‘I don’t know’. So if I ask you, “What is my dog’s name?” what would you say? (Wait for answer). Right, you don’t know, do you?  
h. If I say something you don’t understand, you should tell me you don’t understand. For example, is my shirt gridelin? (Wait for answer). Thank you for telling me you didn’t understand. I’ll ask you a different way. What colour is my shirt? Will you tell me when you |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice narrative</th>
<th>The child is prompted to provide a narrative about a recently experienced fun event. Open-ended questions are used to accustom the child to the style of questioning that will be used later in the interview.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>j. First I’d like to get to know you better. Tell me something fun you’ve done recently.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. A few days (weeks) ago was your birthday (Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc.). Tell me about your birthday (Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc.).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. Tell me about the things you like to do. [Wait for answer]. I want to know more about you and the things you do.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing the purpose of the interview</td>
<td>A neutral prompt is used to establish the child’s understanding of the purpose of the interview and raise the topic of concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Now that I know you a little better, I want to talk about why you are here today. Do you know why we’re talking here today?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n. What do you know about coming here today?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o. Thanks for telling me about [event]. Now let’s talk about why you’re here today. Tell me what you’ve come to talk about.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing the topic of concern</td>
<td>If the child does not respond to neutral prompts, more specific and leading questions are used to introduce the topic of concern (e.g., raising the child’s previous disclosure or physical injury).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. I understand that something may have happened to you. Tell me everything that happened from the beginning to the end.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q. Who is in your family? What’s your favourite thing about [family member]? What’s your least favourite thing about [family member]?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r. (A child reported to her mother that she no longer wanted to go to her friend’s house anymore as ‘Janet’s pop was rude to my bottom’). I heard that you don’t want to go to your friend Janet’s house anymore. Do you not want to go to Janet’s house anymore? Tell me what happened to make you not want to go to Janet’s house</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Free recall of particularised occurrence of abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Open-ended questions are utilised to prompt the child to provide a detailed and coherent narrative about one occurrence of abuse.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>s.</td>
<td>Tell me everything about [use child’s words].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t.</td>
<td>Tell me everything that happened when [use child’s words]. Start from the beginning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u.</td>
<td>Think back to that day/night and tell me everything that happened from [preceding event] until [abusive event].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Specific questions are asked to clarify any inconsistencies in the child’s narrative and seek further forensically relevant information.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>v.</td>
<td>Earlier you said that a friend was there the time it happened in the shed. What is her/his name? [Wait for response]. Tell me about the part where [person] was there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w.</td>
<td>When you told me about the time in the basement, you mentioned that he took off his trousers. Did something happen to your clothes? [Wait for answer]. Tell me all about that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x.</td>
<td>You said he put his finger inside you but you also said you had a snowsuit on. Can you tell me how that happened?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further occurrences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The child is prompted to provide a free recall and answer further questions for further (if any) occurrences of abuse.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>y.</td>
<td>Did [abusive event] happen one time or more than one time? Tell me everything about the last time/ first time/ another time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>z.</td>
<td>Did it happen one time or more than one time? Tell me about the worst time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Tell me what would usually happen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>