School Social Work in the State of Victoria, Australia

65 years of student wellbeing and learning support

Christine Anne Barrett
BA, Dip.T., BSW, MSW

Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June, 2014

Melbourne School of Health Sciences
Department of Social Work
The University of Melbourne
Abstract

School Social Work in the State of Victoria, Australia

School social work is one of the earliest fields of professional social work practice in Australia. Despite the lack of accessible literature to document it, successive Victorian practitioners have perpetuated an unbroken tradition of practice, supporting students to achieve their potential through education.

The research used professional narratives and documents retrieved from private and public archives to consider the organisational, theoretical and practice developments of school social work in the State of Victoria. The findings represent the first broad picture over 65 years of school social work as professional practice.

State education department school social workers, employed within multidisciplinary teams delivering visiting services, have frequently experienced organisational reconfiguration, often associated with newly elected State governments, changing social and educational policies, and the restructuring of successive departments of education. In particular eras, a much smaller number of school social workers has been appointed by individual schools as members of staff.

Since the 1973 publication of an Australian Government report into schooling, Commonwealth and Victorian State Government policies have increasingly focused on concepts such as access, equity and excellence for all students, inclusive of individual difference, socio-economic background and cultural diversity.

Professional identity was found to be based on dynamic school social worker interaction with the changing context of practice, but fundamentally founded on values, knowledge and methods for intervention. School social work was embedded within the ethical base of social work, with particular emphases that
identified it as specialist practice. School social workers were driven to focus particularly on the student in the learning environment, in order to facilitate children’s rights to education, and support social justice outcomes. School social work was integrated into the policies, practices and programmes of the school as host setting, with the purpose of improving student potential, through minimising the effects of inequities and removing impediments to best learning outcomes.

School social workers primarily used an ecological-systems approach, and an eclectic repertoire of theories and methods, to work at the interface of multiple environments around the student. While prevention and early intervention were the preferred levels of practice, most time has been allocated to more complex casework intervention. School social workers needed generalist and school-specific expertise including: counselling and supporting children, young people and their families; teacher consultation and professional development; small group and whole class work; facilitating school policy and practice change; and building school-family-community relationships.

It was by way of the acquisition of specialist knowledge and skills for school-specific methods of practice that practitioners were able to narrate school social worker professional identity at individual and communal levels. The research proposes that “the tradition of practice” is the stream of continuity of shared professional identity, where meaningful connections are made with past, current and imagined future narratives essential to the profession.

Finally, the study proposes multiple areas for further consideration and research into school social work in Australia, including its effectiveness in facilitating school engagement and learning, the impediments faced by students and young people, and comparative studies with international settings.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

i. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the Preface,

ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

iii. the thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signed: _______________________________________

Date:   ____________________________
Acknowledgements

For their support, assistance and patience on the long and winding road that led me nevertheless ever forward through my PhD research experience, I gratefully acknowledge my supervisors Dr Lynda Campbell, Dr Fiona McDermott and Professor Marie Connolly, who in turn guided me finally to my destination.

The research process gave me privileged access to the stories and wisdom of former and current school social work practitioners, and I am hugely indebted to their generosity, honesty and enthusiasm to have their experiences and knowledge recorded. I especially pay respect to those pioneers of Victorian school social work, whose knowledge-building and theorising for practice shines out of documents retrieved for the study. I am exceedingly grateful to those who donated papers that they had been saving, some for forty years, in case they might prove useful some day in recording school social work. They have greatly informed the narratives finally produced by the research.

Thank you to my family, friends, colleagues and school social worker community, including members of the AASW (Victorian Branch) School Social Work Practice Group, who have so patiently awaited this thesis. I hope they find the stories as interesting as I did.

Jennifer Warburton (Melbourne School of Graduate Research) assisted greatly, as did library staff and several student advisors and administrators.

Finally, I cannot thank enough Emeritus Professor Dorothy Scott and Professor Paul Komesaroff, whose words of confidence in my ability to complete this work stayed with me as inspiration and encouragement.
Nelson Mandela

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

18 July 1918 - 5 December 2013
Thesis Outline

Part 1

THE RESEARCH

1. Researching the Professional Practice of School Social Work in Victoria, Australia
2. Review of Literature: School Social Work Developmental Perspectives
4. Professional Narratives and Professional Identities: a Research Approach
5. Methodology

Part 2

THE ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK IN VICTORIA

6. The Organisational Development of School Social Work in Victoria
   Constructed from a review of the literature, collected narratives and retrieved documents

Part 3

RESEARCH FINDINGS

7. School Social Work Values, Theories and Practice
8. School Worker Professional Identity and the Construction of the Tradition of Practice

Part 4

DISCUSSION

9. Implications for School Social Work, Professional Identity and the Tradition of Practice
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................. 3  
Declaration ............................................................................................................. 5  
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................. 6  
Dedication ............................................................................................................... 7  
Thesis Outline ....................................................................................................... 8  
List of Figures ....................................................................................................... 18  

## Part 1  THE RESEARCH

### Chapter 1  RESEARCHING THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK IN VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA ................................................................. 20
- Origin and Purpose of the Research ...................................................................... 21
- Setting the Scene ..................................................................................................... 24
  - Melbourne and Victoria ...................................................................................... 24
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities ........................................ 25
  - Multicultural Australia ..................................................................................... 26
  - Australian Federal and State Politics ................................................................. 27
- Education in Australia .......................................................................................... 27
- Education in the State of Victoria .......................................................................... 28
- Locating and Defining School Social Work ........................................................... 30
  - Defining Social Work ........................................................................................ 30
  - Defining School Social Work .......................................................................... 32
- A Narrative of the Researcher-Research Relationship .......................................... 34
- Rationale and Direction of the Research ............................................................... 37
- Research Question ............................................................................................... 39
- Introduction to Chapters 2-9 ............................................................................... 40

### Chapter 2  LITERATURE REVIEW: SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVES ................................................................. 42
- Introduction to the Literature Review .................................................................... 43
- An International Perspective ................................................................................. 43
  - School Social Work in the United Kingdom ..................................................... 45
  - School Social Work in the United States of America ....................................... 46
- School Social Work in Australia .......................................................................... 48
- School Social Work in the State of Victoria ......................................................... 50
Part 3 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Chapter 7
FINDINGS: SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK VALUES, THEORIES and PRACTICE ......................... 206
Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 207
School Social Work Values ............................................................................................... 207
School Social Work Purpose ............................................................................................. 209
School Social Work in the Host Setting ............................................................................. 210
Shared Purpose and Disparate Professional Perspectives ................................................. 211
Relationships with Principals and Teachers ...................................................................... 213
Clarifying and Negotiating Expectations ........................................................................... 216
School-employed School Social Workers and the Host Setting ....................................... 217
Theoretical Perspectives ................................................................................................... 218
Ecological Systems Perspectives ...................................................................................... 219
Structural and Narrative Perspectives ............................................................................... 221
Other Theoretical Perspectives ......................................................................................... 221
Who is the Client? ............................................................................................................. 222
Targets or Clients? ............................................................................................................. 223
Teacher and School Support ............................................................................................. 224
Who Defines “the Client”? ............................................................................................... 225
Models for School Social Work Practice ......................................................................... 227
Casework Model ............................................................................................................... 227
Casework, Group Work and Community Development .................................................... 228
The Current Model ........................................................................................................... 229
The School-Employee Model of School Social Work Service ......................................... 230
Knowledge for School Social Work Practice .................................................................... 231
Knowledge for Generalist School Social Work Practice .................................................. 231
Specialist Knowledge for the Schools Context .................................................................. 232
Theories for School Social Work Intervention ................................................................... 233
Barriers to Learning .......................................................................................................... 234
Cultural Diversity ............................................................................................................. 239
Referral, Assessment and Planning for Intervention ......................................................... 240
Personal Attributes
Social Background
Values
Politics
Family Considerations
Personal Chronologies and Professional Trajectories
Gender
Defining “Profession”
Professional Identity
Passion, Commitment, Dedication
Crises of Morale
Multiple Professional Identities
Social Worker-School Social Worker
Teacher-School Social Worker
School Social Worker-Psychologist
Building Professional Identity
Social Work Qualifications
Induction
Professional Supervision
Acquisition and Consolidation of Knowledge
Reflection and Practice Wisdom
Maintenance of Professional Identity & the Tradition of Practice
Contribution to Knowledge
Evaluation of Practice
Student Supervision
Collegiate Connections and Networks
Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW)
Trade Unions
The Complex Relationship between Departmental School Social Workers and Psychologists
School Social Worker and Psychologist Roles
Articulating School Social Worker Professional Identity and Tradition
Conclusion
PART 4 DISCUSSION

Chapter 9
DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK, PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND THE TRADITION OF PRACTICE ................................................. 344
Introduction .................................................................................. 345
Professional Identity and the Tradition of Practice ......................... 346
The Organisational and Policy Context of Practice .......................... 347
Issues from Practice ...................................................................... 349
Who is the Client? ........................................................................ 350
Theoretical Perspectives for School Social Work .............................. 350
Models for School Social Work ...................................................... 351
Specialist School Social Work and Community Partnerships ............ 353
Specialist School Social Work Practice, Professional Qualifications and Further Education ........................................................................... 353
The Potential Contribution of School Social Work to Social Work .... 357
Induction, Professional Supervision and Professional Development .... 356
Further Research .......................................................................... 358
The Context of Practice .................................................................. 359
Student Culture and Diversity ....................................................... 360
Barriers to Learning ...................................................................... 363
Professional Issues ........................................................................ 364
Comparative Studies ...................................................................... 364
Professional Identity and the Maintenance of Tradition .................. 366
Professional Lack of Confidence .................................................... 366
Shattering the Cultural Myth ......................................................... 367
School-Employed School Social Workers ....................................... 368
Articulation of Professional Identity and the Tradition of Practice ...... 369
The Host Setting Irony of School Social Work ................................. 370
Contribution to School Social Work Knowledge ............................ 371
Documentation and Archiving ....................................................... 371
The Professional Community .......................................................... 372
The Future of School Social Work ................................................... 373
In Conclusion .............................................................................. 375
APPENDICES

A. Plain Language Statement ................................................................. 407
B. Informed Consent ............................................................................. 409
C. Professional History Questionnaire .................................................... 411
D. Schedule of Questions & Researcher Guide ....................................... 412
### List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>The Four Levels of School Social Work Activity</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Narrator Ages and Years of Service</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Professional Qualifications of Narrators</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Creating Conceptual Categories</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Refinement from Conceptual Categories to Sub-themes</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Narrative Analysis Example</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Organisational Context of School Social Work in Victoria</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Vacancies for Assistants (female) to Departmental Psychologists</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 1

THE RESEARCH

1. Researching the Professional Practice of School Social Work in Victoria, Australia
2. Review of Literature: School Social Work Developmental Perspectives
4. Professional Narratives and Professional Identities: a Research Approach
5. Methodology
Chapter 1

RESEARCHING THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK IN VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

The school social work role is unique in its focus on the student in the school environment in order to facilitate successful learning outcomes through the relief of distress and removal of barriers or inequities.

AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers: August 2008
(Australian Association of Social Workers, 2011, p.7)
Origin and Purpose of the Research

In August 2008 school social workers past and present gathered at Graduate House, University of Melbourne, to acknowledge and celebrate six decades of school social work in the State of Victoria, Australia. In July 1948, after initial advertisements had prompted intense opposition and a contracted legal battle, the Victorian Crown Solicitor ruled that the Education Department had the right to employ social workers, and the positions were subsequently re-advertised. The anniversary luncheon had been stimulated by this research, and organised as a separate activity by the School Social Work Special Interest Group, auspiced by the Victorian Branch of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). The choice of venue was apt, given that the earliest school social workers had graduated from Melbourne University decades before. Furthermore, it was only a few hundred metres down Leicester St to the corner at 234 Queensberry St, where stood the red-brick multi-level building which had once been home to school social workers, and at that time housed the university’s School of Social Work.

In spontaneous conversations over lunch, attendees animatedly shared stories and exchanged insights about 60 years of school social work practice and the context of service delivery. Current and former practitioners shared an abiding commitment to the purpose of school social work: the education of children and young people as a path towards social justice, through focus on both the student and the learning environment.

Those discussions epitomised the essence of this study, which aimed to facilitate school social workers’ access to their tradition. This study focused on professional experiences and professional identity. Moreover, school social workers have been able to contribute to the documentation of that tradition, through the capture of just some of those stories that would shed light on the development and practice of school social work in Victoria. Their voices have provided commentary on influential contextual and theoretical changes. The words of school social workers themselves have given colour to a strong, confident professional identity, on which linkages across time and place were founded, in the narrative construction of tradition.
School social work has not been well-documented in Australia. Unlike school social work in the USA, it is rarely acknowledged in local academic texts; and barely recognised by social workers more generally as a particular area of practice. Claims that there was no school social work in Australia before 1972 are incorrect. It may be true in some states that school social work has not established itself in the education sector (Winkworth & McArthur, 2005, p.20), but in Victoria, over six decades, specifically focused services at the core of which are students in their learning environments, have been delivered by significant numbers of school social workers, developing theory-in-practice for their specialist field of practice. They have demonstrated commitment to their purpose, adaptability and breadth of activity in complex service delivery environments.

Most school social workers have been employed by the state government education system as members of multi-disciplinary student support teams responsible to service networks of schools. A much smaller number has been appointed by individual government and non-government schools as members of staff alongside teachers. To differentiate for the purposes of this research, they have been referred to as “departmental” and “school-employed” school social workers respectively. This study has included government and private school-employed school social workers, rather than focus exclusively on the dominant story of departmental school social workers.

The term “school-based” has been rarely used in the text, as it can refer not only to school-employed social workers, but also to departmental and community agency social workers assigned to spend particular time periods on school sites.

The term “departmental” generically refers to those employed centrally by the state government school system to deliver services across many schools: this is intended to avoid the confusion of frequent name changes of what was originally the Education Department.

Over many years school social workers have collaborated both informally and under community partnership projects, with government and non-government social workers, many of whom have delivered individual, family and group
services at the school site. This research has focused only on school social workers who had been employed by schools or school systems. The research used the AASW definition (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2011, p.7) that differentiates school social work from other social work services delivered in schools, including only those practitioners whose primary purpose was ensuring student health, wellbeing and engagement in the learning environment of the school; and best possible learning outcomes for all.

\[
\text{Not all social work service delivery in schools is school social work.}
\]
\[
\text{A service can be called school social work only if the primary goal is}
\]
\[
\text{achievement of student learning potential and involve particular}
\]
\[
\text{methods of working. These include coordinating and influencing the}
\]
\[
\text{efforts of the school, family and community to achieve this goal.}
\]
\[
\text{(AASW, 2011, p.7)}
\]

Given the scarcity of published Australian school social work literature, it was important to focus on and document school social work as a separate mode of practice with a 65 year history. Consequently, other social workers delivering school-linked services have been excluded from this particular study.

This research explored a simple but multi-faceted question:

\[
\text{What is the story of the development of school social work}
\]
\[
\text{in the State of Victoria, Australia?}
\]

The study began with the origins of school social work in the Victorian public education sector in 1948, just a few years after the graduation of the first professionally qualified social workers from the University of Melbourne, and in the period of post-war reconstruction, and concludes 65 years later in 2013.

The newly constructed research narrative of school social work in Victoria, is an interpretation of existing literature; professional narratives gathered during interviews; and consideration of unpublished retrieved documents. Integral to the narrative account are social, political and institutional settings; and a cast of characters acting out events over time as plots twist and turn within a
trajectory moving forward through six and a half decades. Within a retrospective view, mysteries and confusions abound, and there is intrigue in the unanswered questions.

School social work has nestled within the creative tension of schools as host settings, generating an uneasiness that has contributed to the evolution of this research. Its gaze lingers specifically on the experiences of professional school social workers, rather than on students and the impediments to their learning.

The aim of the research was to contribute to knowledge in such a way that school social workers were able more easily to: access their long tradition of practice and locate themselves within it; recognise the continuity and flux of issues, context and practice; and benefit from and contribute to the on-going development of high-quality practice.

Setting the Scene

Melbourne and Victoria

Victoria was colonised by the British Empire in the early 1800s, and continues under its legislative and cultural vestiges, despite increasing multicultural diversity. Melbourne is the capital city of Victoria, the smallest and most southeastern state on the Australian mainland, with the island State of Tasmania to the south.

Victoria has the second highest state population. By the end of 1949, with elevated post-war birth rates and migration, the population of city and suburban Melbourne, the second largest city in Australia, was 1.3 million; with the total state population at 2.16 million, and Australia, 8 million (Buckley, 2009; Victoria. Dept of Planning and Community Development & Sykes, 2009; Victoria. Government of the State of Victoria, 1951, p.425, 434).

In 2012, 75% of 22.3 million Australians lived in 8 state and territory capital cities and their associated socio-economic areas, all near the coast except Canberra, in the land-locked Australian Capital Territory. Of 5.6 million Victorians, 4.2
million were resident in Greater Melbourne on Port Phillip Bay (Victoria. Dept of Planning and Community Development, 2013a, 2013b).

Victoria struggles with the modern dilemmas of a widening gap between the rich and the poor; especially high youth unemployment (Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2014) and decreasing job opportunities in general; racism and social exclusion; an aging population; bushfires, drought and flood. However it is also distinguished by rich Koorie and multicultural diversity; spectacular scenery from snow to surf; food and wine among the world’s best; and a thriving visual and performing arts scene (Tourism Victoria).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

Kinship, language and cultural Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities connected to particular country are the original inhabitants and custodians of the land, occupied in 1788 by an invading British administration, white convicts and settlers. The area now known as Melbourne is the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. Victoria was colonised on country inhabited by 36 First Nations communities, collectively self-named and referred to throughout this document as Koorie. At the frontiers of settlement, land was acquired by suppression, violence and murder in the face of perceived or real resistance (Jakubowicz, 2014).

Great harm has since been done to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lives, families and cultures. On 13 February 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd paid respect to the oldest continuing cultures in human history; and apologised for the mistreatment and other wrongs done to communities; for the loss and grief inflicted by the removal of children from their families, and the pain and suffering of those Stolen Generations. He repeated often the word that many, including non-Aboriginal Australians, had been waiting so long to hear: “Sorry” (Rudd, 2008). Rudd promised a path to reconciliation, a path that has proven rocky and dominated by non-Aboriginal legislators, without commitment to genuine consultation with Aboriginal people in designing the most significant initiatives for Aboriginal communities (Calma, 2011).
Schools have a role in teaching and raising understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Reconciliation is about “changing attitudes that are often based on myths and misunderstandings” (Australia. Closing the Gap, 2014a). Federal and State governments have committed to the attendance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in quality schools, with quality teaching to improve literacy and numeracy, and to support students especially in remote communities to complete their education and transition to work (Australia. Closing the Gap, 2014b).

**Multicultural Australia**

Early waves of migrants included fortune-hunting prospectors and adventurers from China, America and other nations, spiking population growth especially during the 1850s gold rush (Jakubowicz, 2014; Victoria. Dept of Planning and Community Development, 2013b). In the State of Queensland, white European cane-fields owners colluded with slave-traders to entrap Pacific Islanders (Making Multicultural Australia, 2014).

Victorian schools represent a complex Australian social history that has generated a richly diverse multicultural society with pockets of extreme racial prejudice. In 1901, Australian Government legislation that came to be known as “the White Australia Policy”, restricted migration to white Europeans looking for new lives in the ironically named “lucky country” (Australian Government, 2014; Horne, 1964). In 1972, Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam’s Labor Government finally changed restrictive immigration and citizenship policies, officially ending discrimination. By the late 1980s the Victorian Labor Government had implemented multiculturalism and ethnic affairs policies. By the end of the 20th century, the Federal Liberal Government with Prime Minister John Howard as leader, was actively weakening national multiculturalism policies (Making Multicultural Australia, 2014). Just over a decade later, one of Australia’s pressing moral dilemmas was the treatment of asylum seekers who arrived without visas by boat, and who were transported to off-shore detention centres in conditions that defied human and children’s rights (Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, 2014; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014).
Victoria has provided migrant resettlement opportunities and refuge from civil war and oppression, for people from across the globe, including the United Kingdom, other European nations, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, South Africa, China, Central and South America, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Burma, India, the Sudan, New Zealand, the Philippines, Iraq, Iran and Sri Lanka (Making Multicultural Australia, 2014). Victorian schools represent rich language, cultural and religious diversity. Each school needs to attend to individual wellbeing and learning needs for students of migrant background; the participation of their families; and multicultural awareness and appreciation for all students.

**Australian Federal and State Politics**

Australian Labor and the Liberal Party are the major contenders at Federal or Commonwealth, and State government levels. The Australian Prime Minister and State Premiers are automatically installed as leaders of the elected parties. Under the theme of “fairness”, Australian Labor’s platform includes: economic growth and opportunity; jobs; low taxes and support for families; fair, accessible education; and workers’ rights and protection (Australian Labor, 2014). Liberal Party beliefs are built on: lean government, minimal interference in daily life; individual and private sector initiative; a just society based on family and law; and equal opportunity including the “facilitation of wealth” (Liberal Party of Australia, 2014). Party politicking will be shown to have great impact on Victorian school social work.

**Education in Australia**

Constitutionally, 6 state and 2 territory governments are responsible for the regulation of all schools, and to ensure universal access to education by managing government schools. The Australian government has provided additional public funding for government and non-government schools; and provides educational leadership to ensure the highest quality teaching and learning (Australia. Dept of Education, 2013; Australia. Dept of Parliamentary Services: Social Policy Section & Harrington, 2011, p1-2). The Commonwealth of Australia has no constitutional power significantly to control education, except that it has the
power to provide financial assistance to the states under terms and conditions determined by parliament, and thereby to influence the states to implement Commonwealth education policies through targeted and funded programs (Australia. Dept of Parliamentary Services: Social Policy Section & Harrington, 2011, p.1-3).

Trends in the past two decades towards a national emphasis on literacy and numeracy outputs potentially improve student learning, but do not ensure that schools’ global budgets are directed towards equity and the complex factors that underlie poor academic performance, even though at the policy level socio-economic status and other impediments are well recognised (Henry, 2001, p.53-55, 77-78).

Two major Australian Government reports into schooling: *Schools in Australia* (Australia. Australian Schools Commission & Karmel, 1973) and *Review of Funding for Schooling-Final Report* (Australia. Dept of Education Employment and Workplace Relations & Gonski et al., 2011) recommended improvements in schools and student learning outcomes, including the removal of marginalising barriers to education wrought by difference, disability and disadvantage (Australia. Australian Schools Commission & Karmel, 1973; Australia. Dept of Education Employment and Workplace Relations & Gonski et al., 2011). The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training & Youth Affairs, 2008), agreed to by all Commonwealth and State Education Ministers in December 2008, significantly furthered nation-wide policy and programs promoting equity and excellence, through educating all young Australians to become: successful learners; confident and creative individuals; and active and informed citizens (p.7-8).

**Education in the State of Victoria**

In 1945, immediately post-war, the Victorian Education Department operated primary schools, high schools, technical schools and special schools. Catholic, religious and private schools have been continuously part of the Victorian schools environment. Government primary schools provided Prep (entry level), and
Grades 1-8, which was then the education limit for most children. Schools attempted to manage rapidly increasing student numbers caused by the post-war baby boom and immigration. Grades 7 and 8 were moved to high and technical schools, which tended to provide academic and trade options respectively. Eventually high schools and technical schools were amalgamated, now generally known as secondary colleges or high schools, Years 7-12 (Theobald & Swain, 2010; writer’s recollections).

The 1970s saw the most significant developments in schooling, with:

- child-centred pedagogy, school-based curriculum development,
- multiculturalism, a more genuine partnership with parents (and) a more militant brand of teacher unionism... (Theobald & Swain, 2010)

In 1992, in a major philosophical shift, the Liberal government initiated self-managing schools and devolved administration, as has been done in other states, with reduced funding and no accountability for equity (Henry, 2001, p.59).

- Schools were thrown into competition with each other, with amalgamation or closure facing those who were unable to survive.
  
  (Theobald & Swain, 2010)

The Labor government elected in 1998 reversed some of the previous policies. The 1970s reintroduction of State Aid (Commonwealth or State funds) to private schools, and the federal Liberal government’s ideologically driven further expansion of the private school sector in 1996 had increased the numbers of non-government schools. By 2000, the proportion of children in Victorian government schools had declined, leaving fundamental questions of equity and the potential residualisation of a state system denied access to private education because of poverty, learning or behavioural problems (Henry, 2001, p.58-59; Theobald & Swain, 2010).
Locating and Defining School Social Work

School social work thrives under the assumptions of social discourses that uphold the rights of all children and young people successfully to attain academic, personal and social learning outcomes, as enshrined and reaffirmed in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1959, p.7), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989). School social workers number among those adults professionally responsible to ensure the inalienable right to primary and secondary education, including the obligation to recognise and work to overcome the failure of programs and policies to deliver successful learning and life outcomes (Allen-Meares & Montgomery, 2014, p.106; Constable, 2009, p.3).

School social workers need also to remember that schooling has an additional function in the perpetuation of society and economy where inequity is known to prevail (Meijers, 2013, p.1). Preparing young people for a changing workforce was one of the prime functions of Victorian schools and guidance services in the late 1940s (Cunningham, 1951, p.1-2, 7-8), but schools have also operated as agents of social control and conformity to the needs of production and the national interest (Connell, 1982, p.27; Faulkner, 2000, p.116, 119; Meijers, 2013, p.1; Testa, 2013).

High-quality schooling fosters the development of creative, informed and resilient citizens who are able to participate fully in a dynamic and globalised world. It also leads to many benefits for individuals and society, including higher levels of employment and earnings, and better health, longevity, tolerance and social cohesion. (Australia. Dept of Education Employment and Workplace Relations & Gonski et al., 2011, p.xiii)

Defining Social Work

Before the beginning of professional qualifications, social work and school social work had shared origins in their development in response to inequitable social conditions. In Australia, from the early 1800s, in an environment of emerging
social consciousness, volunteers provided basic social services and were active in moral reform. Philanthropists and social justice activists, including feminists, were the earliest social workers. Among them was Dame Edith Cowan who had promoted the health, welfare and rights of women and children, and was “a state education advocate” in Western Australia, before becoming Australia’s first woman elected to parliament in 1921 (Brown, 1981).

Catholic religious women were working within neighbourhoods to provide schooling and other support (Alston & McKinnon, 2005, p.3; Hughes, 2003). Social welfare services were initiated in the 1920s, and included hospitals, women’s and children’s welfare, training and rights (Gleeson, 2008, p.211). The Victorian Institute of Hospital Almoners established in 1929 the precursor of social work education in Victoria, which was transferred to the University of Melbourne in 1941, and became the responsibility of the Board of Studies in 1949 (Dept of Social Work: Melbourne School of Health Sciences, 2011). Most of the earliest school social workers in Victoria were graduates with the Diploma of Social Studies.

In the early to mid-20th century, analysis of the separate areas of practice, including school social work in the USA, informed a cohesive theoretical understanding of the basic elements of social work (Alston & McKinnon, 2005, p.4; Bartlett, 1961, p.13-14, 17; Brieland, 1995; Kahn, 1965b, p.750), and distinguished it from other professions (Carroll, 1975, p.6; Costin, 1981, p.36).

The early development of professional social work took on dual primary perspectives: the wellbeing of the individual, and the broader concern for communities and social problems that impacted on the individual (Brieland, 1995, p.2248; Carroll, 1975, p.4). The resulting theoretical base put the person in the social environment at the core of modern social work definition and practice (Hare, 2004, p.409) and the student in the learning environment at the core of school social work (AASW, 2011, p.12).

The AASW follows the definition of social work adopted by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) in July 2000 (Hare, 2004, p.407; International Federation of Social Workers), and underpins social work with
commitment to social justice, where people interact with their environments, to achieve wellbeing and the development of potential.

*The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance wellbeing. Utilising theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.*

(Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010)

The alleviation of poverty; the inclusion of the disadvantaged, marginalised or oppressed; redressing inequity and injustice; working towards social development and systemic change, uniquely contribute to professional definition and purpose (AASW, 2010, p.7-9; International Federation of Social Workers, 2012).

**Defining School Social Work**

School social work in Australia is firmly embedded within the broader profession of social work, with definition, values, purpose, theory, knowledge and practice skills that are consistent with those of the AASW and the IFSW. The *AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers 2008* (AASW, 2011) are based on the *AASW Practice Standards for Social Workers* (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2003); grounded in AASW ethical discourse; and provide exhaustive descriptions of theoretical approaches, knowledge, skills and tasks of school social work as a particular field of practice. Core elements of the *AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers* are included in the current role description and supervision guidelines for departmental school social workers (Victoria. Deptment of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), 2012, p46-47).

The definition of school social work links directly to the person-environment focus of social work, through its unique and differentiated student-learning
The fundamental goal of school social work is the facilitation of successful education, by focusing on the student in the learning environment, so that equitable opportunities and best learning outcomes might lead to the achievement of individual potential and social justice through fair access to society’s resources (AASW, 2011, p.7; AASW, 2010, pp.7-9).

The school social work role is unique in its focus on the student in the school environment in order to facilitate successful learning outcomes through the relief of distress and removal of barriers or inequities. Students within schools have diverse abilities and needs. All students are entitled to a quality educational environment which:

- promotes the total development of the child - intellectual, physical, social, creative, emotional; and
- creates learning outcomes which enable the young adult to take a satisfying role in their society and to have fair access to its resources. (AASW, 2011, p.7)

The focus on the student in the learning environment and improved learning outcomes, differentiates school social work from other social work services delivered in schools. The essential difference is found within the purposeful integration of school social work into the educational program of the school; and interventions focused on the student and family, and importantly, the school environment. This definition excludes social work services which do not primarily aim to improve both student wellbeing and learning.

The AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers (AASW, 2011) were drafted by a group of school social work practitioners on behalf of the AASW (Vic) School Social Work Special Interest Group. The draft echoed content from Practice Standards for School Social Workers (Australian Association of Social Workers (Victorian Branch) & Hayes, 1991). The new document was completed in 2006; endorsed by the Victorian Branch Committee of Management; submitted to the National Board of the AASW and placed on the website for comment by members; ratified as standards in 2008; and published on the AASW website in 2011.
Practice standards unite school social workers within shared specialised knowledge and contextual understandings; dedication to and advocacy for the profession.

*It is critical that school social workers articulate and reinforce the theoretical bases and systems frameworks which are unique to social work. Practice standards are one method of delineating the profession’s uniqueness by assisting social workers and to identify basic areas of professional competence and practice.*

(AASW (Vic) & Hayes, 1991, p.1)

*Practice standards describe the interaction between professional knowledge and skills, professional education and organisational environment that nurtures the on-going development of best quality school social work practice.*

(AASW, 2011, p.5)

### A Narrative of the Researcher-Research Relationship

Continuing as a practising school social worker, I was confronted by the complexities of my being one of the group I wished to study, obliged to be objective, but part of the researched phenomenon. I endeavoured to use intellectual honesty and rigour in analysis and interpretation to counter the risk of subversion by pre-existing assumptions, in order to uncover a complex and hitherto untold story.

As a teacher in the late 1970s I completed a post-graduate Bachelor of Social Work, and spent a year in the Education Department’s *Counselling, Guidance, and Clinical Services*, before returning to schools, in various teaching, student welfare, consultancy and policy development roles. By 1990, I had become well integrated into local social work and welfare networks, and self-identified not only as a teacher with welfare and policy responsibilities, but as a social worker member of the teaching staff, a rare position at that time.
Four years after resigning from teaching, I re-joined the Victorian state education system in 1998, as a social worker. I was acutely aware that I had been negotiating a change in my professional self, letting go of the teacher persona and moving increasingly towards a sense of myself as social worker. I have no recall of a particular moment of insight that led to my identifying specifically as a school social worker: it was, no doubt, a series of unfolding illuminations. Nevertheless the conceptualisation of school social work as a specific mode of practice and my developing school social worker identity, were powerful and motivating in underpinning this research.

Tensions in the organisational environment, and a chain of critical moments inspired my wondering about the development and practice of school social work in Victoria. An interstate social work student contacted me, having been told by her lecturer that there was no school social work in Australia. A psychologist said that he was more highly paid and could access promotion positions because, after all, anyone could be a social worker without any particular qualification. I felt strangely diminished when long-serving colleagues referred to our origins as "hand-maidens" or "assistants" to the psychologists.

The culmination came in April 1999, and has stayed with me vividly as a significant moment of insight. I found myself in the Chicago Radisson O'Hare hotel, with school social workers, many representing the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA), which was hosting the first International School Social Work conference. After a day of workshops, I swung open a towering wooden door to enter the ball-room, where I was confronted by hundreds of my professional colleagues seated for dinner. I actually gasped. In that moment I identified myself within a global community of school social workers. I was overcome with a sense of professional validation, within a vibrant and strong profession, acknowledged as dignified and essential throughout many countries of the world. I felt an empowering emotional and intellectual shift: it was visceral and invigorating. This critical moment, within the intersection of personal and professional experience, triggered the research.

Formal and informal relationships between school social workers, researchers and educators were evident at USA and international conferences, in workshops
and excited friendly encounters. It was perhaps school social workers themselves, operating with specific expertise within an acknowledged field of practice; aware of historical and professional contexts; and sharing their professional stories, who essentially created a tradition of practice.

School social work did not have a strong profile in the Australian setting, and I began to contemplate the strength of the school social worker group in the USA and other nations; and the hopefulness in those Asian, European and African countries where school social work was in its infancy. SSWAA had become a strong organising body, with a sense of cohesion that came from shared values, practices and goals; strengthened by state and federal policy and funding mandating school social work; and a solid catalogue of research and theory for practice. With the 2006 centenary celebrations foreshadowed, I was privileged to meet and share stories with those who were designated school social work “pioneers”.

I had sought collegiate connections in the Melbourne-based AASW (Vic) School Social Work Special Interest Group, where I heard stories of commitment to excellent school social work practice, dedication, enthusiasm and hard work. The stories of departmental school social workers, however, also focused on organisational structures and cultures that kept them feeling undervalued.

I became curious about school social work in Victoria, where there was not the advantage of a recognised and documented tradition, and where oral narratives both preserved and diminished its role. I wondered what meanings were to be found in the absence of documented retrospective and theoretical narratives; and whether the documentation of extant oral narratives might contribute to more confident professional identity and facilitate stronger connectedness to the collegiate community of school social workers. The stories of those who had retired, or who were heading precipitously in that direction, needed to be documented within the archives of Australian social work. School social work in Victoria had been and continued to be dynamic, but struggled to link itself to its own story. This study was designed, in part, to reclaim that story.
I was alternately excited by the unfolding story and puzzled by aspects of it. I was sometimes overwhelmed by the knowledge, commitment and frustrations, even decades later, of dedicated school social workers, past and present, who were anxious for their stories to be heard and re-told. My connection with the community of school social workers had been achieved through the sharing of stories of professional practice, and I had now constructed a research project that would keep me engaged in narrative relationships, the outcomes of which have inspired a newly interpreted narrative of school social work.

“Critical moments” are described as points of intellectual discovery, unique to the researcher, and reflecting the exclusive relationship with the research, integrated into the conduct of everyday life (Horsfall, 2001, p.3-13). Indeed, my relationship with this research has resembled a drawn out roller-coaster ride through the sometimes treacherous terrain of everyday life; to the garbled, nightmarish imaginings that were the panicked narratives of sleep; and the high thrills of discovery within critical moments. All things considered, the relationship has always been strong, and the critical moments significant enough to maintain my determination to re-present the stories entrusted to me.

**Rationale and Direction of the Research**

Integral to the development of the research design was the intent to privilege the voices of current and former school social work practitioners, who appeared to have been working quietly, effectively and without strident self-promotion in schools for many decades. The rich documentation of the origins and evolution of school social work in the USA has contributed to practitioner and academic understanding and responsiveness to changing social problems, economic policy and theoretical and practice developments (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013, p.19). With little documented and accessible historical detail despite a sixty-five year history, Victorian school social work does not have a high profile, even among the wider community of social work practitioners. School social worker knowledge and expertise in working with children, young people and families; and with schools and communities as changing systems, are underestimated, neither fully acknowledged, nor accessed by the wider social work profession.
A retrospective view of Victorian school social work and the interpretation of past circumstances, represent a quest for “professional genealogy” (Swain, 2008, p.164), without necessarily representing accurately events and the forces that shaped them. The study selects from available fragments to imagine a new narrative (Flannery, 2014). Gaps and unanswered questions hold meanings unknown. It is not, however, the past that is solely crucial, but the dynamic relationship over time between the past, the present and an anticipated future that has shaped the narrative construction of school social work.

Without substantial documentary evidence of their tradition, Australian school social workers have been denied the professional validation and confidence that a history can afford. Neither can they easily access the practice wisdom of their pioneering colleagues who have already grappled with policy and practice issues in multi-systemic environments. This study aims to contribute to social work education and school social work professional development. Professional identity will be strengthened by access to a documented record, as school social workers adopt, challenge, resist and re-story the discourses of their practice.

This research was clearly defined within the area of professional school social work experiences, as they illuminated service development and practice, rather than specifically around barriers to student wellbeing, engagement and learning, and interventions with children and young people. The research findings contribute to the understanding and improvement of practice, through an exploration of professional identity and the traditions of school social work. The study has contributed to knowledge about school social work, through the interpretation of empirical material, primarily professional narratives, and the rediscovered voices of school social workers or other observers. From within narratives and retrieved texts came opportunity to theorise the construction of school social work, professional identity and the tradition of practice.

The objectives of the research included:

- to contribute to knowledge about school social work in Victoria
- to contribute to the process of the on-going goal of high quality practice
- to provide material that might inspire the education, induction and on-going professional development of school social workers
• to present reports of Australian school social work into the international school social work forum
• to enable school social work practitioners to contribute to a documented account of their tradition and to facilitate the access of school social workers to that tradition
• to raise the profile of school social work practice in the Australian social work setting
• to acknowledge school social work practitioners who have contributed to the profession in Victoria.

**Research Question**

In order to meet objectives, a broad research question and subsidiary questions were established:

*What is the story of the development of school social work in the State of Victoria, Australia?*

*How do the narratives of past and present school social work practitioners construct school social work, their professional identity and their tradition of practice?*

*What issues and concerns do school social workers communicate through their professional narratives?*
Introduction to Chapters 2-9

Chapter 2  Literature Review: School Social Work Developmental Perspectives
Victorian school social work is located within developing historical and international contexts.

Chapter 3  Literature Review: Theory and Practice Perspectives
School social work operates in the host setting of schools; and requires ecological systems theoretical perspectives, specific knowledge and skills. Research, commentary, practice standards and Victorian education wellbeing and learning policy are considered.

Chapter 4  Professional Narratives and Professional Identities: A Research Approach
Professional narratives construct professional identity by attributing personal and communal meanings to the interconnectedness of knowledge and practices, service delivery and collegiate contexts; and were the primary source of data.

Chapter 5  Methodology
The study was developed within an interpretive paradigm with a qualitative research design including retrospective considerations. The study included 27 narrators and documents retrieved from private collections and public archives.

Chapter 6  The Organisational Development of School Social Work in Victoria
A synthesis of available and selected information from a literature review, with findings from newly collected narratives and retrieved documents, has constructed a single, integrated narrative of the organisational development of school social work in Victoria.

Chapter 7  Findings: School Social Work Values, Theories and Practice
School social worker-narrators affirmed values, purpose and activity that shaped the uniqueness of their specialist practice in its focus on the student in the school environment, and the removal of barriers to learning, including
generic social work and education specific knowledge and skills for school change and development.

Chapter 8  

Findings: School Social Worker Professional Identity and the Tradition of Practice

The findings suggested that the tradition of school social work practice is represented by the discursive connections made between those who recognise shared professional identity attributes in past, present and imagined future communities of practice.

Chapter 9  

Discussion: Implications for School Social Work

This study has established school social work as one of the earliest fields of Australian social work practice. There is urgency to research and evaluate school social work in Australia, in order to strengthen and improve practice, document and develop knowledge, and build a catalogue of literature.
In the social work tradition of social activism, school social workers may now view the children of the world as their client group and advocacy for children’s rights, children’s welfare, and access to education as their province.

(Huxtable, 1998, p.96)
Literature Review: School Social Work Developmental Perspectives

Introduction to the Literature Review

A review of the literature begins here in Chapter 2 with perspectives on the development of school social work internationally. The existing literature tracing the development of school social work in Victoria is integrated into Chapter 6, along with information from professional narratives and retrieved documents, as a single, coherent account.

Chapter 3 continues a review of the literature, by exploring issues of school social work theory and practice.

The review of literature represents a process of thoughtfulness and reconsideration in order to present well the scope of information, but remains the product of subjective authorship in its inclusions, exclusions and interpretations.

An International Perspective


*School social workers challenge social justice and human rights and promote social changes to improve human relation issues. Specifically, the characteristics of school social work are to cooperate with teachers in assessment, planning, and monitoring process.*

(Yamano, 2011, p.7)
The International Network for School Social Work (INSSW) website refers to 47 countries, representing every continent, Caribbean and Pacific island states, diverse religions, cultures and ethnicities (International Network for School Social Work). In most countries school social workers are employed by national, state or municipal government school systems. Canada and the Netherlands introduced school social work in the 1940s; Nordic countries in the following three decades; Ghana and Argentina in the 1960s; Germany, Hong Kong, Poland and Korea by the 1980s (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002, p.9-10). Where school social work is new, such as Osaka, Japan, and Mongolia, not all positions are held by qualified social workers (Evans, 2013a, 2013b; Yamano, 2011, p.1-2).

Across the globe, children face the impacts of social problems related to family and social changes, poverty, violence, civil war and injustice; technological advances, internet and social media; and environmental degradation. Migration and displacement are creating ethnic diversity in many countries. School social work internationally focusses on removing school, family and community barriers to learning; addressing language and culture obstacles; and dealing with poverty, homelessness and ill-health. School social work has been consistently defined by commitment to the rights and education of children and young people; and belief that children can attain their potential through universal and successful education inclusive of those with disabilities, disadvantaged, female or impoverished (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002, p.1-3, 5-6, 8).

School attendance and the inclusion of students with special needs have commonly been the first issues addressed, before the wider range of underlying social problems (Huxtable, 2013; Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). Educators in countries as diverse as Jamaica, Finland and the USA have noticed increasingly complex social problems (Allen-Meares, 2010b, p.38; Huxtable, 2013; Sipila-Lahdekorpi, 2013). In Finland, school social workers, established in the 1960s, are part of school-based teams that support equity, promote wellbeing, and remove obstacles to learning (Arffman, 2013; Sipila-Lahdekorpi, 2013). Schools in Botswana, Bulgaria and Jamaica, recognising that teachers cannot handle alone the complex problems of students, have called for school social work. In Botswana and Laos, social work student field placements have introduced school social work (Dangers, 2013; Huxtable, 2013).
Regardless of national levels of economic development, the goal of school social work remains access to and inclusion in schooling. In Laos, extreme poverty, illiteracy, long and dangerous journeys to school, and poorly resourced schools and teachers discourage school attendance. Drug use, human trafficking, HIV/AIDS and other health problems also contribute. Social worker initiated community development and education programs have spread into several schools, and provided teacher professional development and attendance support (Dangers, 2013).

Mongolia is the chosen site for the 5th International School Social Worker Conference in 2015. Mongolia has a strong, relatively new school social work program, established in the late 1990s to address drop-out rates during the social upheaval associated with transition from communism to parliamentary democracy (Mongolian Association of School Social Workers, 2014). School social workers now hold mandated positions in every secondary school, and have a unique role in teacher professional development and community outreach. (Evans, 2013a, 2013b).

Previous conferences have been held in Chicago (1999); Stockholm (2003), South Korea (2006); New Zealand (2009); and Ghana (2012), where discussions included the development of stronger links between school social workers internationally; and with the International Federation of Social Workers (International Network for School Social Work; International Network for School Social Work & Huxtable, 2012).

School Social Work in the United Kingdom

School social work originated in the United Kingdom in 1872, with the appointment of school board “visitors” to address attendance issues. The National Association of Social Workers in Education (NASWE), founded in 1884, is open to social workers and others who support: “the education, attendance and welfare of children and young people in the education system” (National Association of Social Workers in Education, 2014).
Known as Education Welfare Officers, social work and other disciplines have been directed by changing government education policy and legislation. More than a century after its beginnings, the main focus continued to be truancy and crime, through punitive and legalistic approaches conflicting with social work values and principles of inclusion and prevention (Blyth, 2000, p.109; Mason, 2011). Even while they struggled to keep their social work values to the fore in a punitive environment, UK education social workers were encouraged to: “celebrate and declare the richness of (their) history, the diversity of (their) skills and the uniqueness of (their) perspective (Mason, 2011).

The 2012 national government review on Improving attendance at school (UK. Dept for Education & Taylor, 2012), emphasised the complex factors that lead to non-attendance; and required early identification and intervention with vulnerable children and their families (paragraphs 18, 29). The NASWE and schools had long held the position that consistent failure to send children to school was a sign of neglect ignored by child protection workers. Education social workers now saw the opportunity to use their full range of skills and knowledge within a preventative systems framework, rather than a punitive approach (Huxtable, 2013; National Association of Social Workers in Education, 2014).

School Social Work in the United States of America

As the most accessible and complete case study, school social work in the USA provides insight into a strong tradition of professional practice where school social workers can locate themselves with confidence; and engage in research, theoretical debate and reconstruction.

School social work arose in 1906 in an environment of social and economic change and burgeoning migration, in response to the needs of poor, working-class and immigrant children, to guarantee every child’s right to compulsory education provided by the state. Illiteracy; poverty; child exploitation; and ill-health prevented children from attending schools. School social work was primarily founded on effective education; home-school cooperation and understanding; attendance; assessment and casework; maladjustment and treatment (Allen-

In the 1930s, many practitioners began providing emotional support for troubled children through social case work. By 1960, school social work had become an integral part of the school system, with a casework perspective that responded to social, emotional and behaviour difficulties, and poor academic performance. It was a model that placed the responsibility for difficulties on the child or young person; with actual school change a rare focus (Allen-Meares, 2010b, p.27-29).

As questions of educational inequity came to the fore, school social workers were called upon to identify and challenge myths, expectations, policies and practices that adversely affected and further disadvantaged marginalised students. Practitioners added group work and community work to their repertoires (Allen-Meares, 2010b, p.29-30; Freeman, 1995, p.2088). In the 1970s, with a systems perspective, school-community linkage and more creative and responsive practice were seen (Allen-Meares, 2010b, p.32). A school was theorised as: “a community of families and school personnel engaged in the education process”, with the school social worker working with each person within that community, towards developing community cohesiveness to support vulnerable children (Constable, 1996, p.14-15).

The number of school social workers continued to increase, with graduate programs in school social work; published text books, research and journals; representative organisations and conferences; and requirement in some states for school social work licensing (Allen-Meares, 2010b, p.38-39; Huxtable, 1998, p.104). The School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) was established separately from the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in 1994 in order exclusively to address the specific professional needs of school social work practitioners (SSWAA, 2014; Dupper, 2003, p.12; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013, p.26). According to known numbers, in 1998 the USA had more school social workers than the rest of the world combined (Huxtable, 1998, p.107). Federal legislation has ensured school social work services and educational opportunities for all students, in increasingly difficult social environments (Allen-Meares, 2010b, p.38; Freeman, 1995, p.2087-2088).
School social workers operated creatively and flexibly to promote school-community-family partnerships; respect for students’ rights and cultural diversity (Allen-Meares, 2010b, p.38). Mandated requirements also demanded statistically evidence-based practice, even though such interventions may require adaptation to suit the particular school population, resources or practitioner skill (Alvarez & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011, p.62-63, 284; Franklin & Kelly, 2009, p.46, 48-50; Harris, Franklin & Lagana-Riordan, 2010, p.272; Kelly, Frey & Anderson-Butcher, 2010; Thayer & Jayaratne, 2010, p.322). There was growing awareness that statistical evaluation of the effectiveness of school social work intervention was not always consistent with its ecological, multi-level approach (Kelly, Frey, & Anderson-Butcher, 2010, p.195).

Despite a strong documented tradition, school social workers in the USA have at times lacked confidence, feeling under-appreciated and vulnerable to fragile economies, shrinking budgets and reduced positions (Whittlesey-Jerome, 2012, p.45, 54); and drawn into “turf battles”, especially with psychologists and counsellors (Altshuler & Webb, 2009, p.207). Overlapping roles and resultant confusion have been noted since the 1960s (Allen-Meares, 2010b, p.30-32). In 2012, school social work was inconsistently defined across the USA, and some states questioned the need for it (Massat, 2012, p.ix).


**School Social Work in Australia**

The study acknowledges the pre-1948 contribution of activists who were engaging Australian children in schooling from the 1800s as a means towards lifting them out of poverty and child labour (Alston & McKinnon, 2005; Camilleri & Winkworth, 2005; Hughes, 2003). In the 1930s a small group of Catholic women completed social work qualifications in the USA. Motivated by commitment to
social justice and the human right to “housing, health care and education” (Camilleri & Winkworth, 2005, p.81), they became pioneers in social work and social activism in Australia, helping to establish the first professional welfare agencies including children’s services and child guidance clinics (Alston & McKinnon, 2005, p.3; Camilleri & Winkworth, 2005, p.80-81; Gleeson, 2008, p.209-210, 213-216; Hughes, 2003). The precedents of Australian school social work may well significantly pre-date the 1940s: the connection between schooling and social justice was already well-established.

School-employed social workers were funded by the Disadvantaged Schools and Innovations Programs in the mid-1970s, following the recommendations of *Schools in Australia: Report of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission* (Australia. Australian Schools Commission & Karmel, 1973; Sturmfels, 1995, p.125). Craft’s investigation of a range of Australian health and welfare services, concluded that the “complex and fragmented pattern of school welfare provision” was the result of its “piecemeal” development by individual states (Craft, 1980, p.5).

With inadequate Australian school system data bases generally (Henry, 2001, p.58), and no method comprehensively to audit school social worker numbers, the current state of the profession across the nation is unclear. The AASW has access only to members who designate themselves as working in education. State and territory annual education reports for 2012-2013 mentioned collaboration between schools and government and non-government agencies, especially in relation to vulnerable children and young people in low socio-economic, remote and other disadvantaged groups. None cited specific school social work services, though that does not preclude their existence. The South Australian report had a strong social work influence, but did not indicate a school social work service within and influencing the school as a teaching and learning system (South Australia. Dept for Education and Child Development, 2013). AASW (Vic) practice group members who attended the annual Tasmanian Department of Education school social work conference in January 2013 reported (19/3/2013) a thriving community of more than 70 school social workers, within multi-disciplinary teams in three regional Learning Services, well-resourced and with career advancement opportunities (Tasmania. Dept of Education, 2013).
The recommended school social worker to student ratio in the USA is 1:250 or less depending on the needs within the local school population (National Association of Social Workers, 2012, p.18). In 2013, the AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group recommended 1:350. It is not possible to ascertain current ratios because the total number of Australian departmental and school-employed social workers is not known.

### School Social Work in the State of Victoria

There is no comprehensive history of school social work in Victoria, and certainly none of the richness and complexity that can be found in writing from the USA. Victorian academic theses contain valuable documentation of Victorian student welfare and support services from 1947, but are written from psychologist perspective barely referencing school social work (Faulkner, 1992; Jacobs, 1986; Thielking, 2006; Ward, 1986).

The continuous two decade existence of the School Social Work Practice Group in the AASW Victorian Branch suggests the strength of the field of practice in that state. In 1985 there were 80 departmental school social workers (Victoria. Education Dept, 1985b, p.9); a decade later there were 51 (Mahony, 1995, p.32). Four Department of Education and Early Childhood Development regional Professional Practice Leaders, appointed since the most recent restructure in July 2012, have accounted for 102 full- or part-time school social workers in departmental multidisciplinary teams state-wide; and at least 30 school-employed in two of four regions (personal email communications, 22, 14, 25 February and 3 March, 2014). These numbers exclude church and independent private schools. In August 2013, one network had a ratio of one departmental school social worker to 7,520 students (Burrage, 2013, p.2).

The vibrancy of school social work in Victoria was recorded Lee’s 2012 study of Australian school social work (Lee, 2012, p.555, 557, 569), who found individual knowledge and expertise invaluable to inform her research planning. Half of Lee’s 65 respondents were Victorian. In recent years, Victorian school social workers Chris Downing, Kelley Latta, Linda Johannsen and Chris Barrett have
established international connections by attending and presenting papers at USA and international conferences. Johannsen is the international liaison representative for the AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group.

In the interests of presenting a credible and coherent narrative of the organisational development of school social work in Victoria, 1948-2013, Chapter 6 has been written to synthesise the understanding gathered from existing literature, collected professional narratives and retrieved documents. The new narrative, from the perspective of school social workers, holds many tensions, missing pieces and unanswered questions, but will be of interest to social workers and educators in Australia and internationally, and especially to Victorian school social workers.
School social workers work where child, family and community meet. They help students, parents and the community develop increased knowledge and understanding of school goals and processes. At the same time they identify aspects of school experience and local communities which are not responsive to or even hinder students’ progress in developing intellectual and social competencies. Unhappy, self-doubting children do not make the best possible use of educational opportunities.

Barbara Sturmfels, 1995, p.124
Introduction

Victorian school social worker, Barbara Sturmfels (1995, p.124), theorised the ecological systemic nature of practice. School social work focuses on students in the learning environment in order to improve their educational opportunities, and reaches into the multiple domains with which they interact: the inner psychological, intellectual and emotional environments; the external family, social and learning environments; and the policy environments and discourses that impact on children and young people.

_School social work refers to social work services delivered in a school setting, the primary goal of which is the achievement of students’ learning potential, and where the methods of working include coordinating and influencing the efforts of the school, family and community to achieve this goal._ (AASW, 2011, p.12)

Driven by social justice goals (AASW, 2011, p.6, 7; NASW, 2012, p.4), and the belief that educational achievement either facilitates employment, income and social status or compounds disadvantage (Mukherjee, 1997, p.2), the purpose of Victorian school social work has been consistent over two decades:

... to work with students, teachers and parents in an attempt to positively redress any perceived or real disadvantage caused by physical, intellectual, social or emotional circumstances and to support the individuals and social structures which encourage students to make full use of their opportunities and achieve success. (AASW (Vic) & Hayes, 1991, p.16)

There is little Australian literature on which to base a discussion of school social work theory and evaluation of practice (Lee, 2012, p.554; Mahony, 1995; McKinnon, Kearns, & Crockett, 2004, p.238; Testa, 2012, p.538). The studies and commentaries accessed in the course of this study constitute often quite dated snap-shots, in particular times and policy environments, rather than on-going research and knowledge development. Texts hint at continuity and
development in issues of theory and practice, but in their scarcity, highlight the missing information, some of which this research has sought to find.


Alison Goding edited and wrote several chapters for The Migrant Family and the School (Victoria. Education Dept. Migrant Resources Group, 1975), which was cited in 1980 by the Commonwealth Commissioner for Community Relations among resources for teachers and librarians (Australia. Office of the Commissioner for Community Relations, 1980).

Lyn Hayes wrote the 1991 Practice Standards for School Social Workers, over a two year consultation period with Victorian colleagues, under the auspices of the Practice Standards Standing Committee, AASW, Victorian Branch (AASW (Vic) & Hayes, 1991). Significant writing for current practice is contained within the AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers (AASW, 2011), a complex discourse of school social work practice, given substance by the stories of practice brought to the drafting table by Victorian school social work practitioners: Chris Downing, John Frederick, Linda Johannsen, Donna Riseley and Chris Barrett.
School Social Work in the Host Setting

School social workers operate within the schools system as host or secondary settings, playing an ancillary role to the education professional base (Constable & Massat, 2009, p.141; Kamerman, 1998, p.298; Sturmfels, 1995, p.127). Their presence in schools is: “justified by the contribution they make to the purposes and objectives of education” (Rimmer et al., 1984, p.115). School social workers needed to make their own substantive contribution to student learning and the general objectives of education, not simply ease the teacher’s task; and retain their own purpose and identity, while balancing the expectations of principals and teachers who have invited them into the school (Bartlett, 1961, p.45; Patford, 2002, p.215).

Secondary settings were arenas of competing professional ethics and practice, where social workers were not the dominant group (Kelly & Stone, 2009, p.165; Patford, 2002, p.209); and their “ability to produce change may be circumscribed or negated as well as enhanced and legitimated” (Picton & Keegel, 1978, p.6).

There may be conflicts in specific objectives, values and problem emphasis; pressure to divert social work from its appropriate focus; “confusion and stress” if roles were not “understood and properly handled” (Bartlett, 1961, p.38-39, 48, 55) and if “tensions and contradictions” were not managed (Testa, 2012, p.547). The school social worker confronted: “contentious issues regarding the boundaries of the social work role”, student needs and rights as minors (Patford, 2002, p.213), and differing values in regard to confidentiality (Sturmfels, 1995, p.127; Patford, 2002, p.215; Picton & Keegel, 1978, p.5; Rimmer et al., 1984, p.56-57).

require the miracle quick counselling fix to normalise “dysfunctional” students and their families; or play social control agent to modify “unacceptable” or “deviant” behaviour (Lee, 2012, p.564; Picton & Keegel, 1978, p.7-8, 13-14). There could be resistance to the identification of problems not simply within the behaviour, attitude or the family life of the student, but also at the point of interaction with the policy or programs of the school (Picton & Keegel, 1978, p.5; Knights, 1978, p.41).

School social worker focus on learning, personal and social development and their knowledge and skills in school and community change and development, secured their contribution to the objectives of education (Knights et al., 1978, p.42; Picton and Keegel, 1978, p.13; Testa, 2012, p.536-537). Similarities, rather than professional differences, were the basis for the integration of teaching and social work perspectives and cross-disciplinary collaboration (Testa, 2012, p.537; Varley, 1980, p.33). School social workers have expertise and knowledge for the host setting, and have been encouraged to participate actively with school leaders and policy-makers (Allen-Meares, 1994, p.564; Altshuler & Webb, 2009; Costin, 1969, p.280-281; Lee, 2012, p.568).

School Social Work as a Field of Practice

Fields of practice represent the differentiated nature of social work practice, and inequities within multiple spheres of social life (Carroll, 1975, p.4, 6; Kahn, 1965a, p.750; Kamerman, 1998, p.297). Early theorising characterised fields as: a particular social problem; population affected; and system of services (Bartlett, 1971a, p.1480). School social work centres on barriers to student learning, whether within the school or elsewhere in the student’s environments. A field is socially constructed within its time and place, including the sociocultural attitudes that influence it from within and without; legislation and policy; emerging issues and debates; and its own knowledge, research and evaluation.

Practice requires generic knowledge and all core social work methods, to varying degrees, plus particular field specific practice (Allen-Meares, 2010a, p.84-85;
In the USA, school social work has maintained its recognition as a particular field of social work practice since the 1920s (Allen-Meares, 2010a, p.84; Constable, 2009, p.15; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013, p.27-28), although shifting circumstances have prompted questions about historic field distinctions (Franklin, Harris, & Lagana-Riordan, 2010, p.281). From the mid-1970s to 1980s, concerted, cyclical, reinforcing efforts strengthened school social work field of practice and identity distinctly from general social work, through national organisation, and an expanded knowledge base documented in texts and journals (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013, p.24-25).

In the Australian context, school social work has been omitted from discussion of fields (Alston & McKinnon, 2001, 2005). However, AASW Practice Standards for School Social Work (AASW, 2011) and Practice Standards for School Social Workers (AASW (Vic), 1991) confirmed school social work as a field of practice, and that its practitioners had fulfilled the requirement for “progressively defining their contribution” and updating “specific competence” consistent with “ongoing changes in society and the profession” (Bartlett, 1971b, p.1480).

Models of School Social Work Practice

Models for practice are located in time and context to describe how practitioners plan and conduct their work according to school social work theoretical perspectives, roles, purpose, responsibilities and methods (Allen-Meares, 2010b, p.33); and: “function as bridges between broader theoretical ideas and intervention strategies within daily practice” (Connolly & Harms, 2012, p.24). Australian social work practice standards require the articulation of “a practice framework that draws on contemporary theory, knowledge, methods and professional values”; and “the model or approach used in practice and its theoretical and conceptual underpinnings”, according to current research.
Models of school social work practice are predicated on the fact that schools are ideal sites for prevention and early intervention with children, young people and families (Mukherjee, 1997, p.6; Winkworth & McArthur, 2005, p.21). The AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers recommend a three level ecological systemic model: Prevention, Early Intervention and Intervention (AASW, 2011, p.7-8). Victorian social workers have been guided since 1998 by a similar model in the Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools, (diagram below) weighted towards Primary Prevention or strategies universally delivered to strengthen and support whole student populations, and Early Intervention targeting students showing “personal and social vulnerabilities” (Victoria. Dept of Education, 1998a, p.10) with the addition of a fourth level, Postvention or Restoring Wellbeing following critical incidents.

Figure 1  The Four Levels of School Social Work Activity

The levels are not necessarily discrete: some of the activities of school social workers are integrated appropriately across two or more levels (Victoria. Dept of Education, 1998b, p.6); and any planned strategy, according to the issue, might intervene at more than one level.

In their national context, the School Social Work National Model and accompanying SSWAA National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice (School Social Work Association of America, 2013) facilitated: advocacy, practice, and research efforts related to the promotion, practice, and evaluation of school social work (Frey et al., 2012, p.131). The Multitier Interventions Model described in the NASW Standards for School Social Work Services in Schools (2012, p.4-5) emphasised evidence and data-informed practice, and described Tiers 1, 2 and 3, closely resembling Prevention, Early Intervention and Intervention/Complex Intervention in the Australian and Victorian contexts. The USA model is closely linked with particular approaches to disability and learning (Response to Intervention), and behaviour (Positive Behaviour Intervention Support) (Anderson-Ketchmark & Alvarez, 2010, p.61; Kelly, Frey, Alvarez, Berzin, Berzin, Shaffer, O’Brien, 2010b; Lindsey & White, 2009; Massat, Constable, & Thomas, 2009). The theorising of school social work models nevertheless shows trans-national similarities in the concern to implement early strategies to minimise students’ transitioning into complex difficulties requiring third level/tier intervention.

The AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers (2011) overlay the levels of intervention with six main areas of practice:

- Direct Practice with students / families / school personnel
- School Social Work Service Management
- School Development and System Change
- Education, School and other Policy
- Research into education, family, child/youth issues

In the 1970s, Alderson’s four practice models clarified roles for USA school social workers (Alderson, 1972; Peckover et al., 2013, p.10) and informed the theorising
School Social Work in the State of Victoria, Australia

of Victorian practitioners (Mahony, 1995, p.42; Sturmfels, 1995, p.125; Victoria. Education Dept, 1985b, p.8-9). The “traditional-clinical” model focused on the student as needing change, and was the most widely used in the USA (Allen-Meares, 2010b, p.33). The “school change” model identified the problem within the policies and programs of the school. The “community-school” model operated through the development of disadvantaged communities, and building their positive relationships with schools. The “social-interaction” model reflected systems and ecological theories, and focused on developing understanding and shared goals between the various individuals and groups connected to the school environment (Alderson, 1972; Allen-Meares, 2010b, p.33-34; Sturmfels, 1995, p.125).

In Victoria in the 1980s, John Hodgson described four, ideally concurrent models: clinical, the most common; school change; school-community liaison; and consultancy to school staff (Victoria. Education Dept, 1985b, p.8). A 1984 study differentiated between the “institutional” welfare task, problematising individual clients; and the “developmental” concept focused on developing rights, competence and power, accommodating a social change process (Rimmer et al., 1984, p.9). A 1995 study found that Victorian school social workers cited ecological perspectives within Alderson’s social-interaction model as their preferred framework (Mahony, 1995, p.42).

Full service, extended and multi-service schools, school-linked services and school-community partnerships

The school is ideally placed to connect student and families to community services (Winkworth & McArthur, 2005, p.21), and school social workers internationally have historically collaborated with community workers (Dryfoos, 1995, p.1, 3; Muijs, 2007, p.347). The concept “full-service school” gained traction in the 1990s, especially within communities affected by poverty, child abuse and neglect, homelessness, poor health and youth alienation (Berrick & Duerr, 1996, p.53-55; Dryfoos, 1995, p.1; Henry, 2001). “Multi-service” or “extended” schools, “school-linked” services, or “joined up solutions” have addressed inequity, student learning, personal, social and physical development, albeit without necessarily challenging the structural inequities that perpetuate

In the United Kingdom, “full-service extended schools”, communities could access child care, out-of-school-hours activities, parenting support, swift referrals to specialist services and use of school facilities (Cummings et al., 2011, p.6; Muijs, 2007, p.348). In 1999, in response to school demand, the New Zealand Social Work in Schools (SWiS) program based non-government community agency social workers in schools in partnership with the staff and community to provide early assistance when social, health or family issues created difficulties in school engagement (New Zealand. Ministry of Social Development, 2012, p.5-10).


A Victorian Extended School Hub Pilot Project 2010-2013, involved 4 sites and 17 primary and secondary schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, harnessing the “full capacity” of the community “to improve student learning and wellbeing outcomes” (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013b, p.16). The hub projects sought systemically, through school and community development, to support children and young people and their learning; and provided during and out-of-school-hours activities, learning

Since 1998, Victorian policy has required partnerships between school, community and departmental Student Support Services, and at times encouraged “out-sourcing”, to provide a coordinated continuum of health, mental health, family, early childhood, child and youth support services (Victoria. Dept of Education, 1998b, p.11; Victoria. DEECD, 2012, p.9, 28, 53, 61, 67, 69). In the USA, practitioners were wary of those “outside contractors” who came into the school to “fix kids”, then departed without becoming part of the school and its wellbeing system, especially when schools supported by school social workers were the primary providers of mental health services to students (Massat, 2013, p.ix-x; Berzin & O'Connor, 2010, p.238)

A focus on school-linked outside services can underestimate existing school programs and professional expertise, and the need to plan and coordinate an integrated suite of needs-based services at the school level (Adelman, 1996, p.433; Franklin, Harris, & Lagana-Riordan, 2010, p.278-281). In the context of community partnerships to support vulnerable students, the school social worker is the professional who focuses on the totality of personal, cultural, school and wider ecological systemic barriers to learning. School social work’s “broad focus and multiple points of intervention”, and purposeful concern for children and young people in the context of education and schools substantiated its unique and significant role (Massat, 2012, p.ix).

Theoretical Perspectives for School Social Work Practice

Chapter 1 presented a definitional discussion of school social work and its purpose: the facilitation of equitable and successful education, by focusing on the student in the learning environment and the removal of barriers, so that best learning outcomes might lead to the achievement of individual potential and social justice through fair access to society’s resources (AASW, 2011, p.7; AASW, 2010, pp.7-9). Theoretical perspectives provide an analytical framework with
which to approach school social work. A range of other theories additionally apply to specific intervention techniques.

The *AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers* (AASW, 2011) require an ecological systems approach.

> Essential to school social work is the recognition that the individual student’s successful outcomes in education are influenced by personal, family, social, political and economic factors... As a specific area of social work practice, school social work practice knowledge necessarily includes: multiple levels of analysis to encompass causal impacts on human life in terms of an ecological systems framework. (AASW, 2011, p.9)

A 65 year perspective on the developing practice of school social work might be expected to trace both consistency and theoretical evolution through social work’s: “overarching conceptual frameworks” (Scott, 2011) in the arena of practice at the intersection of students, schools, families and communities (Constable, 2009, p.4).

> While it may not have been given the name we now use - a bio-psycho-social perspective, the recognition of the dynamic interaction of factors within both the person and their social environment remains the conceptual hallmark of social work. (Scott, 2011)

In the late 1970s, school social workers in Victoria identified a systems approach to practice (Knights et al., 1978, p.41-42), and subsequent practice standards have emphasised the need to understand evolution and change especially within educational systems and processes, and their impact on students and families; and to take action to overcome systemically perpetuated inequities (AASW, 2011, p.10, 13, 17, 27; AASW (Vic) & Hayes, 1991, p.1).

Systems theory conceptualises schools as open social systems with complex properties, maintaining internal stasis and equilibrium with their environments
School Social Work in the State of Victoria, Australia

(Allen-Meares, 2010a, p.69; Bowen, 2010, p.49). Schools are purposeful and goal-directed social systems, sustained by the input of all individuals and groups to develop the learning culture. Many subsystems, such as classrooms, maintain the functions of the school, and are differently enabled to influence or make decisions. The suprasystem is the environment beyond the school system which nevertheless impacts on the internal functioning of the school, and includes policy and resources; community attitudes; political and professional discourses (Bowen, 2010, p.49-53).

Bronfenbrenner’s *Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* re-visioned the “evolving interaction” between the developing person and the environment, in the context of reciprocal relationships within and across the “nested structures” of the ecological environment (1979, p.1). The ecological perspective locates the student at the core of interactive relationships within the microsystems interlocking around them, for example: personal wellbeing and health, family, friends, discipline procedures, the teacher-learner relationship. Interlocking student microsystems are nested within concentric layers, beginning with the meso-system that refers to the interconnecting transactions between the microsystems. Next, the exosystem refers to the impact of institutions such as education, government and the economy. The macrosystem represents culture and subcultures, beliefs and assumptions. The chronosystem refers to the impact of personal, communal and institutional elements of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.21-27; Connolly & Harms, 2012, p.54-56).

Ecological systems theory for school social work comes from the connection of ecological theories with systems analysis of the school, family or community. It guides the school social worker to define the problem and plan a range of appropriate interventions focused on the student and the points of interaction between their environments; and the dynamic exchanges associated with systemic change (Allen-Meares, 2010a, p.69-70; Bowen, 2010, p.49; Winters & Easton, 1983, p.14-15).

From the 1970s, USA literature has promoted the ecological perspective (Allen-Meares, 1996, p.20; 2010a, p.20, 65; Allen-Meares & Montgomery, 2014, p.106; Bowen, 2010, p.49; Costin, 1975, p.136; Kelly et al., 2010b, p.2; Monkman, 2009,
Lee’s 2012 study of Australian school social work and Mahony’s 1995 Victorian study, both found that school social workers used systems or ecological theoretical approaches. Lee questioned whether the focus on casework was compatible with a truly ecological approach (Lee, 2012, p.567); although Mahony concluded that school social workers could be “engaging in clinical activities from an ecological perspective” (Mahony, 1995, p.42).

Knowledge for School Social Work Practice

Hooley proposed that essential knowledge and its further development is at the heart of professional identity (Hooley, 2007, p.50, 53). Knowledge for practice informs the understanding of students and schools; strengthens assessment; expands the repertoire of interventions; and guides evaluation.

School social workers must keep informed of the complex personal and structural issues that impact on children and young people as students, in the areas of:

- Social, political, economic and indigenous theory; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other cultural histories; education history, practice and policy; Commonwealth and State legislation; pedagogy and learning theories; schools as systems of resistance and change within state, national and international philosophical contexts; the complexities of the dynamic interaction between the child or young person, school, family, community and culture; multidisciplinary teamwork and lines of authority in schools.
- Human development and transitions; the complexities of family life; human behaviour and social environment; child and youth policy and research; welfare arrangements and community resources; child protection; physical and mental health; substance abuse, and
- Core social work values and generic social work methods; theories for assessment, intervention and evaluation in individual, family and group work, policy and community development, and critical incident management, as well as school-specific theory and practice.

Moreover, practitioners need knowledge for critical structural analysis of society, schools, ideologies, power and disadvantage, to enable inclusive, empowering and non-oppressive practice respectful of diversity, with particular consideration given to “age”, and the hegemony of adulthood that disempowers children and young people (AASW, 2011, p.8, 10).

Issues for School Social Work Intervention

Although this research does not focus on the specific barriers to learning, they form an essential part of the context of practice. School social work originated in response to poverty, child exploitation, school non-attendance, failure to learn, personal difficulties and other matters, many of which continue to create barriers to learning that are the focus of contemporary school social work (Constable, 1996, p.4; Shaffer, 2006, p.243, 246-247). The school social work “mission of inclusion of all children, especially the more vulnerable” (Constable, 1996, p.4) makes school social work services potentially available to all children and young people at times of stress, for example, during parental separation or in the aftermath in recent years of devastating fires and floods in Victoria and Australia more widely.

Culture and Diversity

It is within the realm of school social work to refute the societal messages that certain students should not aspire to personal or learning achievement because of: “characteristics such as gender, race, disability, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status” (Constable, 2009, p.23). Schools are not always equipped to offer inclusive curriculum, processes and supports to the diverse Koorie, cultural, ethnic, socio-economic, child and youth cultures and sub-cultures within their populations.

*Schools in Australia: Report of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission* (Australia. Australian Schools Commission & Karmel, 1973) introduced into Australian education policy the notion that inequities in educational access and outcomes were related to socio-economic background
and family culture. The Victorian *Social Justice Framework* (Victoria. Ministry of Education, 1990) formalised the social justice agenda of the 1970-1980s, directing schools to integrate social justice measures into every aspect of school planning, including the use of education support services and community agencies to extend “*educational opportunities and outcomes to the full range of students*” (p.7). The policy identified seven groups of students for whom disadvantage needed to be addressed: female, Aboriginal (Koorie), poor, low social status, rural, immigrant and those with disabilities (p.6).

The 2011 *Australian Government Review of Funding for Schooling - Final Report* (Australia. Dept of Education Employment and Workplace Relations & Gonski et al., 2011) confirmed that socioeconomic status continued as the key predictor of academic achievement. Educational potential was further compromised by compound intersection with: low English language proficiency, disability and school remoteness, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students over-represented in every category of disadvantage (Australia. Dept of Education Employment and Workplace Relations & Gonski et al., 2011, p.xxi, 28, 113, 123).

The *Guidelines for Student Support Services* (Victoria. DEECD, 2012) urge schools, school social workers and other support staff to value diversity (p.69) manifest in individual needs and learning styles and abilities; physical and mental health; literacy levels; diagnosed disabilities and behaviour problems (p.8); cultural and language backgrounds; interests and experiences (p.64); social and economic disadvantage; sexual and gender identity; substance abuse; mental illness and family violence (p.46). Every Victorian school was required to develop Student Engagement Policy guided by a “*comprehensive understanding of the diversity of the whole-school community*” (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009a, p.13).

The *Code of Ethics* (AASW, 2010) requires culturally competent practice. School social worker cultural competence is enhanced by knowledge, awareness and resources; open, empowering school environments; and by specific training for practice in collaboration between home, school, and community (Teasley, Gourdine, & Canfield, 2010, p.93, 101), although in the Australian context this has not been studied.
On the assumption that all children have the abilities to succeed and progress given the right teaching and learning environments (Australia. Dept of Education Employment and Workplace Relations & Gonski et al., 2011, p.105), curriculum and support programs, including school social work, are directed towards building school and student strengths to overcome disadvantage. Victorian government policy, programs and resources address the needs of particular groups, such as Koorie students; children vulnerable because of family circumstances; migrants and refugees; and students with disabilities (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013d, 2013e, 2013g, 2013i).

The NASW Standards for School Social Work Services (National Association of Social Workers, 2012, p.1, 4) and the AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers (AASW, 2011, p.7) share the assumption that social justice is linked to equal educational opportunity, respect and dignity for all students. The Australian standards include within diversity: class, gender, age, intellectual and physical ability, sexual and gender identity, race, ethnicity and culture (AASW, 2011, p.7, 8, 11).

While the focus of social work training and practice is most often on parents (Tilbury, 2013, p.311; Zufferey & Gibson, 2013), educators, school social workers and other student support professionals work directly with child and youth subcultures and their social and behavioural norms. As with other cultural groups, the meanings inherent in cultural practices are not necessarily understood without consultation with members as experts. For example, the meanings that children and young people ascribe to their favourite music (Barrett, 1999, p.73-76) cannot be assumed from the adult perspective, nor even across sub-cultural groups. The behavioural norms for young Australian males in a tough male culture are enforced by social exclusion and worse, and in order to understand them, consultation with young men rather than adult assumption or judgement is required (Barrett, 1999). Teenagers’ participation or non-participation in social media, and the complexity of meaning ascribed to engagement with this public networking space, can only be understood by eliciting explanation from young people as experts (Boyd, 2007, 2014).
Barriers to Learning

Reasons for referral are the visible signs of school non-engagement, and the school social worker’s first task is to identify often multiple problems (Kelly & Stone, 2009, p.164): emotional or health-related, family matters, obstacles within school curriculum or procedures, learning needs, social relationships or bullying (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2014).

Children experience multiple changes as they transition through personal and family life stages: entry into and exit from primary and secondary schooling; relocation and homelessness; family change; placement in out-of-home care; and new class groups or unfamiliar teachers (AASW, 2011, p.11). Defence force, carnival (Danaher, 2001; Kilanowski, 2006) and itinerant seasonal farm worker families (Henderson, 2004) can be subject to particularly transient lifestyles, across state systems. Children and young people as migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Australia experience complex and multiple changes across international borders, cultures, language and education systems (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013j).

School social workers commonly act where students are affected by: grief and loss; health and mental health issues such as sadness, depression, anger or anxiety; mental illness in the family; bullying; trauma; cultural differences; difficult social relationships; criminality and anti-social behaviour; low social, emotional and problem-solving skills (AASW, 2011, p.11; Costin, 1975, p.135; Kelly et al., 2010b, p.6; Lee, 2012; Sturmfels, 1995, p.137).

Family issues, including financial hardship are primary reasons for referral in Australia and internationally (Kelly et al., 2010b, p.6; Lee, 2012, p.560). Poverty or unemployment, housing difficulties, transience or homelessness, lack of parenting experience, confidence, knowledge or skills can impact on student wellbeing and learning (AASW, 2011, p.11; Kelly et al., 2010b, p.6). The abuse of alcohol and other drugs; violence; child abuse and neglect (AASW, 2011, p.11) are significant barriers to a student’s ability to focus attention on the learning environment, and can cause more long-term cognitive, emotional and social damage (Downey, 2007, 2009, 2010).
Schooling Issues

While the divide between the rich and the poor is increasing, some parts of the Australian schooling system: “are becoming increasingly stratified according to socioeconomic status” (Australia. Dept of Education Employment and Workplace Relations & Gonski et al., 2011, p.111, 124). The notion of “engagement” conceptually links disadvantage and other potential barriers to learning such as attendance, curriculum, the implications of disability and home-school-community links (Alvarez & Frey, 2012, p.1-2; AASW, 2011, p.11).

Victorian government policy recognised the school system as a source of difficulties by defining student engagement as a responsibility of schools and support services, including school social workers, to encompass a broad ecological understanding of behavioural, academic and social engagement. Effective Schools are Engaging Schools promoted a sense of belonging to the school and investment in learning, fostered through pedagogy, curriculum, and school processes to build inclusive cultures and stimulating learning environments where students were happy, healthy and safe (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009a, p.7, 9).


The school social worker was often asked to respond to student behaviour seen to disrupt learning or school processes (Kelly et al., 2010b, p.6; Lee, 2012, p.561). Resisting engagement in the discipline process, practitioners found themselves trying to balance the rights of students; the interests of parents; and the concerns of the school, as they worked with students and schools to foster both student wellbeing and improved school discipline policy and practices (Kopels, 2010, p.88; Sturmfels, 1995, p.132-133).
School Social Work as Specialist Practice

School social work as described within the practice standards (AASW, 2011) implies practitioner aspiration to advanced generalist practice, characterised as an eclectic base of knowledge and skills; a multi-method approach; and a focus on social justice (Derezotes, 2000, p.x-xi). The school is a site of interlocking environments: “a natural setting for social work intervention”, allowing for “a unique blend of social work practice” and a “diversity of skills” (Constable, 1996, p.11), with the potential for early interventions located within the student’s normal spheres of experience (Sturmfels, 1995, p.125-126).

School social workers initially require eclectic practice knowledge for generalist social work intervention (AASW, 2011, p.9; Alston & McKinnon, 2005, p.4-5) that is suitably broad for the ecological systems approach to the focus on the student within the complexity of intrapersonal, interpersonal, learning and social environments (Allen-Meares, 2010a, p.70; AASW, 2011, p.9; Costin, 1975, p.139; Ife, 1997, p.9). Research and commentary have found school social work more effective with multiple interventions at individual, family, group, teacher, neighbourhood, organisational, policy, community and societal levels (AASW (Vic) & Hayes, 1991, p.5; Constable, 1996, p.11; Knights et al., 1978, p.4; Picton & Keegel, 1978).

Because of the complex educational, personal and social problems; multiple methods of intervention and systems targeted; and the theoretical underpinnings of school social work, the practitioner needs to become “specialist” in both generic social work and school specific interventions.

School social workers are required to possess knowledge and understanding basic to the social work profession; specialised knowledge and understanding of the process of education; and knowledge of school and school system policy and regulations.

(AASW, 2011, p.8).

Specialist school social workers demonstrate unique perspective and practice through knowledge, values, highly competent skills; and can be recognised as
advanced practitioners (Bartlett & Saunders, 1970, p.195; Lee, 2012, p.560). Initiate practitioners become “specialists” when they have developed expert competence founded on “sophisticated working knowledge” (Bartlett & Saunders, 1970, p.195; Bartlett, 1961, p.53; Derezotes, 2000, p.xii) that evolves from developing theory and expertise out of the richness of extended practice experience, and formal study or on-the-job learning.

The specialist school social work practitioner integrates knowledges into “an eclectic approach to school social work” (AASW, 2011, p.9), guided by analytical intellect and flexibility within the “dilemmas” of practice within changing “societal goals and values”, organisational, technological and theoretical environments (Patford, 2002, p.217).

The school social work specialist requires skills in communicating with children and young people, especially to understand the world from their perspective; and the ability to advocate for them to create change in schools, families and other adult dominant systems. Professional skills include: communication and team skills in school, multidisciplinary and community settings; reflection and critical thinking; observation, data collection, management and analysis; negotiation, mediation, collaboration and consultation; assessment, planning and goal-setting; ethical decision-making; the ability to critically analyse and intervene to counter systemic impacts on student learning outcomes; counselling, casework and other interventions in the range of personal, family, mental health and social problems (Anderson-Ketchmark & Alvarez, 2010, p.60-61; AASW, 2011, p.10).

The Acquisition of Specialist Expertise

Although none is provided in Australia, course content in school social work has been available in the USA for many years (Torres, Patton, Council on Social Work Education, & School Social Work Association of America, 2000). Recent content analyses of such courses, however, pinpoint a bias towards clinical training and special education issues, rather than multi-level systemic practice and specific educational knowledge properly “embedding school social workers in the educational context” (Berzin & O’Connor, 2010, p.237, 243-247). USA scholars
Literature Review: Theory and Practice Perspectives


In Victoria, school social work professional orientation and education have been formal and informal, though not well-documented. Keegel, school-employed, familiarised herself with student and teacher needs, school structure and values; and negotiated roles with other service providers within the school (Picton & Keegel, 1978, p.9). A 1978 study found that departmental school social workers had access to professional development opportunities, although orientation in the first twelve months could be haphazard (Knights et al., 1978, p.42-43). The *Social Workers Orientation Kit* (Victoria. Education Dept, 1985b) was the 3rd edition of a manual initiated in 1980 by four school social workers after their first year in the Education Department. The introduction referred to “the New Social Workers Induction Program”. John Hodgson theorised multidisciplinary team collaboration to address social, emotional and economic problems (p.6-9). Fay Menahem, Jo Ross and Marty Laar wrote initiate practitioner narratives, and recommended orientation, supervision and support (p.15-25). A bibliography directed Victorian practitioners to USA texts for specialist knowledge.

Three documented collaborations between universities and practitioners exemplify the articulation and sharing of school social work expertise, through professionally supervised student placements or internships. Geelong Bellarine Network, around 80 kilometres from Melbourne, resourced a student unit coordinator. Around thirty local and overseas students, mostly from Deakin University (Waterfront Campus, Geelong), completed field placements in primary schools (Barrett, 2006). Testa studied a placement model involving 79 social work students in a Catholic school in a low socio-economic area of Melbourne 1994-2005 (Testa, 2012, p.539-540). Following an extended project from 2004, RMIT university launched a resource kit for school-based placements (School of Global Urban and Social Studies RMIT University, 2012).

The AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group and Peer Supervision Group, focus on the maintenance of the specialist *AASW Practice Standards for School*
Social Workers 2008. Professional reflection and knowledge building is encouraged through discussion, collegiate support and planning for research. International and interstate links are maintained in the wider community of specialist school social workers, as part of the on-going intent to promote school social work as specialist practice within Victorian education, and within the broader field of Australian social work (Jameson, 2012).

School social work is a relatively stable arena of employment. 40 of 51 Victorian departmental school social workers responded to a 1995 study: 62.5% were older than 35 years (Mahony, 1995, p.33). Long-experienced practitioners, as well as those who are entering the field, need the support of professional development to continue the acquisition and updating of specialist knowledge and skills (Kelly et al., 2010b, p.8). Professional identity formation is an on-going project, with little resourcing and support for induction and on-going professional development (Healy, 2009, p.406).

This study searched for a narrative that might explain the acquisition of specialist school social work expertise in Victoria, where there is no access to university education specifically geared towards practice in schools, and where the assumed specialist expertise or “practice wisdom” (Scott, 1990) of experienced Victorian practitioners has derived from other sources.

### School Social Work Methods and Activities

The AASW practice standards describe common school social work methods and activities consistent with the requirements of Victorian departmental policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METHOD</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casework</td>
<td>Individual student, teacher and family counselling;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>advocacy; consultation; referral; crisis intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td>Parent education; therapeutic group work; personal or social skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>education groups for students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Development</td>
<td>Teacher professional development; social action; community liaison; school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>policy analysis and development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Critical Incident Management
Awareness of the effects of traumatic incidents; planning for school responses; provision of counselling and support; monitoring recovery.

Research
Reading to inform practice, evaluation of research and policy, research projects, evaluation of practice.

Administration
Record-keeping; service management; program development and coordination; personal management and evaluation of service delivery; staff induction, training and supervision

(AASW, 2011, p.9-10)

- Psycho-social assessment and mental health risk assessment
- Emergency management and critical incidents response
- Advocacy and support for students and families
- Liaison with external community service providers
- Consultation and professional development for teachers and other staff about program development, classroom and behaviour management
- Individual counselling and group interventions
- Providing case support and assistance to other social workers and Student Support Services Officers

(DEECD, 2012, p.46-47)

Activities cluster in the spheres of Prevention, Early Intervention and Intervention/Complex Intervention (AASW, 2011, p.7-8; Victoria. Dept of Education, 1998a, p.18-19; Victoria. DEECD, 2012, p.63-70), or corresponding Tiers 1, 2 and 3 (NASW, 2012, p.4-5), in multilevel models of practice in Australia and the USA respectively.

Lee (Australia, 2012), Mahony (Victoria, 1995) and Kelly et al (USA, 2010) identified common school social worker activities. Victorian departmental practitioners reported their tasks, from most frequent: casework, consultation, liaison/networking, referral, advocacy, group work, in-servicing, writing reports, developing and implementing programs and trauma counselling (Mahony, 1995, p.55). Australia-wide, school social workers reported main tasks as: counselling, case management and consultancy, with associated activities such as phone calls, emails, referrals, advocacy, meetings, administration and others which were recognisably specific to schools: liaising with teachers and families;
travelling between schools; developing behaviour and crisis management plans; organising financial assistance; and developing programs (Lee, 2012, p.562).

Lee (2012) found preference for a whole school approach to student learning and wellbeing, through preventive, pro-active and early interventions, policy development and community partnerships to build capacity. However, research and commentary have consistently found discrepancy between espoused ecological systems theory, prevention, early intervention including school culture change, and a dominant casework or counselling orientation (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010, p.239; Knights et al., 1978, p.41-42; Lee, 2012, p.560, 562-563, 567; Varley, 1980, p.33). Lee (2012) and Mahony (1995) concluded that the discrepancy was generated by demand for casework, crisis intervention and critical incident management, although Mahony also found practitioner preference for direct work (Mahony, 1995, p.37, 39-40, 42, 56). Studies in Australia and the USA have found an emphasis on individual casework at the complex intervention level, despite a body of research to support ecological and preventative practice (Costin, 1969, p.277; Franklin & Kelly, 2009, p.47; Kelly, et al., 2010a, p.201; Kelly, Frey, & Anderson-Butcher, 2010, p.195; Kelly et al., 2010b, p.1, 6-7; Knights et al., 1978; Lee, 2012; Mahony, 1995; Peckover et al., 2013, p.10, 12-13). The mismatch between models of school social work service delivery and actual practice, potentially reflects multiple causes within ecological systemic factors.

**Professional Issues in School Social Work**

**Who is the Client?**

School social workers have identified the student and the school as client (Knights et al., 1978, p.43) or have acknowledged some confusion (Rimmer et al., 1984, p.55; Sturmfels, 1995, p.128). The Code of Ethics (AASW, 2010) defined clients as:

> individuals, families and other kinship arrangements, groups, communities, organisations and societies, especially those who are
neglected, marginalised, vulnerable, excluded, disadvantaged, alienated or have exceptional needs.

(AASW, 2010, p.8)

**AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers** identifies the student in the learning environment as the client and focus of attention, and the school as one of the targets for intervention (AASW, 2011, p.12). Arguably, it is the student, rather than the school, who is at risk of being vulnerable, marginalised, excluded or disadvantaged, and whose rights and interests are the priority (AASW, 2010, p.25). In adult dominated societal and school settings, defining the student as client particularly respects the voices of children and young people and includes their understanding of their own wellbeing and learning experiences (Kiraly & Humphreys, 2013, p.324-325).

Practice encompassing individual casework and counselling, parent support, and consultation in relation to students with learning, behavioural and social problems, undoubtedly delivers benefits to various individuals and groups in the school community (Sturmfels, 1995, p.128; Patford, 2002, p.209). The host setting potentially clouds the distinction between students as clients and educators as collaborators, with complications in relation to loyalty and accountability, especially where the goals of the student and the school system are incompatible (Dolgoff, Loewenberg, & Harrington, 2009, p.101-102; Patford, 2002, p.209, 212; Picton & Keegel, 1978, p.3; Sturmfels, 1995, p.128). As school specialists:

... social workers must be able to carry two professional roles at the same time, a helping role with the client and a role of professional collaboration with the associated professions... (Bartlett, 1961, p.55)

**Frustrations to School Social Work Practice**

Whether in the USA or Australia, school social workers were most often engaged in individual casework, but expressed preference to undertake a much wider range of activities related to the school and its community, the curriculum,
teacher professional development, and preventive group programs (Kelly et al., 2010b, p.6-7; Lee, 2012, p.560, 562-563, 567; Mahony, 1995, p.42).

School social work practice was negatively impacted by large caseloads, increasing poverty and family disintegration; working across multiple sites; expectations by managers who were not of the same professional background; insufficient staff and resourcing; and inadequate facilities. Schools’ prioritising casework, crises and critical incidents; and demanding that students labelled problematic be fixed, impeded prevention and pro-activity such as school change and capacity building, policy development and community partnerships. Time constraints limited the potential for multi-disciplinary collaboration (Allen-Meares, 1994, p.564; Lee, 2012, p.563-564, 566, Mahony, 1995, p.46-49).

School personnel could define roles unclearly and narrowly; subvert intervention; decline collaboration to improve student-teacher-school relationships (Knights et al., 1978, p.36; Mahony, 1995, p.49; Picton & Keegel, 1978, p.8); and fail to understand the potential social work contribution (Testa, 2012, p.543, 546).

The social, political and economic systems, including the lack of alternative programs to meet individual student need, and the successive government re-formulation of policy and services, frustrated professional practice and impacted on confidence, notably when proposed privatisation of specialist services was interpreted as failure to understand and support school social work and collegiate practice (Knights et al., 1978, p.36; Mahony, 1995, p.46-49).

**Evaluation of Practice**

There are minimal documented case studies to describe contemporary school social work in Australia, and no accessible quantitative and qualitative studies of school engagement and learning outcomes resulting from planned interventions based on thorough assessment, consultation, research and practice wisdom. Anecdotal richness of multi-method and multi-systemic expertise and the individual and communal reflective evaluation of practice have not been transformed into formal evaluation of everyday practice.
Professional Identity

School social work practice standards (AASW, 2011; AASW (Vic), 1991; NASW, 2012), IFSW and AASW definitions of social work, and social work codes of ethics construct a discourse for practice, and “provide a focus for professional social work identities” (AASW, 2010, p.10) by affirming communal membership; publicly declaring shared perspectives; and highlighting differences in orientation from other practitioners (Banks, 1998, p.218; Hare, 2004, p.408; Lee, 2012, p.568). By calling themselves “school social workers”, practitioners represent themselves coherently, with a shared professional identity; describe their specific role in education; and advocate for their unique identity (AASW (Vic) & Hayes, 1991, p.3; New York School Social Workers Association, 2009). Professional identities are further shaped by theoretical debates; the personal and professional tensions of practice; compromises forced by bureaucratic imperatives (Zufferey, 2011, p.510, 521, 525); and the credibility granted to practitioners by the perceptions of others (Brownlee, Halverson, & Chassie, 2012).

Claims for school social work professional identity are both explicitly stated and implied by a body of internationally available literature, albeit at present with minimal Australian content; state, national and international professional bodies; and collegiate networks. Whether there are common professional identity essentials across national boundaries, remains contested (Fargion, 2008, p.206). Chapter 2 presented examples school social work services, within different international school, welfare, economic and social systems, where there appeared to be evidence of core principles and the commitment, shared across borders, to ensure the right of children and young people to equity in education.

Social work has subjected itself to constant self-analysis and debates about professional identity (Weiss, 2002, p.5990; Zufferey, 2011, p.510, 513), particularly in multi-disciplinary environments (Banks, 1998; Scottish Government. Clark & Waterhouse, 2005). Payne described the assertion of professional identity as “claims-making”, aimed to “assert a clear role” and
School social worker professional identity is diminished by confusion about perceived roles; significant rewriting of policy and roles at bureaucratic levels; the gap between policy and practice; and "the blurring of professional roles" in multidisciplinary settings (Patford, 2002, p.217; Peckover et al., 2013, p.15-16). Confident professional identity can be undermined by organisational side-lining and economic strictures that leave school social workers feeling: “overworked and unsure and fearful about the future” (Whittlesey-Jerome, 2012, p.44-45).

The expression of unease about externally sourced contracts and other challenges is effectively an assertion of professional identity, through claiming unique and specialised multi-systemic practice. In the USA context, but equally applicable to Victoria, Massat wrote:

> The role of the school social worker is not just to provide psychotherapy to one child at a time or even to groups. We are there to strengthen and empower teachers, to train school personnel in dealing with social and behavioral issues, to advocate for changes that benefit children, families, schools, and communities. We are there at every level of the environment to support the educational and social missions of schools. (Massat, 2013, p.ix)

Studies in Victoria and Australia-wide have found that practitioners were professionally satisfied, optimistic about the future, informed and ready to postulate service improvements (Mahony, 1995, p.49-53; Lee, 2012, p.564). Nevertheless, identity crisis has apparently been a recurrent feature for Victorian school social workers, dependent upon the policy and organisational context.

> Given the existence of (the) threat to social work provision in Victorian schools, the profession must be deliberately pro-active in its approach, if it is to flourish or even survive. (Mahony, 1995, p.6)
Australian school social workers sought a more confident professional identity; more recognition and respect; a stronger professional body; opportunities for peer networking and collaboration; greater opportunities for training and career advancement; and advocacy of school social work (Lee, 2012, p.564, 568). Researchers urged practitioners to:

*establish themselves as professionals with a body of specialised knowledge and skills and to advocate their particular role in the school system.*

(Lee, 2012, p.568)

Even without advocating adequately for themselves: “within and outside the education system” (Mahony, 1995, p.6), and irrespective of any self-doubt, Australian respondents appear to have self-identified clearly as professional school social workers, with a body of specialised knowledge and skills.

*Participants reported that social workers understand the influence of the social environment surrounding students... their approach is non-judgemental, supportive, and flexible, and they advocate for students and raise awareness of social justice and disadvantage...unique skills ...to work with multiple stake-holders and to take on various tasks from counselling to community engagement.*

(Lee, 2012, p.561-562)

**Reflections on the Literature**

The richness of the documented origins and evolution of school social work in the USA stands in stark contrast to the minimal accessible Australian literature that has nevertheless proven to be quite informative. Far from comprehensive, and unchallenged by a body of alternate perspectives and research, it has allowed consideration of Victorian school social work in an international context.

Evidence of Victorian school social work theory and practice was found in practitioner and researcher writing spanning four decades, to reveal patterns
and development over time and contexts. Individual practitioner-authors and the professional community represented by practice standards and other literature, suggest that professional identity is strong; but reflect ambivalent self-assurance, and apparent hesitation to shape the perceptions of others and promote the field of practice.

Chapter 6 will construct a narrative of the development of school social work in Victoria, based on a review of further relevant literature, collected professional narratives and retrieved documents. Chapters 7 and 8 present the findings of this research effort to explore the interconnected themes of school social work theory, practice, professional identity and the tradition of practice.

This study aimed to build on sketchily documented records of school social work in the State of Victoria; and redress the under-representation of school social work in Australian social work literature. The voices of practitioners themselves, through professional narratives collected in interviews, and various texts acquired during the research process, yielded richer perspectives on the development of school social work, professional identity and the tradition of practice.
Chapter 4

PROFESSIONAL NARRATIVES and PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES:
A RESEARCH APPROACH

Using narrative, the ‘self can be located as a psychosocial phenomenon, and subjectivities seen as discursively constructed yet still as active and effective. Material social traditions, discourses and practices interweave with subjectively experienced desires and identities and people make choices, re-construct pasts and imagine futures within the range of possibilities open to them.

(Andrews, Day Sclater, Squire, Rustin, & Treacher, 2004, p.1)
Introduction: from Stories to Research

A narrative research perspective has given substance to the intuition, based on observation of the shared professional story-telling of school social workers, that the primary source of information for this research would be practitioners themselves. Consideration of professional narratives as the performative construction of school social work and professional identity, has helped me to position myself as researcher, listener, interpreter and narrator within this study.

Professional Narratives

School social workers, as protagonists and commentators, provided autobiographical professional narratives as empirical data for the research, demonstrating the attribution of professional identity characteristics to self and a community of others, in interactive social contexts, through accounts of everyday work practices, knowledge and reflection (Chase, 1995, p.25-26, 33, 64-65). Professional narratives are described as narratives of an individual's past, present and imagined future work or professional practices (Baynham, 2011, p63; Chase, 1995, p.ix); and the “nature and ethos” of professional life (Boeri, 2010, p.63).

Professional narratives include theoretical, practice, and organisational matters; and dominant or current notions of practice discipline promoted by scholars (Boeri, 2010, p.63; Johnson, 2010, p.1) or others granted the power of influence within the profession. Professional narratives demonstrate how institutions exist, flourish, or die, on the basis of the individuals who populate them; and are of especial interest to those who share the interests, goals, or professional setting of the narrator (White, 2010a, p.341).

Professional narratives are produced at the intersection of personal lives and social institutions (Riessman, 2008, p.3); locate the professional self in particular (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.201); and include elements of family, community connection and personal stance (Shamai, 2005, p.204; White, 2010b, p.337-338).
Narratives

_Narrative is a telling, a performance event, the process of making or telling a story. A story is an account involving the narration of a series of events in a plotted sequence which unfolds in time. A story and a narrative are nearly equivalent terms._

(Denzin, 2004, p.xi)

Narratives are purposefully performed psychosocial stories that interdependently integrate language and experience to represent the storied nature of self and society (Andrews et al., 2004, p.1; Chase, 1995, p.29, 32; Denzin, 2004, p.xi). This study sometimes uses the term “story” to describe narrative content. Narratives relate topical stories about particular events and characters; significant periods or aspects of life such as marriage or work; or whole of life stories (Chase, 2008, p.59; McAdams, 2008, p.244), and re-express experience by transposing it into words (Riessman, 2008, p.3). Narratives interpret the world according to: “_history, culture, and character_” (Fisher, 1989, p.23; 1994, p.57).

People are natural storytellers, and school social workers are far from unique in narrating their practice (Andrews et al., 2004, p.1; Fisher, 1989, p.56; McAdams, 2006, p.244). Stories serve many purposes: for example, to record, explain, teach, warn or justify, and can be seen as productions from within a cultural setting (Andrews et al., 2004, p.5-6; Squire, 2004, p.13), either to reinforce or challenge its boundaries. Narrative based research theorises culture and society, but incorporates human experience, historical time and subjectivity (Andrews et al., 2004, p.5).

While there is some contestation about the term “narrative” (Andrews et al., 2004, p.1; Riessman, 2008, p.3-5), this study has adopted the following construction. The narrative form in aural and visual literature, art and other media, and even in private unspoken musings, complies with narrative conventions and cultural scripts (Andrews et al., 2004, p.3; Chase, 1995, p.30), including sequenced events linked over time, characters, plot, setting and themes (Morgan, 2000; Talib, 2011, p.1). The narrative form is also dependent
upon how the story is told, particularly in relation to the intended meaning for the specific audience (McAdams, 2008, p.245; Riessman, 2008, p.3; Talib, 2011, p.1). It is within both content and narrative style that meaning can be found.

Narratives are innate ways of understanding and structuring human experience (Rideout, 2008, p.55) accessed through narrative memory (Denzin, 2004, p.xi). The narrative paradigm posited by Fisher (1985, 1994) cast personal and social life in terms of the available stories from which humans, as story-tellers, can constantly re-create their lives. Co-existing and sometimes conflicting narratives represent the differentiated processing of events and attribution of meaning (Morgan, 2000); although an alternate view is that narratives are inherently incoherent, “contradictory and fragmented” (Andrews et al., 2004, p.8).

As “constructive”, “performative” pieces, narratives are not neutral representations of social life (Abell, Stokoe, & Billig, 2002, p.180), but biased constructions reflecting personal or communal need. Even where the story-teller claims objectivity, the narrative is nevertheless a creative endeavour producing history filtered by personal memories and goals (Andrews et al., 2004, p.6).

Narrative Performance

Narratives are psycho-social phenomena, subject to social norms; to be understood in the context of a relationship with listener, reader or audience; influenced by expectations about the audience; and delivered in different styles, for example, “dramatic” or “reflective”, for different listeners (McAdams, 2008, p.245-246). Within the moment of communication, narratives are “socially situated interactive performances”, or co-productions, where purpose and dynamic interplay with the audience influence the narrative content and style (Chase, 2008, p.65-66).

Written narrative may or may not reach its intended audience, nor achieve its purpose. The audience for a retrieved text may be distanced by time, place and context from the environment wherein the narrative was produced; minimising the opportunity for narrator-audience interplay, and often lacking significant clues towards the rationale for its production and meaning (Talib, 2010, p.13).
Rhetorical Intent

The recounting of narratives is purposeful action aimed at particular results (Bradbury & Day Sclater, 2002, p.195). A narrator might have many reasons for engaging in story-telling: recording, explaining, entertaining, disconfirming, for example, but irrespective of purpose in relation to the audience, the narrator “shapes, constructs and performs the self” (Chase, 2008, p.65), in a way that might be seen as inherently persuasive. Narrative strategies focus audience attention on particular parts of the story to draw them into the narrator’s perspective, perhaps using rhetorical ploys such as entertainment, deliberate misinformation or calls to action (Chase, 1995, p.32; Riessman, 2008, p.9).

Narratives can feature a tension between fragmented biographical memory and the desire accurately to represent events, characters, time and place. This instinct, which arises in the meeting of professional identity and audience, includes attempts to clear up misconceptions; and to draw conclusions that are outside of the narrator’s personal experience (Leociak, 2009, p.36) so that the audience becomes the target or the medium of clarification.

Narrative Memory

The narration is a moment in a continuous stream of consciousness, representing the “felt quality of the present”, as it is affected by past experiences, even if specifics are not recoverable as memories (Flanagan, 1992, p.187). Memories are stored for their personal meaning; and narratively recalled in order to understand past experiences and move ahead (McAdams, 2008, p.244, Flanagan, 1992, p.189). In turn, narratives reinforce specific memories (Riessman, 2008, p.10).

With the passing of time, personal narratives become more prone to factual error (Chase, 2008, p.65; McAdams, 2008, p.246). Changing personal priorities and autobiographical processing stimulate variations in the detail, emotional content and purpose of shared stories, but personal narrative significance is maintained (McAdams, 2008, p.246, 252).
Discourses

Narratives “draw on taken for granted discourses and values circulating in a particular culture” (Riessman, 2008, p.3), and are both “enabled and constrained” by social, organisational, cultural and historical contexts (Chase, 2008, p.65; Fisher, 1994, p.30; Riessman, 2008, p.3; Boeri, 2010, p.62; Denzin, 2000, p.xii; Andrews et al., 2000, p.1). Discourses mediate narrative presentation, including vocabulary and culturally shared knowledge about society and social practices, community, personal life, and institutions such as social welfare, education, the family and work (Riessman, 2008, p.3; Weedon, 1987, p.109). Furthermore, discourses, include the inherent power relations within social constructs that disadvantage or marginalise (McAdams, 2008, p.247; Morgan, 2000; Weedon, 1987, p.107-109).

Although some have referred to these beliefs as narratives or meta-narratives (Andrews et al., 2000, p.3; Boeri, 2010, p.63), this study uses the term discourse rather than narrative to represent hegemonic ways of conceptualising and verbalising (Johnson, 1999, p.10) personal or professional narratives.

Discourses become the blueprint for how we think, talk about and practice the self and our social and institutional relations within particular arenas (Hobbs, 2008, p.8; Pinkus, 1996). As thinking social agents, we can resist or improvise upon dominant narratives, especially in the light of contradictory discourses and practices that allow for resistance and reconstruction (Chase, 1995, p.xi; Weedon, 1987, p.125).

Collected school social worker professional narratives comprised stories of practice with children and young people; the systems and sub-systems of schools; employment within the institution of education; and school social work service development. Moreover, narrative performance of those stories included how they were presented, language, style and contextualising discourses.
A century of debate continues to contemplate whether or not social work is a profession (Fargion, 2008, p.206; Hare, 2004, p.410; Healy, 2009, p.405). Nevertheless, after much consideration, the IFSW determined to begin its definition: “The social work profession promotes social change...” (Hare, 2004, p.411).

Critical appraisal of professional boundaries ideologically challenges the assumptions that generate such a construct, including expertise, altruism, institutionalisation, and claims to legitimacy, on the grounds that they serve to disempower others (Illich, 1977, p.15-16). Within social work itself, the notion of professionalism has been seen at odds with the altruistic or humanistic nature of the arena of practice, and professional identity has been found to be the weakest of health and welfare groups (Healy, 2009, p.405-406). For Tongans, the political act of resisting “professional imperialism” (Haug, 2005, p.127) was exemplified by refusal to adopt the name “social worker”, because of its identification with western cultural domination (Fargion, 2008, p.216).

From a different perspective, New Public Management has sought to reduce government service provision and expenditure by transfer to the non-government sector where generic appointments requiring limited qualifications can be made, even while there are increasingly complex social needs to be met. This effectively devalues the social worker’s ability to analyse, conceptualise problems and engage ecologically systemically and creatively with client groups (Healy, 2009, p.401-404).

This study uses the contested notion of “profession” while acknowledging the risks of accepting such a construct without critical challenge. Social workers are ethically required to promote social justice and fairness; to advocate change in social structures that preserve inequalities and injustice; work to eliminate violations of human rights; and promote community participation in societal processes (AASW, 2010, p.13). While these ethical ideals can be subverted in institutional practice, they stand as warning against falling into the role of “expert professional” to disempower.
Elements common to constructs of professional practice include approved prerequisite specialised knowledge, often initially acquired through higher education (Spada, 2009, p.3; Lunt & Majors, 2000, p.238; Hooley, 2007, p.50). This knowledge is supplemented through reflection on practice to create new forms of knowing (Lunt & Majors, 2000, p.239); professional updates; and the shared development of new knowledge through “the bringing together of divergent views and the creation of new understandings” (Hooley, 2007, p.50, 53).

Altruism (Lunt & Majors, 2000, p.238); “the duty to serve the public interest” (Spada, 2009, p.3); and “dedication to the field and its participants” (Hooley, 2007, p.50) have been used to characterise professional practitioners who exercise responsible, autonomous judgement to engage in and negotiate relationships with members of the public (Hooley, 2007, p.50).

Members of a profession are bound by a code of ethics (Lunt & Majors, 2000, p.238; Hooley 2007, p.49) associate themselves with a professional organisation that oversees standards of entry and practice (Spada, 2009, p.ii, 3); and protects and enhances the ethical conduct of their work (Hooley, 2007, p.50). However, self-regulation can appear to be more in the interests of “the profession” rather than the protection of the public (Lunt & Majors, 2000, p.239), so that the erosion of public trust has been countered by tighter codes of practice and external regulation (Reece, 2001, p.106; Spada, 2009, p.33).

**The Tradition of School Social Work Practice**

The complexity of tradition that is referred to in this study as “the tradition of school social work” or “the tradition of practice”, refers to the values, purpose, activities, theories and discourses of practice that are shared inter-generationally. Scott has referred to the: “intergenerational links in a chain, each forged by its own time and place”, representing both continuities and discontinuities in values, knowledge and skills (Scott, 2011).
Tradition is narratively constructed and communicated, with inherent meaning and relevance for practitioners past, present and future (Scott, 2011). Language is the essential medium of tradition, giving meaning within the transmission of ideas and behaviours through social changes across time, in order to protect institutions and preserve knowledge already accrued (Giddens, 1991, 23-24). Unlimited by currently available “pre-established precepts or practices” (p.20), tradition anticipates futures:

... organised reflexively in the present in terms of the chronic flow of knowledge into the environments about which such knowledge was developed (p.29).

Professional Culture

Professional narratives are culturally located, and address and influence culture, representing both individual and collective experience (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008, p.5-6; McAdams, 2008, p.246; Squire, 2004, p.13). Culture is “made up of events, representations and values that are relatively long-lasting and widely distributed” (Squire, 2009, p.13), and refers to the “values, ceremonies and ways of life characteristic of a given group” (Giddens, 2006, p.1012). Culture differentiates groups of people who experience collective identity through shared behavioural, thinking and emotional guidelines, and associated rituals, myths and symbols, proven successful for interpreting, interacting and coping with their environments (Willcoxson & Millett, 2000, p.92-93).

School social workers with their own cultural assumptions operate within cultural diversity, with groups that are often marginalised. They also work within and narrate their own organisational cultures: “the unwritten, feeling part(s) of an organisation” (Ozanne & Rose, 2012, p.78), represented by structure, power relationships, and decision-making that can either foster or stymie adaptation and change. Organisational cultures allow for effective working relationships; and for responding to the external environment (Ozanne & Rose, 2012, p.79, 83; Willcoxson & Millett, 2000, p.93). Organisational culture and its sub-cultures are
distinguished by “rituals, ceremonies, stories, heroes and myth” that give meaning to events, but which can also have negative impacts within the organisation (Ozanne & Rose, 2012, p.36, 80-81, 84).

Social workers identify with their organisational culture and as one of the “diverse sub-cultures” based on “professional affiliation, status, social or divisional interactions” (Willcoxson & Millett, 2000, p.91, 95).

Professional Identities

The construction and re-construction of professional identity is achieved through autobiographical “psychosocial narrative production” (Denzin, 2004, pxi), embedded within the context of practice and the tradition of professional practice and its discourses, and ascribing shared identity characteristics to others (Abell et al., 2002, p.184, 186; Bradbury & Day Sclater, 2002, p.194).

Narrators construct the professional aspect of self in various contexts over time, in the pursuit of personal integration, clarification and strengthening of meaning (Chase, 2008, p.64-65; McAdams, 2008, p.242-245; Morgan, 2000; Boéri, 2010, p.62). “A reflexively ordered narrative of self-identity”, calling on the past and projecting into the future, evolves in interaction with the knowledge and options for behaviour and interpretation, and with past experiences and shifting social and political environments, in the quest for coherence or “inner authenticity” (Giddens, 1991, p.215). As an aspect of self, professional identity is a narrative construct of the stream of consciousness, ever changing by small degrees and responsive to new experiences and settings (Flanagan, 1992, p.187); and made apparent in story-telling (Boeri, 2010, p.62; Chase, 1995, p.xiii; McAdams, 2008, p.244-246; Morgan, 2000).

Conflicting narratives can represent the co-existence of multiple identities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.11; Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p.1); the differentiated processing of events and attribution of meaning (Morgan, 2000); or attempts to assert, reclaim or change particular identities (Bradbury & Day Sclater, 2002, p.195). Variations can be produced by the avoidance, intentional or not, or
reframing of negative experiences; or the reconstruction of narrator identity and positioning in relation to the audience or other characters (McAdams, 2008, p.245-246, 253).

Professional identity is an on-going project, open to re-construction, but essentially stable over time, and represented by beliefs, values, purpose knowledge and skills. Shared professional identity recognises “a set of shared resources on which members can draw to inform, develop and sustain their practice and their career development”, and achieve communal social advancement (Healy, 2009, p.404-405). The knowledge integral to professional identity is: “critically influenced by disciplinary attachments and the underpinning values and nature of the profession itself” (Connolly & Harms, 2012 p.1). Hooley (2007) theorised the relationship between practitioners and their own professional knowledge as the key to identity. They are not using “the remote knowledge of others”, but generate their own theory for practice through reflection and professional development within a discursive communal setting, and enacted with strong “inner dedication” (Hooley, 2007, p.50-53).

Re-storying of professional narratives over time may indicate the outcomes of a reflection and further learning (Hegge, 2007). Reflective social work narratives respond to unease in relation to a client or a situation (Miehls & Moffatt, 2000, p.341), and develop professional identity through re-thinking the nexus of theory and practice, stimulated by client stories and professional dilemmas. Beyond reflectivity, reflexivity embraces subjugated alternate discourses that provide spaces where dominant knowledges, social and professional practices and identity can be contested (Pinkus, 1996). The reflexive reconstruction of the professional self equally represents service-users’ narrative selves and their construction of the context, to dislodge discourse assumptions that marginalise or prescribe power and knowledge, and to envision alternate ways of being in reciprocal and dialogical relationships (Miehls & Moffatt, 2000, p.342-343). It is within the reflexive professional narrative, that social worker professional identity can be challenged and re-constructed with reference to power differentials and assumptions of expertise or altruism that subvert mutually empowering relationships.
Professional Narratives and Research Methodology

This study explored the development, theory and practice of school social work by collecting, analysing and interpreting professional narratives, with particular interest in how narrators made sense of their unique experiences as actors or observers; and revealed narrative purpose, emotions and thoughts, including the prior interpretation of past events (Chase, 2008, p.64-65). While the professional narrative also constructed personal identity (Dominelli, 2007, p.174), it was at the intersection of the personal and professional spheres where interest was focused, rather than the narrator’s personal life (Chase, 1995, p.31). The collection of professional narratives would not result in indisputable facts. Rather, careful analysis and interpretation drew links between biography, work and society, demonstrating professional identity in dynamic inter-relationships with others, and with social contexts and discourses over time (Chase, 2008, p.64; Riessman, 2008, p.10; Andrews et al., 2004, p.2; Squire, 2004, p.14). Some consistent threads could indeed be stitched together into the loose fabric of a new narrative of school social work in Victoria.

It was important to consider narrative form and performance, and to be aware of persuasive rhetoric in order to be both excited by and wary of narrative content. Equally, as a participant in the psycho-social phenomenon that is narrative performance, I needed to be aware of the interplay of narrator and researcher goals; cultural and discourse assumptions. The collection and consideration of data was informed by a narrative framework whereby conversation, rather than question-and-answer, was more respectful of the narrator-researcher relationship. It explained the engaging strategies of the narrator, and the impossibility of listener passivity. The qualitative and narrative methodological implications of mining professional narratives for empirical data are addressed in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5

METHODOLOGY

One of the strongest forces determining the growth of a profession is the way in which the members themselves perceive and define what they are doing or trying to do - the goals, knowledge, and techniques.

(Bartlett & Saunders, 1970, p.9)
Introduction

This research assumed the primacy of school social workers as the source of data, since the development of understanding begins in conversation with experts in the field of study (Lukaitis, 2011, p.47), and it is practitioners themselves whose narratives: “define what they are doing or trying to do” (Bartlett & Saunders, 1970, p.9).

The Research Question

What is the story of the development of school social work in the State of Victoria, Australia?

SUBSIDARY QUESTIONS

How do the narratives of past and present school social work practitioners construct school social work, their professional identity and their tradition of practice?

What issues and concerns do school social workers communicate through their professional narratives?

With scant prior documentation, the purpose of the research was to produce a narrative of 65 years of school social work practice in the state of Victoria; and to document theory and practice considerations. The breadth of these goals determined a sweeping panorama, rather than an in-depth focus on issues or moments in time. The broad lens approach anticipated findings of professional interest to school social work practitioners and more broadly to Australian social work; and a basis for future professional and academic analysis, study and challenge.

Research methodology describes the process of discovering what can be known, and represents: “a creative approach to understanding” matters central to the study (Laverty, 2003, p.12, p.16). It was framed from a constructionist, interpretive perspective, informed by qualitative and narrative considerations, whereby knowledge is constructed through interpretation of language and narrative as people experience and reflect upon their various social contexts.
The Research Paradigm

Ontological Considerations

The study has been developed within a constructionist paradigm that allows for multiple realities located within the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences and other phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.3; Spector-Mersel, 2010, p.209). Phenomenology focuses on the meanings that people give to their own lived experience (Laverty, 2003, p.4) of personal and social life; and the degree to which some experiences are more meaningful and significant than others (Mattingly, 2007, p.409).

Narratives reflect the meanings that people give to their interactions with the world not through separate words or discrete word groups, but through specific and entire language products that connect events over time in a meaningful way for an audience (Chase, 2011, p.421; Oliveira, 2005, p.243). The narrative paradigm assumes social reality to be a narrative reality: narratives, both individually and collectively, interpret and define behaviour, identity and community connectedness (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p.211).

Epistemological Considerations

The study sought new knowledge and understanding to explain aspects of school social work in Victoria, using the hermeneutic art of interpretation (Abulad, 2007, p.11) and reinterpretation of meaning within language and other discursive content, to find more nuanced, deeper or new understanding within school social worker narrative constructions of reality (Laverty, 2003, p.9; Lukaitis, 2011, p.47).

Rather than proposing discrete infallible facts indicative of causality or representative of the only “truth”, interpretive researchers attempt to make sense of the complexity of interpretations of phenomena and experiences, in terms of the meanings that people bring to their stories. Researchers: “use words in their analysis” and “collect or construct stories” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p.4) as they build knowledge by representing and interpreting the world through accumulated empirical data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.3).
Knowledge is narratively built through processes of interpretation that are both subjective and culturally determined, and relative to the circumstances and environments in which stories are produced (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p.211). Stories of past or possible future events are developed within the context of the perspectives and goals of the present; constructed from selected memories; and rooted within the relationships of story production, the social environment, and the discourses that give meaning (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p.211). The narrator is not a sole agent in story production, but rather a co-writer, enabled and limited by context and discourse (Chase, 2011, p.422; Spector-Mersel, 2010, p.212).

Methodological Considerations

The study was framed within a constructionist paradigm, with a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective, and an interpretivist approach, allowing for constructed, fluid, multiple social realities. Knowledge was constructed through the interpretation and inclusion of meaning within narratives, not simply external researcher reflection and judgement on words (Gergen, 1991, p.78-79).

A narrative approach to data gathering nestled comfortably within qualitative research principles (Chase, 2011, p.421; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p.5); informed the collection of practitioner stories as the primary source of data; and logically explained my role as listener-researcher rather than objective data collector.

This research, with its broad area of study over time, sought a “complex, holistic picture” (Creswell, 1998, p.15), unlimited by presumed variables and outcomes. It required multiple representative narratives, rather than the small number of case studies usually subject to narrative analysis (Riessman, 2005, p.6). Interpretive methodology attended to how the narrators made sense of their experience, in order to develop an understanding of how individual and communities of school social work practitioners more widely shaped their identities through stories of personal or collective endeavour (Spector-Mersel 2010, p.209, 215). In order to include further contextual information and to uncover written narratives, hitherto “lost” documentary evidence was sought and retrieved from personal collections and public archives (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p.215; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.3-4).
Retrospectivity

Historical studies in social work can follow multiple avenues of inquiry; and have practical implications for service delivery, social policy, client voice and evaluation (Danto, 2008, p.5, 7, 30-31), and can explain times of service strength and divergence from its goals (Shaffer, 2006, p.251-252). However, history is always “contested territory” of “competing narratives” (Scott, 2011). This research therefore cautiously constructs the most comprehensive communal professional reflection, to date, on the development of school social work in Victoria. Potentially “affirming” and ‘empowering” (Swain, 2008, p.193), its value rests not only in providing narrative access to the past, but in a vision towards a future of confident, purposeful and reflective practice.

In the mid-20th century, a positivist approach to historical research with its claims for “indisputable knowledge of past events through testimony” (Lucey, 1984, p.p.16, 20, 22), gave way to a major epistemological shift prompted by the emergence of the oral history method. Despite concerns for researcher bias; risks in the “trickery” of “selective memory”; and a purported lack of accuracy, oral history was based on humanistic and democratic values; and added relevance and balance (O'Farrell, 1979, p.4-5, 7-8).

No longer seen as the accurate cause and effect depiction of the past, historical evidence and testimony were understood as subjectively recalled (Thorpe, 1980, p.55), and in turn interpreted as “provisional knowledge” (Fines, 1988, p.2-3) by historians through the lens of their own contexts, values and beliefs. Postmodernism has impacted on history studies, demanding multiple interpretations; challenging hegemonic assumptions and social categorisations; and making way for narratology (Danto, 2008, p.22-23).

Oral history shares with qualitative and narrative research an epistemological stance where the interview sits within oral cultural tradition, as a site for knowledge-building. Interviews allowed the collection of specific reminiscences, where school social workers could speak with authority, to ascribe meaning to the events they had witnessed or participated in, thereby supplementing and revising records (Lukaitis, 2011, p.47; Martin, 1995, p.4, 8). Narratives
appropriately addressed questions related to a professional sub-group whose history was incomplete, unclear and marginalised (Danto, 2008, p.19, 32). The intersection of oral history and qualitative research appropriately mirrored the hermeneutic practices of narrative interpretation in order to see the world from the perspective of the individual or group (Danto, 2008, p.6; Scott, 2002, p.924).

This study does not claim to fall within the academic parameters of history practice, but it does take a retrospective view, informed by interpretive epistemological approaches to history and heedful of the warning within oral history that it is: “not intended to present the final verified or complete narrative of events” (National Library of Australia, 2013).

**Trustworthiness**

The goal of the researcher is to introduce new or modified knowledge. In qualitative or narrative research, where knowledge is not an absolute construct, “veracity” is found in: “a level of subjective truth about life events” that “transcends the absolute facts of a situation” (Martin, 1995, p.2). Faulty or selective memory, inconsistencies and contradictions are not necessarily impediments to trustworthy analysis and interpretation of narrative making (Cándida Smith, 2002, p.711-712; Elliott, 2005, p.23).

> Narratives do not mirror, they refract the past. Imagination and strategic interests influence how storytellers choose to connect events and make them meaningful for others. Narratives are useful in research precisely because storytellers interpret the past rather than reproduce it as it was. The “truths” of narrative accounts are not in their faithful representations of past world, but in the shifting connections they forge among past, present, and future.

(Riessman, 2005, p.6)

Narrators are able to tell their own story, from their own perspective, reflecting the language, context and experience of narrator and listener, rather than “truth” (Hunter, 2010, p.44). Trustworthiness within this study relates to the
extent to which audiences can accept new interpretations of school social work, based on a research process demonstrating intellectual rigour in critical thinking, an ethical approach, self-awareness, reflection and reflexivity.

In the positivist tradition, the credibility of research findings depends on reliability or replicability; and validity or generalisability (Elliott, 2005, p.23). The concept of “trustworthiness” in qualitative research similarly refers to the rigour required for credible knowledge building, where claims to objectivity are considered suspect, because of individual researcher goals, stand-points, sub-cultural features, or familiarity with the field of study. Subjectivity, and engagement efforts to reduce it, are essential considerations for the interpretive researcher, who cannot be separated from the phenomena under study; nor from the narrative as a unique and new product of the research setting (Oliveira, 2005, p.423; Spector-Mersel, 2010, p.216).

... when the research data are stories told to the researcher: those stories were not previously there; they were created for him or her, in his or her presence and under his or her direct and indirect influence. This influence is unavoidable even when the researcher invites the interviewee openly to tell a story with no apparent direction or intervention... (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p.216)

The interview was a source of data and a unique site where new narratives were drafted and re-worked to clarify meaning and make sense of professional experience. Within the narrator-listener relationship, I was able to return to emerging themes, cross-check, clarify and explore nuances within stories, all recorded and transcribed, thereby strengthening the likelihood of an accurate representation of participants’ meanings.

Having already impacted on the production of stories, I moved into the analysis and report writing phases constantly striving to resist the shackle of preconceptions, biases and research goals.
The elicitation of stories and their interpretation are thoroughly “soaked” with the subjectivity of the researcher. In a word, the self of the researcher is always part of the whole process of researching. (Oliveira, 2005, p.426).

The generalisability the research was enhanced by its focus on communal practice, rather than solely focusing on individual experiences and concerns (Elliot, 2005, p.27-28). Narratives contained the patterns and norms; the struggles and resistance; identities shared and rejected, that demonstrated the nature of school social work, and allowed informed statements or hypotheses that related more widely than to the individual narrators.

As a researcher-narrator, I had wanted to uncover and tell a good story. As researcher and PhD candidate, I needed to convince examiners and other readers of the trustworthiness my thesis account, within a readable work (Elliott, 2005, p.152). I had wanted to document the tradition of school social work and confirm that practitioner commitment to school social work was well-founded, shared across generations, and worthy of proper documentation. Such dedicated intent, a risk to trustworthiness, was countered by intellectual honesty and the rigour of the knowledge-building process.

Reflectivity and Reflexivity

Claims for the trustworthiness of the findings were dependent upon intellectual rigour and researcher self-awareness, as essential individualised elements within both reflectivity and reflexivity. The quest for new and trustworthy knowledge:

should be driven by an imperative to employ the most exciting images, the most evocative narratives, and - inevitably - the approaches that are the most personally relevant.

(Danto, 2008, p.11)

With a chosen research methodology already impacted by personal stance, the interpretation and selection of findings was potentially further compromised:
...qualitative research is particularly susceptible to...the selective analysis and presentation of data so that one finds what one wishes to find... Systematically and rigorously searching the data for disconfirming evidence is essential. (Scott, 2002, p.929)

Reflectivity is the process of contemplation that demands an openness to new or conflicting ideas; the ability to understand the impact of one’s own stance, beliefs or experience on interpretation of meaning, in this case, of narratives and documents; and the application of analytical thinking processes in order to bring new understanding to the familiar (Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2011, p.152-154).

Reflexivity takes researchers beyond reflectivity, to understand and deal with their dynamic, interactive relationship with narrators and authors, and the shared, reciprocal impact on the co-production of narratives (Steier, 1991, p.4) and the collection of documents. Reflexive analysis included contemplation of researcher and narrator motivation, emotions and power dynamic; individual and communal experience of school social work practice; and shared or disparate purpose, attitudes and assumptions (Connolly & Harms, 2012, p.164-165).

From interviews to writing, I have been guided by a narrative paradigm, and I have paused regularly to challenge my influence within narratives and the meaning assigned to them at the time of production. In the shared understanding of the interpersonal narrator-researcher dynamic, the collected professional narratives did not pre-exist as unique entities, but came into being in dynamic dialogical processes in which I played a part. For example, I challenged myself to understand my researcher complicity in co-created narratives of the complex psychology-school social work relationship; to interpret meaning accurately; and to find new knowledge within reasonable extrapolation.

The critical thinking required for the analytical interpretation of text in the context of active self-awareness and consideration of narrator and author stance, is not always a conscious process. Some thought processing happens mysteriously in the recesses of the mind: insights click into place at unexpected moments. However, the deliberate process of analysis and interpretation, and self-checking
to promote reflectivity, is described later in this chapter in an attempt to make transparent that which I have referred to as intellectual rigour. Throughout this chapter I have described my contemplation and decision-making in relation to the research process. Rigorous reflectivity and reflexivity were essential for the construction of credible new knowledge about school social work, especially if there were no: “single truth to be found in acts of interpretation, nor a single method by which to proceed in such work” (Steedman, 1991, p.57).

**Ethics**

The collection of narratives in the research context was an intimate interpersonal exchange where I was entrusted with the confidences of narrators, as well as their purposes in telling their stories. Their privacy and confidentiality needed to be maintained (Josselson, 2007, p.537).

Some of the participants in this study had been retired for many years, and I aimed especially to respect their individual needs in contacting and conducting interviews with them. Age was, in fact, no barrier to purposeful participation. I did not anticipate that the narrative collection process would be stressful or harmful to any participant, but I relied on my interpersonal and counselling skills, and resources within and beyond school social work, to meet needs that arose as a result of interviews.

Inviting school social workers to speak their own narratives would include them in the dynamic process of the research, countering at least to some extent my inherent power as researcher (Elliot, 2005, p.17), and in some way redressing a power imbalance that had rendered their work and achievements poorly recognised. I was confident that within the narratives of school social workers lay colourful, textured knowledge and wisdom. I found it difficult to intrude into people’s lives to help me, albeit for the ultimate purposes of their contributing to knowledge (Josselson, 2007, p.538), but they were always keen to participate. The trust established in the researcher-narrator relationship within the interview determined the nature and emotional complexity of stories. For privacy, I chose
not to use a few short stories that were intrinsically confidential, about self or others, or that could be attributed easily to particular narrators.

I felt the ethical responsibility to deal respectfully with the narratives that I collected. Firstly, they were the very personal property of past and present school social workers. They had entrusted me with personal, professional, and communal stories. From those stories, I would fashion another narrative in my own voice, based on my interpretations which would include judgments by way of my position as researcher. My goal was to be both respectful and rigorous.

Secondly, I became acutely aware that knowledge and interpretation pre-existed the interviews, even if the narratives themselves were new products. The narrators consistently demonstrated their thoughtfulness and theory making, and while it was my task to develop knowledge, it was on the basis of knowledge that had been shared with me, sometimes by pioneers of the field, who had been making sense of school social work and furthering excellence in practice, decades before I became part of that collegiate community.

An ethical approach to document analysis, required respect for the integrity and intent of writers, and the avoidance of even unintentional misrepresentation, while searching deeper or alternate meaning. It was necessary to consider all possible meanings within the language used, with reference to idiomatic forms that were historically located, but no longer considered acceptable or useful: for example, referring to students as **retarded**.

**Human Research Ethics Committee**

The study was subject to approval and on-going monitoring by the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and the Human Ethics Advisory Group relevant to Social Work. The original Application for an Expedited Review of a Low-Risk Project Involving Humans was approved in 2006, and updated through the submission of annual reports and re-approval by the HREC through until December 2013.
Informed Consent
The plain language statement on University of Melbourne letterhead, “Project: School Social Work in the State of Victoria, Australia” (Appendix A) described the project, and advised that participation was voluntary, and that they were free at any time to withdraw, or withdraw any unprocessed data they had supplied, without prejudice. Potential or actual participants were directed to the executive officer of the HREC should they have any concerns about the conduct of the project.

The accompanying Informed Consent form (Appendix B) included the necessary participant permission for the inclusion of unidentified elements of narrative within the study and subsequent modes of dissemination. The plain language statement included an explanation of the possibility in specific circumstances for participants to give consent:

1. for their names and dates of service to be listed along with non-participants, as part of a record for posterity, and/or
2. that with their specific written consent, they could be identified as contributors of information or direct quotes

The latter option was abandoned as I determined that I could not identify knowledge of individual narrators without risking conjecture about their other stories or the identities of the un-named participants. I had wanted to credit important pieces of practice wisdom to the rightful owners, but this could not be achieved ethically in the context of research findings.

Confidentiality
Some local contexts of practice, dates and characters have been disguised. Where such identifying details are within retrieved documentary records in the public arena, they have been used in the findings, although some discretion has been exercised in the interests of doing no harm. Details of clients and their issues have been generalised under themes, or changed to protect privacy while maintaining the integrity and meaning of the narratives and the focus of analysis.
Narrators have been numbered: N1, N2, N3, et cetera, although I changed some sequencing that some readers might have thought to be clues to identity. I removed identifying idiomatic words or phrases that seemed particular to a narrator. As a hypothetical example, if someone had used: “In the fullness of time”, throughout a narrative, I would have removed that.

In collegiate settings, where people were aware of my research activity, I sometimes found myself with two or more narrators from the study: I was careful not to identify the participants, although they sometimes identified themselves. In the course of school social worker conversations about practice and organisational issues, I was careful to separate public knowledge from, and not repeat, information given to me by narrators in the research interviews.

A locked filing cabinet in my home study, to which only I had access, contained:

- Completed consent forms
- Professional questionnaires
- Schedule of questions with hand-written researcher notes made during the interview
- CD copies of interviews
- Printed transcripts

My home computer and laptop were used only by me; and my laptop was password protected.

The Empirical Data

This study of school social work in Victoria was based on the systematic collection and analysis of empirical data in the recollections within professional narratives and retrieved original documents as primary sources. In addition, secondary source material found within previously published and accessible documents has been used to complete the construction, in Chapter 6, of a “defensible historical narrative” (Danto, 2008, p.4-5) of the developing organisational context of school social work.
The Narratives

This study was based primarily on the biography of everyday professional experiences (Chase, 2011, p.421), through narratives newly gathered in conversational interviews (Denzin, 2004, p.xi-xii; Andrews et al., 2004, p.4). Each narrator produced multiple narratives, including short or extended personally significant stories, in response to particular questions or invitations to reflect on aspects of practice (Riessman, 2008, p.23). The longest narrative, more than thirty minutes, was a reflection on early case practice, to which the narrator returned several times during the interview.

The research plan could not anticipate the specific content or performance of the narratives. The narrative products did not pre-exist as unique entities, although some of the material may have been previously performed as part of the narrators’ processing for meaning and theory-building.

Recruiting the Narrators

Considerations that determined invitation to participate as school social worker-narrators in the study included:

- Coverage of the time span 1948 - 2013
- Gender representation
- Representation of the government and non-government school sectors
- Teacher and non-teacher trained school social workers
- Former and current practitioners

Names were gathered initially through the School Social Work Special Interest Group; recommendations of informants; and then through interviewees themselves. It was not possible to locate some of those referred; nor to interview all who might have been included. Those who were contacted were enthusiastic to be included in the study. Some were precluded by personal circumstances.

I contacted potential narrators in person or by phone to talk about the project, and if they were interested, I mailed or emailed the Plain Language Statement and consent forms so that they could be brought to the appointed interview.
The Narrators

Participant narrators were not simply informants or commentators, but were personally engaged in their own stories, to illuminate school social work as the focus of investigation (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p.217). Narrators were both primary sources who had witnessed particular situations, and secondary sources who reported what they had heard second-hand (Martin, 1995, p.51).

The 27 narrators were eligible for membership of the AASW, and had been employed by schools or school systems. They represented each decade from the 1950s: 15 currently practising and 12 former school social workers, including 4 who had retired completely and 8 in other positions. There were 17 female and 10 male narrators. The oldest narrator was almost 90; and the youngest was in the mid-twenties. The retrospective lens resulted in a preponderance of older narrators, selected for their potential story-telling across time.

Figure 2   Narrator Ages and Years of Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age and years of service were not necessarily related, since many narrators had completed their Bachelor of Social Work as mature-age students. The three earliest Diploma of Social Studies (DipSS) qualifications for professional practice were awarded in the 1940s; and the five most recent Bachelor of Social Work degrees between 2001 and 2008. 18 narrators held one or more professional or post-graduate qualifications in addition to undergraduate degrees.

Figure 3   Professional Qualifications of Narrators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Work Qualifications</th>
<th>Higher Degree by Research</th>
<th>Additional Professional Qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DipSS 5</td>
<td>BSW 22</td>
<td>Teaching 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MSW 3</td>
<td>Psychology 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PhD 3</td>
<td>Other 13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviews

Interviews were pivotal events in the narrative construction of meaning and effective sites from which purposefully to draw rich empirical data (Chase, 2008, p.58-59). Narrators were epistemologically engaged in re-interpretation and new meaning-making, so that the context of the interview, my presence as researcher, and the narratives themselves, constructed social reality and meaning (Elliott, 2005, p.17-19, 22; Warren, 2001, p.83, 85).

For the effective collection of free-flowing oral narratives, the researcher-informant relationship was “transform(ed)... into one of narrator and listener” (Boeri, 2010, p62; Chase, 2011, p.423), with space for characters, setting and events over time (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p.213). I drew on social work skills: empathy, attunement to diverse cultural backgrounds and identities (Danto, 2008, p.6), and counselling micro-skills transferable to the conduct of a research interview (Connolly, 2003, p.104; Martin, 1995, p.33-40).

This study evolved over a long period, initially influenced by the discourse of qualitative research that prioritised researcher objectivity. During the first two interviews, I was perturbed by my own aloofness, as I tried to maximise objectivity in interviews that had their own momentum towards collegiate conversations, whether or not the narrator was previously known to me. I felt ungenerous when avoiding narrator attempts to draw me into narratives by addressing me directly as a school social worker colleague.

Intellectually and personally uncomfortable, I discontinued research interviews to reflect on my dilemma. Oakley’s discussion of conversational engagement in her research interviews with women (Oakley, 1999) confirmed that my disquiet had been reasonable. I continued with the interviews without resisting engagement: my verbal contributions would be transcribed and available for analysis and critique. As I reflected on and experienced the collaborative nature of the narrative process, I relaxed into the role of listener in the context of narrative co-production. My unease was replaced in the remaining interviews by a more natural sense of reciprocity, though not over-involvement, through my more relaxed emotional presence and engagement with the narrative process.
Methodology

(Riessman, 2008, p.24) and greater comfort with my coexisting roles as researcher, listener, analyst and school social worker.

Researcher-narrator power dynamics were not predictable. I felt humbled in the presence of thoughtful and dedicated former and current practitioners. I had set the parameters of the interviews, but narrators often seized the moment: to ensure I understood the background to stories; to dispel any misconceptions; and intentionally to ensure I heard particular stories. The narrators guided the conversations in their story selection, development and nuancing, and their reasoned digressions and more thorough explanations.

From a position of feminist sensibility, I experienced in the interviews a gender-based trend that I have not explored beyond initial impressions here. While persuasively telling their school social work stories, women tended to be more conversational, reflective, questioning and sometimes doubtful of their professional effectiveness with children and schools, despite ample narrative examples to the contrary. Men were equally committed to school social work practice, they tended to engage less conversationally, being more direct in giving their ideas, and more likely to discuss their own career status.

Interviews usually lasted 1-1½ hours. The shortest was completed in 40 minutes, and the longest was in two parts over 3½ hours in the one day. I took time at the beginning of the interview to go through the plain language statement and consent form to ensure they were clear, and that there was genuine informed consent (Appendices A & B). An introductory professional history questionnaire (Riessman, 2008, p.25) helped establish professional qualifications and experience; and school social work context (Appendix C). Sometimes that process initiated spontaneous narrative.

I used minimal verbal and non-verbal cues to encourage the continuation of storytelling, initiated with broad, open-ended questions, for example:

*Can you tell me about a significant or memorable example of your work as a school social worker?*
Free-flowing interviews, set up purposefully to address school social work, naturally yielded rich narrative data without the need to follow a schedule of questions or themes (Riessman, 2002, p.695-6, Czarniawska, 2002, p.735). Nevertheless, I was not passive, nor had I abdicated my responsibility to guide the interviews towards manifesting school social work as a social reality (Elliot, 2005, p.18). To maintain consistency, since I had originally conceptualised the study using a schedule of questions and researcher guide (Appendix D), I paused towards the end of each interview, explained that I was checking the schedule, and in a very few cases asked the narrator to speak about a matter that had not been mentioned.

All narratives, irrespective of length or meanderings, were valued for the meaning that might be revealed (Czarniawska, 2002, p.p.735; Riessman, 2002, p.695, 2008, p.23-26). I tried not to interrupt narrative flow with clarifying questions or redirection (Elliot, 2005, p.21). As listener and analyst, I was not solely in control of the interview, but I remained alert to pursue plots, themes and narrative purposes that were newly emerging, confirmative or discordant. My comments and questions arose out of the stories as told, in order to clarify; make connections; or shed light on apparent discrepancies. At times I prompted the narrators to explain more fully something that was tacitly understood between us.

I had planned a final question about the ideal design of a school social work service, but the practitioner reflection within narratives usually made the question superfluous. Having observed that narrators were purposeful in relating certain stories, and sometimes continued narration after interviews had supposedly concluded, I began to ask whether there was anything more in particular that they wanted to add to the study.

Interpretation and analysis began in the interview itself, allowing for immediate further explanation and clarification as themes and storylines emerged. Even though interviews generated common themes and ideas, individual threads were plentiful and divergent. Far from a “magical” process, the emergence of themes is analogous to the intellectual assessment activity of counselling, when I am listening for ideas and connections in a client story in order to understand it from
their perspective, and checking and clarifying developing hypotheses there and then. I was predisposed towards narrative elements that might shed light on the research questions and possible themes suggested by the literature review. Moreover, I was alert to content that I had not anticipated, because it was new, or inconsistent with the narrator’s other stories or the stories of other narrators. I pursued some of these new storylines with later narrators, in order to access the communal memory as represented by individual narrators.

**Transcription**

Immediately after the interview, I uploaded the digital recording to my laptop, and made a CD copy, before erasing the original. I used Media Player and Microsoft Windows voice recognition software to transcribe the interviews. In listening to the audio material and repeating it as dictation, I found myself mimicking our tonal quality and vocal gestures, so that I re-captured somewhat the dynamic narrator-listener relationship as I completed the transcription and continued the analytical process begun in the interview.

Although it was incredibly time-consuming, I trusted myself to prepare transcripts: I was very persistent in listening repeatedly to words that were difficult to decipher. Also, I used transcription as a significant stage for thematic generation and interpretation in the analysis process (Riessman, 2008, p.21). I did not show participants their transcripts, as I used them as meaningful productions at the particular moment of creation. I regret not anticipating how very personal those products would be, and including in my ethics application a process for returning to narrators their transcripts and audio recordings: this will be a post-thesis project with advice from the Human Research Ethics Committee.

I printed each transcript double-sided and bound it with cloth tape as a book, befitting the integrity of individual narrators’ professional stories, and to facilitate my focus on the discursive flow within each narrators’ collection of stories, even though I would complete qualitative thematic content analysis across interviews. The book format was a familiar literary mode, and reinforced my approach to the data as personally authored, performative and meaningful.
Generated within the interviews; edited, interpreted and re-worked in performance; recorded; transcribed and bound, the narratives became new static textual products (Riessman, 2008, p.22-23) subject to more on-going interpretive analysis. I had been party to the dynamic creation of the narratives, and would continue as researcher to imagine a new narrative, within the bounds of my personal narratives, professional discourses (Boéri, 2010, p.62), and imagined outcomes to the study.

**Retrieved Documents**

Documents are included in research “for the sake of completeness and fidelity to the settings of social research” (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004, p.56). Private documents and public records are inescapably integrated into everyday life; contribute to the definition of our identities, and shed light on both public and private concerns (McCulloch, 2004, p.1, 25). While this study was based on the collection of oral narratives, stories of professional life were also found in archived and organisational documents (Riessman, 2008, p.4). Documents contributed to the context of the narratives by constituting “another text” with different content that sat alongside oral narratives (Czarniawska, 2002, p.736).

I had suspected that some professional documents might be drifting in the twilight zone between private collections and public records. Professional experience told me that discussion papers; policy, program and evaluation documents; project proposals; and much more, had been prepared by school social workers in the course of their everyday work. If accessible, they would be intrinsic to the construction of a narrative of the interaction between school social workers and their multiple environments.

I expected to find only a small proportion of extant, relevant documents; and they would have been variously stored, according to the motivations of those who decided, either privately or communally, to archive them; and no doubt, subject to periodic purging (McCulloch, 2004, p.43). With no clear promise of what I might find, I was nevertheless hopeful, and I soon found myself in possession of significant bundles of documents both private and public. In the Public Records Office of Victoria, I was able to access letters, memos and reports.
from 1947-1949, from the papers of Dr Chris Jorgensen, the first Psychologist. I read the documents on-site, noting verbatim the content that seemed relevant to the development of school social work in Victoria.

Barbara Sturmfels contributed boxes of material she had kept safe for a future history. “They're only what's been left when I've thrown everything else out” she said during our phone call in August, 2006, but they were a most fruitful source of information. One set documents had been compiled by John Hall, head of the Psychology & Guidance Branch, from his own collection of letters and reports at the time of his retirement in 1973. Sturmfels’ hand-written note on the folder explained that Hall had considered them of possible interest to social workers, and had given them to Senior Social Worker, Pam Holden, who later passed them on to Sturmfels.

Included among Sturmfels’ personal collection was a copy of the paper she wrote with Rosemary Cailes to record John Hall’s address to the school social workers network in December, 1978. I had heard and seen this paper referenced, but the actual document was of far greater interest than previously referenced. Not only were John Hall’s insights recorded, but so too were the stories of named school social workers as well as notes of general discussion.

There were minutes of social worker meetings spanning 1969 to 1980; papers related to structural change planning in 1987; and two folders of materials collected by Marilyn McInnes and Zoe Anderson. Sturmfels’ foresight and commitment to school social work is an invaluable contribution; and I am now responsible to find safe archiving for the collection.

John Hodgson allowed me to borrow notes from the school social work elective he coordinated at the University of Melbourne in the late 1970s, along with other documents from his personal collection. Two people allowed me to read personal, confidential documents that gave clues to what I might find elsewhere. Others gave me various documents.

There are many gaps in the story of school social work service development in Victoria. One can only imagine how much valuable narrative material has been
destroyed when the custodians decided, finally, that there was probably no purpose in keeping it. The missing pieces may well be found among stored papers, forgotten and disintegrating; personal collections; narrative memories of past and present practitioners; or, indeed, forever lost.

**Analysis and Interpretation**

I approached the interpretive act, begun in interview and transcription phases, with care to exercise rigour and ethical intellectual practice. The purpose of analysis was to establish the relationship between interpretation and understanding at the core of the cycle of knowledge-building. It required that I challenge myself, as researcher, towards ongoing re-interpretation of meanings (Lukaitis, 2011, p.47-48).

Three modes of analysis gave access to stories of the development of school social work; theory and practice issues; and individual and communal constructs of professional identity:

- thematic content analysis using data within and across narratives
- narrative analysis of the performance and content within a single narrative
- document analysis to inform the developing research narrative

The breadth of the study, including its retrospectivity, demanded a focus on thematic content analysis of collected narratives. Narrative analysis informed my greater understanding. Retrieved documents were used to fill gaps in the historical record of school social work development; and to give more context, confirmation or disconfirmation of the themes and issues that had arisen in the interpretation of narratives.

I used discussions with colleagues in the context of the School Social Work Practice Group peer supervision to test ideas that were unexpected or uniformly consistent with expectation. For example, in relation to: *Who is the client?*, both the interpreted findings and the discussion with my peers indicated lack of consensus. When I suspected I might be over-stating the extent to which school
social workers thought ecologically systemically, collegiate discussions indicated that it could well be fair interpretation. None could think of any situation without reference to multiple personal, school and cultural environments.

**Analysing the Narratives**

Narratives had been dialogically co-created within the context of research interviews designed to explore the development of school social work. As it became increasingly apparent that narrators were purposeful in their participation and narration, I began to ask why they had been so willing.

*I just think any opportunity... it’s something I really enjoy doing, and I’m happy to pass on any information about what we do, if I know... it can promote opportunities for social workers in the future.* (N12)

Narrators had their own objectives in promoting school social work and affirming the personal importance of their own professional roles, and entrusted to me their professional stories, including those that expressed individual or communal self-doubt. Narratives were laden with personal language, style and intent; but were also couched in shared professional language.

Throughout the research process, including writing, I was aware of the sense of my own relationship with and reaction to individual narrators. I had a strong sense of the personal and professional identities interpreted within individual narratives; and strong feelings of connectedness to the community they were representing, even where experience and ideas different from my own were recounted. In the light of my subjectivity; my membership of the group under study; and narrator-researcher complicity in documenting school social work, it was essential to engage rigorously with the process of analysis and interpretation of individual narrator meaning and intent, especially in the search for new, unexpected, discomfiting or inconsistent narrative elements.
Qualitative Thematic Content Analysis

Qualitative thematic content analysis accessed knowledge by organising stories piecemeal by way of grounded theory coding (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p.214, Riessman, 2008, p.12, 57), and did not depend on any one narrative as a whole. To this end I approached narratives as a source from which to lift bits of empirical material, to identify conceptual categories, themes and sub-themes, through content within and across narratives.

My impact as researcher on the outcomes of the study was counterbalanced by a rigorous process of reflectivity whereby, with awareness of my personal stance and a questioning, thoughtful approach, I explored narratives not only for the obvious, but for underlying implications, especially incongruities, inconsistencies and unexpected information (Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2011, p.155).

The intuitive creativity of the intellectual process had begun with the conceptualisation of the research questions. The process of challenging new interpretations and understanding required a highly skilled intellectual process; complexity of thought; ability to seek a range of alternate meanings, especially those outside my presuppositions; ideas management; and creative inspiration spawning new ideas.

Analysis demanded high level critical thinking simultaneously divergent, in order to generate all possible themes; and precise, in order to ensure that contextualised meanings were properly interpreted. I applied convergent thinking to draw thematic patterns and connections together as categories. I used critical re-thinking to discover nuanced detail within sub-themes and develop possible explanations (Ben-Ari and Enosh, 2011, p.155).

A careful reading of the transcripts generated multiple themes and sub-themes, initially named and recorded with little detailed analysis. Themes were sorted into conceptual categories (Connolly, 2003, p.109) for example:
Three broad conceptual categories had become evident: *the context of school social work; theory and practice;* and *professional identity and tradition.* I examined more intensely themes and sub-themes within each conceptual category; questioned and expanded my interpretation of the text.

Where there was possible ambiguity, I returned to the audio recording to ensure the best interpretation within the dialogical context. Early themes and sub-themes did not necessarily stand through the next phases: some were reinterpreted, and some were set aside as thematic directions were clarified and refined. As interpretation delivered new understanding, I applied it to on-going analysis in a repetitive, cyclical process that led towards optimal understanding, theory-making and newly constructed knowledge. I teased out the strands of nuanced meaning within themes and sub-themes, thereby refining interpretation. For example, significant unanticipated issues consequently emerged in relation to school social workers who were school-employed.

Analysis and interpretation were facilitated by my preferred management technologies: highlighter pens; note-books; post-it notes on themed posters; a theme-mapping wall; Microsoft Word “Find” function, dual computer and laptop use for cross-checking and comparison. I began with hard copy transcripts before returning to digital transcripts to highlight illustrative quotes or whole narratives. I then dealt with hard copy quotes on paper. While reading the de-contextualised colour-coded quotes for sorting into established themes and sub-themes, I continued to examine closely my interpretations for nuanced meaning.
Narrative Analysis

As a minor parallel process alongside qualitative thematic content analysis, narrative analysis added complexity by focusing detailed attention on the internally located empirical data of single narratives, short or long; and included the context of production; and how they performed and constructed social reality (Chase, 2011, p.424, Spector-Mersel, 2010, p.213, Riessman, 2008, p.23). The insights from narrative analysis have been integrated into the findings along with the knowledge garnered by qualitative content analysis, and contextually supplemented by the interpretation of textual material.
### Figure 6 Narrative Analysis Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Narrative</th>
<th>Content &amp; Function</th>
<th>Researcher Annotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Therape,you can callit literallytherape...</strong></td>
<td>Attention-grabbing opener</td>
<td>Narrator invited to discuss change. “Rape” analogy gendered, given context of M-F interview relationship. My feminist discomfort!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I was the last man standing.</strong></td>
<td>“Hero/victim/survivor”, visual depiction</td>
<td>Gendered language, personal style, internally consistent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>They brought these coordinators in from (...)</strong></td>
<td>Villains “they” the bureaucracy, and their agents, the coordinators</td>
<td>Protagonists who enacted closure were “outsiders” from an area un-named here (confidentiality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>It was scuttled, the rats were running away from the ship.</strong></td>
<td>Commentary: disgust, betrayal, anger</td>
<td>Infers that narrator’s colleagues and management did not resist?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>You had to close all the schools down. They brought in... a schoolteacher... his job was to close the school down and he got a huge bonus for closing the School Support Centre down.</strong></td>
<td>Plot: the process of closure and the day on which it physically happened: a new story for the researcher. Teacher as “other”; nemesis/non-supporter Commentary: mercenary agent</td>
<td>Inconsistency? Narrator did not really like SSC service model and management, but did not appreciate Kennett’s closure. Is “shock” exacerbated by powerlessness/lack of consultation? Narrator soon left school social work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I can remember the last day,</strong></td>
<td>Emphasis/attention! Lone “hero”/survivor (of rape?) standing in the face of intruders/marauders Personal story</td>
<td>Potent memory/emotional. How does bureaucracy prepare for organisational change? Prof. identity relationship with context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>they were throwing things on the truck so he could meet his criteria by midday.</strong></td>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>Disrespecting, diminishing, negating the work that had gone on in that office. My alert interest!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>And literally I was left in a room that was no bigger than the toilet you went to, no bigger... Pretty terrible, shocking.</strong></td>
<td>Resolution/ending. Constructing self as powerless hero/victim/survivor Dramatic performance Commentary: disgust, Desolation, disrespect Emotional connection to place, reaction to loss</td>
<td>Individual story Disconnected from community Constructed as a story of invasion and plunder; betrayal and loss; narrator as the last, futile line of resistance. Consultation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Narrative analysis and interpretation expanded an understanding of the relationship between professional identity, theory and practice, as narrators reflected on past and current practice scenarios, sometimes quite extensively; or theorised the values and purpose of school social work as specialist practice. Narrative analysis gave detailed information about individual interpretation of experience, thought and emotion; and insight into the performance of self and how the narrator wanted to be known in the professional context.

Analysis of the short narrative above has been integrated into Chapter 6 to illustrate the dynamic relationship between professional identity and the personal experience of organisational change. Elements of narrative analysis: thematic, structural, interactional and performative, covered elements of content, the way the story was told, co-production, performance and persuasion (Riessman, 2005, p.2-5). A simple template includes annotations considering possible meanings and interpretations.

This particular story was new to me, although I had often heard about the disbanding of School Support Centres. The emotional intensity of this narrative illustrated individual “self” as well as professional identity. The loss of place and perceived contempt for the school social work done there, was expressed with rhetorical imagery to engage me as listener. This was a short, dramatically performed personal story with thematic connections with another narrator’s account of disempowerment, anger and communal grieving that continued for several months. The fine lens of narrative analysis prompted the re-examination of qualitative thematic content analysis related to the political and personal circumstances of organisational change.

Analysing the Retrieved Documents

For the purposes of this study, documents from public archives and private collections were analysed for their confirmation or disconfirmation of narrative-based findings; or to document hitherto unpublished detail of school social work service development.
Unlike oral narratives generated in the dynamic of an interview situation, documents pre-existed the research process (Riessman, 2008, p.22). Texts “often enshrine a distinctively documentary version of social reality” (Lee, 1999, p.59); and can be seen as “receptacles” of information, not actually speaking for themselves (Riessman, 2008, p.22). Most authors were no longer accessible, and documents needed to be ethically handled according to their original purpose and meaning, rather than skewed to support the emerging research narratives.

The reading of documents required a clear, rigorous logical approach simultaneously with a creative imagination (Danto, 2008, p.61-62). The retrieved documents had been constructed for intended audiences to reflect the authors’ interpretations of events and issues, as products of particular discursive environments; and preserved privately or publicly according to decisions about their value (McCulloch, 2004, p.460; Riessman, 2008, p.22-23; Swain, 2008, p.193). Documents had been purposefully prepared and shared, and however “official”, did not prove they were read, accepted and acted upon (Lee, 1999, p.58, 67).

I assumed that documents were authentically written by the purported authors; or if unsigned reports and minutes of meetings that they accurately recorded group activities. The documents were an incomplete collection, with countless broken and unspoken stories. For example, departmental responses to management requests were not always available; memos or minutes predicted the next plot turn, with no record to indicate either follow through or abandonment.

The writings of Dr Chris Jorgensen and John Hall significantly recounted the origins of school social work in Victoria. To my knowledge they have not been studied before, and so bring new information to retrospective narratives. The documents penned by Jorgensen and Jack Cannon 1947-1949 had been established as authentic by the Public Records Office Victoria. The provenance of the documents authored by John Hall was told to me by Barbara Sturmfels. I assumed Jorgensen, Cannon and Hall to be credible and competent in terms of organisational development as it affected school social work practitioners.
The papers authored by school social workers from the 1960s into the 1980s were rich with data. The voices were strong even from this distance, confirming and detailing some of the collected narratives, and providing organisational information. Documents were mostly prepared for a communal audience of professional peers or for other targets of advocacy. I assumed them to be authentic and reliably written by authors competent to represent the events and ideas they represented (Danto, 2008, p.63). Papers were varied, and included, for example: records of discussion and submissions in relation to the Australian Government poverty inquiry in the 1970s; minutes of social worker meetings; planning for a University of Melbourne school social work elective in the late 1970s; a report into school social work in 1978; planning for organisational change in 1987; and minutes of the inaugural AASW School Social Work Special Interest Group meeting in 1994.

Just as professional narratives were impacted by lapses of memory and personal interpretation, so too were writers and record keepers likely to have their own biases. I read documents empathically to understand authors’ perspectives; and ethically, accurately to represent meaning and move forward creatively to support new narratives (Danto, 2008, p.8, 17, 61-62).

Characters within the texts became vibrant, and I was surprised by the extent to which I felt authors could speak meaningfully through time of interpersonal dynamics, frustration, territoriality and the exertion of authority.

*The effectiveness of primary sources lies in the empathy they evoke so that a reader responds to a historical character with a sense of shared experience...* (Danto, 2008, p.61-62)

Intellectually excited by the texts, I was cautious about my relationship with documented characters and situations that eventually felt “known”, albeit as interpretation.

At one point I had to step back and reflect on the fact that I would be able to use only a small part of the data contained within the retrieved documents. The development of school social work in Victoria, professional identity and tradition
were the umbrella conceptual ideas for this study. Excess data would have to be the foundation for future projects.

Early readings of the documents had revealed new information about the origins of school social work. Qualitative and narrative analysis had begun to uncover the contribution of practitioners to service development and school social work theory. I returned to the retrieved documents for more detailed scrutiny based on the emerging narrative themes. It was in the writings of school social workers and records of their meetings that I found strong confirmation of their dynamic interaction with the context and theory of practice, and which led me further to theorise the connection between professional identity and tradition.

The Literary Process of the Report

As scholars we are story-tellers, telling stories about other people’s stories. (Denzin, 2004, p.12)

As researcher-writer, I embarked on the construction of a narrative spanning 65 years of school social work, 1948-2013. I had access to fragmentary information held within existing literature, collected professional narratives and retrieved documents, from which I further selected or cast aside interpreted information to construct through the mediation of imagination, the stories presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. Being able critically to consider my own role in the production and interpretation of empirical data, did not eliminate the problem of subjectivity (Oliveira, 2005, p.426), which extended into the report-writing and editing stages. The new narratives represent my emphases in the fluidity of knowledge and alternate interpretations (Elliott, 2005, p.153; Spector-Mersel, 2010, p.217). The subjectivity of authorship based on data representing only parts of the evolution of school social work in Victoria, has surely led to incompleteness, skewed content and omission of significant characters within the narrative product. However, I believe that with documentary back-up and repetition across narratives or through time, I have been able to construct credible and trustworthy narratives. In this relatively small project compared to
its very broad scope, I have gathered together many interesting stories, albeit with significant gaps. I have written not a historical record, but an interpretation of school social work as told to me by protagonists, witnesses and commentators.

I felt strong emotional and intellectual connection to the knowledge and wisdom shared, and it was hard to discard significant amounts of content in the selection of the most pertinent ideas and illustrative narrator quotations. Decisions to exclude material, and therefore about the thesis as a complete work, were usually final, but in the process of writing I restored some content more fully to describe particular issues. Despite discarding material, I am confident in the integrity of new researcher narratives, based on new and pre-existing empirical data primarily provided by school social work practitioners themselves.

Even as I wrote, I found subtle nuances that I had missed earlier, and like the evolution of an art work, my narratives could be re-shaped within the integrity of a dynamic research process. Drafting aimed to develop a research narrative that included thematic specificity and properly represented the contributions of narrators (Danto, 2008, p.39). I knew that narrators wanted me to retell their stories well, and I was aware that within the boundaries of the academic project, I would not be able to include all the issues they considered important.

In the first instance, I had written about the organisational context of school social work practice in the literature review; with new information in a findings chapter. In the interests of producing a credible and “well-told, multi-faceted story” (Danto, 2008, p.39), I decided to synthesise the information from existing literature, with narrator accounts and retrieved documents in Chapter 6.

I found myself wanting to refute the validity of the pervasive myth of school social worker inferiority in relation to psychologists. The new information was so complex and interesting, that I found it difficult to limit the content, and have in fact discarded much of the originally drafted material including excerpts from collected narratives. I sought honestly to present a fair, concise, trustworthy account.
I aimed to balance first and third person writing, to include reflexivity and my own voice, but focus importance on the story of school social work (Elliott, 2005, p.155). The relationship between the research and my self-constructed personal, professional and academic identity was clear from the start, in the research questions and in my choice of qualitative inquiry through professional narratives.

Writing in the past tense supported the notion that narrated experience is context-bound and transitory, and that interpreted knowledge is provisional.

My newly constructed narrative, while based on careful analysis, interpretation and consequent knowledge-building, needed necessarily to include the rhetoric of persuasion. However, I did not consciously exclude interpretations that reflected poorly on the school social worker community or ran counter to my presuppositions; nor create intrigue for the sake of a good story. I was cautious of the hazards of retrospective qualitative research, and considered the tone of my writing in light of:

*risks of ancestor worship, of ignorance of key people and events, and of unfairly passing judgement on those who have gone before because we fail to understand them in the context of their time and place.*

(Scott, 2011)
THE ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF
SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK IN VICTORIA

6. The Organisational Development of School Social Work in Victoria
   Constructed from a review of the literature, collected narratives
   and retrieved documents
There was a genuine enthusiasm to help children, and to help the parents and help the teachers and change schools for the better. It wasn’t false idealism, it was genuine vision of a better world, and I was just very lucky to be part of that.

“Narrator 15”
The development of school social work in Victoria is located within the institutional context of education and schools, but represents the dedicated and persistent action of school social workers in dynamic and reciprocal interaction with that context. School social worker professional identity is constructed not passively by the context of practice, but by the contribution made by practitioners to that very context.

This study has included two distinct organisational contexts. Primarily, school social work has been part of an ancillary service provided by the Victorian government education system to all state primary and secondary schools, and at times, other registered and Catholic schools. The somewhat different organisational context, where the practitioner has been employed by government and non-government schools as members of staff, has been a smaller, but growing aspect of Victorian education.

In order to present a single, credible and coherent newly reconstructed narrative of the development of school social work in Victoria, Chapter 6 has been written to include new research findings, integrated with existing literature, through interpretation and synthesis of:

- spoken professional narratives collected for the purposes of the research
- documents retrieved from Public Records Office Victoria and personal collections
- published documents.

The following researcher narrative is an interpretive piece, based on the recollections of narrators and authors. The three sources of information provided a general coherence that makes claims for “trustworthiness”, if not for “truth”. Narrators, reliant upon memory, have interpreted their experiences, many long past. However, neither was literature completely reliable, since it had been written from a particular standpoint; sometimes relied on earlier writers rather than new evidence; and contained discrepancies. Even the Report of the Minister of Education contained the inaccuracy that non-teacher social
workers had been employed for the first time in 1974-1975 (Victoria. Education Dept, Emerson, T., 1976, p.42). Every effort has been made to reconcile inconsistencies, but the constructed narrative below stands open to factual correction; the addition of copious missing information; and alternate interpretation.

Of the few existing textual narratives of the development of student welfare and learning support in Victoria, most have been written by psychology practitioners with scant mention of the significant role of school social workers. With the inclusion of information gleaned from retrieved documents rarely before seen, and the words of narrators, this researcher narrative of the development of school social work is set in a multi-disciplinary environment, but told from the perspective of school social workers themselves.

All references to pre-existing literature have been cited within the text of the new research narrative. Retrieved documents have been referenced. Direct quotes taken from professional narratives have been indicated by pseudonyms: N1, N2 ... N27. Narrative elements without the references described above, represent research findings or accumulated knowledge developed through thematic and narrative analysis and interpretation of the collected professional narratives.
Figure 7

The Organisational Context of School Social Work in Victoria

Key Dates: Australian Federal and Victorian Governments, Education Department Name Changes and Developments in School Social Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Australian Federal Labor Government elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873-1985</td>
<td>EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (Victoria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>State of Victoria Labor Government elected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1947  | Psychology Branch established  
Social Work positions advertised and subsequently withdrawn |
| 1947  | State of Victoria Liberal-Country Party Coalition Government elected |
| 1948  | Social Work positions re-advertised |
| 1948-49 | Les Halliwell, Joan Barrett and Elaine O’Neill appointed as first social workers |
| 1949  | Australian Federal Liberal Government elected |
| 1950  | State of Victoria Country Party Government elected |
| 1952  | State of Victoria Labor Government elected |
| 1955  | State of Victoria Liberal Government elected |
| 1955  | Psychology & Guidance Branch (organisational re-structure)  
Elaine O’Neill appointed to senior social worker position |
| 1972  | Australian Federal Labor Government elected |
| 1974  | Report of the Interim Committee of Australian Schools Commission  
Recommendation and funding for school-employed social workers Australia-wide  
Establishment of Disadvantaged Schools Program |
<p>| 1974  | Counselling, Guidance &amp; Clinical Services (organisational re-structure) |
| 1975  | Australian Federal Liberal Government elected |
| 1982  | State of Victoria Labor Government elected |
| 1983  | Australian Federal Labor Government elected |
| 1985-1990 | MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (Victoria) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td><strong>Student Services Offices</strong> (organisational re-structure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td><strong>School Support Centres</strong> (organisational re-structure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-1992</td>
<td>MINISTRY OF EDUCATION &amp; TRAINING (Victoria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>State of Victoria Liberal Government elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992-1999</td>
<td>DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (DoE, Victoria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td><strong>Student Support Services</strong> (organisational re-structure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School social workers relocated to schools, managed by principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Australian Federal Liberal Government elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>State of Victoria Labor Government elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Student Support Services</strong> returned to Dept of Education regional management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2002</td>
<td>DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING (DEET, Victoria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2006</td>
<td>DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING (DET, Victoria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Australian Federal Labor Government elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (DoE, Victoria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-</td>
<td>DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (DEECD, Victoria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-</td>
<td>State of Victoria Liberal Government elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Growth in numbers of school-employed school social workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td><strong>Student Support Services</strong> returned to principal governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commissioned by Australian Labor government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-</td>
<td>Australian Federal Liberal Government elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Gonski&quot; education funding reforms in question</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School social work in Victoria was envisioned in an era of post-war recovery. Those who had served in the military for up to six years were returning to previous lives, or availing themselves of government-provided education or re-settlement. Teachers could return to the classroom directly, or up-grade their qualifications with tertiary studies through the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme (Jacobs, 1986, p.27; Victoria. Education Dept, 1947, p.101).

The needs of young Australians had not been well served during the 1930s depression and the 1939-1945 war that followed. Their own war efforts had included long, hazardous, after-school hours in industry (Cunningham, 1951, p.4-5, 12-15, 25-26), while they focused on communal, hopeful purpose. However, the end of war can fail to deliver the anticipated security and respect (Komesaroff, 2013). Many young people experienced the loss of role and purpose. There was Education Department concern about: “maladjusted or problem children, including truants and delinquents” (Victoria. Education Department & Osborne, 1950, p.14). Social and youth policy were enacted through education.

And so this was a sort of progressive boost, I think, this idea of...keeping (kids) at school longer... coming down on truancy, which was linked with delinquent behaviour in those days. (N17)

Population growth due to post-war birth rates and migration, and changing social, family, work and leisure environments, required progressive youth, education and welfare policies including the provision of improved universal secondary education and pathways to employment, with more schools and support services (Faulkner, 1992, p.16). Schools needed to prepare students for a changing world of work impacted by higher level technology and training, and the loss of artisan and family occupations. The economic environment threatened an inadequate supply of juvenile labour and the potential commodification of young people (Cunningham, 1951, 6-10, 20-21).
Many families were “desperately poor” (N17); and for most young people, secondary and tertiary education were unattainable. For many years to come, the education system would provide school health and dental services; and uniforms and allowances for those on a list of children deemed “indigent”, “a dreadful, discriminatory name” (N2). With their professional qualifications, the earliest school social workers were atypical within their generation of young women who tended not to complete post-primary school, nor continue to university.

In 1947, within this social environment, Jack Cannon, Assistant Chief Inspector of Primary Schools, established a Psychology Branch within the Victorian Education Department Primary Schools Division, although the University of Melbourne had begun the School of Psychology only the year previously (Jacobs, 1986, p.27; Thielking, 2006, p.7). It has been believed that Cannon’s decision was inspired by an overseas study tour in 1946 (Jacobs, 1986, p.27). In fact, the tour had been proposed in 1947, and the Carnegie Foundation funded a delegation who travelled independently and met together for the first time in London in September 1948 (Cunningham, 1951, Preface). In other Australian states, education departments were also developing guidance services for children and young people, supported by the Commonwealth Office of Education and UNESCO (Mills, 1948; Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.1).

**Why were Social Workers Employed in the Psychology Branch?**

On 15 December 1978, in what may well be one of the first attempts formally to capture their tradition, school social workers invited John Hall, former head of the Psychology & Guidance Branch, to return from retirement to speak of his remembered experience as it related particularly to matters of their professional interest. Hall’s talk and subsequent school social worker discussion were documented by Barbara Sturmfels and Rosemary Cailes, remembered by several narrators as stalwart and influential school social workers. At one point in the meeting, someone voiced the mystery on behalf of the collegiate group: *Why were social workers appointed to the Branch?*
This same question arose spontaneously amidst the process of retrieved document examination, which seemed to point to untold narratives between the cracks of the dominant story, particularly as revealed in the papers of early head psychologists, Dr Chris Jorgensen (1947-1949) and John Hall (1950-1973). Jorgensen’s apparent desperation to secure the earliest school social workers seemed to be at odds with the prevailing narrative that had perpetuated the casting of social workers as inferior to psychologists, with marginalising descriptors such as “assistants to the psychologists”; “second-class citizen”; and “hand-maiden” (N2, N15, N17) that even school social workers themselves continued to repeat into their cultural mythology, despite lingering frustration:

… maybe you could think about the original name of the social worker. You know, “assistant to the psychologist”, implied you were the hand-maiden, rather than an independent professional. (N2)

Hall ventured that Jorgensen might have been responsible for the appointment of social workers. However, Cannon had received Teachers Tribunal prior approval to implement his plans for the Psychology Branch, including the integration of non-teacher social workers as core practitioners. Cannon’s firm guiding hand of authority was referenced by Hall and appears evident in various letters and memos suggesting that Cannon saw himself as the master of the enterprise (Cannon, 1948a, 1948c; Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.1-2).

In May 1947, Cannon appointed Dr Chris Jorgensen as “The Psychologist” and head of the Psychology Branch, which was established in October 1947. On October 28th, positions for female social workers were listed, transcribed below from the Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid (Victoria. Education Dept, 1947, p.101, 241).

The federal Public Service Board definition of a social worker in the late 1940s specified “a woman” (Tierney, 1979, p.49), reflecting a social context to the gendered designation. There is no evidence to show why the positions were advertised for female candidates only, although we know that almost all of the qualified social workers at the time were women, and with gendered salaries, they would be much lesser remunerated.
Applications will be received by the Teachers’ Tribunal from persons who are qualified for appointment as assistants (female) to departmental psychologists, Professional Division, in the Education Department of Victoria. Three positions are available.

**Yearly Salary.** £300 (minimum), £420 (maximum); plus cost of living allowance (at present £36 a year). Annual increments of £20 will be paid after twelve months’ satisfactory service until the maximum salary is reached.

**Duties.** Under the direction of the Psychology Branch of the Education Department to carry out field work in the schools and in children’s homes; to assist in cases of problem children; and to perform such other duties as may be required.

**Qualifications.** To possess the Diploma of Social Studies, suitable qualifications for work in psychology, a suitable personality, and a general aptitude for this type of work. Applicants should state their full name, date and place of birth, present position, qualifications and experience if any. They should furnish any particulars or evidence they may have to submit in support of their applications. Applications should be lodged with the Secretary, Teachers’ Tribunal, Observatory House, Domain, South Yarra, S.E.1, not later than the 14th of November, 1947.*

*Should circumstances make it necessary, late applications will be received until the 21st of November.

The notion of “assistant” was intrinsic to the hierarchical structure of the Education Department, where non-senior teachers were classified as assistants. One of two program supervisors appointed in 1947 was required: “to assist in carrying out psychological and other testing” (Victoria. Education Dept, 1947, p.101); and for two decades teachers were recruited as “assistants” to the psychology program. Despite this broadly applied use of “assistant”, the appointment of the first non-teacher school social workers as both female and “assistant” to the one psychologist, Jorgensen, has been interpreted and often repeated as a major factor within a potent narrative of “insignificant and lower status roles”, organisational disadvantage by virtue of low numbers, and uncertainty about on-going roles (Mahony, 1995, p.13).
We cannot be sure why Cannon was so determined to secure and continue social worker appointment. The Health Department argued vehemently for the sole right to employ social workers, available for loan to the Education Department. The original advertisements were withdrawn, but Cannon promised to get the Education Act changed, if necessary; and persisted to fight the issue before the Crown Solicitor (Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.2).

While Cannon obdurately pursued social worker appointments, Jorgensen, the sole psychologist, was increasingly desperate to engage professionally trained staff. Various correspondences archived in the Public Records Office Victoria appear to indicate tension in Jorgensen’s relationship with the authoritative Cannon. Jorgensen was frustrated by his heavy case load, simultaneously with organisational development and staff recruitment, within an inadequately resourced service. Melbourne University was yet to produce its first psychology graduates, and with the requirement that psychologists also be teachers, Jorgensen warned that the branch was struggling to establish itself.

*In any psychological or guidance service a clinic staffed by experts is essential, but in Victoria such experts are not available at the present time.*  

(Jorgensen, 1948d, p.20)

Jorgensen urged the immediate employment of testing and guidance teacher assistants; and social workers (Jorgensen, 1948c), who represented a university educated and professionally qualified cohort of experts in the human services environment, and perhaps even a “*status symbol for the department*” (N3). With their social work “*specific knowledge and skills*” (N2), including Psychology majors, social workers were far more valuable than “*hand-maidens*” or underling “*assistants*”, and better prepared than seconded teachers who would be precluded by the Education Department from completing psychology majors for at least two decades.

On his return from a Commonwealth Office of Education conference in Sydney in May 1948 (Cannon, 1948b; Jorgensen, 1948d), Jorgensen presented to Cannon a comprehensive report comparing psychology, guidance and children’s clinical psychiatric services, in Victoria and the other states represented (Jorgensen,
1948b). Jorgensen’s depiction of The Psychiatric Clinic; Travancore Clinic; and Children’s Court Clinic in Melbourne (Jorgensen, 1948b, p.2) indicated that he was familiar with successful models for multi-disciplinary teams including social workers. He negotiated some of the earliest protocols of cooperation with Health Department facilities (Jorgensen, 1949).

Cannon’s persistence was rewarded on 16 July 1948 when the Crown Solicitor (Hall, 1964d), agreed that social workers were not “ordinary”, but “special” in the “intimate and necessary connection of their work with that of the psychologists” in an educational setting; and appropriately employed by the Teachers’ Tribunal (Hall, 1964d; Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.2). Fortuitously, linking social workers to the psychologist had legally justified their employment. Cannon’s foreshadowing of school social work as a specialist field of practice is fascinating, and it is tempting to contemplate whether he had continued throughout his legal battle to consult with social work practitioners or educators.

Advertised vacancies reappeared a month later, with the same wording, except that there were two, not three positions (Victoria. Education Dept, 1948, p.163).

On 27 August 1948, Jorgensen requested a transfer for L.M.D. Halliwell from Brunswick West Primary School (Jorgensen, 1948a), perhaps explaining why the number of vacancies had been reduced to two. Les Halliwell was approved as the first school social worker, but technically precluded by gender, he was appointed as a social work qualified teacher “assistant” (Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.3). One of the narrators recalled Halliwell saying, as they approached the end of their studies, that he had been offered a job in the Psychology Branch. Presumably, he resumed a teaching position while the Crown Solicitor made his deliberations. As the first teacher-social worker, he kept his higher teaching salary.

Joan Barrett and Elaine O’Neill commenced in 1949 as the first and second social workers (Hall, 1956a; Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.1).

John McLeod and Frank Rouch, both returned service-men with some psychology studies completed, were approved for release from teaching duties and transferred into the Psychology Branch early in 1949. Les Halliwell appears to
have been not only the first social worker, but the first fully professionally qualified member of the psychology-social work team under Jorgensen.

The multi-disciplinary team, pioneers in Australian schooling support, developed an innovative model of school and family based casework, addressing: “the personality of the child and the environmental stresses” to provide:

... a specialised service for teachers and parents designed to help them to cater more adequately for the educational, emotional, and social needs of children.

(Victoria. Education Dept, 1951, p.6)

Psychologists tested students and dealt with the school; social workers were concerned with the child in the family; and they collaborated on report-writing, family-school meetings and case planning (Jacobs, 1986, p.38; Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.3).

It is intriguing to consider the extent to which Lyra Taylor may have influenced Cannon’s determination to employ social workers. In 1948 Cannon had been preparing for his leg of the USA and UK study tour proposed and submitted for funding by the Commonwealth Office of Education in 1947. The group included Melbourne representatives Taylor and K.S Cunningham. Taylor was a “persuasive, charming and purposive” woman of achievement when women of intellect and ability found it difficult to reach positions reserved for men (Tierney, 1979, p.49). She was a founding member of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW); highly regarded as a social work educator, service manager and passionate advocate for the status of the profession; and a member of the Board of Social Studies, University of Melbourne, 1947-1952 (Bundock). It is perhaps not unreasonable to surmise that Taylor might have had opportunity to encourage Cannon in his endeavours to secure the appointment of social workers to the Psychology Branch.

The study tour was framed in sociological rather than psychological terms; and set against war and abhorrence of totalitarianism, with a democratic respect for the individual. The report was published in 1951. The adjustment of young
people was portrayed in terms of the development of physical, intellectual and emotional potential, within social contexts, schooling and vocational training for a world recovering from the trauma of war and moving into changing work, technological and social environments (Cunningham, 1951, p.1-2, 7-8).

The final chapter about social work, presumably written by Taylor, may well include the first Australian reference to school social work. Client participation was described as fundamental to work with young people. The modes and purpose of social worker practice: casework, group work or community organisation with students, were geared towards facilitating adjustment to social environments, but equally professionally bound to bring about changes in those environments (Cunningham, 1951).

The report demonstrated the earliest Victorian link with school social work in the USA, where well-resourced guidance and counselling teams, including social workers, were at the forefront of educational renewal (Cunningham, 1951, p.78, 80); dare we suggest, confirming Cannon’s commitment to social worker inclusion in the Psychology Branch.

It is not beyond imagining that Taylor would have championed the applicability of social work to schooling, and likely influenced Cannon’s thinking. With Jorgensen’s additional urging, Cannon, although depicted by self and others as a man of absolute authority, was likely to have been encouraged in his dogged campaign to secure social work within the Psychology Branch. Perhaps from her position on the Board of Social Studies, Taylor continued a watchful eye on the early development of the Psychology Branch and its social workers. She would not have approved the unjustly lesser implied value that would be later given to female school social workers (Mahony, 1995, p.13).

This newly constructed research narrative gives credit to social workers, professionally trained from the earliest days to understand the connection between the individual and environments, for their influence on the Psychology Branch approach towards home-school cooperation. Earlier writers have attributed this solely to a social psychology emphasis (Jacobs, 1986, p.37-38), although psychologists did not abandon the notion of “innate deficiencies” until
The Organisational Development of School Social Work in Victoria

the 1960s (Thielking, 2006, p.8). The earliest psychologists, including Hall, McLeod and Brown, argued for a social understanding of student support rather than a reliance on testing (Faulkner, 1992, p.156-157), but according to narrators’ accounts, psychology education did not include skills and knowledge for social problems, community resources and interviewing. Consequently, the collaborative psychologist-social worker partnership ideally met the needs of the child or young person at school, in the family and the community.

Secondly, credit is given to Jack Cannon and the Victorian Education Department for their vision in pioneering the integration of social work into Australian student and school support services, representing transnational influences from the USA and UK (MacLeod & Wright, 2008, p.6). Some states would add a social work component, but Victoria would lead the way over several decades.

Despite the rise of a dominant marginalising narrative which they have helped to construct by voicing it, school social workers were a planned and necessary component of the workforce, highly valued and hard won, and have continued as a consistent professional mainstay, significantly contributing to the service delivery environment and even influencing the very practice of psychology.
School Social Work in the State of Victoria, Australia

Slow and Steady Growth 1950-1973

The extension of compulsory education to all young people up to the age of 14, and then 15 from 1964, met the altruistic goals of personal and social well-being, but also served the interests of national citizenship, social and economic imperatives. The 1960-1970s was a period of significant technological and social revolution, with claims that secondary schools needed to uphold traditional social and moral values, and reinforce roles that were being challenged by a headlong rush to change and modernity, including calls for “freedom”, amidst rapidly expanding knowledge and changing adolescent cultures influenced by peer group, mass media and popular culture. It was above all young people who shouldered the burden of adaptation to a world that no longer promised stable, anticipated futures. Larger schools and increasing numbers of students with lower ability or interest, became sites of problematic student behaviour. Teachers needed to provide for widening individual learning differences (McLeod, 2006, p.1-9).

School social work continued as essential support to children and young people still affected by family and social problems in a modernising world. Government services provided via the Psychology & Guidance Branch were reinforced by increasing organisational integration within the Education Department and expansion into metropolitan and regional centres, despite significant problems with staff recruitment and retention to keep pace with school system expansion. Nevertheless, until 1973 there was relative organisational stability compared with later years.

From 1950, following Jorgensen’s resignation, John Hall led the Psychology Branch (Jacobs, 1985, p.31). In 1955, the renamed Psychology & Guidance Branch was expanded from the Primary Division, to the Secondary and Technical Divisions, with Hall as Principal Psychologist and Guidance Officer until his retirement in 1973 (Faulkner, 1992, p.160). In 1972 the Psychology & Guidance Branch was included among Special Education and Curriculum Support, in Special Services, a fourth division created alongside the schools divisions, with Les Emerson as Director (Faulkner, 1992, p.160).
Representing still fledgling professions in the 1950s, psychologists and social workers conceptualised and theorised their unique roles and pioneering collaborative approach, in Friday afternoon whole staff planning sessions (Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.3). Although the fully qualified teacher-psychologists were the “dominant partners” (N17), no evidence suggests anything other than mutually respectful team partnerships (Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.3), under Hall’s “benign” (N3) and supportive leadership.

For two decades, complementary role differentiation delivered an innovative casework service that responded to individual, school and family factors. Social workers had longer term contact with families, while the psychologist completed testing and school consultation. Complementary partnership delivered a comprehensive casework service to state schools and a small number of Catholic and registered schools (Victoria. Education Dept & Emerson, 1974, p.38).

(The psychologist) was crystal clear that he did his stuff and the social worker did the family. That was the division. They did everything together ... they’d share. (N17)

Social workers are those members of staff who are involved more directly in family social work, though they undertake other important roles including social research.

(Victoria. Education Dept & Emerson, 1972, p.54)

The supply of teachers retrained in psychology under the post-war Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme had been exhausted by 1950, and it was difficult to recruit teacher assistants with adequate psychology studies (Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.2-4). Teachers also disliked the “assistant to the psychologist” tag, and though still officially “teacher assistants”, were afforded “the courtesy title of guidance officer” (Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978). Even when trained, it remained difficult to retain them in the face of more attractive positions; university appointments; and promotion positions in the teaching service (Faulkner, 1992, p.160, 162; Hall, 1950b, 1958; Thielking, 2006, p.22-23). Only three psychologists were eligible when the 1965 Psychological

The initial inclusion of school social workers alongside psychologists had represented both exquisite foresight and absurd irony. They were a cohort of professionally qualified social workers with Psychology majors integrated into their courses. Social worker Joan Barrett, was one who actually completed cognitive assessments (Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.3). One of the narrators had studied psychology alongside one of the earliest psychologists; and others, having completed psychology majors before further training and supervised social work field practice, knew that psychology studies alone did not provide skills for counselling and casework.

_We certainly had exposure to interviewing, personal, which the psychologists at that stage had none. And we’d had all this practical experience... Plus the knowledge of the community, other community links... social workers had usually had much wider experience._ (N17)

By the early 1970s teacher professional development, support and advice were prioritised, to confine referrals to the most serious. Systemic program responses were seen, for example, in a collection of papers about education and cultural backgrounds, arising from several years of work in schools and teacher professional development by Alison Goding and her colleagues. _The Migrant Family and the School_ was ultimately published in 1975 by the Education Department following demand by: “_universities, teachers’ colleges, and Government and other agencies_” (Victoria. Education Dept & Emerson, 1972, p.55).

The loss of social workers to overseas travel and family responsibilities, combined with a shortage of qualified practitioners, meant there were often vacancies (Hall, various). In the _Report of the Minister of Education 1971-1972_, with 26 social workers, staffing in general at “_crisis level_” and services to schools “_in danger of breakdown_”, the Director of Special Services urgently requested 200 social work positions and improved career prospects for non-teachers (Victoria. Education Dept & Emerson, 1972, p.54-55), echoing Jorgensen’s 1948 warnings.
that a comprehensive service was unsustainable without a full complement of qualified experts.

The First School Social Workers

The Victorian school social work pioneers were young, highly educated women in the male-dominated spheres of society and work. Professional anecdotes integrated personal goals and social mores of 1950s and 1960s. They suggested the dichotomies of life in Melbourne and its suburbs, where poverty and underdeveloped infrastructure contrasted with the easier life of others. One narrator recalled dressing very properly for work, and socialising in the city’s most elegant hotels.

So we always wore suits, if you can believe it! I especially remember my grey suit with my tan accessories, and meeting people at the Australia Hotel for Pimms (cocktail). This was the height of sophistication! And I can remember “Susan” was a very tall girl and she was from (interstate) ... Well, we were all sort of young and going out with boyfriends … And “Susan” was very keen to have an active social life... Of course it was all public transport in those days and “Susan” bought herself a motorised scooter because those were very popular, too, little Vespas. But we’d be amused because she’d always come to work with a bag of shoes and other clothing because she might be going (to schools or home visits)... You know, Preston (suburb) was pure mud ... And that night she’d have to appear at The Windsor or some elegant thing. So she always had her little bag of clothing on the back of her scooter. (N17)

Elaine O’Neill was caught by senior staff while washing her hair in the “Ladies Retiring Room” (Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.2). When housing and facilities were poor, the ritual of hair-washing required buckets and basins. O’Neill, a competent professional woman and the first Education Department senior social worker, was spied by Cannon himself, from a passing tram, as she entered the elegant Georges department store in the heart of the city, during work hours (Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.2).
Recruitment and Work Conditions

Without formal processes mandated, and within a smaller professional arena, recruitment was often through personal contacts. One narrator was enlisted by a senior psychologist encountered at a party. Potential applicants were deterred by the “assistant to the psychologist” tag (Hall, 1958); minimum salaries irrespective of experience; poor facilities; lack of interviewing rooms; and having to use public transport for home and school visits (Hall, 1956b).

Staff might be “crammed in together” (N2) in spare classrooms, perhaps with the luxury of linoleum, and cast-off furniture. There was sometimes no electricity (Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.3). One narrator recalled with amusement that without heating, and with poor lighting in mid-winter Melbourne, staff were granted the bonus of being allowed at 3.30pm to “call it a day because (they) couldn’t see” (N17).

School social workers traipsed through the mud of the suburbs and might arrive for an interview “like a drowned rat” in spite of their smart dress (N17). Until a used Vauxhall was acquired, staff relied on public transport. One was caught riding first class on a third class train ticket: the inspector informed John Hall.

_We were famous for knowing every bus route and connection. But it was a major logistic exercise... it inevitably involved long waits, in the rain often._ (N17)

With few staff in 1950-1969, despite some expansion, social workers and psychologists knew one another well. Friday nights at the pub were happy occasions, sometimes celebratory. The Branch was: “a whole lifestyle, a culture”, with some staff living in the same neighbourhoods (N3).

Senior Social Worker

The importance of the social work role within the Branch was represented by the “creation of the position of Senior Assistant to Departmental Psychologists”. Hall’s proposal to Cannon implied the need for professional management and
supervision of a discrete, professional social work stream, within the context of organisational expansion. He recognised the requirement for induction, and the opportunity for career advancement for experienced staff.

*With the gradual decentralisation resulting from expansion of the activities of the Branch generally, there is now a need for a senior position with responsibility for organising and coordinating the work of these social workers, two of whom will be located at district centres. An additional responsibility is that of making newly appointed social workers familiar with their duties and the direction of their work.* (Hall, 1955)

The position was advertised on 15 December 1955, and after six years of service, Elaine O’Neill was appointed to the position (Jacobs, 1986, p.35).

**Employment Conditions and Career Structure**

For several decades experienced social work practitioners were deterred by poor pay and conditions, and the non-teacher status that precluded career advancement. The Teachers’ Tribunal was not bound to pass on improved social worker pay and conditions. Nevertheless, social workers at times outnumbered qualified psychologists and positions were filled through most of the 1950s, with a complement of 5 in 1958. School social workers brought a stable, professional identity to the organisation, even if there were individual staff changes (Hall, 1950b, 1951 1958).

It became harder to recruit during a shortage of social workers in the 1960s, as conditions elsewhere were much better (Hall, 1964d). Nevertheless, management protected the professional integrity of social work by rejecting many with high educational standards, but not: “*appropriately qualified professionally in their field*” (Hall, 1964b, 1965, 1966, 1967b, 1969c; Victoria. Education Dept & Emerson, 1972, p.54). The Minister of Education affirmed for the opposition Labor shadow minister the need to increase social work strength in the Psychology & Guidance Branch (Thompson, 1969).
In 1959, Rosemary Davison advocated before the Teachers’ Tribunal for equivalent pay and conditions with professional peers in other government departments (Sturmfels & Cailes 1978, p.4). In a letter to the Tribunal, Hall referred to the unacceptable outcome.

As a result one of them has resigned to go to another State Department, and the other four are restless. I hope that when and if the Tribunal is considering our position generally, their claim will not be overlooked. (Hall, 1959)

Joyce Padman (1961) made a personal submission for fair pay, pointing out that her previous experience had not been considered in setting her starting salary; and that for nine months she had been acting without any higher allowance, in Elaine O’Neill’s senior position while she travelled overseas (Padman, 1961).

Women’s past structural disadvantages and their quiet frustration can be lost to the collective memory. Marriage compromised government employment: Joan Barrett was re-classified downwards and lost salary. Equal Pay for Women (1969) was no straight forward win: Rosemary Davison had been paid at the higher level before its reversal on the grounds that she was ineligible because her “female” social work position meant there were no comparable men on higher pay (Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.3-4).

Part-time employment for married women was not available (Hall, 1967b), and many women returned to practice after long absences. Hall took advantage of a two week refresher course, organised in May 1964, by the Victorian branch of the AASW (Hall, 1964c).

Where he could, Hall appointed social workers as “temporary teachers” the Technical Division Teaching Roll, which recognised industrial experience and facilitated a higher starting salary.

He was always very supportive of social worker staff, and he always tried to get you the best possible conditions that were available at the time. (N3)
Briefing the Minister of Education (Hall, 1969b), Hall justified using the Technical Division, on the grounds that it had been difficult otherwise to fill full-time positions. When unqualified staff were required to apply for teacher training, Hall suggested that social workers comply. He thought they were unlikely to lose their jobs, although it was possible that teacher training be mandated. Some social workers considered the usefulness of teacher training as professional development (Social Worker Group, 1971c, 1972b), and narrators recalled that completed teacher training.

The Director of Special Services, in the Ministerial Report 1972-1973, urged government towards the “early consideration” of poor social worker career opportunities and conditions.

*Unless they are trained teachers, social workers are employed as temporary teachers, are paid a very low fixed salary irrespective of their experience, and must remain at this level unless they train as teachers.*

*(Victoria. Education Dept & Emerson, 1972, p.54-55)*

“Assistants”

Hall made regular futile requests that the title be properly named “social worker” rather than “assistant to the psychologist/s” (Hall, 1964b). Social workers were advocating on their own behalf, and had the support of the AASW, whose Executive Secretary, Helen Stuchberry, wrote in April 1964 to express concern about the “assistant” title (Stuchberry, 1964). In June, Hall responded with another comprehensive appeal, arguing that the Teachers’ Tribunal had won the legal right to employ social workers, and should name them correctly to remove the ambiguity that negatively affected recruitment and raised legitimate complaints from the University of Melbourne and the AASW (Hall, 1964a).

Four years later, Len Tierney, Head of the Department of Social Studies, University of Melbourne, communicated to the Minister of Education the concerns of social workers.
I notice that the Education Department is advertising for “Women Assistants to Departmental Psychologists”. The qualifications specified are the Diploma of Social Studies or approved equivalent. It is customary to refer to such persons as Social Workers. As social work is an established profession, social workers are sensitive as being described in the terms used in the Education Gazette. (Tierney, 1968)

Apparently asked by the Minister to respond, Hall noted briefly, perhaps with an abrupt tone borne out of frustration: “There is a considerable file on this matter which has been raised from time to time over many years” (Hall, 1968).

This study has found no evidence of school social workers self-identifying as “assistants”. Rather, they maintained professional integrity and resisted a title that demeaned their independent practice.

I would introduce myself as a social worker. That may have been part of my perversity, too, because I wouldn’t take kindly to being an “assistant to the psychologist”... (N2)

The Director of Special Services, in the Report of the Minister of Education 1971-1972 clearly advocated for the proper professional title.

It needs to be understood that social work is a profession in its own right, as is psychology. Social workers are not directed in the practice of their profession by psychologists, doctors, magistrates, clergy, or charitable foundations, and because of this, the professional roll title “Assistants to the Departmental Psychologists” is an inappropriate one.

(Victoria. Education Dept & Emerson, 1972, p.54)

Before his retirement in 1973, Hall again failed to convince Cannon, who had fought hard against a Health Department that still bore an old grudge and remained alert to any change (Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.2).
Social Worker Status

Organisational change was engendering growing ill-ease which Rosemary Davison formally expressed in April 1965, on behalf of the four social workers currently employed and in attendance at an executive meeting of Professional Officers who were the teacher-psychologist officers-in-charge of centres (Professional Officers: Psychology and Guidance Branch, 1965). It appears that guidance officers had been assuming for themselves the status of psychologist managers, and were treating social workers as subordinates on the basis of their “assistant” designation. Executive minutes affirmed that psychologists and social workers, representing emerging professions, enjoyed mutual respect and shared understanding.

*Social workers share with psychologists the disadvantage of being members of a comparatively new profession, and even among other professional people, their function is not always clearly envisaged.*

(Professional Officers: Psychology and Guidance Branch, 1965)

The meeting acknowledged that there were some overlapping and inexacty defined roles for social workers and guidance officers, but both were assistants to the psychologist managers. Minutes recorded that social workers uniquely brought to the *Psychology & Guidance Branch*: principles of self-determination; an understanding of human behaviour and tolerance; psychology knowledge; and “skills in interviewing and a knowledge of community resources” (Professional Officers: Psychology and Guidance Branch, 1965). Debunking any notion that social workers were subordinate to guidance officers, the Professional Officers determined to reinforce their equivalency as consultants and caseworkers.

*Social workers would work as professional consultants and caseworkers in co-operation with guidance officers, but the Officer-in-Charge (Psychologist) would retain overall responsibility for all casework handled by the Centre. In this respect the social worker would have the same professional responsibility to the Officer-in-Charge as the guidance officers attached to the centre have.*

(Professional Officers: Psychology and Guidance Branch, 1965)
Hall and later Bernie Fitzgerald supported social workers as respected, professionally autonomous team members. Hall reflected their consistent focus on family and community, and increasingly complex casework.

.. social workers are particularly involved with long-term cases, and with family problems where knowledge of community resources or referral to other agencies is necessary. Social workers handle highly complex and delicate problems in human relations and are frequently involved with families of children who are seriously disturbed, such as “school refusal” cases. (Hall, 1969a)

Psychologist and innovative educational leader John McLeod, alternately regarded as philosopher, inspirational educational visionary, maverick, socialist and intellectual (Faulkner, 2000), affectionately known by older narrators as “Mac”, demonstrated respect for social workers by proposing the potential expansion of their services in changing social and curriculum environments. McLeod suggested that social workers were well placed to take a core role in the promotion of parent-teacher communication; and consultation with teachers about their relationships with children. He proposed that guidance officers would be concerned only with learning problems, requiring a social worker to guidance officer ratio of 3 or 4:1 (Social Worker Group, 1972c, 1972d), an aspiration that would not come to pass.

Retrieved documents and narratives suggest that while relationships with psychologists remained mutually respectful for at least 20 years, the influx of teacher assistant-guidance officers somehow changed the organisational dynamic. Some narrators attributed the increasing dominance of the psychology-guidance stream to psychologist registration in 1966. One narrator, a lone social worker, had vivid and still painful memories of her exclusion from professional activities including casework and critical incidents in the early 1970s, until finally allocated her own schools. Others were managing respectful collaboration and friendships with colleagues who benefitted from or subtly enacted the marginalisation of social workers.
The Organisational Development of School Social Work in Victoria

Study Leave for Teachers

Social workers became of political interest. Lindsay Thompson, Minister of Education, in a reply to a parliamentary question, and briefed by Hall, acknowledged that social worker numbers in the branch needed to be increased, assuring government and opposition that an “active recruitment program” was in place (Hall, 1969b).

A year and a half earlier, in fact, Hall’s reply to a Ministerial question had foreshadowed the introduction of study leave for teachers to increase social worker numbers and overturn the gender restriction, an aberration no longer in place in other settings.

...the Education Department has had an establishment of trained social workers for over twenty years, but in recent years, like many other agencies, it has not been able to fill existing vacancies. For this reason it has recently made it possible for two teachers to qualify in this profession, and the intention is gradually to build up the staff of teachers with social work training within the Psychology & Guidance Branch.

At present male social workers are not employed, but this policy will not necessarily be adhered to. (Hall, 1967a)

Cannon had trialled study leave for two female teachers in the late 1940s, but only one completed the course and joined the Branch, before marrying then resigning to travel overseas (Sturmfels & Cailés, 1978, p.4). As early as 1956, Hall had suggested the granting of bursaries, although two decades passed before the reintroduction of social work study leave for teachers. Helen (Bailey) Murray and Alison Meddings were the first teachers to complete a Diploma in Social Studies under the study leave option, and immediately joined the Psychology & Guidance Branch in 1969 and 1970. The program, including several men, continued for another decade (Sturmfels & Cailés, 1978, p.4; Victoria. Education Dept, & Emerson, 1976, p.42), with later candidates completing a Bachelor of Social Work when it was introduced, and all working on the higher teacher salary.
The recruitment program changed the face of Education Department social work, hitherto the province of female non-teachers with poorer pay and conditions. Social workers already in the system had always felt the organisational domination of teachers as psychologists and senior management, and were understandably cautious about the influx of teacher-social workers. They had participated in the selection of candidates in order to boost numbers and protect the professional characteristics of their stream, but discovered that some of their carefully considered recommendations had been vetoed by school principals on school staffing grounds (Social Worker Group, 1973e).

**Victorian School Social Work in the Australian Context**

A document retrieved for the research, *Education Workshop Findings, 1971* recorded that school social workers were responding to school requests for help to understand and meet the needs of students otherwise at a disadvantage, through physical and emotional disability, poverty, Aboriginality and migrant status. Victoria had the strongest complement, with 19 departmental school social workers; South Australia had 6; Queensland and Tasmania had one position each. New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Queensland schools accessed social work and other services via Health Department child guidance clinics (Anonymous, 1971). By July 1972, the number of Victorian departmental social workers had increased to 28 (Social Worker Group, 1972b).

Well before the progressive social policies of the Australian government post-1972, which would expand the role of social work in schools and more widely in the community, the *Psychology & Guidance Branch* had recognised and integrated school social work as an essential discipline within student support, and had enacted an active recruitment program.
Organisational Remnants of the War Years

Embedded within the organisational structure and culture of the Psychology & Guidance Branch, and enduring into the 1970s, was an apparent reflection of the war years that had immediately preceded the establishment of the Psychology Branch, and so pre-occupied Australian life. The use of “military labels” such as “Headquarters”, “Officer-in-Charge” and “Section Leader” (N2) helped to construct that ethos. Cannon maintained a hierarchy of authority by enforcing respect for line-management; especially his own firm authority over the development of the Psychology Branch (Cannon, 1948a, 1948b).

For female social workers, for at least twenty years, it represented complex power, social mores, and gender and age dynamics in organisational and collegiate relationships within the social setting of the times. Narrators voiced respect and gratitude for the ex-servicemen who had been teachers before joining the armed services, and acceptance of their leadership as male teachers retrained as psychologists.

See, that was the whole climate. The senior men when I joined were all ex-service-men. They’d been in the war. They were fully grown up men ... I think that was a factor, a big factor, but we were all influenced by that. But they were ten years older than me. (N17)

Experienced teachers, men with revered reputations for their sacrifices on behalf of the nation, having achieved high levels of university education but several years older than the usual new graduates, entered the hierarchical Psychology Branch as its leaders. They were highly respected by social workers for their knowledge of education and their innovative ideas. There was, of course, an intrinsic societal gender dynamic at play. Despite there being social workers who were “very powerful women” (N17) running welfare organisations or heading departments, there were few women otherwise in management positions in the 1950s and 1960s. Feminist critique would come later:

Don’t forget we were women and they were men and that was the way it often was. So women sort of fitted in to the hand-maiden
role. You know, we weren’t very critical of that sort of thing. It was before feminism, remember. And if you had a similar group today, maybe they wouldn’t have taken those jobs … (N17)

The respect was still evident in the voice of another narrator as she spoke of the opportunities given to returned service men, but the acceptance was waning at the end of the 1960s:

... a lot of the men who were running it were returned servicemen and had just come back, done their study after the war. It was so male dominated. It was extraordinary. (N2)

Social Change in Australia 1972

Narrators consistently described changing Victorian and Australian governments as having the greatest impact on the context of practice (Thielking, 2006, p.6), requiring them to work within diverse policy and organisational environments dependent on changing political landscapes and social and education policy not always consistent with social work values and goals. Most narrators recognised Labor national and state governments, since 1972, as more likely than Liberal governments to support a social justice ethos and organisational structures that respected both multi-disciplinary collaboration and professional autonomy.

In 1949, coinciding with the employment of the first school social workers, a conservative Liberal government with Robert Menzies as Prime Minister, had been elected to oversee post-war reconstruction. Change would be long in coming for left-leaning practitioners, even beyond Menzies’ retirement in 1966 (National Archives of Australia, 2013):

Well, of course, I vote Labor and I thought I’d never be able to vote on the winning ticket. Menzies was still going strong. Everyone adored him. (N17)
The prelude to the eventual election of a socially progressive Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, and his Labor Party in December 1972, included the Vietnam Moratorium marches, which were joined by some school social workers and their colleagues. Under Whitlam’s leadership, troop withdrawal in January 1973, made way for revitalised social and educational policy, community development and resourcing, in some ways akin to 1940-1950s post-war reconstruction.

... post Whitlam, issues related to social change, to women... disadvantaged, disabilities, a real social justice environment in society. And I think that really fed into school social work with quite a lot of us who were training in social work at that stage. A sense of trying to make a difference, and very definitely social justice oriented. (N15)

The Karmel Report & the Disadvantaged Schools Program

_During the 1970s the sun came out from behind the clouds so far as general educational provision was concerned... (N3)_

A major investigation described in *Schools in Australia: Report of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission* (Australia. Australian Schools Commission & Karmel, 1973), known as the Karmel Report, recommended the removal of educational inequities related to socio-economic background and family culture (Rimmer et al., 1984, p.4); and needs-based funding to ensure “minimal accepted standards” (Australia. Dept of Parliamentary Services: Social Policy Section & Harrington, 2011, p.3).

In 1974, the Australian Schools Commission established several targeted programs. The Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP), operated in Victoria as the Supplementary Grants Program, was philosophically based on equality of educational opportunity and participation of parents, teachers and students (Picton & Keegel, 1978, p.3; Rimmer et al., 1984, p.12; Sturmfels, 1995, p.125). Other simultaneously funded programs targeted teacher professional

School social workers were challenged by critiques of schools as agents of social control and the perpetuation of the status quo (Connell, 1982, p.27). Critics accused social work of being: “identified with the power structure and thus aligned against those it is supposed to serve” (Roberts, 1971). Victorian practitioner, Varley (1980), challenged the fundamental failure to recognise inequitable social and economic structures.

*On the one hand schooling is the door by which to young people gained access to skills, credentials and the employment careers that depend on them. However, at the same time, schools are the major institution involved in sorting and ranking students, and success in school and in competition for employment is largely determined by factors such as social class, ethnic background and geographic location.*

(Rimmer et al, 1984, p.1)

**School-employed School Social Workers**

The Karmel Report specifically recommended the appointment of school-based social workers to identify and help overcome barriers to learning. They were integral to the culture of the school, and engaged in community development rather than casework, in partnership with community agencies (Australia. Australian Schools Commission & Karmel, 1973, p.95-96; Rimmer et al., 1984, p.12-14, 30-31). One narrator appointed to a school described her role as creatively: “looking at disadvantage and responding to it” (N20). While school-employed social workers had consistent presence to develop inter-professional understanding and collaboration, visiting Education Department social workers were more able to remain impartial in the roles of mediator or advocate; and less likely to be seen as colluding with the school (Craft, 1980, p.9).

In 1970, departmental school social worker Marilyn McInnes had an unusual temporary appointment to one site, Hurstbridge High School (Social Worker Group, 1970b), and prior to the outcomes of the Karmel Report, some schools
had appointed their own social workers. Pat Trueman was funded by the Myer Foundation to work in three Richmond schools; Sister Joan was a social worker in Catholic schools; and Ron Smith was employed at Collingwood High School (Social Worker Group, 1973c, 1974a). Later, Margaret Keegel had a two year appointment at Ferntree Gully Technical School, funded by the Australian Schools Commission; Bruce Morris was part of a welfare and career guidance team in a technical school (Social Worker Group, 1977c). A “handful” of social workers was employed with Australian Schools Commission grants; and some teachers were practising as qualified social workers in the role of Pupil Welfare Coordinator (Keegel, circa 1980).

The national Labor government overturn, in 1975, by Malcolm Fraser’s Liberal government did not, in fact, bring an immediate end to the social justice agenda in schooling. With the continuation of the Disadvantaged Schools Program into the 1980s, some still referred to “Whitlam money” (N19) in recognition of his leadership in radically addressing social and educational disadvantage.
Major Restructure in the Victorian Service Delivery Environment 1974

Even though, in the State of Victoria, the long-standing Liberal government would not loosen its grip on power until 1982, the service environment of Victorian school social work and student support services generally was revitalised. In a decade of progressive Australian schooling policy, Victorian Education Department school social workers employed to work across the schools system were encouraged to initiate and support inclusive social policy and programs that might overcome social and economic disadvantage.

Counselling, Guidance & Clinical Services (CGCS) 1974

The Karmel report had coincided with plans for the earliest major restructure affecting Education Department school social workers. Counselling, Guidance & Clinical Services, known as CGCS, was established in 1973-1974, headed by an Assistant Director of Special Services.

Bernie Fitzgerald had replaced John Hall 1973, but with the new management hierarchy, Fitzgerald indicated that he would no longer have influence to advocate for improvement in social workers' employment structure (Social Worker Group, 1974a). Emerson continued as Director of Special Services, replaced on retirement in 1976 by Mervyn Kydd (Victoria. Education Department & Kydd, 1977, p10; Victoria. Education Dept & Emerson, 1974, p.37; Victoria. Education Dept, Hunt, & Lacy, 1980, p.39).

With teacher-psychologists as CGCS officers-in-charge, school social workers became part of multi-disciplinary professional teams including guidance officers, speech therapists, welfare officers, support teachers and interpreters, within regionally based and centrally managed centres (Mahony, 1995, p.13; Thielking, 2006, p10). Psychologists without teaching experience were employed for the first time (Thielking, 2006, p.10; Victoria. Education Dept, Emerson, 1976, p.42). Metropolitan centres serviced country areas not covered by a regional centre; and some narrators recalled providing limited support on request to Catholic schools.
Ironically, considering social workers’ long-standing angst, several “assistant professional appointees” were employed, including welfare officers to: “assist social workers in the provision of welfare services to schools” (Victoria. Education Department & Kydd, 1977, p.12). The Australian Assistance Plan established in 1973 by the Federal Government resourced the employment of welfare officers. Social worker group members produced theoretical and practical discussion papers; reflected on their own roles and effectiveness; deliberated role differentiation; planned welfare officer training for the school setting and liaised with potential post-secondary training institutions (Australian Association of Social Workers, 1973; Clemens, 1973; Goding, 1973b; Manning; Melbourne State College: Education Faculty, 1975; Psychology & Guidance Branch. Migrant Study and Workshop Group, 1973; Roberts, 1973; Social Worker Group, 1973f; Trueman & Wareham, 1973; Victoria. Education Dept, 1975).

CGCS support was increasingly cast as both consultation and casework, through: counselling; therapy; programs to support children and parents; advice and teacher in-service on the management of individual students and classrooms; and appropriate curriculum and programs (Victoria. Education Dept & Emerson, 1974, p.42; Victoria. Education Dept et al., 1980, p.37). The impetus towards promoting a consultancy approach was, in part, an attempt to obviate the need for referrals to the understaffed CGCS (Victoria. Education Dept & Emerson, 1974, p.37; Ward, 1986, p.13).

School social workers embraced consultancy for which they were already equipped, and were not included in the skills training necessary for guidance officers (Ward, 1986, p.298-299). Consultation had been essential within collaborative psychologist-social worker casework for two decades, but social workers now had greater advisory roles in schools, including in regard to the learning of students with disabilities (Victoria. Education Dept, Emerson, 1976, p.36). However, narrators from this and every organisational phase emphasised that casework was always prioritised by schools.

School social worker numbers rose to 49 in 1975; 63 in 1976; and 90-100 in the mid-1980s (Sturmfels, 1995, p.125; Victoria. Education Department & Kydd, 1977, p.12), in part due to improved conditions and the recruitment of teacher-

**Program Development**

CGCS developed within an educational environment of innovative curriculum, teaching and learning development, supported by national and state funding, teacher resource centres and information exchanges. The casework model became part of a broader service vision, one that social workers were trained and ready to embrace. Some were commissioned to work in teams to research and develop teacher in-service and curriculum in schools to address literacy, numeracy and social skills. Exciting new programs such as "Artists-in-Schools" were implemented. By 1978, 32 community Education Officers, some of them social workers, were building strong links between schools and their communities (Victoria. Education Dept, 1978, p.21, 24, 25; Victoria. Education Dept & Emerson, 1976, p.34, 50).

CGCS adopted the focus on positive school-community relationships promoted by the Innovations Program of the national Schools Commission and Victoria’s Supplementary Grants Program (Jacobs, 1986, p.170; Victoria. Education Dept, 1978, p.21). CGCS teams: “act(ed) as a community agency to facilitate the essential re-amalgamation of schools with their communities” (Victoria. Education Dept & Emerson, 1976, p.42).

Increasing engagement with community agencies, working parties and consultative committees reshaped CGCS programs (Faulkner, 1992, p.167; Jacobs, 1986, p.170). Narrators and their social work colleagues initiated or participated in community development projects; and became increasingly involved in inter-agency collaboration as Education Department representatives in case management, needs analysis, community consultation and project development.

Throughout the retrieved minutes of 1970s social worker meetings is reflected the broader model of service, with professional learning opportunities in: community development, emerging social issues, and the latest trends in social
work education and the welfare scene; theoretical and practice developments in group, family and individual intervention such as gestalt and play therapy, psychodrama and parent education (Social Worker Group, 1977d).

School social worker Alison Goding took the lead in helping educators and CGCS staff to understand the social and learning issues and improve schooling for migrant and refugee students, and develop relationships with their families. She eventually coordinated the CGCS Multicultural Resources Section (Victoria. Education Department & Kydd, 1977, p.15; Victoria. Education Dept, 1978, p.45; Victoria. Education Dept & Emerson, 1974, p.37). School social workers’ analysis and response to the needs of migrant students is documented in the minutes of meetings throughout the 1970s (Social Worker Group, 1970b).

Inclusive practices to support participation and equity in education for indigenous students and families, known as Koorie in Victoria, have reflected changing Australian policies and fluctuating community attitudes. A change of emphasis was brought about by mid-1970s social and educational policy acknowledging Aboriginal rights to equality of educational opportunity and outcomes. Koorie students in Victorian schools were given additional teaching support, and indigenous history and culture were included in curricula (Victoria. Education Dept & Emerson, 1976, p.14-15; Victoria. Education Dept et al., 1980, p.35-36). Non-indigenous teachers and school social workers were perhaps not immediately attuned: with hindsight, one narrator told of interventions compromised by cultural insensitivity and failure to recognise culture, life experience and kinship bonds.

School Social Worker Contribution to the Service Delivery Context

The minutes of social worker meetings and associated documents through the decade of the 1970s contain significant information about school social worker organisational discussion and activity. The social worker group executive contributed ideas and concerns directly to management and to Officer-in-Charge meetings. Others represented the group on sub-committees: Staffing; Training; Program; and Salaries and Structure, which was chaired by social worker, Marilyn
McInnes (Social Worker Group, 1974e). They submitted their suggestions in relation to the prerequisite experience and qualifications for Officers-in-Charge (Social Worker Group, 1973 1977b).

The “Senior Assistant to the Psychologist” position established in 1955 had been discontinued at some point. Recognising the need for a senior practitioner to liaise with management; coordinate professional issues; and act as a central point of contact for outside organisations (Social Worker Group, 1974a, 1974e), the Assistant Director of Special Services appointed chairperson of the social worker executive, Pam Holden, to act in the position ahead of the 1976 notice of vacancy. Holden was based at Head Office in Queensberry St, where she liaised directly with senior staff and advocated for social work interests. Narrators spoke respectfully of Holden’s conduct of the role, and her support when they sought positions in education.

The minutes of meetings throughout the 1970s record the regular reports of Training Committee members Rosemary Cailes, Alison Goding, and Pam Holden, as they consulted about social worker induction and professional development. Cailes additionally had a significant role in the team responsible for the two year guidance officer training. Three of the narrators recalled their own contributions to guidance training, including ethics and counselling skills. The latter was interpreted as of “immense benefit” to guidance staff (N3), who:

... found they were getting a great deal of satisfaction out of this ability to do counselling, although they’d never consciously ... really been aware of the fact that they couldn’t do it, not until they learned how to! (N3)

Committed to strengthening their stream, they participated in selection panels for teacher applicants for social work study leave (Social Worker Group, 1973e, 1974c). Two teacher-social worker narrators recruited under this program were recorded in minutes as active members of the school social worker group.

Well, I was a trained teacher, an experienced teacher for probably about 13 years ... you had to be an experienced teacher, and get into
the social work faculty, both... the requirement was that you practiced as a school social worker... that was the introduction to school social work, and I continued to practice as a school social worker... A great social justice initiative. And I think what a generous scholarship we got, to do two years fulltime social work at Melbourne Uni... on full pay, it was exceptionally generous... And we were very fortunate to have that opportunity. (N15)

School Social Worker Transfer to Psychology-Guidance Stream

Some social workers had the academic prerequisites to pursue psychologist registration, although as non-teachers, they were ineligible to be employed in that capacity (Hall, 1969d). Hall himself asked one narrator to consider training in guidance rather than apply for a social work position. When active recruitment of the new teacher-social workers began, a motion was forwarded to management and the Staffing Committee:

> teachers undertaking Social Worker training at the Department’s expense, at the outset, should be informed that they will be expected to work as a Social Worker and not as (guidance officers) following completion of the course. (Social Worker Group, 1974c)

Social workers were apparently justified in their concern, as narrators recalled 10-15 teacher-social workers moving to psychology-guidance in the 1970s. Their colleagues may not have appreciated the defection, but could still understand the acceptance of “any decent offers” (N3) for better pay and career options.

One narrator interpreted the recruitment of teacher-social workers as an organisational response to psychologist registration from 1966, when there were only three eligible (Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978), and many guidance officers needed to upgrade their qualifications to meet standards now mandated by law for the conduct of psychological testing (Victoria. Education Dept, 1968, p280-282). Those who joined the guidance stream brought their social work knowledge and skills to enrich it. One narrator, a teacher-social worker recruited as a
psychologist, believed that social work had pervaded the practice of psychology at least until the early 1990s. School social workers recognised the outstanding work of psychologists, but contributed unique, “conceptual models, practice experience and wisdom”, and consciously strategised to “inform psychology” to “broaden its models of practice from a fairly clinical model” (N15).

Work and Employment Conditions

Workplace conditions had improved, but there was continued expectation that social workers and their colleagues would use public transport or private vehicles when the few departmental cars were unavailable. One of the narrators would think twice now not only about the paltry petrol allowance, but also the considerable risks that were taken:

... considering the wear and tear on our cars. Because we really thrashed our cars in that job! (N10)

... with the blessing of our superiors we were going out to do home visits at night, alone, and there were things going on out there, shootings and all sorts of things happening; stabbings. (N10)

Throughout the 1970s, social workers on the Professional Roll, without teaching qualifications, tried to win industrial equity with social work colleagues on the Technical Division Teaching Roll, and with teacher-social workers who had kept their original teacher conditions:

I still got school holidays... It was like having two parallel employment tracks which was grossly unfair, because they always got paid less than I did as a teacher. (N2)

Conditions were dramatically impacted by Teachers’ Tribunal determinations in 1978 and 1980 that appointed all social workers, psychologists and others who were on the teaching rolls, to the Professional Roll, bringing them all into the Public Service. The dual teacher-social worker qualification would be phased out and no longer recognised (Social Work Executive, 1978; Sturmfels & Cailes,
Rejecting public service conditions with lower career and salary potential, many psychologists left the Department of Education (Thielking, 2006, p.11). Some social workers, perhaps not ready to give up the teacher identity, returned to schools as teachers or Pupil Welfare Coordinators (writer’s recollection; Keegel, circa 1980), a 1976 initiative that released a teacher from classroom duties (Thielking, 2006, p.11, 13).

Despite their active participation in the evolution of the organisation, school social workers felt increasingly marginalised, with CGCS Centres managed by teacher-psychologists, shaping the informal hierarchy in the workplace. Narrators thought that greater numbers of teacher-guidance officers gave them more opportunities in schools; and organisational dominance to influence the prevailing atmosphere. Narrators recalled only one of their number who had acted in a senior position meant for a guidance officer, despite wider school social worker aspiration and readiness to take on management responsibility. With “quite a number of women heads of centres” (N19), it was lack of teacher and guidance officer status, not gender, that precluded competent social workers from leadership. In 1979 a career restructure opened up promotion positions, including senior social workers in larger centres (Faulkner, 1992, p.160).

The relegation of social workers to lower status was perceived as taking greater hold in the CGCS years. Narrators suggested that professional relationships depended on individual attitudes; school social worker numbers; centre ethos; and the attitudes of officers-in-charge. One narrator spoke of a professionally satisfying atmosphere of equal partnership, mutual respect and friendship. Others less satisfied with the organisational culture, nevertheless consistently expressed their respect for individual psychology-guidance stream colleagues.

.. I couldn’t have wanted for more skilled and sensitive people... They chose me and I chose them, and that probably tells the story. You know, you’re on the same wavelength. (N18)

For the first time the core function of CGCS was designated to psychologists, without reference to the contribution of others. One narrator remembered
School Social Work in the State of Victoria, Australia

vividly social workers’ shared response to what they had seen as their deliberate exclusion. School social worker, Janet Fitzwater, wrote a detailed briefing paper for discussion and possible presentation to management (Fitzwater, 1980).

... several official publications and memos relating to work of the CGCS Branch have failed to make adequate mention of the existence of the work of welfare staff within the branch. The impression gained from reading these documents is that either they do not relate to the work of the welfare staff, or that welfare staff are non-existent in the areas of work referred to. However, this is most definitely not the case... I feel that it is important that we are mentioned by name and not just by implication in all policy statements, directives or descriptions of CGCS Branch services, so that our professional contribution to the Branch is specifically acknowledged. Otherwise we cannot hope to achieve improvements in our conditions of employment and areas of responsibility within the Branch, which in turn contribute substantially to high levels of professional practice and job satisfaction.

Fitzwater continued to discuss in specific detail “various offending documents”, including Criteria and Procedures for Placement in Certain Special Facilities, which designated to guidance staff the sole responsibility for student placement in special facilities, in spite of the fact that social workers had consistently been involved in placements and working with families.

Regular social worker meetings, the site of such discussions, lost support under a new regime a few months later, in April 1981, by way of a memo from Alan Farmer, Assistant Director of Special Services responsible for CGCS to officers-in-charge, canceling future state-wide social worker meetings (Farmer, 1981).


Policy Developments

Narrators described, throughout a decade of Labor, significant policy developments consistent with social work values: inclusion, access and success; connecting student wellbeing, equity, learning and the achievement of potential. Corporal punishment in state schools was abolished in 1982 (Faulkner, 1992, p.71). The Commonwealth Government resourced the Participation and Equity Program (PEP) in 1983, and this was reinforced by *Curriculum Development and Planning in Victoria* (Victoria. Education Dept., 1984) based on the principles of Labor Government educational philosophy:

> Participative, collaborative decision-making involving the school community on the basis of shared responsibility and the precept of equal educational opportunity for all.

(Victoria. Education Dept, 1985a, p.1)

A broad general education, with access and success for all students, was required for a changing social, economic and technological world (Ward, 1986, p.183-185). The *Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Schooling* (Victoria. Ministry of Education Victoria & Blackburn, 1985), recommended inclusive teaching and other programs to meet the diverse needs of students, so that all would have access to the successful completion of Year 12. Schools were required to provide the “caring and supportive environment” required for learning (Ward, 1986, p.185; Jacobs, 1985, p.170).
Several narrators mentioned the *Integration in Victorian Education Report* (Victoria. Ministry of Education, 1984) as highly significant for day-to-day school social work practice. It challenged teachers and support staff to forego protective attitudes and assumed “expert” practices (Sturmfels, 1995, p.134). The marginalisation of difference and lack of options had been represented in the education sector by special schools and residential-educational facilities. Under new policy that brought huge conceptual change, all children were deemed able to learn; and more credence was given to parents’ knowledge and preferences. Narrators recalled their roles with children and families, as they accessed mainstream schools with policy and program support.

Except for the ramifications of under-resourcing and under-prepared teachers, and the lack of support for other students with social-emotional needs, school social workers could appreciate the benefits of integration:

... *it could actually lead to fantastic outcomes for all children, not just the children with disabilities but other children in the class as well in terms of understanding and accepting a greater degree of diversity, and becoming a bit more understanding and tolerant of other kids who were different.* (N4)

The establishment of a Social Justice Section within the schools Programs Branch clearly prioritised Labor government educational policy targeting equal educational participation and opportunities for the diversity of students. Schools were exhorted to promote understanding and respect for Aboriginal culture, and to include local Aboriginal communities in decision-making more effectively to cater for the educational, cultural and social needs of their students. Migrant education and multiculturally inclusive curriculum prioritised the development of knowledge and competencies for a culturally diverse society. Programs were put in place to meet the needs of children educationally and socially disadvantaged by poverty and rural isolation. With family patterns and the work environment rapidly changing, the schools system was required to respond innovatively to improve social equity and life outcomes for women and girls (Victoria. Ministry of Education, 1988, p.190). According to narrator accounts, school social workers were instrumental in supporting the education of students.
whose diverse needs were not included by schools; and in re-shaping teacher expectations that limited their opportunities.

One of the final education policies of the Labor government, the *Social Justice Framework* (Victoria. Ministry of Education, 1990) based on the principles of inclusion, was among the earliest Australian theory-for-practice documents guiding teaching and school social work practice inclusive of diversity. For a brief period, Victorian schooling was driven by social justice policy towards inclusive teaching and learning, wellbeing practices, and successful educational outcomes for all students, irrespective of potential barriers to learning, difference or disadvantage.

**School Support Centres**

The *Annual Report of the Ministry of Education* (Victoria. Ministry of Education, 1988) revealed the growing complexity of the Victorian schools system, as resources for curriculum innovation, teaching and learning, school and student support were diversified in response to proliferating objectives for learning outcomes, inclusion, school-community connectedness and wellbeing. *Counselling, Guidance & Clinical Services* staff had been re-assigned in 1986 to renamed *Student Services Centres* or new *Regional Integration Services* (Thiekling, 2006, p.11; Faulkner, 1992, p.160), where they awaited further change. In 1987, midst the surge of progressive educational policies, imminent and significant organisational change generally created anxiety. School social workers participated in the planning and consultations within the renamed Ministry of Education, or played more significant roles in developing the new *School Support Centre* model (Anonymous, 1987).

Four decades had passed since the establishment of the *Psychology Branch*. In 1988, forty-one *School Support Centres*, strategically located across the state, provided integrated, interdisciplinary consultancy in school organisation, curriculum development, policy implementation and student support:
... social work and guidance services, speech therapy services, visiting teacher services, special education services, and remedial physical education services.


Management and services were decentralised to the authority of regional general managers. For the first time, some responsibilities were devolved to schools, and newly established school principal networks participated in corporate management structure and policy development (Victoria. Ministry of Education, 1988, p.17, 21, 29-30, 32, 41, 71, 186).

Narrators described strong interdisciplinary teams with: “an awful (lot of) time in team activities and team planning” (N3). For the first time, there was equivalent status for senior social work, speech pathology and psychology stream leader positions. Centres were staffed and well-resourced to deliver curriculum, teaching and learning consultancy; teacher professional development; policy implementation support; and direct services to students.

There were two state-wide school social work conferences; greater opportunities for networking across centres; and the delivery of innovative programs and workshops in the period of professionally “exciting and stimulating” (Mahony, 1995, p.15) School Support Centres. Narrators recalled this period with great satisfaction. Another remembered being disappointed when appointed immediately following the closure of the highly respected centres.

One narrator found organisational matters frustrated social work service.

School Support Centres, at least the ones I worked in, had become their own icons, their own ivory towers... There just seemed to be lots of committees and lots of meetings to participate in and I just thought they were not anywhere near direct service. They tended to support the School Support Centre and its structure and its management. (N13)
**Programs and Service Management**

*School Support Centres* were publicly accessible; and located in excellent facilities that included lecture theatres, meeting and interview rooms.

... it was neutral territory to a school and so we were seen very clearly as not school staff: working for the education department, but separate. So we could organise meetings in there with parents and talk fairly openly about school-related issues. (N5)

Narrators described the allocation of resources specifically to support the amalgamation of hitherto disparate professional groups. Multidisciplinary teams worked together on a whole school approach to the development of curriculum, welfare and discipline policy and practice, driven by progressive equal opportunity and social justice policies. A “pro-active approach to school planning” empowered and educated school communities (AASW (Vic) & Hayes, 1991, p.1; Mahony, 1995, p.14).

It was an exciting and stimulating environment for social workers as they offered counselling and casework, group work programs, consultation and advice to teachers and principals, training and in-service, crisis intervention and policy and program development (Mahony, 1995, p.15). With the threat of corporal punishment removed, many teachers required support with alternate teaching approaches (Victoria. Dept of Education, Fordham, & Curry, 1985, p.79).

For me, probably, the highlight was the School Support period... we started to move a little bit more away from just clinical work and got into more program(s)... So there might be a project team of perhaps some curriculum consultants, psychs, social work and working with a school staff... (N5)

Narrators reported the advantages of skill sharing; personal and professional support; and better service delivery in the collaborative teams. On the other hand, decision-making and planning could be time consuming, and problematic when the social work *Code of Ethics* was not shared by others (Hernon,
Kromodimoeljo, & Cavedon, 1990). Multi-skilling affected both school social workers and psychologists as they expanded their activities in an innovative environment, with a blurring of professional boundaries, rather than concentrating on a smaller, highly skilled repertoire (Thielking, 2006, p.12; Mahony, 1995, p.15).

With innovative and effective teaching and learning for equitable outcomes held as the standard; and state-wide and individual school policies consistent with school social work values and purpose, it was an “exciting” period (N9). Greater focus on community development, allowed school social workers to take “a very proactive, preventative, social justice kind of approach” (N9).

... there was a lot of optimism, there was a lot of belief that education could make a difference. Education was forever; you know, the resources far more readily available. A lot of the schools that were built were beautiful settings... Children were valued. (N9)

There was a genuine enthusiasm to help children, and to help the parents and help the teachers and change schools for the better. It wasn’t false idealism, it was genuine vision of a better world, and I was just very lucky to be part of that. (N15)

Employment Conditions

With all senior positions apart from stream leaders held by principal or senior class teachers, within a broad range of school support services, school social workers enjoyed the more equitable setting, where they could no longer be marginalised as “assistants” within a “hierarchical psychology structure” (N3).

... it was the first time I took a deep breath and said: Well, thank God, we’ve got there at last! Not in pay terms: I don’t mean that social workers were well-paid... it was the first time that the section leader: social work, was on the same status level as section leader: guidance... (N3)
Social work stream leader and regional senior social worker positions meant that social workers could legitimately speak as a professional group. However, compared to other organisations:

*Limited career opportunities for experienced social workers tend(ed) to promote job dissatisfaction and stress in staff.*

(Hernon et al., 1990)

Despite opportunities for innovative programs and whole school development in a progressive policy environment, departmental school social workers continued to be uncomfortable that their job descriptions had been written by earlier psychologist managers, and that at some point they had come to be seen as accountable to psychologist colleagues (Mahony, 1995, p.14). Social workers seemed caught in an enduring identity crisis, determined by the organisational context of practice and “professional imperialism” (Craft, 1980, p.8). Premier Joan Kirner, though seen as committed to economic and educational equity, having served two years as Minister of Education was reputed to be: “not very favourably disposed towards professional do-gooders” (N18). Nevertheless, social workers remained committed, “enthusiastic” and “optimistic” about their practice, and sought to “consolidate and strengthen” their contribution to education in Victoria (Mahony, 1995, p.57).

**Changing Government and Economic Imperatives**

School social workers noticed some increasing principal disquiet about regional School Support Centre oversight of specific program funding and school policies such as expulsion. Alternate Liberal and Labor government value stances in relation to principal and school autonomy have since repeatedly impacted on the organisational context of school social work and other support services, with governance alternating to various degrees between the education bureaucracy and principals.

Under the Labor government 1982-1992, the link between education and student welfare policy had become entrenched in Victorian state education, requiring inclusive practices, and emphasis on social issues such as homelessness. A time
of strength in school social work began to turn sour with economic imperatives. During what would be the end of its term of office, the Labor government initiated school closures; down-sized the School Support Centres; and abolished the broadly multidisciplinary concept on which they had been founded:

And that, in my view, was a sad day... I understand the reason, and I talked to the then Premier about it... There were huge financial pressures that the government had on them to prune budgets... (N15)

In the final stages of School Support Centres, there was a sense of pending loss and powerlessness, but no consultation. School social workers and their colleagues might not have predicted the devastating changes that would be wrought by the election of a Liberal government. Twenty years later, there was potency in a narrator’s personal reflection on events that have become ingrained into professional identity.

... there was a flurry of activity to make School Support Centres a kind of legitimate system of operating and providing relevant school support services, and I still believe that today... I think that SSCs at least enabled a kind of consensual view about assessing the needs of a school in a particular cluster and then working out how you were going to equitably provide some services to those schools...a responsive service; it was credible. I think the schools liked us. I don’t know why they were closed down to be quite honest. I can’t imagine what rationale there would have been for that. Other than perhaps the need for principals to get more control over their own services or how they could actually ensure their kids in their school were getting perhaps from their perspectives better services by having staff located at their schools... There was a lot of dismantling that took place, and it wasn’t so much that it happened, but it was the lack of consultation. (N4)
Fragmentation of Student Support Services 1993-1999

Under Jeff Kennett’s Premiership, the Liberal government newly elected in October 1992 immediately withdrew the Social Justice Framework, ousting the value base that had held general precedence in education for two decades.

_We used to have Social Justice Committees - that was taken seriously. But when the Kennett thing happened, whatever your political views, they just went by the way-side._  (N9)

Policies and language consistent with social work values, for example, “access”, “participation”, “equity”, and “rights” could:

.. very quickly be replaced with market-place objectives and terms which emphasise efficiency, output, economies of scale and competitiveness.  (Sturmfels, 1995, p.127)

The 1993 Schools of the Future paper announced a major reform to the Victorian schools system, based on the concept of self-governing schools, with responsibility and accountability for educational outcomes devolved from the centralised control of the Department of Education (Victoria. Auditor General, 1997, p.13; Victoria. Dept of Education et al., 2007, p.6). Local decision-making potentially creates school environments for innovative community and school programs (Townsend, 1995), but more disturbing themes dominated school social worker narratives around the time of change and upheaval.

By the end of 1996, the government had addressed perceived financial and structural problems with severe cuts. School closures were vigorously pursued, counter to the wishes of communities, and “incredibly unsettling in rural areas” (N16). The “disposal” of 300 school sites left 1,700 to continue; teachers numbers were reduced from 40,000 to 34,000 (Victoria. Auditor General, 1997, p.13). An ethos of competition and insecurity blanketed those schools at risk of closure or staff reduction (Theobald & Swain, 2010).
I just called it the massacre... I would walk into staffrooms and everybody would be devastated. You know, they’d be losing their jobs... It was quite bizarre because I was talking to people who’d been friends for long periods of time... who were against one another, because one of those people was going to lose their job. (N7)

Closure of School Support Centres

Upon election the government set in motion “the demise of School Support Centres” (N13) by way of consultants Byrne Fleming. Ancillary professional groups, under scrutiny, were forced to justify themselves.

... social work’s argument was that we were employed to work with children and families, particularly making the links with families, for cases that did not fit psychological boundaries at the time. (N13)

When School Support Centres were dismantled at the end of 1993, some found the process ruthless.

It was scuttled. The rats were running away from the ship. They brought in... a schoolteacher... he got a huge bonus for closing the School Support Centre down. I can remember the last day, they were throwing things on the truck so he could meet his criteria by midday. (N16)

Student Support Services

Consistent with principles of “new public management” (Healy & Meagher, 2004, p.247), the renamed Student Support Services teams were down-sized and “fragmented” (N9, N25), effectively losing their communal voice and organisational influence. They were dispersed in 1994, from co-located professional offices, to base schools, individually or with one or two colleagues, servicing several allocated schools within a District. Management of the service was devolved to principals with a different professional orientation, and among
whom only some were familiar with the complexity of school social work or the requirements for multi-disciplinary Student Support Services practice. New appointees were employed on short-term contracts.

My first contract was for two weeks. And I thought to myself: Gee, I wonder what mistakes I can make in two weeks?.. And then my next contract was for 6 weeks. And my contract after that was for another 6 weeks. And then it went 12 weeks. (N7)

Responsibility “exercised through accountability to the school principal” (Patford, 2002, p.212) was manifest in the new performance management system. Often without professional mediation, principals judged the appropriateness and effectiveness of specialised interventions, to grade performance and level of salary increase (Community and Public Sector Union, 2000). Social workers were both frustrated and aware of the irony:

(I was) accountable to a principal. My practice could have been shocking! (N27)

Some principals advocated strongly to increase school social worker numbers. Elsewhere, those with on-going positions felt “a certain amount of uncertainty about the long-term picture” (N9), especially in areas where out-sourcing seemed to be catching on. It could be harder to exercise professional ethics and autonomy within the direct management of a school principal.

I was in a bit of conflict with the principal about what he expected me to do, and what I thought I was there to do. So there would have been uncomfortableness for me in terms of saying: Well actually I’m not going to be doing what he wanted me to do. (N23)

On the other hand, a narrator who had been unhappy in the “highly politic” environment of the School Support Centre, now enjoyed “halcyon days” of “incredible freedom” and direct accountability to schools, although the loss of multi-disciplinary consultation and collaboration was “very, very difficult” (N13).
AASW (Victoria) School Social Work Special Interest Group

The AASW (Vic) School Social Work Special Interest Group was announced in a notice of the inaugural meeting in 1993, in response to the need to network and organise in the face of Department of Education reforms (AASW Vic School Social Work Special Interest Group, 1994c). The Special Interest Group, now known as the Practice Group, has operated continuously since that time.

In June 1994, Heather MacLeod, as convenor, wrote to former school social worker, Helen Murray, as acting convenor of the Ethics Committee of the AASW Victorian Branch. McLeod outlined concerns at the intersection of organisational context and ethical practice: proposals for out-sourcing; principals making binding decisions on professional practitioners isolated from professional consultation and collaboration; and in particular, the confidentiality and safe storage of case files (McLeod, 1994).

Programs and Service Management

The fragmented service was “radically different” (N5) from the School Support Centre, with the focus on individual casework rather than school system development. Without central intake or pre-referral systems in place, some school social workers were allocated schools by student population, irrespective of the needs within the wider group of schools; or the balance of cases for individual workers.

Professional wellbeing could be compromised by management decisions that tied practitioners to a schedule of school visits, without the flexibility to manage effective practice across a number of schools. Often precluded from inter-agency and intra-departmental networking; and disallowed from providing professional development and support to student welfare coordinators, many school social workers found themselves unable to fulfil those responsibilities they considered properly to be within their role. Others found great professional satisfaction.
I worked with a fantastic cluster that were very coherent, cohesive and very focused on welfare issues and eager to put in a lot of programs... three of us, a psych, speech and myself... And we were very much part of the... student welfare coordinating committee. We had credibility and support. We worked well together. (N12)

Although it was not a view held by the majority of current practitioners who were excited by their practice and hopeful for the future, narrators with a longer-term rear view perceived a decline in school and student support policy, resourcing and service delivery.

The closure of School Support Centres, the whole Kennett period... generally I think the service has gone downhill, because I’ve had the chance to experience what it’s been in the past with a lot of resources. (N5)

**Employment and Work Conditions**

With rare access to collegiate support and consultation, many school social workers operated on strict timetables, without the professional autonomy to determine schedules for effective practice. Those with long careers recalled the worst employment conditions during this period under Kennett’s Liberal government.

As the 1990s progressed and “new public management” or managerialism decentralised Student Support Services (Ozanne & Rose, 2012, p.12), some services were privatised or outsourced, and school social workers were uncertain of their employment. Temporary staff were required to re-apply for short-term contracts, and even permanent staff knew: “there was always that idea that the job may not continue” (N9). Worse, some faced non-renewal of contracts with positions replaced by psychologists:

..that really hurt.. I was actually involved in you might say some grief counselling and support with those people who knew their jobs were not going to be replaced... really cruel, really hard time. (N13)
Previously, **Counselling, Guidance & Clinical Services** and **School Support Centres** had “distinct ways of operating and very clear hierarchies and career structures” (N5), with only a few management positions open to non-teacher school social workers. Ironically, it was within this period of generally poor employment conditions, with no central or regional departmental management, that some school social workers began to access principal-appointed network coordinator positions, a situation that has continued.

Many narrators linked “the Kennett era” (N13) with the destruction of professionally satisfying policy and organisational environments for school social work. A complement of almost 100 school social workers in the mid-1980s was halved by 1994 (Sturmfels, 1995, p.125).

> The care for families and kids and teachers in schools... I think that was the Kennett government that tended to change that whole orientation. And student services, the notion of having a body of people who could in fact enhance one another's work with professional training, a cohesive group, to talk about issues and policy has gone. (N18)

On the other hand, new practitioners, whose professional identities had not been already shaped within earlier organisational structures and modes of practice, established themselves without the angst wrought by the change.

> I was just a new worker being told that I would be working in a school, and that was fine, it sounded like a good idea. I had no problems, but for these other people, they felt there was this real undermining of their worth and their conditions. (N12)

With inconsistent arrangements across the state, some were seen to “struggle” (N5) under service delivery expectations and work conditions.

> Depending what network you were in of course... I knew some people (who) never got any admin time at all. But (here) it was usually accepted that you were full-time, you had one day... in the office to do work. (N25)
Stringent economic restraints included reduced mileage allowances: one narrator sparked a disciplinary issue by refusing to use his car for long distances. Whether in city or country areas, travel between schools has always affected efficiency and personal wellbeing.

*What I found difficult was the amount of travel and the amount of time in the car, and the fact that there were some days when I was at four schools in the day. And that is really tiring and difficult and incredibly time-wasting. Incredibly inefficient... you never got a lunch break...* (N25)

**Policy Developments**

In 1998, after four years of fragmented services, and in what would be the last year of the Liberal term of office, the *Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools* (Framework) (Victoria. Dept of Education, 1998a) provided wellbeing policy for schools and support services. The *Framework* was based on the premise that: “Students are better prepared for learning when they are healthy, safe and happy”.

In 1997 *Suicide Prevention Victorian Task Force Report* (Victoria. Dept of Health, 1997) had considered mental health, personal, family and social issues that were becoming more prevalent for some young people, and recommended a conceptual integrated suicide prevention model that was incorporated into the Framework. It aimed to foster resilience in students through the provision of a continuum of integrated school and community welfare systems focused in four levels of activity: primary prevention, early intervention, intervention and postvention, with increased emphasis on the first two (Victoria. Dept of Education, 1998a, p.5-6). The accompanying School Focused Youth Service (SFYS), a joint initiative with the Department of Human Services, funded effective linkages between schools and the community sector, targeting young people 10-18 whose behaviours, circumstances or mental health required support (p.6-7). Narrators reported their own and other school social worker SFYS involvement at administrative and project levels.
While the *Framework’s* “considerably broader and more systemic role” was new to many psychologists (Thielking, 2006, p.14), school social workers immediately recognised its formalisation of their comprehensively systemic and preventive approach. Narrators practising at the time of interview, whether departmental or school employees, government and non-government, held it as a guiding document several years later, well beyond the next organisational change. The School Focused Youth Service and the *Framework* were both initiatives consistent with school social work practice, their origin in Kennett’s Liberal government perhaps forgotten within an otherwise professionally frustrating service context.
Restoring Multidisciplinary Teams 1999-2010

Government policy had rendered employment practices and service management across the state inconsistent if not chaotic. School social workers withstood an environment that structurally devalued them, most noticeably in declining numbers. A collective sigh of relief greeted the 1999 election of a state Labor government, with Steve Bracks as Premier, heralding improved industrial conditions and stability of Student Support Services for at least a few years. Narrators were among those consecutively contracted employees who were finally given on-going positions.

Planning for Organisational Change

The 1998 Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools was kept in place, facilitating a smooth transition through planning for change. School social workers contributed to government reviews:

... actively pursuing the opportunity for change and an opportunity to pursue a different model. (N14)

The AASW (Vic) School Social Work Special Interest Group advocated for better employment conditions, professional support and supervision, and more appropriate working environments. The Community and Public Sector Union negotiated improvements in pay and conditions, and embarked on a campaign to overturn the “reforms” of the previous government which had actually hampered the effectiveness of school social work and other services. The CPSU report, Improving Student Support Services in State Government Schools recommended the restoration of multidisciplinary teams, co-located to service a network of schools. The report listed multiple professional concerns including: lack of clear guidelines for workload and time allocation; isolation; lack of supervision compliant with AASW standards; and an inequitable performance management system (Community and Public Sector Union, 2000, p.4-5, 11-15).
Policy Development

The *Blueprint for Victorian Government Schools* (Victoria. Dept of Education and Training, 2003) was developed through extensive consultation with stakeholders, and made a commitment to improved learning outcomes for all students through recognition of their diverse needs; and continuous, cooperative school improvement (Victoria. Dept of Education et al., 2007, p.7).

.. *we’ve got a Labor government in, putting out policies around school inclusion; putting policies out around concepts like social justice; putting policies around cooperation where schools cooperate with one another rather than in the old Kennett days where it was competition.*  (N7)

The *Blueprint* was released by the Minister for Education and Training (2002-2006), Lynne Kosky, a school social worker briefly in the early 1980s, and: “*somebody who you knew right from the start was very political*” (N10). Kosky rejected school social work approach, and became a Community Education Officer in the western suburbs of Melbourne, where many students coped with the disadvantages of poverty, new migrant and refugee status (Bradley, 2002).

In 2006, the legal school or alternate training leaving age was 17 (Victoria. Dept. of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013). In 2007 a restructured Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) represented significant policy change. The DEECD Office for Children and Portfolio Coordination became responsible for the Health and Wellbeing Service Framework covering 0-18 years, and *Student Support Services* was included in a suite of early childhood, health, and school wellbeing and engagement programs. Collaboration with community agencies, its origins in Jorgensen’s 1949 agreement with the Health Department, was formalised by a Partnership Agreement with the Victorian Community Sector, to improve learning, development, health and wellbeing outcomes for: “*all Victorian children and young people, particularly those who are vulnerable or experiencing disadvantage*” (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010a, p.17, 19).
Effective Schools are Engaging Schools: Student Engagement Policy Guidelines (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009a) replaced earlier conduct and attendance guidelines. Building Respectful and Safe Schools (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010b), focused more generally on unacceptable behaviour, updating and strengthening earlier anti-bullying guidelines. Many new policies and resources reinforced the link between student wellbeing and learning, consistent with the role and purpose of school social work.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is committed to providing safe, secure and stimulating learning environments in all Victorian government schools. Students can reach their full educational potential only when they are happy, healthy and safe, and when there is a positive school culture to engage and support them in their learning. Student wellbeing and student learning outcomes are inextricably linked...

(Effective Schools are Engaging Schools, DEECD, 2009, p.5)

The Office of the Child Safety Commissioner published Calmer Classrooms, From Isolation to Connection and Caring Classrooms (Downey, 2007, 2009, 2010), integrating the knowledge of government and community child protection and education specialists. School social workers used these materials in the delivery of professional development to support teachers in understanding the effects of childhood trauma, abuse and neglect on learning, school engagement and relationships.

To improve support for vulnerable children and their families, the Department of Human Services established the Child FIRST intake service to integrate referrals to youth and family support agencies, consistent with the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Victoria. Dept of Human Services, 2012a). School social workers used this new early intervention service, the goal of which was to prevent later child protection notification.
New Guidelines for Student Support Services

Stakeholder consultations in 2008 (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009b) preceded the publication of *Strengthening Networks and School Communities: Guidelines for Student Support Services* (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010c) which included the minimally updated 1998 Framework. Schools and Student Support Services were required to implement universal student wellbeing and engagement policies, and supplementary services for students with additional needs, and those vulnerable or at risk of disengagement from education. The guidelines aimed to improve service delivery; management structure and workforce support. Co-located multidisciplinary network teams, no longer isolated, had professional coordinators. Principals had consultative, locally informed input into their network services. Accountability was to restructured regional management, including Student Support Services coordinators. Part-time regional social work stream leaders aimed to ensure the professional development and supervision needs of practitioners (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010a, p.46; 2010c, p.4-5, 15-16, 19-20).

School social workers in Student Support Services required eligibility for membership of the AASW. Their role was defined to include:

- professional advice, consultancy and support to principals, school communities and school networks through the development and implementation of programs and services related to the learning, development and wellbeing of students, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

- involvement in complex student engagement and wellbeing issues, individual, group and family work, and attendance at critical incidents in schools where appropriate. Staff in the social work stream are experienced in the development and implementation of programs and strategies that foster resilience in children and young people and that address their social, emotional and educational needs.

(Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010c, p.28)
However, there was continuing inconsistency across regions and networks, and problematic service delivery conditions affecting social workers and their colleagues.

*It’s chaotic how the Student Support Services Officers are managed and how that resource is deployed, totally chaotic... it’s not easy to be a SSSO in this system. They’re poorly supported; poorly managed often, unless you get in a good network... There’s no (professional) supervision... you don’t get a room, you don’t get an office in schools, you have to fight for some little square inch of territory. So the system doesn’t look after its support services staff at all.* (N11)

While some had already become co-located, all school social workers now returned to the “*collegiate support*” (N14) and social cohesion reminiscent of the *School Support Centres*.

*I loved working there. Everyone just worked together. It was beautiful.* (N25)

**Employment Conditions**

With *Student Support Services* restored to networks under the management of coordinators, those school social workers who had lost autonomy regained “*flexibility*” (N25). Rather than being strictly timetabled, practitioners were able independently to schedule school visits and other planned and crisis work, “as the demands occurred” (N25).

School social worker numbers were subject to inconsistencies across networks: some created more positions, with the support of principals, whereas other networks replaced school social workers with psychologists. Two narrators used the notion of grieving to describe the experience of seeing their professional numbers comparatively depleted.

The dominance of psychology-guidance had been long-established through higher pay scales and inequitable career conditions that social workers had taken action
to improve over decades with little result. School social worker-psychologists had certainly noticed the difference:

.. there was an advantage to be called a psychologist and say that that’s what you were doing in terms of recognition and pay level. (N23)

The agreements for a new Allied Health structure in 2006 were designed to create career pathways, but there were inconsistent, and consequently inequitable, results across the state, with only a few social workers granted equivalent grading with psychologist colleagues. Others were not successful, despite “good arguments” (N5) for meeting the same criteria. It perpetuated the “classic stress of working in the system... such inequity and injustice” (N14). Nevertheless, narrators reported the collation of their experience and achievements to be confirming. For most school social workers and speech pathologists, long-standing salary inequities continued to give organisational dominance to psychologists.

A repeated theme in the narratives spanning five decades including the 2000s, reflected complex relationships with psychologists and guidance officers, the latter now phased out. Narrators representing every decade spoke of valued and lasting friendships with individual psychologists. However some found the organisational environment could be marred by dismissive words and sometimes bullying behavior.

I love working with psychologists... I value their knowledge and the assistance they can give me. But I don’t often see that same respect come back, because, you know: You’re a social worker. (N25)

(I) experienced some really difficult workplace bullying and don’t feel it was managed as well as it could have been... there was a real split between psych and social work for a while. (N14)
School-employed School Social Workers

Although barely seen in the previous two decades, a new wave of school-employed social workers appeared in government schools. It was more purposeful and cost effective to employ social workers rather than teachers as Student Welfare Coordinators in secondary schools. The April 2003 state budget established funding for part-time Primary Welfare Officer positions open to teachers, social workers or other candidates (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013f). Some schools resourced additional time, and one narrator had funding support from a local church.

With no literature found specifically about school-employed social workers in Victoria, narrators, have provided the information for this study. They shared the belief that the school was “a very natural environment” (N11) in which to work with children and young people. Three of the seven narrators employed during the 2000s by primary and secondary schools including a Catholic school, had formerly held school social work positions in Student Support Services.

While departmental school social workers described their organisational context primarily in terms of a multidisciplinary allied health environment, school-employed social workers identified themselves as members of the school staff, and in most instances working in close relationship with the principal and teachers. Even with minimal time-fraction, schools valued highly the inclusion of school social workers into the staff team and the school program, rather than relying on visitors from Student Support Services.

They wanted someone to develop a relationship with the staff and the kids and be a really constant presence. (N1)

To preserve the trust of families in the face of preconceptions that went back to the 1950s, linking social work to “the welfare” (N17), some principals opted for titles such as Community Liaison Officer or Student Wellbeing Coordinator (School of Global Urban and Social Studies RMIT University, 2012). In practice, school social workers clarified their professional status.
The principal didn’t want me to be called a social worker. He was worried that families would be concerned ... you know, the stigma that can be known around social workers: child protection, taking children away that sort of thing. And I have had some parents when they’ve heard I’m a social worker: “Oh, you’re the welfare are you?” (N6)

School-employed social workers did not enjoy the guarantee of on-going contracts. Some narrators had independently found employment in two or more schools; and two schools had jointly budgeted to cover one social worker. Among a teaching staff with defined career pathways, social workers had no career advancement. One had accessed higher pay within a limited scale; some had been given more complex, professionally satisfying roles. One narrator had been upgraded to replace a teacher Student Welfare Coordinator. Another had moved into a regional student welfare management position.

There were no guidelines for school-employed social workers. In the ambiguity of their positions, they liaised closely with the school leadership and student management groups, but were not part of the teacher base.

So you’re certainly the minority in the school, and that can have implications in terms of support. (N8)

Social workers had specialist skills and knowledge generally not held by others, but as non-teachers did not have immediate credibility in a role that could be somewhat “invisible” (N11) behind the office door. Without departmental policy to direct and legitimate them, school-employed social workers independently needed to consult with peers and Student Support Services, and negotiate with principals and other stake-holders in order to define their roles.

Although part of the school, the social worker was seen by families as someone less tied to a disempowering system.

I am not “the school”, I am someone different to talk to, and that’s a good thing. (N26)
Prelude to Another Change of Government

The 21st century had brought new social, health and wellbeing issues. State education was becoming: “a more residual system” (N9) as students drifted to private schools (Theobald & Swain, 2010). The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) had grown to a huge organisation, with a complex bureaucracy to support schools and educational programs. The DEECD website, www.education.vic.gov.au, had become the repository of hundreds of reports, policy and resource materials for curriculum, health and wellbeing.

After six decades, the effects of poverty and disadvantage on learning were still to be overcome. The needs of vulnerable, abused and traumatised children and young people had been identified (Downey, 2007, 2009, 2010; Victoria. Dept of Premier and Cabinet, Cummins, Scott, & Scales, 2012). Key government outcomes included: “a fairer society that reduces disadvantage and respects diversity” (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010a, p.49). Koorie, migrant and multicultural education were among those programs integrated into curriculum and wellbeing policy. Many students with disabilities were being supported in schools through the Program for Students with Disabilities. Schools were supported to include health, mental health and drug education, and required to provide a safe environment intolerant of bullying (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008, 2013d, 2013e, 2013g, 2013h, 2013i, 2013j)

Social workers were operating in an environment where student wellbeing, understanding of disadvantage and respectful of diversity were well-established in policy as essential to learning. However, there was still room for school change and development.

Despite all we know about student wellbeing and its contribution to improved learning outcomes... student wellbeing in a lot of schools is still quite marginalised in the discourse and in school business.

(N11)
Returning Student Support Services to Principal Governance
2012

The election of Edward Baillieu’s Liberal government in December 2010 paved the way to return Student Support Services to principal governance. In July 2012, significant change disbanded regional support structures, and returned line-management of non-teacher professionals to principals. In 2013, the implications of changes were yet fully to be known, but there were some contextual issues to consider.

Policy Development

The Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment, a partnering agreement between the Department of Human Services, and government, Catholic and independent schools systems, integrated the notions of wellbeing and learning; noted the academic under-performance of students in out-of-home care; and mandated collaborative case management (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2011).

In January 2011, the government commissioned a comprehensive investigation into the Victorian child protection system. The Report of the Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry (Victoria. Dept of Premier and Cabinet et al., 2012) recommended improved systems to reduce the incidence and impact of child abuse, trauma and neglect (p.xxiii). Schools were recognised as universal services with which all children and young people were connected, and those who were vulnerable needed the care and protection afforded by well-informed, collaborative, government, education and community services. The aspiration of Victoria’s Vulnerable Children: Our Shared Responsibility Strategy 2013-2022 was that:

Vulnerable children are kept safe from harm and have had the opportunity to succeed in life.

(Victoria. Dept of Human Services, 2013b, p.1)

In this instance, albeit without mention of “social justice”, Liberal government policy was founded on principles absolutely consistent with the values and
purpose of school social workers, who work at the interface of vulnerability, protection and wellbeing, and fair academic and life outcomes.

_Education and learning are critical to an individual’s life chances, and education is a pathway out of poverty and intergenerational disadvantage._ (Victoria. Dept of Human Services, 2012b)

**Planning for Organisational Change**

In September 2011, leaked information from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) was passed on to union members, outlining possible changes (Community and Public Sector Union, 2011b). With no workforce consultation until then, Karen Batt, CPSU Victorian Branch secretary, wrote to the Secretary, DEECD, with concerns about service delivery and professional standards (Community and Public Sector Union, 2011a).

School social workers attended departmental briefings with colleagues, and the AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group submitted to the dedicated website a comprehensive _Response to the Safe and Caring Schools Discussion Paper_ (December 2011), critiquing proposed organisational changes according to criteria within the _AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers_ (Jameson, 2012).

**Return to Principal Governance**

The government’s policy to transfer _Student Support Services_ funding to schools, was directed by new _Student Support Services Guidelines_ (Victoria. DEECD, 2012), and implemented in July 2012. The guidelines aimed to integrate more closely the student wellbeing efforts of schools and support services staff. The new guidelines cumulatively preserved past policy and service strengths, by including the principles of the _Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools; Effective Schools are Engaging Schools;_ and _Building Respectful and Safe Schools_ (Victoria. Dept of Education, 1998a; Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009a, 2010b, 2013c).
Multidisciplinary network teams were not immediately broken up as they had been at the end of 1993. However, the new guidelines allowed for organisational inconsistency across the state, as principals within networks were given “control and flexibility” (Victoria. DEECD, 2012, p.9), to co-locate or ultimately break up network teams, with line-management by a principal, a Student Support Services coordinator, or a combination thereof (p.27). School social workers were wary of the option for the “Outsourced Model” (p.28) previously available during 1992-1998, when contracted practitioners not only depleted departmental resources, but lowered service quality, with interventions not properly integrated into the learning environment.

With regions reduced to four, and regional “support”, “programs” and “expertise” (N25) withdrawn, changes appeared to represent both cost-cutting and principles of school autonomy versus layered bureaucracy. However, the establishment of regional Professional Practice Leaders, aimed to promote and protect high quality professional service (Victoria. DEECD, 2012, p.15).

There were inconsistencies across the state: the complexities of school social work practice might be differently interpreted. One narrator was instructed to abandon a multidisciplinary professional support project, but another enjoyed an “open” and “transparent” (N24) close working relationship.

They’re strongly supportive of our team, the way we work and strongly supportive of the mix of (disciplines) that we have ...I know other networks where that’s not the case, and it’s very difficult. (N24)

The first Implementation Bulletin (May 2013) for Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Strategy 2013-2022 cited the devolution of Student Support Services management to principals in networks of schools as a reform designed to: “strengthen the early identification of children and young people at risk” (Victoria. Dept of Human Services, 2013a, p.2), although the devolution of governance of Student Support Services had been flagged before the election as a principal autonomy issue, and its connection with supporting vulnerable children was not made clear at policy and program levels.
School social workers could be heartened by the inclusion, for the first time, of *AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers* definitions and principles, and AASW professional development requirements, within *Student Support Services Guidelines* (Victoria. DEECD, 2012, p.45-46, 97-98). The priority for School Social Work Practice Group members was the protection of school social work and its high quality practice within the structural changes to the service environment (Jameson, 2012). Individual practitioners focused on the continuity of service delivery and engagement in improved service management at the local level.

*Now of course we’ve reverted back to principal management, but the service delivery model hasn’t changed... They’re separate things. There’s one thing about who manages you, one thing about the service delivery model you have.* (N25)

*It’s my social work training that helped me manage that process pretty well, I think... developing strong relationships and working within a systems framework has really helped...* (N24)

In the absence of a formal review, anecdotal evidence points to inconsistency across Victoria, and various levels of satisfaction under principal governance. With a scheduled state election where some pundits predict change, the immediate future is uncertain. On the basis of recent patterns, school social workers might reasonably expect in the longer term, organisational and management disruption and re-configuration in response to government change.
Australian Government Initiatives

National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program

Government, Catholic and independent Victorian schools could opt to employ social workers under National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program Guidelines, which the Australian Labor government had extended to include not only chaplains, according to policy established by the Liberal government in 2007, but also student welfare workers including social workers (Australia. Dept of Education, 2011).

Review of Funding for Schooling 2011

Despite attempts, the school system had not achieved equity for students.

There’s no consistency about the rights of children and young people to access the support they need when they’re in school. It’s very ad hoc: if you live in this suburb, you get these services, but if you live in that suburb, you’re likely to get no services...there’s no social justice to that. (N4)

In 2010, Julia Gillard, Australian Government Minister for Education and soon to be Australia’s only female Prime Minister, announced the first comprehensive review of school funding since the 1973 Australian Schools Commission report. The Review of Funding for Schooling-Final Report, released in 2011 and known popularly as the Gonski Report, proposed sustainable school funding to ensure that:

- differences in educational outcomes are not the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions
- all students have access to a high standard of education regardless of their background or circumstances.

(Australia. Dept of Education Employment and Workplace Relations & Gonski et al., 2011, p.xxxi)
The panel had considered the removal of barriers to achieve greater equity and achievement of potential through excellence and inclusion (p.xiii, 105, 225) irrespective of student diversity including:

*English language proficiency, Indigeneity, location, disability and special needs, and other disadvantaged groups such as low socioeconomic areas and other concentrations of disadvantage.*

(p.225)

Recommendations were written as policy through the National Plan for School Improvement (Australia. Dept of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012), and negotiated with states and other stake-holders during 2012-2013 (Rout & Edwards, 2013).

With a new national Liberal government elected in September 2013, future funding became unclear. In January 2014, Australian Government web-sites had expunged the Gonski report and school funding information was unavailable pending “machinery of government changes” (Australia. Dept of Education, 2014). A brief text promised a “*fair, stable and sustainable approach to funding*” (Australia. Dept of Education, 2013). The extent to which school funding under a Liberal government would address disadvantage would depend on their interpretation of “*fair*”, and the degree to which they could forgo equal distribution among rich and poor, in favour of deliberate and calculated investment in the education of children and young people who were unable to meet their potential in their marginalising school and societal systems.

Only the future would tell, but it was beginning to seem unlikely that the Gonski Report would bring to Victorian education the sense of renewal in learning, wellbeing and social justice that had followed the Karmel Report, in the 1970-1980s.

*The Disadvantaged Schools Program was very good really. We need something like that again, there’s no doubt about it.* (N19)
Conclusion

Since the establishment of the *Psychology & Guidance Branch* in 1947, the State of Victoria has never reneged on its responsibility to provide additional resources to support those students who were unable otherwise successfully to access educational opportunities; nor on its commitment to provide school social work services. Moreover, school social work has been practiced within a policy context that has increasingly promoted the link between student wellbeing, the diversity of individual student needs, and learning. Narrators reiterated a six decade school social work focus on the interface between poverty, disadvantage and marginalisation and schools as institutions, without, however, significant impact on the educational and societal structures that stratify and marginalise.

Organisational change and environmental challenge are inevitable (Ozanne & Rose, 2012, p.42-43). However, political and philosophical contest at government level, especially school autonomy versus departmental management, have caused radical changes to *Student Support Services* and its predecessors, and to resourcing for school-employed social workers. Practitioners have been dislocated, distressed and professionally frustrated, but have demonstrated adaptability to imposed disruptions. With knowledge of organisational change and commitment to best possible service management, school social workers have continued in dynamic interaction with the context of practice. Nevertheless, their actual influence since 1992 can be questioned as management has devolved to separate Networks, with little indication of organisational arrangements through which school social worker voice can influence state-wide organisational change or policy development.

School social work and schooling dwell within a contradictory social and policy environment. Schools prepare young people to achieve their potential through learning, but simultaneously, as agents of social control, encourage conformity to national, social and economic interests. Irrespective of government philosophy and economic imperatives that have driven education policy, Victorian school social workers have held firm to a belief in their contribution to students and schools, and to the ideal of social justice through learning outcomes.
I would like to see more school social workers. I would like to see more support for the role. But in a climate where there's cut backs in the public sector, and tight government funding, then I can’t see that changing. (N24)
Part 3

RESEARCH FINDINGS

7. School Social Work Values, Theories and Practice
8. School Worker Professional Identity and the Tradition of Practice
Chapter 7

FINDINGS:

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK VALUES, THEORIES and PRACTICE

What we were put there for... was to maximise kids’ education. Not for any other reason... what we felt we could contribute legitimately to children’s school experience: that had to always be the measuring stick for what we were doing.

“Narrator 3”
Introduction

The preceding chapter gave an account of the organisational development of school social work in Victoria. School social workers’ professional identity is developed by their connection with and contribution to the organisational context of service delivery, but is fundamentally grounded in values, theory and practice.

In the absence of substantial documentation, the purpose of this research was to present an overview of the development of 65 years of school social work in Victoria. In the following text, the dates of narrator school social work service have not been identified in order to facilitate anonymity. Unless specified as located within particular decades, the narrator quotations used represent shared meaning across decades. Where two or more quotations are used, unless otherwise stated, they represent the ideas drawn from narratives covering several decades.

The findings trace patterns and transitions, based on the interpretations of narrators and retrieved authors who have represented their professional community. Myriad stories remain uncollected, and their implications count as gaps within this study. Nevertheless, the findings construct a rich, though loosely woven tapestry of the development of school social work in Victoria.

School Social Work Values

School social work practice was generally seen as value-based, promoting the goal of social justice for disadvantaged and marginalised students through maximised opportunity for learning. Without exception, irrespective of the words used to narrate their practice, the era of service, or the theories and practice they went on to describe, school social worker-narrators affirmed their professional identity in statements of underlying values that shaped the uniqueness of their school social work practice in its focus on the student in the school environment and the removal of barriers to learning. From its origins, school social work was driven by fairness and equity for all children and young people as they moved through schooling into adulthood.
empowerment of the client, promotion of equality amongst people, advocating for those who are in disadvantaged situations. (N13)

Social justice... that’s always driven me. (N16)

It’s about me being respectful... working where people are at, not where my expectations are. (N1)

We are there to promote the rights of the child... We’re there for the wellbeing and best interests of the child. (N27)

.. client determination, and confidentiality and loyalty to one’s client first and that first ahead of all other considerations. (N3)

Early social work graduates had been trained to consider themselves as experts, but self-determination, “worth of the individual”, valuing the “possibility of individual growth and change” (Social Worker Group, 1973f) and respect for clients was paramount. Social workers began to focus on client strengths, even, for example: the enterprise of a mother who went to several agencies for help; the determination of the parent described by the school system as “difficult” (N16); or the independent, rebellious student at odds with teachers or parents.

School social work with students already marginalised by the school system could be ethically challenging. Care was needed to “do no harm” (N1). Practitioners juggled: “dilemmas, twisting and turning in the wind” (N16), with frequent decisions to be made about providing teachers with helpful, perhaps generalised but not confidential information. The AASW Code of Ethics was the guide:

My principal is fully aware of that. That’s what I follow and I won’t step outside of that... I have to be really careful about what I say, basically. And it’s really only if it’s actually going to impinge upon them being in the classroom and also before I do any of that I talk to parents about passing on information. And to the students, too. But if it was to do with safety, that’d be different. The kids know that. (N6)
School Social Work Purpose

Social justice values underpinned the school social worker purpose of facilitating successful schooling for all students. Social justice required that the least advantaged students would have fair access to society’s resources and the ability to achieve the success to which they were entitled. Although the actual term “social justice” was not widely used in the 1940-1950s, the earliest post-war practitioners through to newer generations shared that vision.

Every child has a right to experience an education, and we need to do whatever we can, to make sure that we assist in that process… so that they can reach their fullest, their highest learning potential. (N14)

... helping kids to realise their potential... to go as far as possible with their education, certainly. Raising the expectations of teachers. (N19)

“Fixing” students, making them compliant, was not the purpose of school social work, which required a complex systemic approach including school change.

School social work is more about trying to ensure the education system is inclusive as far as possible for all kids, and that kids aren’t marginalised within it, that it’s open, and that there are better, more humane or understanding or flexible approaches, particularly for kids with difficulties, and I think that it’s important for schools to see their role in that broader sense and I think that’s something that social workers can do. (N9)

Although not formally educators themselves, school social workers were necessarily concerned with teaching, learning and curriculum policy and practice, especially their relationship to student wellbeing, student-teacher relationships and behaviour.
I am driven in this role to have really robust discussions with leadership, because that’s where it has to change around student wellbeing. And look, we know that student wellbeing impacts on learning and improved learning outcomes. We’ve got more traction in terms of having that conversation because all the accountabilities are around improving learning outcomes. So we can have those conversations. You know, (when) we talk wellbeing, (we) talk learning outcomes. (N11)

Several narrators indicated that the articulation of purpose had been crystallised and strengthened by practice experience, now integrated into collected professional narratives that demonstrated the commonality of purpose over decades.

**School Social Work in the Host Setting**

Schools, shaped by government policies and educational theories, were the natural environments for school social work practice and the development of professional identity. The host setting constituted an atmosphere of shared values and purpose in terms of student wellbeing and learning; and potentially productive, cross-professional, collaborative work. However, schools were also sites of resistance to aspects of the school social work perspective.

Some narrators had a broader view of the institution of education, but most focused on state government and non-government school systems and school communities, and their impact as the host setting for school social work.

*It was, from my way of seeing it, a fairly marginalised position, within a larger host organisation.* (N4)

*You have to be really clear about your agenda... when you’re one discipline amongst a sea of others.* (N11)
The core business is not social work, and social workers are a minority group within the education department. (N14)

Some narrators mentioned a somewhat useful ambiguity about whether school social workers were aligned with teaching staff, especially when they were managing teacher-student or school-family relationships.

Families on the whole... appreciate having access to another worker who's a little bit removed from the school. (N22)

Shared Purpose and Disparate Professional Perspectives

School social workers were invited into the school to work collaboratively with teachers, students and parents towards wellbeing and learning. Narrators held school social work and the relevance of its knowledge and skills, as an important secondary or ancillary profession in the core business of education.

... (the) prime function was the education of children, and the only way you could really justify a social work component was in terms of leading towards improvement in kids’ education. (N3)

In the context of post-war youth and education policy, social workers were extending schooling through student and family welfare. From the mid-1980s, student wellbeing was increasingly recognised as a pre-condition for learning. In their shared purpose, school social workers have been “valued” (N17); “very well respected” and “well regarded” (N19) by Victorian schools across six decades.

I felt I was valued... I felt I would have had good credibility with schools, I felt I had something to offer them. I felt that they would call me in for complex and difficult matters. (N9)

Those schools that have had social work service love it, absolutely love it... if you’re using a systems model of assessment... Things change, things are like magic... schools know it; and principals know it. I can’t tell them. (N13)
One narrator shared the contents of a letter of thanks from a principal, describing her complex, balanced work in supporting student learning; thoughtful analysis; support and strengthening of teachers and parents; individual and group work with students; professional commitment; and considered advice to the principal.

Differences in professional values and orientation were ever-present in the collaborative tension where educators were dominant. Productive, creative tension was found in relationships with teachers, built around the best interests of students and shared commitment to learning and wellbeing.

*The teachers struggle to know where to put me, because I’m very clearly thinking about things differently... the teachers now recognise that I’m not going to be following through some of their methods of dealing with kids, and my ways are different... they’re very passionate about these young kids... But there is such a difference between thinking from a social work perspective and thinking from a teaching perspective... it’s a good clash... we agree to disagree on many things.* (N1)

The school social worker needed to uphold professional ethics; ensure proper educational and personal support for individual students; and simultaneously effect change within a host setting that could be resistant, despite government policy requiring improvement in educational practices. The school social worker walked a tightrope of neutrality, balancing the need to be part of the school in order to influence it, with the need to be seen as professionally separate.

*You have to be aware of... the normal social work guidelines and ways to operate, as well as also acknowledge and be aware of school guidelines and the ways schools operate, which can be contradictory sometimes.* (N8)

Working in the host setting required the maintenance of school social worker professional identity against pressure to conform to other values and practices, for example “punitive” approaches (N1, N14) that were “confronting” (N1). Teachers and school social workers did not share the same requirement for
findings: School Social Work Values, Theories and Practice

confidentiality. Narrators were respectful of teachers and their often difficult work with students, but they nevertheless noted teaching practices and school procedures that became barriers to student learning and personal potential.

Relationships with Principals and Teachers

A theme common to narratives post-1970s was the impact of relationships with principals, support for and understanding of school social work, within the context of professional similarities and differences. As the responsible final arbiter and potentially the greatest support, the principal could facilitate or frustrate the school social worker. “What a load of nonsense!” (N2) was one principal’s memorable response to a school social worker’s suggestion.

Prevention and early intervention and associated methods, rather than “band-aid” approaches (N2, N14, N21, N25; Anonymous, 1971), have been a concern of school social workers, at least since the 1970s, and enshrined as departmental policy since 1998. Nevertheless, principals have always primarily requested casework, and several narrators explained that compliance in that regard was a prerequisite for establishing credibility and acceptance.

Narrators had negotiated with principals to establish their roles, and re-negotiated with newly appointed principals with different management styles and student welfare perspectives. The visiting service provided to schools by departmental school social workers was shaped by principals to varying degrees depending on the prevailing organisational structures, as described in the preceding chapter.

School-employed school social workers, as lone professional members of the school staff, were always directly accountable to principals and subject to their individual interpretations of the role, so that responsibilities differed across schools. Narrators had experienced changes of principals affecting their relationships and their work. Some principals were welfare-minded, and collaborated closely with the school social worker, or relied significantly on their advice and included them in leadership meetings. Some micro-managed the role and work-load. One school-employed narrator who had a close working
relationship with the principal, consequently felt more acute awareness of fluctuating government policy priorities that impacted on the daily life of the school.

School-employed school social workers met frequently with principals, with high levels of trust within sometimes difficult negotiations over priorities emanating from distinct professional and ethical perspectives:

"That’s our relationship every day. I will bring the social work perspective, and she’ll bring the administrator, head of the school perspective... every meeting, every conversation we have, is usually trying to adjust those positions to something that will work. And sometimes that can be a bit stressful... as time has gone on, we’ve both got better at it. So it’s now up to the point where we both freely express our opinion... we try and meet that middle path. (N26)"

"I juggle and dance around. Sometimes I stand my ground, like: “No, from a social work perspective, I just can’t” .... And other times (he says): “No. I don’t care what you say. This is what has to happen”. (N6)"

The relationship with the principal, and his or her understanding of the role, determined the shape of the service and professional satisfaction:

"I was fortunate that the principal of the school that I was in was very, very supportive, and gave me great autonomy and respected my professional judgement around how services... should be delivered... a unique opportunity to really do lots of important and creative work... So it was a great environment to be in. (N11)"

Besides principals, school social workers collaborated closely with assistant principals, year level coordinators or student managers, and other student wellbeing staff such as chaplains or youth workers. In particular, narrators worked alongside teachers, generally held in high regard for their skills and caring, to build partnerships in supporting students.
The better known you were to the school, the more they would be likely to draw on your understanding of what schools do and what education’s there for... what a school will refer to you depends on how much they really know you... and trust you. (N3)

Whether a departmental visitor or school-employed, it took time, deliberate effort, persistence and the ability not to take oneself too seriously, to forge relationships and establish credibility with school staff.

In the early years I used to go into some schools (staffrooms) and no matter what I did, they wouldn’t talk to me. I’d go in before they got there, I’d go in after they got there, I’d sit in one area, another area (laughs) and I remember someone telling me that “Before you came to our school we had no problems!” I don’t think there’s many people who have to walk in and out of work places like we do, it’s an incredibly hard job! And whenever we get a new staff member they’d say: Oh my god, it’s so scary! (N14)

It took me such a long time to develop their trust and even form connections with them. I’ll never forget the first day I came and sat down in the staffroom and no-one even asked who I was... (N6)

Cooperative relationships with teachers were based on responding to classroom needs, especially behaviour management; keeping them informed, confidentiality considered; respecting their knowledge of the student; protecting the wellbeing and safety of all students, not just clients; and understanding teacher language and view of the world. On the other hand, teacher distrust could result from school social workers’ broader ecological systems perspectives; resistance to the dominant discourse of behaviour management and control; and protection of confidentiality. The different, open communication with students and families added to the suspicion at first. A narrator who had been school-employed explained that teachers sometimes preferred to handle welfare matters themselves, but without the training to analyse all of the environmental factors, sometimes failed to refer until things had gone terribly wrong.
Narrators spoke of the educative and trust-building steps required by the host setting. Departmental school social workers who visited schools on request as expert consultants had the advantage of established roles. School-employed social workers, as lone workers in a different professional environment, needed to negotiate and promote their own roles, although being on-site to participate in the life of the school facilitated trust and understanding.

\[ I \text{ remember drawing position descriptions... I had a professional development session on what I can do with them. So it took all that time to establish that... and to develop the relationships. It’s almost like I had to earn my trust and prove to them that I’m of value. } \] (N6)

\[ \text{What they’ve always said they like best about me - because they don’t get my theoretical approaches! - is that I’m prepared to be involved. I’m there; I’m a presence and they like me for that... I’m involved and the kids know me, and the teachers know me, and it’s allowed us to find a place to fit. So it’s having a presence... } \] (N1)

**Clarifying and Negotiating Expectations**

While it was necessary to understand teachers’ professional perspectives and systemic difficulties, it was part of the school social work task to negotiate roles; build positive working relationships; and explain ecological systemic practice that looked beyond the student in order to resolve difficulties.

Narrators rejected calls for “fixing” the student (N8), rather than advocacy for system change on behalf of those “at risk or in disadvantaged situations or disempowered” (N13). In fact, collaborative efforts of teachers and school social workers had placed multiple school and community supports around students. Nonetheless, school social workers could feel compromised by the competing needs to advocate for individual students; maintain positive working relationships with staff; and challenge school practices.

Two departmental narrators discussed with principals their concerns about consistent resistance to the ecological perspective or expectations that they
work according to incompatible values and methods. One was asked to stay at a school; and both were asked to leave schools. Usually, relationship-building and role explanation sufficed.

... you've always got to be building good relationships, in a sense you're always the one who has to... I don't mean shifting in terms of compromising... it's a sort of educative role around why you're doing what you're doing... People have very different expectations of how they think you should work, and you've got to negotiate that and explain it... clarity around what I do and what I don't do, and why I'm doing what I'm doing... (N11)

Departmental school social workers needed to negotiate several school cultures, and: “a lack of understanding about the diversity and the breadth of our role” (N14). Each principal or delegate could interpret differently their role in managing practitioners and their workloads, sometimes not appreciating the complexity of their roles, or providing suitable facilities such as interview spaces, desks and telephones. One narrator had been dismayed to discover that a principal with whom she regularly worked had a limited expectation of the scope of her work:

I found out they were defining social workers as people who could do home visits... And that really was not very flattering. I hoped I could do better than that! (N3)

School-employed School Social Workers and the Host Setting

Certain host setting factors were uniquely experienced by the smaller contingent of school-employed school social workers. Unable to retreat to a central office and professional collegiate support, the lone social worker could feel “isolated” and “drained” (N6), even amongst “great teachers” (N26) who shared a lot of the same goals and values.
School-employed social workers found themselves co-opted or volunteering for other jobs not strictly within their professional domain, such as sports days or classroom aide tasks. They contributed to behavior management policy development and consulted with teachers about strategies, but often had to resist calls to engage in the actual discipline process. They avoided being seen as “the shrink” students had to tell their problems to when they were “in trouble” (N1).

Able to build relationships with students, teachers and families, there was great personal and professional satisfaction in being a member of the school community rather than a visitor.

*I’ve been here for a few years, and the community generally knows me. If they were to have a one-to-one conversation with me, they would know who I am, and I think they accept me as part of the community here, and I think I’m regarded fairly well.* (N26)

*One of the... richest experiences is when you see on graduation day kids you worked with in year 7 and over that 6 year period, and they’re graduating. So they can have consistency; you can work with them over time and their families. And you actually have time because the sort of changes that happen in schools take time, and from the day I started until the day I left there was a huge amount of change, but gosh, it took 9 years... you have the opportunity to really make significant changes... if you’re allowed to.* (N11)

**Theoretical Perspectives**

The development of professional identity requires the school social worker to construct and adopt a personal theoretical perspective with which to approach professional practice. Most narrators described their theoretical perspectives as refined in practice but originating in their social work education and dominant and alternate social work and school social work discourses.
We’re looking at systemic change and a system-wide interventions, I think social workers are better at it, and that’s really due to our training and experience. (N24)

In the coherence between theoretical stance and narratives of practice, narrators reflected paradigmatic theoretical thinking. This theoretical underpinning had become their own; was personally and professionally meaningful, and integral to professional identity.

Ecological Systems Perspectives

Systems theory was most commonly named as the elemental perspective shaping practice, with references to ecological theory. Narrators representing the 1950-1960s identified intrinsic social work precursors of systems theory, by describing the requirement for social action and social change in association with casework. One recalled the “no man is an island” (N3) metaphor used by early social workers to explain the relationship between people and their environments. Retrieved documents 1970-1980 are replete with references to the theoretical position that focusses on the student in the totality of systems or environments. Their role required school social workers to: “perceive the child in relation to his total environment, of which the school (was) only a part”; to be aware of the “sociological implications” of the “physical, social and economic qualities of the era in which the school was situated”; and to have an “intimate knowledge” of the school, its staff and its values (Clemens, 1973).

There was scant reference to the term “ecological systems theory”, although it was arguably well represented in narratives.

My preference was really to work with families and their relationship to the school… if you can get the environment around the person to help them flourish that was a better focus than if you tried to work with them individually only... (N20)

Neither systems nor ecological systems theory was fully articulated at the suprasystem or exosystem and macrosystem levels. Despite lack of
differentiation expressed between systems and ecological systems theories, perhaps due to their connectedness, narrators consistently constructed professional practice on personal assumptions of ecological systems discourse at the system and sub-system or micro-systemic and meso-systemic levels.

...the ecological model I love, just because it speaks really powerfully about the complexity of where people are situated in their lives and the sort of linkages. And you know obviously systems theory... those two theories have a lot to say to each other. (N11)

And school systems, school communities, the development of that whole organism in order to meet the child... it isn't necessarily the child’s fault that they've dropped out of the system. (N18)

I think schools are incredibly complex organisations. I think social work as a discipline understands organisations: they have an understanding of systems... it’s not about pathologising individuals it’s about looking at how individuals sit within the whole ecology of their worlds, and you know, whenever I would see a young person I was really aware that any encounter is one where you are negotiating the multiple worlds that people live in. (N8)

That’s one of the most complex parts of the role, trying to deal with all those kind of different tensions, so really valuing and seeing where the young person’s coming from, but also seeing where the stress and anxiety is coming from in the school system as well, and then trying to work the family in amongst that as well. (N14)

So partly I was using a systems theory approach, I guess, in the sense that I was using the school and the family as a system and that my role was sort of on the boundaries, translating between the two. And I saw myself as someone who was advocating, or creating relationships between teachers and parents. (N20)
Structural and Narrative Perspectives

Two narrators talked in depth and at length about their respective structural and narrative perspectives. Both referenced systems theory, but it was the structural and narrative frameworks that drove the discursive construction of their theoretical approaches and permeated their stories of practice.

There’s a strong link between poverty and educational outcomes. If you are born in a poor family, there’s a higher probability that you won’t necessarily be successful at school... I actually have these conversations with principals, to get them to understand poverty... a better understanding of the much more structural issues... I think that’s what social workers can do... we can link policies and structures to individuals. (N7)

So the narrative stuff is very useful because it does allow some ideas with the kids of finding the other stories that are tucked away, that things are working on some level... the kids go back to school with a new story: “I’ve succeeded. I’m ready. I’ve made the decision that I’m ready to try again”... I’m advocating for those young people. They’re not doing very well today, but actually they did really well yesterday. I’m almost a voice for them in staff meetings: “But hang on, he’s still turning up every day, and we had ten minutes of good stuff today. We haven’t had ten minutes of good stuff for a long time.” (N1)

Other Theoretical Perspectives

Several narrators mentioned one or more of radical casework, critical, feminist, narrative or structural theories as influential but not core; and many mentioned “empowerment” as an essential platform. One narrator used critical theory in combination with an ecological systemic approach:

... the lenses through which race and gender and sexuality and the dimensions that create, that animate the world... That we look at all
School Social Work in the State of Victoria, Australia

the taken-for-granted assumptions that the world tends to sort of revolve on, that we actually stop and unpack those and look at them and question them and challenge them so that we are continually very reflective in our practice... there's a lot of really interesting stuff in the critical theory area around young people  (N11)

Who is the Client?

School social work values and purpose, with a focus on the vulnerable and disadvantaged, were somewhat incompatible with a certain ambiguity in response to the question: Who is the client? Some narrators acknowledged that they had a confused sense of “the client”. Some clearly and adamantly defined the student as the client. Some included the student’s family. A few narrators named the school or multiple clients. School-employed school social workers, some of whom had previous Student Support Services experience, increasingly saw the whole community, rather than the student, as the client. One narrator argued that the client contract is with the school until the student agrees to intervention, and another held a client-and-team perspective.

Well, to me the child is the client. They’re the person who’s the most important... I call it a teamwork approach. The parents and the school, the teachers or the principal, we’re working as a team to help this child. (N21).

It was not a new question. In 1974 school social workers considered the impacts of identifying the student or the school as the client (Social Worker Group, 1974d). In a review of school social work in Victoria, clients were identified as: “school, parents, students, community” (Hodgson, 1978b, p.1). Professional narratives and retrieved documents indicated that up to the late 1980s, before the wider availability of community services, school social workers conducted a high proportion of intensive casework with parents as clients.

Regardless of who was defined as the client, past and current practitioners agreed that the focus of school social work attention was the student.
... ultimately you’re there to help students. They’re the ones who need to benefit from school, and that could be a group of students; it could be a particular student; it could be a class of students. But ultimately, the school is there for the good of the students. (N9)

**Targets or Clients?**

School social workers had long been consulting with teachers to support students.

*Social workers are already making a significant contribution by helping educationalists to understand and meet the needs of groups of children in the community who are at a disadvantage in the education process.* *(Social Work Executive, 1971)*

The *School Support Centre* service model 1988-1993 reinforced the view of school as client, although casework continued as a main method.

*... we started to move a little bit more away from just clinical work and got into more program(s) and seeing schools as the client in some respect and doing work with whole school approaches.* *(N5)*

With the closure of *School Support Centres* in 1993, and principals increasingly demanding casework, school social workers maintained their focus on systemic change, even though they had less legitimacy to effect it. Nevertheless, the breadth of focus had been established, and narrators described consultancy and advocacy to influence school practices, including behavior management, and professional development to help teachers understand the emotional and learning impacts of family trauma, and social and economic disadvantage. Sometimes the student was not seen by the school social worker as consultant.

*Ultimately I think the client’s the student and the student’s needs need to be placed foremost... And sometimes I think you’re better just to work with those systems around the student,*
to make that work more effectively, and ultimately you help the student that way. (N9)

... that is part of our work too, educating teachers and some of them come from a very middle class background and haven’t undergone any sorts of hardships themselves. So sometimes you need to take them through that. (N21)

Several narrators nominated schools as clients, in an attempt to explain the focus on school change, and the fact that the school system benefitted from the intervention. Multiple targets for intervention may have led to uncertainty about the definition of the client or clients, but narrators consistently held students as the focus of intervention.

The student needs to be the centre, that it really is about the students’ needs... The client can be different, because I would say in some cases, the school has been probably the client... But definitely, what’s in the best interest of the students. (N12)

I always believed that the client was the student... There were often times when that was blurred in terms of advocating for staff wellbeing and support, and family wellbeing and support... there are three different client groups, I think you could say... I guess I always came back to the young person... they needed... a level of support that helped the adults engage with them more effectively. (N23)

**Teacher and School Support**

Narrators gave examples where teachers had been given support in situations of personal or professional stress or low morale:

... staff who have had family members suicide; people in prison... disability... life-threatening illnesses. And sometimes it can be as simple as listening to these people, at other times it’s giving them some resources in the community that might help them. And some
of them are just annoyed with work and the treatment that they’re getting from the department, so sometimes it’s just listening and talking with them about that sort of stuff. (N5)

Although the student was the focus, there were times when teachers or schools needed support.

*It gets really blurry where a teacher might be completely having a meltdown about this kid in their classrooms. They’ve got to have some support and some advocacy and changes happen for their sanity...* (N23)

Narrators recounted complicated situations where the needs of the student and the needs of the school community were in conflict, for example, where members of the school community were feeling vulnerable because of harassment by students or families. The school social worker could feel like the “meat in the sandwich” (N12) while negotiating multiple clients.

*I had to work with the students, the school community, the teachers, (the student’s) extended family, and I remember thinking: This is too much. There was so much anger and angst... and I remember thinking: I don’t really know who my client is here. I don’t know which one I’m meant to be focusing on. I’m not sure what I’m meant to be doing.* (N14)

**Who Defines “the Client”?**

Some had resisted the interpretations of managers or principals who saw the schools as clients.

*I would say to my managers: Well, who is the client? And it’s not uncommon for them to say it’s the school that’s the client, when I would say: “Well, no, if you look at my code of ethics” - and I would encourage them to read my code of ethics - “it’s the student and the family who’s my client”. So sometimes that can create real creative
tension, particularly with senior managers, because they see the school as the client, where I would see the individual. And sometimes the school’s interests are not consistent with the student’s interests… it’s not uncommon for me to say at professional development (sessions) that we need to ask ourselves whose needs are being met? Are the students’ needs being met, or are the school’s needs being met? (N7)

Some narrators expressed confusion and sometimes embarrassment about not having a clear answer to this recurring question. Some re-worked their conceptualisation of “the client” within the narrative flow of the interview.

Ah, that’s a tricky one… I think I have a number of clients, and I think that’s what I’ve got to juggle… I think because my role is to work in the way (the principal) wants me to work, and I have to accept that. And hopefully if it’s not the way I think things should be going I can try to bring about some change. But I mean I suppose families are my clients. I don’t see teachers as my clients… I suppose you could argue the school as a whole as the client. Yeh, I think it’s tricky, and I have often thought about it. Who is… and how do I balance up who is the client… I don’t know, I think it’s tricky. (N22)

Three narrators suggested that that in a subordinate relationship with the school system, school social workers struggled to hold the professional right to define the client.

Look then maybe underneath it… we know that (the student is the client), but in a way we’re sort of almost trained to say: “Well, it’s the school that is a client”. (N22)

Sometimes principals think they’re the client, that they’re the ones whose needs should be met… We’re there for the wellbeing and best interests of the child! (N27)
The definition of “client” had personal, theoretical and practical meaning, while resonating with the professional discourse, either in agreement or digression from it. Further findings presented below indicated that school social workers engaged in theorised casework and school change essentially to support student learning, despite inconsistent notions of “the client”.

### Models for School Social Work Practice

Narratives and documents inferred consistent patterns and developments over time in what could be seen as models fluctuating with educational and social policies; social change; and social work discourses. Narrators often mentioned the satisfaction of being able to take a creative, flexible approach to determine practice according to the context and its boundaries, and reflective of personal interest and professional stance.

Regardless of the era of practice, narrators had a shared understanding of a broad, systemic model for school social work intervention. This is not to say that the balance was always satisfactory. The casework and counselling emphasis, focusing on the student rather than school development, especially in certain organisational epochs, frustrated actual practice, but did not dislodge more complex ecological systemic school social work perspectives.

### Casework Model

For the first 25 years of school social work in Victoria, casework intervention in partnership with psychologists encompassed the student, family, school and community, demonstrating very early considerations of later named systems perspectives. In some centres during the early 1980s, the casework model prevailed with a more clinical focus, and included family therapy, which was a burgeoning practice more widely. Casework has continued to predominate in response to school requests, but also “because that gives you immediate credibility” (N13), to expand into other activities within a broader model.
From the early “no man is an island” approach, school social workers have evolved through systems theory to an ecological systemic focus in case conceptualisation.

... you have to see a person in their environment, their family first, their location, the area they live in. You have to look at all the factors that are impinging on what they’re doing and on their hopes for themselves for their future. (N3)

Casework, Group Work and Community Development

Social workers used their knowledge of social problems and community resources, but notions of community or school development had not been incorporated originally into the school social work service model. Narratives and documents showed that in the 1970-80s, Victorian school social workers were reading, discussing and theorising about practice to expand into the tripartite model: casework, group work, community development. Alderson’s model was discussed and incorporated into the content of a Melbourne University school social work elective (Alderson, 1972; Hodgson, 1978a). Practitioners were beginning to network with community agencies, initially for case management, and as innovative community programs were gradually introduced to schools. Social workers began taking a more active role with school development.

In the progressive social and educational environment of the 1970-1980s, some principals who were “far-sighted” with “a broader view” (N15), supported community development activities, such as neighbourhood drop-in centres that might strengthen parent connection to the school and their support for children’s education.

As school social workers moved into School Support Centres in 1988, they were more able to apply school and community development within the tripartite model. Narrators found great satisfaction in whole school improvement projects delivered by multidisciplinary teams. There was coherence between social work principles and a model of practice mixing community, individual, family and
group work, in an atmosphere where community and school development were encouraged.

The Current Model

Narrators referred to the AASW school social work practice standards and the usefulness of the practical examples that illustrated the six main areas of practice within: Prevention, Early Intervention and Intervention (AASW, 2011). Together with the Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools (Victoria. Dept of Education, 1998a) they provided “a really effective tool” (N9) for shaping a practice model for both departmental and school-employed school social workers.

In the mid-1990s school social workers were isolated from professional colleagues, many ostensibly restricted by principals to a casework model. The maintenance of an ecological systemic approach was affirmed by the Framework’s multidisciplinary, ecological systemic service model that emphasised prevention and early intervention over intervention and critical incident recovery. The key concept of “resilience” was promoted by “building a healthy culture in the school” (N11), where commitment to student welfare would create a school “more humane for kids” (N9).

…it (summarised) the things that we did, and it gave me a bit of a framework I suppose in writing, that was already in my head… (N14)

The Framework policy to me was probably the best statement I’ve ever seen to come out of the department, it took guts to put that out… primary prevention and getting that into schools and into place… I do see social work heavily involved in it. (N13)

Despite its de-emphasis in the Framework, reactive casework remained the major request, and narrators still saw it as establishing credibility with principals and teachers. They commonly expressed adherence to the Framework’s emphasis on prevention and early intervention, but in practice, most time was given to intervention for advanced difficulties, crises and critical incidents.
The School-Employee Model of School Social Work Service

All currently practising school-employed narrators, including those within the non-government sector, referred to the AASW practice standards and the Framework, but described a service model that was different from a visiting departmental service, with greater focus on community and school development.

... for families to feel more involved in the school community; for teachers to be connected with families, not just the children... It doesn’t have to be “us and them”. It can be much more open and transparent and more fluid about people just coming in and being involved in the school community. (N6)

School-employed social workers were more able to provide preventative programs and early intervention. Visiting school social workers and community agency professionals with more choice about the referrals they accepted, were invited into the school as expert consultants on school issues or particular cases at complex intervention level.

School-employed school social workers described advantages of their positions, particularly intimate knowledge of the school community facilitating responsive, creative planning and intervention. Collaboration with teachers; support and supervision with departmental social workers; consultation with psychologists and speech pathologists; and peer support and supervision with agency colleagues and others who were school-employed, mitigated the isolation of the lone social worker.

Having a permanent office meant being able to set up as a practitioner, with tools otherwise precluded, such as sand tray and toys for play therapy, or a teen-friendly lounge or games area. An office created a space accessible to students and facilitated relationships. Being based in one school more often allowed comprehensive, integrated support rather than “band-aid” treatment (N25). Narrators described themselves as valued members in collaborative school teams. Teachers cared for the wellbeing of students in classrooms, but the
school-employed school social worker was on call to support the educational goal when things were: “looking a bit serious” (N26).

School-employed school social workers shared theoretical and practice issues with their departmental counterparts, but operated a service model embedded within a particular school community, and more holistically focused on that community.

Knowledge for School Social Work Practice

Knowledge for Generalist School Social Work Practice

Narrators designated their university courses as providing beginning knowledge for the generalist social work practice which was the basis of their theory, assessment and intervention. With generalist practice came the need for breadth and depth of “generic knowledge” (N14).

You've got to have an array of different tools and different ways that you can deal with things... being a generalist in terms of theorising and dealing with students... (N8)

School social work... certainly has a lot more diversity than any other type of social work I've done... in this job you cover all kinds of aspects of the role, really: the case work, the group work, the community development, the opportunity for policy development... I can't really describe it any other way... It's just such a generic role compared to other roles. (N14)

One day you could be managing a school crisis; the next day you could be counselling a family; the next day you could be working on developing a program around girls' bullying. (N6)

The variety was a source of satisfaction in constantly absorbing new knowledge and acquiring new skills; the ability to focus on particular professional interests; and the requirement for responsive creativity. The constellation of proactive
preventive work, early intervention, intervention and crisis work added to the satisfaction of generalist practice, although one narrator worried about being “too generalist” and “spreading (herself) too thin” (N26). It was more likely for narrators to recognise the breadth and transferability of their generalist skills:

I would say that the foundations I got in school social work have stood me in good stead in other areas of practice... You cover areas of disability, trauma, grief, life and death issues... You become very capable and confident in probably a number of areas. (N16)

Specialist Knowledge for the Schools Context

School social worker-narrators used specialist knowledges to support their consultancy activities: initially, an understanding of schools and how they operate as complex systems; and policies in relation to students and staff. They needed to understand how class groups operate; the changing demands on teaching; the role of the teacher in building relationships and offering curriculum suited to individual students, including those who have experienced trauma, abuse and neglect; and the learning, social and emotional supports that can be implemented within the student’s multiple environments.

doing observations of children in classrooms; providing teachers with classroom strategies; providing teachers with basic information on different sort of conditions of children... a specific knowledge that you wouldn’t have to worry about in any other job... the classroom’s a contained environment: it has structures, it has boundaries. It’s not their parent, it’s someone else who’s in authority. So there’s lots of knowledge... how to best deal with a particular situation. (N6)

Narrators needed knowledge of: how to create a learning environment; how to make community and family changes “to get the child to the gate” (N27); alternate individual and whole-class behaviour management principles; developmental and learning theory including the effects of trauma, neglect and abuse on brain development.
From the earliest days of the *Psychology Branch*, narrators and their school social work colleagues have used their knowledge of private and public issues; public welfare and community resources; youth justice; parenting skills; child protection; and the social needs and sub-cultures of children and young people. As society has changed, additional knowledge to support students or their families has been required in relation to: alcohol and other drugs; health, mental health, gender and sexuality; Koorie culture and education; migrant and refugee issues. Narrators referenced political and economic knowledge; social policy, social inequity, disadvantage; theories of change and influence; and rural sociology.

**Theories for School Social Work Intervention**

With values and purpose guiding practice; an ecological systems perspective; and background knowledge to inform work within the multi-faceted school environment, school social workers sought theories for intervention appropriate to the characteristics of the client group and the service delivery context. While individual professional style brought variety to repertoires across the cohort, narrators also demonstrated some commonalities, one of which was the term “eclectic” (N9).

There was evidence that narrators had critiqued the “bower bird” (N11) approach and integrated it usefully into generalist school social work practice:

... what you try and do is take bits and pieces of different theories and put it together in a way that you think will best support the young person. You sort of adapt what you’re going to do around the issue that you have... there’s a lot of differences in students... a variety of different socio-economic areas... (N8)

Solution-focused and strengths-based, sometimes linked to brief intervention, were most commonly cited by narrators as useful for working with students, families and teachers.
I also work from a strong solution-focused perspective in that I believe that I’m not the expert, you know, the family, the children, the client, they’re the experts, and it’s about finding what the solutions are.  (N24)

... if a child is achieving in some area in school, be it art or sport or in the academic subjects, then that builds their confidence and self-esteem, and once that starts to lift then they can work through a lot of issues.  (N21)

Narrative therapy, specifically mentioned by a few, fitted well with the strengths-based approach:

I like to use the narrative to actually get them to extend the story, and if there’s a block in their life, to tell me how they got that block unblocked.  (N1)

School social work practice had allowed diverse and at times new ideas: art and serial drawing therapy; dance and play therapy; rational emotive therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy and neuro-linguistic programming. Several narrators were among those who completed family therapy qualifications. One narrator recalled using sociograms, mapping dominant groups and isolated children in the classroom, to inform some of the earliest group work acknowledging the importance of social dynamics and the friendship group on student wellbeing and learning.

**Barriers to Learning**

Narrators commonly used the language of the removal of barriers and engagement to explain interventions. School connectedness not only enhanced learning, but provided a safe haven for students who were otherwise coping with multiple problems outside. One school-employed narrator consulted a departmental school social worker:
And she said to me: your job’s really around removing the blockages to education. That has stayed with me, and that’s pretty much what it is... I like that description.  (N26)

Those impediments to student learning might be found in the students themselves or their social connections; family dynamics or circumstances; school policies and processes; or the teaching-learning environment and curriculum.

learning or in the playground... or friendships or self-esteem... whatever is happening at home and is impacting on the child being able to be a happy, educationally progressing child in the school.  (N21)

You just know when kid’s connected to school and you can see the difference it makes.  I love the concept because it’s not about what’s wrong with the kid, it’s about what can the school do, what’s wrong with the school... to establish connectedness for this young person so it takes away the problem...  (N11)

... identify and remove whatever barriers there might be to children doing really well at school, and acknowledging that there were lots of barriers and that social workers were probably in some ways the best ones to identify those barriers because they had a kind of broad ecological perspective on children’s lives.  And we also had a whole repertoire of intervention and ways of trying to influence change.  (N4)

Narrators noted a “broad cross-section” (N5) in the barriers to learning that have become reasons for school social work intervention. Some have been repeated from the time of post-war reconstruction: problems arising from the complexity of family life; school non-attendance; language and learning difficulties and other disabilities; social problems and peer relationships at school; child and adolescent behaviour problems at school and at home, and including criminal offending; family violence; parents with reason not to value education.
School social workers have maintained a continuity of focus on overcoming the social and educational disadvantages of poverty, a recurring theme in the findings. In the 1950s, one narrator was offered tea in chipped cups with newspaper instead of lace tray cloths, by desperately poor mothers in public housing. At Camp Pell, a decommissioned military base re-purposed as makeshift housing in Royal Park, close to the city, social workers were linking families with resources; supporting them in parenting issues; and maintaining children at school. In the early 2000s, when a child had failed to return a parent consent form because he had used it the night before as toilet paper, the narrator discovered not only terrible poverty, but also addiction, mental illness, transience and the mother’s dread that her children would be taken from her by “the welfare”.

Fear of “the welfare” has made families cautious of the school social worker by association until current times. In the 1950s:

... nearly all struggling families would have had some experience of welfare, the welfare department, coming in, removing a child... people were frightened of the welfare. (N17)

Some problems existed behind closed doors but became more openly recognised over time: alcohol and drug abuse; child sexual and physical abuse or neglect; family violence; disability, health and mental health issues for parents and students; trauma; grief and loss; depression; anger; teenage pregnancy; bullying; the need for parenting education. Developing medical knowledge changed the definition of and response to some problems.

I think we knew about autism then but it was unusual, very unusual. I remember (one) boy vividly... No-one knew what was wrong with him. He didn’t fit into most obvious categories of being different. (N17)

Narrators noted that lack of parent support and connection to the school was a barrier to student engagement and learning. Societal growth had meant for some students and their families social isolation and alienation. Increasingly, school
social workers dealt with family breakdown and homelessness; transitions, including expulsions and school closures; family unemployment and chronic financial stress; rural isolation and poor resources; emotional and mental health issues, including suicide and self-harm; extreme and challenging behaviours in the classroom; illness and diagnosed conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Autism Spectrum Disorder; disruption to cognition and learning caused by trauma; bullying and racism.

One narrator discussed the lack of readiness for school; inadequate experience of socialising with others; and little understanding of rules and consequences. Two narrators, in Melbourne and regional school communities in the 2000s, spoke of highly anxious and unhappy children, and the resultant anxiety for teachers, in schools where parents were working long hours to maintain their standard of living, and pressuring children to achieve.

The impediments to learning could no longer be located solely within the student and family: teaching practices; curriculum content; and student-teacher-parent relationships were recognised as excluding factors. School social workers needed to counter labels related to behaviour, family background, or learning: such labels risked limiting expectations of student potential, and inaccurate problem definition and curriculum response.

...sometimes I find they’re quick to label: he’s ADHD or ADD without looking any further than that. (N6)

I’ve seen kids who have been labelled all sorts of things, but giving them some work experience or giving them a different type of program, you know, they blossom. It’s great! (N7)

The quality of the teacher-student relationship was crucial to learning, and there was general respect for the commitment of teachers to the learning and wellbeing of their students: “much of it is quite special and brilliant” (N1). However, teacher personal and work-place stress, including inexperience, could impede student learning.
Three narrators specifically spoke of the connection between family violence and children’s inability to learn, exacerbated by teachers who were loud, negative or aggressive.

Focus on poor student behaviour might mask the real issues. The school system’s inability to adapt to accommodate the needs of some students has been a constant factor in student learning. Teachers’ professional efforts have brought about “lots of successes”, but other students have fallen “through the cracks” (N1).

What I saw, was this terrible black hole, where you could go in, and a kid would be struggling, there’d be behaviour problems, you might think about a behaviour management plan... but in the end that kid went in every day and struggled in their classroom. And how many of us could go in and face that every day, and not lose it or melt down? (N25)

Sometimes, where the rift between the student and the school could no longer be mediated, the school social worker needed to facilitate a successful school transfer.

The difference in school attitude was just extraordinary. The student just went ahead in leaps and bounds; the parents were super-happy. (N5)

Narrators cited school non-attendance, as perhaps the most enduring and obvious impediment to school engagement, and a focus of school social worker attention since the post-war period: truancy; parent approved absence; anxious school refusal; chronic illness; suspension and expulsion; social isolation and withdrawal (Professional Officers: Psychology and Guidance Branch, 1970; School Social Worker Group & Hodgson, 1978).

In the 1940-50s: “truancy... was linked with delinquent behaviour” (N17). For three decades school social workers worked alongside truancy officers whose role was to enforce attendance, but policy post-1980s required schools to develop
wellbeing, engagement and learning policies that ensured “participation” and “access to resources” (N3). Suspension and expulsion became more strictly subject to protocols and departmental involvement, including the participation of school social workers.

**Cultural Diversity**

Narrators did not generally relate diversity separately from assumptions within a broad ecological systems focus on students, sensitivity to their differing individual needs including Koorie, ethnic and socio-economic cultural backgrounds, and the personal support and systemic changes needed.

Only in recent decades have dominant societal, social work and education discourses and State education policies included the dispossession of Koorie and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, and its effects on educational outcomes. With hindsight, one narrator could now reflect on intensive work in the 1980s with a family where a mother’s kinship and culture were not recognised and included in assessment and planning:

> I don’t think we were taught much about it. I don’t think we were told what to do with that... it might have been that services from an indigenous agency could have been helpful to her, which at that time I wouldn’t have known much about and in fact I’m not sure they existed... (N10)

Since the early 1990s, the requirement for inclusive education and support has been included in schools policy and program development, and another narrator recounted casework collaborations in the 2000s with Koorie Education Support Officers to ensure appropriate school social work and teaching practices for individual children and their families.

Two narrators remembered school social worker Alison Goding as a pioneer in policy and program development regarding the education of migrant students. She began with the first departmental working parties in 1967 before
appointment as Section Leader, Multicultural Resources Section, *Counselling Guidance & Clinical Services* (CGCS). Goding had responsibility to enact Karmel Report recommendations for cultural awareness, the maintenance of family language, and the use of interpreters. She liaised with school social workers; coordinated professional development to increase multicultural understanding and competence of teachers and CGCS staff; and maintained linkages with other organisations (Goding, 1973a, undated; Social Worker Group, 1973b).

**Referral, Assessment and Planning for Intervention**

In their stories representing the 1970s onwards, departmental and school-employed narrators consistently constructed school social work activity systemically or within an ecological systems perspective, where the student was seen at the nucleus of potentially supportive interlocking environments, including the school. Whether confronted with individual or group referrals, or a broader issue, planning was predicated on the need to look beyond the student in order to strengthen protective factors.

... you’ve got the child but you’ve got the home context and the school context. I think you have to look how one system integrates with the other... (N6)

If you can get the environment around the person to help them flourish that was a better focus than if you tried to work with them individually only ... (N20)

School social workers stood ready to “play around with the system” (N7) so that the school met the needs of its students. Irrespective of the balance between direct and indirect service, school social workers intrinsically thought ecologically or systemically. Casework was described as ecological rather than clinical, and included school development; the strengthening of teacher capacity to support students in difficult situations; and community linkages.
Respecting the student included their right to a successful education, and to be appreciated as someone with a complex life situation, and the strengths and potential to have some control over their lives and to learn in a way that empowered them to deal with some of their own issues.

**Referrals and Assessment**

Despite the broad scope of barriers to learning, referrals in most instances defined problems within the student or the family, and were rarely credited to shortcomings in the school or other interconnected environments. The issues were “manifesting themselves at school” (N4), and often represented disruption to the functioning of the school or teacher difficulty with particular students. Problems included: student behaviour, learning, coping or social skills; family circumstances, breakdown, bereavement, and child protection issues; and emergency situations.

Ecological systemic bi-psycho-social assessment defined the problem as the basis for any intervention. It was a careful process that could take some time, especially in order to respect the young person’s voice.

... you really need to look at the whole family along with the child, and do more assessments of the child and spend more time with the child. (N25)

If you’re using a systems model of assessment... you’re not looking at the problem being in the (student). You’re looking at the problem being the whole relationship, the whole dynamic, so the focus is off the child. And when you take the focus off the child, you begin to deal with some of the structural stuff around kids, that actually mess them up at school. (N13)

When the school requested consultancy or action with a group of students, or on a particular wellbeing issue, the social worker had the theoretical background to respond to the systemic interconnections that created difficulties for students.
Schools often refer boys with violent, angry behaviours... an anger management counselling approach kind of gives the message that it’s their problem rather than a family problem, a systems problem, a much broader community problem. (N12)

Assessment included not only a recognition of the systems in play, and the potential for support, but an understanding of the degree to which schools, families or community were able and willing to bring about necessary change.

One of our schools recently did a bullying survey and they said: “Can you come in and work with our bullies?” And I said: “Well, what would be the point? What are you going to do as a whole-school... to address this issue?” ... You have that kind of conversation with schools, and they actually listen, and they actually then go on and implement it. (N14)

Planning for Intervention

Assessment preceded planning for intervention, and both were part of a deliberate, theorised, thoughtful process. Commonly, problem definition might be different from the original school or parent interpretation.

You have to have collected data that supports your own notions, not what the school says... You have to do some analysis and planning around that... Social work is a planned intervention process. It is a profession that makes judgments about intervention. So your judgments have to stand up if you’re going to be involved in intervention. (N13)

Planning aimed to modify factors within the student’s environments, and to support teachers and parents as most influential to facilitate change. School social workers had opportunity to look individually or more widely into the peer group, the classroom, the whole school or the family, to plan, where appropriate, a multi-pronged approach towards a student wellbeing issue.
We worked with schools to survey student attitudes to bullying, and then collected those surveys and collated the data, and presented it back to school staff, and all of this might happen over the space of 2 or 3 months... working with a school to write policy on that sort of stuff. But then I might also be working individually with some students on bullying related issues... (N5)

Skills for Intervention

The considered application of core social work skills facilitated the interventions that would bring about ecological systemic change.

The tools in my tool-kit are skills around therapy; skills around interpersonal skills, you know, building relationships; all that kind of stuff, and that’s always your first point as a social worker. You need to be able to do that well. (N7)

Narrators listed important skills including: consultation; negotiation; communication; listening, questioning; being supportive, able to engage and engender trust; the ability to find common ground with people, and practical, workable strategies. The context of school social work itself called for the development of new skills for creative, responsive intervention and the assuming of new projects and interventions.

Levels of School Social Work Intervention

The school social worker narratives represented four levels of intervention. Departmental school social workers acknowledged a focus on Complex Intervention, despite organisational policy, AASW practice standards and social work theory requiring more effective focus on Prevention and Early Intervention.

Prevention: as visitors to the school, except for the organisational period 1974-1992, departmental narrators were not excluded from, but tended to be
less able than school-employed colleagues to engage in collaborative school-community development, the implementation of school-wide inclusive support and prevention programs, and curriculum and policy development. As needed, from the 1970s, all were able to deliver small group or whole class programs, for example, in communication and social relationships, emotional literacy and problem-solving; teacher professional development; parenting information programs and sometimes research into student issues.

**Early Intervention:** Being on-site and easily accessible, school-employed school social workers were more likely to be called upon at the early intervention level in relation to individual students, whereas referrals to departmental practitioners often represented the progress of difficulty to a more serious phase. Whether departmental or school-employed, narrators gave examples of educative small group work; short-term counselling and casework intervention; established and innovative programs with targeted students; implementing environmental supports; teacher consultation; case management and liaison with community services.

**Complex Intervention:** school-employed school social workers were more likely to use referral, and departmental school social workers were more likely to use intensive crisis intervention, casework, referral, counselling and support strategies when students had serious academic, behavioural or social-emotional problems.

**Restoring Wellbeing:** critical incident management increasingly drained the limited resources of practitioners who needed still to fulfil other roles and responsibilities deferred at times of emergency and communal trauma.

**School Social Work Methods and Activities**

School social workers were distinguished from other professions in the educational setting in how their methods were carefully and purposefully planned according to values, ecological systemic perspectives and essential specialist knowledge deeply embedded within professional identity.
There were so many ways that I worked in that school that I believe only a social work framework... saw as possible. (N11)

Teacher consultation was always fairly important... in-service work with teachers on request; continuing roles in local organisations trying to build up or bridge gaps in provision of welfare services, whether it was shortage of youth groups or whatever... (N3)

School social work methods were the means whereby practitioners interacted with students, schools and other systems to contribute to student learning and school improvement. Methods were used in configurations which could change over time according to educational and welfare policy; organisational context; community resourcing and current trends in social work; individually preferred models of practice; student needs and school requests.

A 1978 Latrobe University school social work elective course outline depicted the role choices in school settings as: counsellor/caseworker/therapist; consultant; mediator/broker; liaison; researcher; community organiser; educator and group worker (Glasson, 1978).

Former and current practitioners narrated multi-faceted and ecologically determined activities:

There was a high demand for casework and next to that would be running groups, and then next to that would be training, developing welfare policies... but most of it was about problem-solving in the school around particular students... Consultation, a lot of consultation. (N4)

We do a variety of different things... what takes up a core amount of your time is a lot of the individual one-on-one stuff that you do with students. I also do a lot of liaising with staff; it takes a fair bit of time as well. Also parents, a fair bit of contact with parents. Some group work activities, around confidence, self-esteem, bullying, harassment, that type of stuff. Art therapy. We also spend a bit of
time too linking with other agencies and organisations within our area. That might be for programs as well, or it might be for health issues... We also look at policy development, any policy changes need to be made... some staff (professional development) and training in areas that we feel staff might need a bit of assistance or support.

(N8)

Until the 1990s, narrators and their colleagues directly intervened in a range of child protection, family support and counselling, before such services were widely available. In present times, when children or families do not fit into the criteria for appropriate community-based support; waiting lists in community agencies are too long; referrals not accepted; or there is reluctance to engage with other agencies; and urgency is determined, school social workers fulfil a diversity of roles, for example, in the areas of sexual assault, family violence, and mental health including attachment problems.

**Casework**

The distinguishing feature of casework has been a focus on student learning and a school-specific approach. Narrators framed casework ecologically to include as required: student and family counselling and support; group work; teacher consultation in regard to wellbeing, relationship-building, learning, curriculum, resources and behaviour management; professional development with teachers and other support personnel; referral to and liaison with other agencies or schools; and student peer group development. School-employed school social workers were able to include brief, frequent contact and classroom support.

Current practitioners described school-based case conferences known as Student Support Groups (SSG). SSGs are mandatory for students with disabilities or in out-of-home care, but school social workers have increasingly used them to advocate and plan for clients. Collaboratively, teachers and other school staff, parents or carers, agency representatives including State child protection workers, and often the child or young person, establish wellbeing and learning engagement goals and strategies, with a shared commitment to achieve them.
The nature of casework has changed over time as more resources became available through community agencies. Narratives from before the 1990s described few though expanding family support services, when a child’s referral on the basis of presentation and learning at school, meant that the school social worker was much more heavily involved with the complexity of the family system. At times, the school social worker had the added responsibility of ensuring the health and safety of all of the children in the family, often: “a de facto child protection worker” (N16). Similarly, mental health, sexual assault and incest were essentially within the domain of school social work in the days before greater understanding and resourcing of specialist services.

The growth of the government and community welfare sectors has provided more referral and liaison opportunities. In the 1970s, case conferences brought school social workers and agencies together to discuss families; and identified emerging community issues. In the 1980s social policy environment, school social workers increasingly sat on government and agency consultative groups: such formal arrangements were not referred to in the 2000s. Referrals to community agency family support workers have ostensibly removed the need for school social workers to be responsible for intensive family casework, allowing them to case manage and focus on the child or young person at school. Nevertheless, long waiting lists, under-servicing in rural areas, and parent reluctance to engage has continued to require school social workers to fulfil counselling and support roles that would otherwise be undertaken by specialist agencies.

Because school was a constant touchstone in a child’s life, the school social worker was well placed to witness the trajectory into young adulthood. This narrative from the 1970s depicts a child let down by family, school, welfare and other systems, and the casework model.

_I remember one little boy who was about 10, and he was very active, and quite a behaviour problem... both his parents were alcoholics. Both would have been brain damaged quite severely, very fond of the little boy but quite unable to cope and sometimes abusive with him... I remember him coming to me. He said: “I really want to leave home. Can you find me somewhere to go?” There was just nowhere_
that I could get him. Not that there were many suitable places, but there were no homes that would take him at that stage... Within about a week, actually, he had stolen a soft drink (soda) and he came before the Children’s Court. I went along with the parents, and so he was put in a home then. I saw many, many years later, his name was in the paper charged with robbery with violence. (N19)

On the other hand, casework narratives demonstrated the effectiveness of casework. In the late 1990s, one narrator engaged with a mother caught in poverty and transience, on parenting and health issues; with the boys at school on anger issues; and made referrals to community agencies. She organised the school to provide basic staples for the family; and gained community support for a Breakfast Club, thereby meeting the needs of several students. She used her knowledge and theoretical perspectives to improve a teacher’s relationship with students.

One teacher, especially with the youngest boy, wasn’t very compassionate. He said: “He puts on this cutesy grin which I’m not falling for”... he was sort of bringing his values into the situation as well... I did explain to the teacher about the intersecting pressures that were impacting on this family... I sat down with him for about half an hour, and I explained it to him, and he was able to see, yes, this family was under an awful amount of pressure... (N21)

The case ran intermittently over two years, demonstrating the school social worker’s ethical discretion to stay involved while there were on-going concerns for the students’ wellbeing and learning. In the end: (The family) came through. They came through, which was really great. (N21)

Counselling

Counselling has always been one of the main school social work methods. School social workers have always been ready with interviewing and counselling skills, thanks to the training within professional social work courses and further professional development.
Narrators illustrated that counselling included assessment; problem-solving and support; and cited contact of 2-3 weeks, around 8 weeks, or extended as needed. Some did more intense therapeutic intervention, but it was difficult: “because of the constraints of time, and the school system” (N14).

Whether departmental or on-site, school social workers had scope to apply their counselling skills and approach in a flexible setting: appointment times and length, access to the playground, classroom, music and art rooms, as suited to student needs. On the other hand, counselling was often limited by room availability and schedules. Sometimes teachers expressed annoyance when a student returned to class unsettled after a counselling session.

The majority of narrators described their counselling in terms of solution-focused, strengths-based interventions that improved student coping and engagement with school.

No narrator gave the impression that they counselled students in isolation from the world around them; nor did they give the impression that teachers and parents were the only others who needed to be considered. In their ecological thinking, narrators considered their counselling relationship with the student at the centre of multiple environments and complexities within those environments, requiring complementary methods to support the student, immediately and in the long-term. The counselling relationship was, in fact, a site of information and inspiration for school social worker efforts towards improved student wellbeing and learning processes within schools.

Teacher Consultation

By 1970, consultation was intrinsic to school social work: helping teachers to understand the impact of factors in home and family, and how best to support students (Professional Officers: Psychology and Guidance Branch, 1970).

Teacher consultation and assistance in the interests of the long-term support of the student, were seen as highly important; sometimes without direct work with the student. Consultation aimed to improve teacher-student relationships and
confidence through increased understanding of student difficulties, for example, the impact of cultural background, family violence or poverty on learning and behaviour. Narrators recognised teachers as highly skilled in working with a classroom of children, but sometimes the school social worker, as an informed observer, could identify effective strategies for behaviour change.

*I tried to keep the focus very practical... (teachers) dealing with these difficult situations in their classroom... required practical strategies for helping to manage students.*  (N9)

Supporting new teachers; providing personal assistance for those experiencing personal difficulties; debriefing; and consulting, for example, with regard to individually-targeted and whole class behaviour management were core activities. School social workers prioritised informing and up-skilling staff.

*A lot of the staff now will actually come to me and say: “I’m not too sure whether I’m doing the right thing”.  (N6)*

In the 21st century, schools continued to see the first signs of distress caused by the ever-growing divide between the rich and the poor. School social workers could take educative roles in helping teachers to understand structural inequity.

*(They) have real difficulty understanding people who don’t have a house; people who don’t have a job... ... I actually have these conversations with principals, to get them to understand poverty... a better understanding of the much more structural issues.*  (N7)

**Providing Professional Development and Support**

Professional development up-skilled school staff about student and family issues, and encouraged improved teacher-student relationships for better learning.

*I very much see my role is getting teachers to have those relationships with the kids that are going to open up things, and so I think we’ve had a win on that.*  (N1)
With privileged knowledge of students, families and communities, school social workers have interpreted for school staff the relationship between home and school, on matters such as: family violence; child abuse; mandatory child protection reporting; family separation; migrant and other cultural issues. Narrators gave accounts of professional development delivered in single schools or across schools, sometimes by multidisciplinary teams, to inform the wellbeing understanding and skills of teachers. To minimise the labelling of individual students, professional development has included identification of and response to difficulties; building optimism and resilience; teenagers’ legal rights; bullying and harassment; confidentiality; and healthy communication. One narrator worked to overcome teacher power in the student-teacher dynamic by offering a counselling skills program.

... interpersonal skills: issues around engagement; empathy; how to sit; how to talk; ... how to listen; all that sort of thing. Because a lot of them don't listen, because they’re in powerful positions. (N7)

Some workshops and individual support addressed staff welfare issues, including the development of teacher professional identity, as new teachers struggled with personal values and pedagogy within the reality of their practice.

He was a young man who was a real sweetheart but couldn’t control a class, he really struggled. It was so hard for him that first year. (We) used to spend quite a lot of time with him around supporting him and working out strategies because he really cared about the kids; he really wanted to be a good teacher. (N20)

Narrators had contributed to capacity building of various school staff through the provision of individual and group support for student welfare coordinators in secondary schools, primary welfare officers and chaplains; case-conferencing and professional supervision for school-employed social workers.
Curriculum Development

School social work intervention in the learning environment, teacher-student relationships and curriculum distinguishes it from other social work services delivered at school. School social workers have advocated for curriculum content and learning activities designed for individual and groups of students, better to meet their diverse needs within an otherwise standardised education system.

School social workers participated in management committees and delivery of innovative learning programs, and experimental schools (Social Worker Group, 1971b). Mainstreaming students with disabilities under the innovative 1984 integration policy, gave school social workers a specific support role with teachers required to cater for students with significant physical and intellectual differences.

Integration was a fairly major policy drive... the casework I was doing reflected some of the... impacts of that policy at the school level in that more and more teachers were being asked to accommodate children with special needs into their classrooms. (N4)

It was not only students with officially recognised disabilities who had difficulties accessing the curriculum. School social workers were frustrated by the exclusion of students with social, emotional or behavioural issues, from supported mainstream programs. One narrator had devised an innovative teacher-school social worker in-home program to help re-engage socio-economically disadvantaged children and families with learning. Sometimes there were alternative programs, where “hands-on” activities were delivered in supportive environments that were “not punitive” (N20).

The way you kept those kids engaged was by giving them a break and ... a sense of self-esteem... If they could see their achievements they were more likely to be able say: “Hang on, I can do things!” Particularly boys... it worked for a lot of them. They stayed engaged; they got a lot out of it... (N20)
Advocacy

One narrator described advocacy as a specialist skill that differentiated school social workers from other student support staff. Several narrators included advocacy as a way of redressing power imbalances and dominant teacher voice.

*It’s to be the voice of advocacy for young people and families, because a lot of families are very intimidated by schools, and a lot of authority resides in the teachers. So I think there’s a role around advocacy for families and young people. I think it’s to help people think differently about things like student management.* (N11)

The difficulty of advocacy lay in school social workers’ lower position within the school hierarchy. Advocacy implied that current practices or policy needed improvement. Two narrators were wary of the term “advocacy” which suggested to school staff: “you’re trying to attack them” (N7). One interpreted advocacy as a “last resort”, “almost threatening” (N12), or an ultimatum when negotiations have failed. Both used the term “negotiation” (N7, N12) although it minimised the impact of the power differential that other narrators addressed with advocacy as a core social work method.

Where there was confusion as to whether the school or the student was the client, and while practitioners needed to maintain credibility and trust within the school, it could be difficult to speak strongly on behalf of students or families who had been marginalised.

Student Group Work

For the first two decades of school social work, group work was still developing theoretically and was minimally used. Narratives recounting the 1970s onwards, included small group work that was mostly early intervention with targeted students with particular needs. Narrators recounted from more than two decades ago: a transition course for “vulnerable” grade 6 girls who were about to face a “steep learning curve, socially, emotionally and educationally” (N10); social skills training to assist the coping of grade 5 and 6 students; using migrant
university students as mentors and role models with high school students from their own cultural background. Similar needs have been continually identified for group work: difficulties with emotions including anger; confidence; self-esteem; bullying and harassment; school disengagement; social skills, including students with autism; and enduring family difficulties.

Access to whole class groups allowed narrators to facilitate social-emotional learning through: Year 7 orientation; school camps; and classroom curriculum or programs. Narrators needed group work skills and often creativity to achieve goals through activity-based programs, art and mosaics, music and dance, cooking or outdoor adventures.

... allowing stories to open up around fires, or in canoes and really acknowledging, talking about dreams, hopes, successes... and being able to go: “That’s not all bad. Can we hang on to some of that stuff? How did you make that happen?” (N1)

Before prevention was written formally into policy in 1998, school social workers for years had incorporated universally delivered programs. At a high school in the 1980s all of the year 9 girls, many from low socio-economic and migrant backgrounds, and at risk of not continuing their education, participated in small groups facilitated by the departmental school social worker. Study skills, relaxation and stress management workshops have assisted year 11 and 12 students. With their understanding of social competence, school social workers have continued to work with whole-class groups in the areas of social and emotional literacy and mental health. One narrator regularly worked with children to overcome racism. Before the days of health and human relations courses, some school social workers included sex education in their group programs.

Parent Groups

Parent programs since the 1970s have aimed at improving student engagement and learning at school through: improved parent-school relationships; and improved parent-child-family relationships. School social workers have
facilitated mothers’ clubs, parent groups, community drop-in centres, cooking and nutrition classes designed to overcome social isolation and build parental confidence to support children’s learning. Programs have met specific needs such as the involvement of fathers and men in children’s lives and learning; the development of family participation in multi-cultural and rural communities.

Parenting programs designed to build confidence in managing behaviour and building positive family relationships have been implemented by school social workers. Since “there’s no stigma attached to going to a school” (N2), a primary school in particular was an ideal site for initiating parent support.

Two departmental narrators gave accounts of neighbourhood parent support activities around 1980, to improve parent relationships with the school, and to address risks such as family violence, anxiety and parenting. One facilitated groups and camps with young mothers on an inner suburban public housing estate, separated from friends and extended family, focusing on self-development and social cohesion. Elsewhere in outer Melbourne, two drop-in centres in adjoining suburbs offered conversation and programs in parenting, communication skills and compiling resumes.

Critical Incidents

Narrators considered that school social workers had expertise and understanding for the increasing calls to respond to critical incidents affecting the school community, for example: deaths, suicides of parents and students, school fires and bush-fires. Well before emergency responses had been planned and implemented, Psychology and Guidance Branch staff were called to attend the earliest critical incident recalled. The collapse of the West Gate Bridge while under construction in October 1970, killed and injured many local fathers, uncles and family friends, and traumatised children and families.

In the mid-1990s, crisis and trauma recovery were ecologically framed to include the development of “on-going structures in the school” (N4). Critical incident management has been driven by state-wide guidelines, but organised locally. Some narrators had management responsibilities; others were involved to greater
or lesser degrees. Critical incident and crisis assessment and management have continued to be founded on strengthening individuals and communities.

*I like being able to do that, and I just like the fact that you go in and you work, you achieve something, you get everything in place and then you move out.* (N14)

**School Community Development**

All of the narrators rated school development highly among the goals of school social work, and all contributed to school policy or programs at some level. The most efficient support for student learning lay in building supportive processes, especially where inflexible practices otherwise frustrated the particular needs of some students. Narratives of 1970 onwards defined the school social worker’s role to focus more broadly than the individual student and their family.

*... to work within the school to bring about any changes within the school... staff development, professional development sessions, talking to the whole staff at staff meetings...* (N2)

*If I can just help a few kids, that’ll be good. But then... developing the services just seems to be the best, the greatest need.* (N19)

School social workers coordinated or participated in student wellbeing teams and attended leadership meetings, and it was often from here that policy and program development emanated.

Departmental and school-employed narrators recalled school development and capacity building activities such as consulting on reporting procedures, or contributing to welfare, discipline and other policy development, evaluation and implementation. School social workers have informed the writing of policies such as: self-harm; smoking; bullying and harassment; behavioural code of conduct; absenteeism; pastoral care. Relationships with local community and government agencies were formalised through protocols.
An integrated approach from research to program implementation has been applied to issues such as school non-attendance, lateness and bullying, and programs have been "rolled out in several schools" (N6). Programs such as breakfast clubs were conceptualised ecologically, with respect for financial hardship and with multiple goals, for example: timely school arrival; health and wellbeing; learning capacity; and community participation.

However, school development appeared to be more possible when school social workers were school-employed, or if departmental, assigned to a particular school for two days or more. On-site more often and integrated into the wider school community, they were able to integrate their efforts into a balanced plan for change. They seemed more able to implement parent activities and programs to promote parent participation in children's learning at school and home; safe student areas during break times; and after-school activities for targeted groups. School-employed school social workers could assume a long-term plan for school culture, inclusive of individual and group needs, operating within but bringing change to the school system:

... everything was underpinned by wanting to build a really healthy and positive help-seeking culture in the school... (N11)

Projects

State and federally funded programs since the 1970s have allowed for innovative time- and resource-limited projects, some continuing as programs in individual or clusters of schools. The Disadvantaged Schools Program funded one narrator to work on student engagement and retention in the early 1980s; and several of the retrieved documents referred to school-employed social workers within the same agenda. Another worked in a cluster of schools under funding arising from the Suicide Prevention Task Force Report (Victoria. Dept of Health, 1997) in the 1990s. Several narrators were involved in the development and collaborative regional administration of School Focused Youth Services, established in response to the same report, and providing multiple, locally designed projects in schools to improve access to health and wellbeing support.
Our goal was to maximise resources. We discussed trends and issues in the community: gangs, even a murder. There’d been school lock-downs. Agencies were working together. (N27)

Community Networking
School social worker-narrators furthered the wellbeing of children and young people through networking with other agencies also supporting their needs: youth services, and further education; health, mental health and disability services; child and family support. These networks promoted collaborative environments to facilitate case management and ease of referral and access for students and families; and maximised opportunities for community programs delivered on the school site, for example recreation or health, for students, parents or teachers. Community networking also furthered student wellbeing and school engagement, directly through learning options.

Schools need to form partnerships with non-government agencies, with local businesses, with a whole range of people so they can offer their students and the families of those students, different types of education, rather than just talk’n’chalk. (N7)

Research and Evaluation
Research and evaluation of practice were poorly represented. Several narratives depicted research as a planning tool for responding to issues such as bullying. One narrator described research activity in the 1970s in response to schooling in the context of multicultural diversity. No narrator mentioned research as a consistent area of practice, although some expressed the desire to do more.

There was little formal evaluation of practice, which was highlighted by some as a deficit, with need for more rigorous and documented study. There was also scope for stronger ecological, primary prevention needs analyses.
Social Action

School social worker-narrators, themselves buffeted by political change, barely questioned underlying structural assumptions, generally accepting the construction of education, teaching, learning and supplementary support services within which school social work was embedded. One narrator critiqued schools as producing institutional conformity.

... it’s such a technology driven self-regulation and compliance and it’s preparing them for a compliance culture. It’s not actually educating them about what is in the world and how it could be in the world and what role they might play in the world. It’s just teaching them how to comply. (N20)

Narratives featured the removal of barriers to learning within the given context of schools, including school development and school and community linkages for improved service management, but few included broader social action to challenge structural inequities faced by students and their families. The earliest social work graduates had been ready to address social problems at a societal level, but activists needed to do that in their own time, certainly not given opportunity within the workplace: “to influence the system” (N17).

*Education Workshop Findings* (Anonymous, 1971) reported school social worker participant concern about inequitable school subsidy systems that granted government funds strictly proportional to parent fund-raising, effectively perpetuating socio-economic disadvantage. They recommended fundamental changes in the professional roles and institutions of education, to meet changing individual, family and community aspirations; the need for “reconciliation” and “security”; and “profound rethinking” by Commonwealth and State governments about the allocation of priorities and resources, so that the potential of “all sections of the community” might be realised.

Documents revealed a time when school social worker collective activist voice was more prevalent, in the progressive social environment following the election of the Federal Labor Government in 1972. *Values in School Social Work*
(Hodgson, circa 1975) focused on the injustice of poverty. School social workers contributed to *Poverty in Australia* (Australia. Commission of Inquiry into Poverty & Henderson, 1975). Pam Holden liaised with the Commission, and the group wrote reports and completed questionnaires about poverty and schooling, collated by a sub-committee including Ron Smith, Alix Clemens, Marilyn McInnes and Alison Goding (Social Worker Group, 1973a, 1973c, 1973d).

As part of a community action network in her service area, Barbara Sturmfels prepared a *Poverty Survey* report (Sturmfels, 1973) that addressed the family and schooling impacts of poverty and poor housing. She critiqued curriculum delivery and content inappropriate to student interest and need; and inconsistent staffing that impacted negatively on student welfare and learning. Sturmfels emphasised the need for positive parent-teacher relations and parent participation in decision making; and recommended that each school of 500 or more should have its own social worker, still an unmet aspiration.

In 1977 social worker group elected a sub-committee to negotiate with the Social Welfare Department a more timely payment of the education “maintenance allowance” for low income families (Social Worker Group, 1977b).

**School Social Work as Specialist Practice**

The chapter thus far has indicated the construction, developing over six decades, of a consistent, generalist, ecological systemic approach, focused in the specific area of schools and student learning, in order to maximise potential and achieve equity through education. Narrators distinguished school social work from other fields of practice, and defined school social work as specialist social work.

**A Narrative of Professional Identity and Specialist Practice**

The following narrative consideration of specialist practice presents some characteristics of the unfolding school social worker professional identity. “Narrator 24” has encapsulated factors that define the uniqueness of school social work, including: theory, knowledge, practice and context, through
reflection on practice over time, to develop a meaningful personal conceptualisation of school social work as specialist, generalist practice.

I definitely think it's specialised. I think it’s a specialist area of practice that I think whilst general social work practice is definitely the basis we all need for it, and there are some theoretical perspectives that better inform school social work. I think, you know, the eco-systemic is the most relevant, especially the work we do with children and schools and so we wind up getting involved with families, so all that I think really lends itself well to that. Developmental theory is very important, and theories around trauma, crisis theory, all those things are important. So yeh, I think school social work is a specialist area, and the way we work is a bit different from other areas of social work.

CB: Can you expand on that a little bit?

Well, our context is different, we only work in schools: we don’t work outside of schools. We only work with children that are having difficulty with school, whether that’s because of behaviour or learning problems. So if a child has difficulties outside of school, and is not presenting with difficulties at school, we don’t work with those children. I guess being based in schools we work very closely with the school personnel, and so I guess in some respects we have a fairly intimate understanding of the schools and what goes on in the staff, and I guess we get a really good insight into the school staff. So we’re not so much outside the system, although I think in our role we can very well play a neutral, objective role, and we do. We’re probably not as objective because we’re quite embedded in the schools. I think the fact that we do have such good insight and such good relationships with the schools, we can be a lot more effective in ensuring that children are properly supported in schools, that they get, you know, that modifications are made for kids, that there’s the right amount of support for them. So those sorts of things we can achieve them quite efficiently, whereas outside personnel from outside agencies would have no idea of how to do that. So yeh, we need a really good understanding of how schools work, we need a really good understanding of how the power works in schools, and I guess how to effect change, what the systems are, what the processes are, the relevant guidelines that are really important. So all that I think, certainly for me, it’s taken me quite some time to develop a really good understanding of that. (N24)
School Social Workers as Specialist Practitioners

In the first instance, “Narrator 24”, other narratives and documents confirmed that departmental and school-employed social workers were generalist practitioners.

*The boundaries of the job are extensive and blurred and the possibilities are enormous.*  
(Keegel, circa 1980)

*We can have anything crop up at any time, and we have to be able to hit the ground running.*  
(N21)

*I really enjoyed the breadth and depth of what I’ve learned. I reckon it’s quite a generic role, even though you do have specifics around learning about schools, and educational systems and teachers and classrooms... I would feel confident to work somewhere else because I think a lot of the skills I’ve learnt I could easily transfer.*  
(N6)

School social workers were specialist in knowing how creatively to apply the full range of generalist social work knowledge and methods at the intersection of various systems in the school environment.

*All the schools have their individual cultures and it’s about getting to know all those individual cultures as well that are present in schools. So it is a specialist area.*  
(N21)

*I think it’s a specialist field and you need a specialist set of skills, and a specialist body of knowledge to understand how the system works. If you don’t understand how the system works, I think you can struggle to be effective, because really, you can’t just work with the kids. You have to work with systemic issues. And you have to understand how schools are structured and where the influence lies and where you can change things, where you can and where you can’t.*  
(N9)
The school social worker is unique, is different from working in hospitals or with older folk, you know, it is unique. And it’s that educational focus wrapped around those social work skills... (N7)

Describing school social work as a specialist area of practice was associated with professional identity.

I like to think of myself as an educational social worker, or a school social worker... I think there’s expertise and skills you gain that are very different from doing some other form of social work. (N25)

... very much a school social worker, because it’s very much bound up with education for me... I really worked with teachers, even more than social workers... (N19)

“Narrator 24” distinguished school social work practice from other social work delivered in schools, thereby reinforcing a specialist professional identity. Practitioners with specialist knowledge and access to the learning environment were considered better placed to mediate case management or program development.

I’ve worked within an agency, working within a school three days a week as I was doing a project... I felt somewhat more impotent... because the focus of the work was very specific. Whereas if I was a school social worker my role would have been more wide-ranging and perhaps my assessment of what was needed in the school might have taken into account many more elements... I had a limited amount of time and the school had a particular expectation of what we were going to do... community based social workers have very different roles than school social workers. They’re not part of the education system... the school social worker really knows the system well... not just in terms of how schools function, but how regions and head office, the whole thing. I think people from outside in another agency might miss a lot of that. (N4)
Not defining school social work as specialist was a small minority view among narrators, but nonetheless included the need to gather, with experience, specialist knowledge about working with schools.

(It’s) social work in a particular field setting, in just the way that social work is in a lot of other settings... But you do need the setting specific background to function at your best.  (N3)

It struck me that people could actually think of (school social work) as a particular kind of practice. I did some reading around... the link between schools and families and social work’s role in that... I don’t know where I stand on field of practice, really.  (N20)

A school-employed narrator noted that school social work is both a specialist area of social work practice, and a specialist practice among educators in the school setting: “my job here is seen as different from everybody else’s” (N26).

Narrators described themselves as specialist school social workers, whose expertise developed with experience and acquired knowledge, but hesitated to call themselves “experts”. “Narrator 24” initially resisted the descriptor because it was inconsistent with the solution-focused approach.

Expert? No, I wouldn’t describe myself as an expert. Others might. That’s the role the schools want you to play, I understand that. The schools have me there at the meetings with parents and agencies, they have you in that role, and that’s OK.  (N24)

Finally, having worked through the matter, “Narrator 24” acknowledged: “Yeh..definitely developed expertise, for sure.”

Narrators presented the shared essence of social work and school social work in their underlying principles such as social justice, but it was within the school setting, and the knowledge and skills required for it, that specialist practice was defined. “Narrator 24” confidently acknowledged that understanding and, by inference, practice wisdom had come with time, and later in the interview, spoke
about the acquisition of specialist knowledge and skills. “Narrator 24” and others described the sound generalist social work education that prepared practitioners with the core knowledge and the specialist knowledge for school social work, developing continuously with experience over time, and discursively through personal reflection, collegiate discussion, reading and writing.

_There is a lot of extra information and knowledge that I think school social workers build up over time that is unique to the field. And there is a body of literature about school social work, as well._ (N5)

**Professional Identity**

“Narrator 24” demonstrated a personal commitment not only to the practice of school social work, but to the on-going process of reflection and theory development, individually and within the collegiate community and shared professional identity represented by the inclusive “we”. The narrator forged a place as a link in the chain of specialist school social worker professional identity. Professional identity is a main theme for consideration in Chapter 8.

**Specialist Work with Children**

School social workers focused much of their intervention on adults in the school and family domains, but were highly skilled in communicating with children in confusing school environments where they could be disempowered. They developed expertise in individual and group methods from a broad repertoire in order to maximise the effectiveness and reliability of assessments and interventions with children and young people, to become specialists in hearing their perspectives.

_I might do a few weeks with a child, one-on-one, while I try and decide what’s the best process or what are the issues are, or whether there’s some other issue that hasn’t revealed itself, bullying, you know, or something else._ (N25)
Expertise in working with children was so intrinsic to professional identity that practitioners could take for granted a necessary and unique skill acquired through practice, and recognised by students themselves who shared openly their stories.

... we’re not there as authority figures, and while we might not like the stuff they get up to, and might work with them to change that, it’s to bring about positive changes for them and their success and enjoyment in the school environment. And they do know that; so I don’t know how they know it, but they do. (N22)

Service Management

Service management, one of the six main areas of practice, includes the responsibility to use skills, time and resources to support ethical service delivery consistent with practice standards, at both organisational and personal levels (AASW, 2011, p.22). Individually, or with their colleagues, practitioners made decisions about managing referrals; set priorities for service delivery; dealt with the constraints of inadequate facilities; and monitored leakage of work into private time.

Narrators recalled essential service management tasks: case note and report writing; travelling between schools; liaising and consulting with community agencies; meetings and collaboration with colleagues. From the late 1960s the list also included: attending and chairing meetings in the school and community; research, needs analysis, and evaluation; program design and funding applications; media liaison; writing referral letters to family doctors or paediatricians; acting as representatives on departmental panels, disability funding applications, suspension and expulsion processes.

Most direct contact happened at the school or home. Home visits, a feature of casework since 1948, have been increasingly limited by principals and practitioners themselves because of Occupational Health and Safety concerns.
My principal does have a policy not to do it. We have visited home a couple of times but I’ve always been with the principal. (N6)

Departmental practitioners, as school visitors, had to manage their services within limited resources and facilities. School-employed school social workers had their own offices. For both, yard duty was sometimes the only time to walk and talk with busy teachers.

Service Management: Departmental School Social Workers

Positions of Responsibility

Until the abandonment of School Support Centres, there was little opportunity for non-teacher school social workers to hold line-management positions. Nevertheless, there were always those who had taken on leadership and acting responsibilities in special programs including training; at head office, regional and District or Network levels.

A currently practicing narrator described some management responsibilities: supporting and consulting with psychologists and social workers; organising meetings; induction of new staff; and regional policy development. A few narrators had moved into management positions in head office or regions, finding the bureaucracy more or less compatible depending on the role and consistency with areas of professional interest and expectations.

It was absolutely enormous. It was like being hit by a tsunami. If I’d known what a major challenge it was going to be perhaps I would have been a little more hesitant. (N11)

Post-1993, a few narrators found service management roles in sub-regional Districts then Networks of schools, but there appeared to be no intermediate career opportunities or process for positions of responsibility for practitioners who wanted to advance in the management structure of school social work.
Workload and Personal Service Management

The hardest thing is the number of schools to try and cover ...and the amount of work. The volume of work's enormous and you have to work out ways to try and limit that. (N9)

Heavy workloads have required organisational and personal service management. Jorgenson was frustrated by his workload in the fledgling, under-resourced Psychology Branch. In his turn, Hall requested another social worker (Hall, 1950a) to cope with the changing nature of referrals and a greater reliance on social work, although numbers seem tiny by contemporary state-wide standards.

Not only has the number of cases increased, but the procedure now followed in case studies calls for more social work than was done formerly. An average of ten new cases requiring social work are being received each week. This caseload, together with follow-up work resulting from earlier cases, is too great for the two social workers at present employed to carry out effectively. (Hall, 1950a)

“Juggling” the workload (N14) has always been a concern, for reasons of personal wellbeing and because of the ethical stress of not meeting perceived needs.

... the demands were incredibly big, and I think we always felt frustrated about not being able to meet even fifty percent of the demand that was actually out there. We were only meeting a small proportion of it, and that was very difficult. (N4)

It was suggested that the cases allocated to school social workers have been more complex and often difficult to resolve: social workers often had the “too hard cases” (N17). The workload included “a huge amount of casework” (N14). The needs of a particular student might require extra attention at school or home, reducing time for others. Depth and complexity of environmental assessment could be sacrificed for an “endless workload that you need to get through and get on with the next one” (N25). Forward planning could be difficult with
unpredictable referral rates. There seemed to be scant management concern for staff welfare in relation to caseload:

As an Occupational Health & Safety (representative) I had tried for years and never got anywhere in trying to find what is considered a good case load. What is a fair amount of work for someone to do? ... and if you get a lot of really complex cases... Often they come in and superficially don’t seem like such a big deal, but then when you actually get into the caseload you suddenly discover that it’s massive. (N25)

When narrators spoke of workload stress, they referred mostly to casework, but lack of time properly to complete the full range of direct and indirect work was a common problem. On-going responsibilities could suffer when crises or critical incidents needed immediate response, taking time from other planned activity, with the constant pressure of trying to catch up with schools and students.

The one thing that gets me the most distressed is when I don’t see the children. Because kids don’t understand; they just know that you haven’t seen them. (N6)

The departmental school social worker, who might have an “enormous” (N16) responsibility for around 20 schools was especially impacted by the increasing number of critical incidents.

Critical incidents can be difficult to deal with, especially the ones that are fairly distressing, and there seemed to be quite a range of them. And when you’re the only practitioner, you deal with them all...and I think schools and families tend to be very grateful for the support they get but it can be very demanding work, especially if you have a few in a row. (N9)

Narrators gave examples of individual service management, maximising time efficiency by working in the areas of personal and school strength.
I try to work within the area that I feel I have some strength and you have to be a bit of an all-round person, but I would try to focus on those areas I felt I was stronger in... It’s really important when you have limited resources to not be running down fruitless paths. (N9)

... what I thought the kids needed and what I thought was realistic for me to do... you tend to deal with what you’re immediately presented with and where you think you can have the maximum impact for that time. (N20)

**Allocation of New Referrals and Programs**

In the early years of the Psychology Branch and Psychology and Guidance Branch, referrals would come to school social workers by way of other government departments, or the psychologists during their school rounds. Narratives and documents showed that Counselling, Guidance & Clinical Services (1974-1985) and School Support Centres (1988-1993) received specific requests for casework or other group or school-wide programs (Barrett, 1979). Narrators were highly satisfied with School Support processes, where service agreements were negotiated with schools at the beginning of the year, with time allocated for proper discussions about services required, their delivery and review.

..many of those plans included not only casework but also running groups around particular themes, or areas of interest with the children or young people. Some of the expectations that principals had were that School Support Centre staff would provide training to the teaching staff at the school; we would assist them in developing policies around student welfare or disability and the like. (N4)

Until the 1980s, cases were often allocated jointly to a psychologist and a social worker, with attempts in some centres to allocate schools to specific workers in order to facilitate strong relationships with principals and teachers. School requests for service were prioritised by teams and waiting lists used for workload management, but the study found no later evidence of routine dual-discipline allocation of casework referrals.
During 1994-1998, there was inconsistency depending on whether Student Support Services teams were still co-located and how principals locally determined that referrals and other requests should be handled. Some referrals were directed to teams, while others were made directly by principals, irrespective of workload.

Post-1998, within their reconstituted multi-disciplinary Student Support Services teams, some school social workers offered pre-referral consultation in order to clarify the appropriateness of referrals. Several narrators talked of putting boundaries around referrals by specifying that issues needed to be impacting on learning, health or social wellbeing at school. Some were redirected to community agencies, although long waiting lists or parental unwillingness saw school social workers themselves doing family support work or counselling, so that children and families did not have to wait without any service.

Rather than taking on unworkable caseloads across a large number of schools, some school social workers used a consultancy model:

> Initially I covered a big territory with about fifty schools and I couldn’t be anything other than a consultant and my main work was with principals, student welfare coordinators, assistant principals and then some consultancy work with teachers. (N9)

The notion of “triage” was used in some Networks, as a prioritising system that somewhat imperfectly aimed at the fair allocation of more urgent work.

> ... you look at the complexity and the weighting of (referrals), and hand them out to people... when we’d review the waiting-list, we’d try to make sure the urgent ones would be picked up ... you want a variety of complex and non-complex cases. I’m yet to work out the true method of how you weight the complexity of a case. (N25)

Cooperative management included sharing caseloads to balance difficult cases: “so everybody’s very considerate of each other” (N21), although it was always hard to predict the difficulty of a case.
School Visits

In the 1950s, departmental social workers used slow public transport to try to visit at least two schools in the one area. Government or private cars were increasingly used, and private car availability was now a condition of employment, a professionally excluding factor that was not questioned within the narratives.

Good liaison with classroom teachers was always essential, but working within the rhythm of the timetable was difficult.

Teachers... were really busy and when they did have free time they valued that time and so you felt somewhat guilty in encroaching. (N4)

Most commonly across the decades, in order to build and maintain relationships, school social workers regularly visited particular assigned schools rather than responding ad hoc to referrals, with some negotiation between colleagues to achieve the best worker-school match.

I really worked closely with three schools but even that felt a bit fractured because there were other schools I visited less regularly and I felt I wasn’t really making relationships and that was frustrating. (N20)

Timing of school visits was at the discretion of the worker. For some, from 1994 to 1998 following the closure of School Support Centres, some principals insisted that particular schedules be followed, irrespective of the needs of the students and the direct and indirect requirements of the workload.

The principal group that managed you... would allocate what schools you had to go to... It wasn’t like now where you’ve got the referrals and you just go wherever... They knew that they had X number of schools so they weighted it on student population. (N25)
The lack of appropriate rooms often left departmental visitors contending with or rejecting the "paper storage cupboard" (N25), staff room or some other unsuitable space. Lack of dedicated space for the purpose put confidentiality at risk, and practitioners were often unable properly to offer therapeutic activities such as art or play therapy. Poor workspace and facilities for telephone calls, case notes and report writing were additional frustrations to efficient and ethical service management during school visits.

Service Management: School-employed School Social Workers

Positions of Responsibility

The school-employed worker could not access career advancement or positions of responsibility reserved for teachers, but nevertheless held significant responsibility, as sole expert, for helping to shape the school’s welfare program. They needed to uphold social work ethical standards and service management principles, within an educationally oriented professional setting.

Workload and Personal Service Management

Lone, easily accessible school-employed social workers, tied to the school premises, were particularly vulnerable to the stress of huge workloads. Small time-fractions and time-limited contracts because of funding were problematic personally, and to service delivery, but school-employed social workers at least had the benefit of their own work spaces, and if not their own interview and group rooms, easy access to them. One narrator, currently practicing, suggested that there would always be a backlog, even if at the school “24/7” (N6). An experienced departmental school social worker, employed by a school in the 1990s, described the number of referrals as “enormous”, the complexity “astonishing”, and in retrospect, the “hardest, fastest pace” of her varied social work experience (N10). The same observation had been documented even earlier.
...he/she is there every day, has a base in the school, is widely known to staff, students and parents and therefore is available and accessible. There is rarely a dull, quiet, orderly day when working in a school; there is usually a constant stream of students and teachers, stopping to talk, presenting a wide spectrum of needs, and interests, ranging from informal social contact, to unburdening of very real concerns and problems. (Keegel, circa 1980)

Personal service management was both difficult and essential within the context of constant availability. The immediacy of unexpected student and family emergencies, could frustrate work intentions, and exhaust the practitioner:

I am pretty overworked. You have a list a mile long... I've tried to set boundaries around parents making appointments to see me... a lot of them live in crisis mode... (N6)

Before and after school were integral to service delivery, offering the chance to connect with students and parents.

... a mum might come up to me weeping about a crisis in her life and you have to, if you can, make time available to talk to them right there and then because... that opportunity might pass to connect them to whatever service they might need, or connect with you a bit more. (N26)

With direct student, parent and teacher contact throughout the day, there was little time for associated casework, program development and organisational tasks. School-employed social workers balanced a broad range of services; and juggled planned activities with the possibility of emergencies.

There's so many jobs to do... you have to work out the priorities. OK, what's the most important thing I need to focus on? ... What's the most effective way I can work here in the short amount of time that I've got? (N26)
It was important not to take on the unrealistic “magic wand” (N8) expectations of others who did not share professional orientation. With experience, it became easier to avoid the “undue stress” caused by “thinking you can solve things that are out of your hands” (N8).

Peer support, supervision and regular contact with departmental school social workers and psychologists helped school-employed school social workers to develop strategies for managing workloads. Government schools maintained their access to departmental staff, who might provide individual and group professional supervision, consultation, casework or other services at the request of the school-employed social worker or the principal. Referrals to Student Support Services staff were activated when all avenues at the school level had been exhausted; when there were too many individual cases for the school employed-social worker to handle; or when the principal directed it for reasons including staff wellbeing or legal.

Referrals, Programs and Other Requests

Once they had good working knowledge of school processes and community, and collaborative relationships with staff, the school-employed social worker could be inundated with referrals. Parent self-referral could become unmanageable. One narrator had three parents waiting at her parking space one morning. Two narrators had insisted on particular times when they were available without appointment. One had built opportunities for parent self-referral into school “drop-off” and “pick-up” times when she was available in the schoolyard.

Referrals were rarely formalised in terms of suitability, reason and requisite information. At one school, the student referral could be a name on a “post-it” note on the computer, with little or no further information. School-employed school social workers were more likely to receive inappropriate requests, such as involvement in discipline matters that should have been handled via school procedures, necessitating negotiations with teachers in attempts to prevent recurrence.
As members of the school staff, social workers could engage with students under the direction of the principal without parent permission, and therefore regularly responded to crises irrespective of other work plans for the day. After initial contact with a distressed child, parent consent would be sought before continuing longer-term.

School-employed school social workers implemented pre-packaged group and whole-class programs; developed innovative programs within the school; and built partnerships and programs with community agencies.

### Imagining the Ideal School Social Work Service

On the basis of commitment to purpose, theoretical perspectives, practice knowledge, experience and reflection, narrators imagined the ideal school social work service. Several spoke of increased numbers of school social workers, at least one full- or part-time for every school, more for those with higher needs. The favoured *Prevention* and *Early Intervention* emphasis before *Complex Intervention* and *Restoring Wellbeing* would provide a model for a broad range of creative school social work at individual, small group, whole class, family, school and community development levels.

Strong links with families, neighbourhoods and community agencies, collaborative research, planning and recruitment would link the needs of schools in the area with the wider community, with time for program implementation and evaluation. Schools could operate as community service hubs, with the specialist school social worker having responsibility for case management and liaison with community agencies, and facilitation of service exchanges.

Two basic service models were proposed: centre-based, co-located multidisciplinary teams; and school-based multidisciplinary teams networked across schools; and both under the management of senior practitioners rather than educators. Supportive infrastructure would provide professional supervision and time for reflection, preparation and planning. Narrators envisioned school social work services in the context of flexible and responsive school communities,
and properly supported with a variety of administrative and therapeutic work spaces; high quality technical equipment kept in good order; and significant resources to fund individual, group and community activities.

Centre-based school social workers would participate in a duty system for consultation. New referrals would be allocated so that staff were assigned to a limited network of schools in order to build strong relationships. One narrator imagined sub-teams specialising in, for example, crises and critical incidents, community development, group work or projects, where workers would be able to pursue their interests and strengths. Another had conceptualised a mobile service to address inadequate facilities.

*For me would be to have a (van) like Postman Pat. And I would have my play therapy set up in the back with my resources and it would have to be a pretty big van, but I think that that would be a great thing to have.*  (N21)

School-based school social workers, with the proviso that they were networked across schools for collegiate support and collaboration, assigned to a particular school would be better integrated into the community of the school, including policy teams, welfare committees, teacher professional development and school culture development. Importantly, it would give students easy access to alternate support.

*I think students need to have someone who they can be connected to, who is not totally part of the school structure and who they can feel safe with and they can say: Well I hate my teacher, she gives me a really hard time. Or: Dad’s hitting me all the time but I don’t want anyone at school to know.*  (N22)

School-based school social workers would have a deeper understanding of the school as an organisation and the needs of the students; and render early intervention more likely, rather than reliance upon referrals to outside student services staff when problems had become more serious (Keegel, circa 1980).
Conclusion

School social worker professional narratives that spoke to values, theory and practice, and imagined idealised services, were shaped by the dominant discourses of social work and school social work, but made personal through story-telling and knowledge-building. Narrators and retrieved authors had theorised and developed practice, which they recognised as their own, rather than the wisdom of others (Hooley, 2007, p.50, 52). School social work required broad generalist social work knowledge, methods and skills, with specialist practice delineated by school specific approaches to information-gathering for assessment and intervention at the student, family and school levels in particular. Those who identified as school social workers were directly involved with the processes and programs of the school, including the classroom and the curriculum, according to student need.

The process of narration within this study now stands as an example of how school social workers have developed their professional identity. Private reflections on theory, knowledge and practice have been performed interactively with a colleague-researcher; and broadcast narratively to a wider audience, for their own discursive consideration, acceptance or reconstruction. Consideration of the ways in which school social workers have developed their professional identity, individually, by making knowledge personal, and communally, through discursive theory-making interactions, is included in Chapter 8.
Chapter 8

FINDINGS:

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER
PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND THE
TRADITION OF PRACTICE

“And now I’ve got to go and face the music.”

“Narrator 22”
Introduction

At the end of our early morning interview, as she headed off to begin a day of school social work, “Narrator 22” chimed: “And now I’ve got to go and face the music.” In that moment it struck me and has lingered as a metaphor to encapsulate the complexity, frustration, questioning, self-doubt, fun and dedication that she and others had been describing within their own professional practice and identity. Her words contained an ominous edge: perhaps something might not go well when advocating for a student, or interventions might fail to achieve intended goals. But there was also possibility of a song to celebrate student, school and practitioner achievements. Even if it were a fanciful researcher notion, it struck a chord within meanings that had been crystallising in the process of the study.

The research was originally prompted by questions of professional identity and the possible connections between Victorian school social workers past and present. I aimed to document a tradition of school social work, as if it were an objective artefact that could be defined and up-dated. Narrators had been chosen and documents sought for their potential to provide interesting professional stories of past and contemporary practice. Some stories have been integrated into Chapters 6 and 7, to help bring school social worker voice to the issues of context and knowledge for practice. As in the previous chapter, illustrative narrator quotations represent meaning from narrators across several decades unless specifically identified with particular eras.

Professional Identity and Tradition

Irrespective of their eras of practice, narrators brought more than setting, plot and characters to a newly constructed research narrative of the development of school social work in Victoria. As if to explain the statements: “I am a school social worker” and “We are school social workers”, narrators constructed school social worker professional identity, and illuminated its dynamic interconnectedness with the “tradition of practice”.

280
In the schools setting, where others sometimes claimed to be “doing social work”, differentiation was found in a shared a professional identity consisting of a complex sphere of personal attributes; core social work values; school social work purpose; multiple specialist knowledges; theoretical approaches; eclectic, multiple methods; and arena of practice within the schools environment. The context of practice did not impose itself on, nor determine professional identity. Rather, the way in which school social workers negotiated, narrated and contributed to that context determined an essential element within the sense of the “professional self”.

It was by way of the acquisition of specialist knowledge and skills for school-specific methods of practice that practitioners began to identify clearly and strongly as school social workers. Considered and dynamic interaction with the fundamentals of practice, reflection and re-working knowledge, and then recognising and claiming that knowledge as their own, allowed the narration of professional identity at the individual level. The personal meaning ascribed to professional identity facilitated discursive interaction with those attributed with the same professional identity characteristics, as represented by “we”, whether past, present or future, in a collegiate community.

*I think what we can do in schools is quite unique. I don’t think the other streams can work the way we do, with some of the cases that we work and I think, you know, we are really important. There’s not enough school social work.* (N24)

The tradition of school social work practice in Victoria was well-understood by narrators, but without documentation, new-comers struggled to find themselves within it.

*I was a bit despondent about school social work because... we’ve got no history, we’ve got no connections...* (N6)

The whole process of this research has represented dynamic interaction with the context and knowledge of school social work practice. Rather than simply documenting the tradition of school social work, according to my original, naïve
intent, this study has served two purposes. It stands alone as a piece in the jigsaw that helps to construct the tradition of school social work. Additionally, it has provided the means for dialogue across six decades between practitioners who self-identify as school social workers, by giving them opportunity, now or later, to relate stories that have constructed professional identity and given substance, continuity and development to the tradition of practice.

**Narrative Performance and the Construction of Professional Tradition**

Narrators were keen to participate in the interview process, and wanted to communicate their ideas about school social work.

*(I)* relished the opportunity to talk about the job that I’m doing... there’s been a lack of school social work (literature) in general that’s Australian, and relative to what we’re doing, so I was keen to put some information forward that might help you with extending the knowledge and get it out there. (N6)

Their professional identities were important to narrators, including those long-retired; and they wanted to interact with me as school social worker-researcher and with the potential audience in academia, social work and school social work. Narrators sought to locate themselves within school social work as unique and specialist social work practice. They wanted to ensure their contribution of knowledge, experience and interpretations to considerations of the past and comparisons with current practice; and inform the future of school social work.

All narrators appeared to be reflecting on and affirming or reconstructing school social work and their own roles within it. Whether currently or formerly practising, each narrator consciously participated in the development of professional identity by producing their own professional, but personalised narratives, in order to add the construction of school social work, and contribute to currents, past, present and future, within the stream of tradition. Some had definite agendas: retrospective narratives both personal and communal that they wanted recorded; instructions about content and themes that should be covered.
Those narrators who were unfamiliar with me ensured that in fact I was someone who shared characteristics of their professional identity. Usually it was casual questioning during the interview, but one narrator took control to check my credentials before allowing the interview to begin. The dynamics of the research relationship, with knowledge shared and interpreted, exemplified the construction of tradition within the discursive arena of shared professional identities.

Strong school social worker voices resonated meaningfully from 20 to 40 year-old documents, to clarify, support or query professional narratives. School social workers had purposefully constructed and recorded in text their professional issues and identity for reasons then relevant. Whether or not they were consciously preserving tradition into the future, is not clear. Evidently, however, some practitioners made individual decisions to keep certain documents, in case of a future purpose related to professional identity and the tradition of practice.

The intersection of Personal Stories and Professional Identities

Professional narratives were personal stories that described the context and practice of school social work, and included significant personal issues that contributed to professional identity.

Personal Attributes

Professional identity included personal characteristics and self-understanding.

*I probably was (judgemental) when I was a teacher, especially as a young teacher. I certainly don’t take that to my job now. I am flexible and I don’t think that’s just about being a social worker, I think that’s a bit about the nature of the way my life has been.*

(N22)

Personal strength, adaptability and commitment within shifting organisational contexts were evident as narrators demonstrated persistence in negotiating their
roles and educating others about their work. Personal style and professional skill were required to balance agitation for school change with the maintenance of positive relationships. Flexibility was seen in negotiations at the boundaries of knowledge and identity, as new theories and methods were integrated into the professional repertoire.

School social work required putting aside one’s own emotions and adult expectations, to understand the student’s position within the school, family and community.

I get really frustrated when I see young people coming time and time again in trouble, or being rung by the police, or mums and dads ringing up... I’m not going to be told to “f*** off”, but I’m also hopefully sitting with the idea that that’s where they’re at. So I’m going to get (annoyed) about it, but I’m also going to have to control my own (feelings).  (N1)

Social Background

School social workers represented the range of childhood socio-economic backgrounds, including low income or poverty, and financial security. Some had parental role models in teaching or other professions. All had good basic schooling that led to further education, opportunities, and eventually school social work.

I’m very fortunate enough to have an education because the sacrifice mum and dad gave, and so I was going to make sure that they were proud of me.  (N16)

School social workers had come to experience a degree of privilege not afforded to many of their clients. Several narrators gave clues to their relative comfort, social connections and activities, but remained committed to students who were poor or marginalised.
Values

Narrators commonly identified values and principles at the very core of personal and professional identity. Shared values and ethical base are the foundations of professional identity, but are subject to personal interpretation and differently nuanced meaning. Narratives indicated integration of personal and professional commitment to social justice.

(I) very much I believe in social justice... very, very strongly that old people, young people deserve a fair go in life, and this world needs to be supportive and if we’re not supportive then we’re not providing fairness... I believe very strongly in that people deserve to be given an opportunity not to be downtrodden. (N1)

Politics

Over six decades, school social workers have been politically aware, irrespective of party affiliations, and their professional identity included: “political stance... How you see the world and what’s happening” (N18). Some narrators spoke directly and indirectly of political preference for Labor governments as more likely to value social justice. Victorian Minister for Education and Training (2002-2006), Lynne Kosky, recalled as “very political” (N10) during her brief school social worker stint, is the only former Victorian school social worker known to have become an elected politician.

Family Considerations

Two of twelve male narrators made significant mention of family; whereas most women incorporated marriage and family within their professional narratives. Their husbands’ professional responsibilities, location and income influenced decisions about their own employment. Three narrators had made their way into school social work by way of parenting, and a growing interest in education. One had been encouraged by a friend to join her as a departmental school social worker, where she would at least be paid for all her otherwise voluntary work in schools. Several referred to breaks in their employment for the raising of
School Social Work in the State of Victoria, Australia

children; with part-time options on return. One described a recent increase in grand-parenting responsibilities that curtailed plans for further professional study. Another described the emotional support of a partner who packed her lunch and sent her off after such a difficult day that she doubted she could return.

**Personal Chronologies and Professional Trajectories**

Ten of the twenty-seven narrators had opted to study social work immediately after secondary school, thereby beginning to identify themselves in terms of their professional aspirations. Others assumed family responsibilities, or began in education, health or welfare related professions, before deciding on social work qualifications. Only one narrator transitioned from a position not related to education, health or welfare. Ten entered school social work as new graduates, while seventeen took initial positions elsewhere. There was no consistent pattern in terms of age or experience prior to school social work appointment, although there was a trend for early professional identity to be located according to a personal sense of self within the “helping professions”.

**Youth and Inexperience**

Work life accommodated youthful dreams and commitments that sited professional identity in a social context. Young women employed as the earliest school social workers were socially engaged and adventurous. Later documents and narratives attested to the number who travelled overseas. Narratives from every decade referred to naiveté and lower status when young.

*I was a junior staff member. I wasn’t tuned in to the goings-on in the department, really... We were small bikkies, and we did what we were told.* (N17)

Several recalled the “arrogan(ce)” (N20) and enthusiasm that kept them oblivious to possible organisational constraints as they launched into innovative
school social work practice, sometimes oblivious to the seriousness of situations. Nevertheless, those early years when professional identity was germinating, were rewarding. Despite being “young and green” (N5), they survived new responsibilities and unfamiliar tasks.

Regardless of age or experience in other settings, negotiating a new environment was not always easy, even for the most enthusiastic.

*I annoyed people because I did too much…I was too busy. I was wanting to do good social work. I was trying to develop a great reputation. I did everything they asked of me. I had no boundaries. And I would have been annoying, I reckon, to people who’d been there for a long time!* (N14)

*They were great times, really fantastic… I grew a lot, emotionally, developed my skills in areas I didn’t think I’d be developing.* (N16)

Some narrators spoke of their comparative youth or inexperience within the organisation as rendering them ignored or vulnerable to bullying.

**Maturity and Retirement**

Older practitioners remained thoroughly engaged with ecological systemic school social work, continually learning through practice, professional development and collegiate dialogue. Two narrators, long-experienced and feeling somewhat disillusioned by the organisational environment, had rekindled their enthusiasm by taking temporary leave to sample other work. There were hints of ageism that were not only organisationally embedded, but personally distressing:

*... feeling that, sensing that I felt like a dinosaur, you know. I was on my way out, just left alone.* (N13)

Given their stories of context and practice, and their construction of professional identity, there was no reason to refer to themselves with terms like: “past it” (N12) and “dinosaur” (N13). One narrator was considering alternate work
because she did not picture herself in direct practice with children who might think of her as a grandmother.

Potential separation from the regular practice that nurtured professional identity, was not an easy prospect. One continued working in education and welfare for several years after the usual retirement age. One narrator reported management suggesting, on the basis of age alone, that it was time to retire. Assumptions about school social worker lack of career intentions may well be misplaced.

*People keep saying to me: Why do you keep going? Why don’t you just retire? ... I guess there’s something there that keeps drawing me.*
(N22)

Four narrators demonstrated school social worker professional identity meaningful beyond retirement and direct connection with context and practice, nurtured by continuing narrative reflection, social links and conversations with former colleagues that reflected on and reconstructed past professional experience, and showed concern for current and future practice.

Bridging activities, such as non-social work volunteering in schools assisted retirees to cope with changing personal and professional identity. By the same token, retirement was a time to focus on personal life rather than professional identity.

*I can remember thinking... I should be doing something that continues this in a voluntary capacity... But you somehow want to move to something else, in fact a very self-centred thing, like I want to enjoy myself. I want to go out and do things with my friends that I’ve never done before.* (N18)

One narrator lamented her inability to impact on the future of social work, as she considered her own retirement: she had not yet identified herself as connecting to the tradition of school social work, with both the past and the future of school social work, through her narratives.
Gender

Issues of gender were ambiguous. Narratives and documents gave some clues, but conclusions were difficult to draw. Chapter 5 includes notes about an apparent gender-based trend in terms of narrative style and rhetoric in the interviews and transcripts. Interpretations positing potential gender inequality within stories were not generally supported by narrators during interviews. Only one narrator confirmed definite gender discrimination within the bureaucracy of the Education Department beyond student support. Another described the Psychology and Guidance Branch as “male dominated” (N2). A third suggested that she might now be more aware of gender discrimination.

Don’t forget we were women and they were men and that was the way it often was. (N17)

The minutes of social worker meetings 1960s to mid-1970s show that they were interacting very cooperatively with male psychologists as their managers. There was no indication in the collected narratives or retrieved documents that women felt discriminated against within everyday working and social relationships. However, a 1970s narrative recounted a husband offended by a patronising, sexist joke directed to his wife by a male psychologist.

There were definite advantages for men, at least in the early years: female teachers and social workers were beyond consideration for management.

At present there is one vacancy for an Assistant, Psychology and Guidance Branch...and another vacancy will be created... It is most desirable that these positions be filled by males if possible, as we have no reserve of trained male classified teachers to take responsibility for districts if further loss of experienced male assistants occurs. (Hall, 1958)
Despite their much fewer numbers, male social workers appeared to have a definite advantage in terms of finding academic and other positions because without taking time out to raise children, they were consistently employed.

*I’m quite sure of that. It was just the way the world worked...* (N3)

The high proportion of female guidance officers and officers-in-charge showed that teaching qualifications, not gender, had been the basis of discrimination prior to 1994, when management was opened to non-teachers and non-psychologists. This study can only hypothesise that as women more generally began narrating their oppression in the 1970s, the inequitable nature of the psychologist-social worker relationship clouded gender imbalance or subtly precluded its consideration. Nominating social workers, all but one of whom until the 1970s were women, as “handmaidens” gave a gendered slant to what was also professional chauvinism; and reinforced a class distinction in terms of a mistress/master-servant relationship.

One male former practitioner narrated rescue from a psychologist dominated and implied sexist organisational culture by an influx of male social workers. Men could not be pigeon-holed by guidance officers as “handmaiden(s) to the practice of psychology” (N15).

_Historically, social workers in the education department, had been overwhelmingly women. And I think some of the dynamics of the change, as, say, some males came in, and then worked with the women who were doing a terrific job in school social work anyway. I think that created some energy, which then destabilised maybe some of the internal forces within the education department._ (N15)

Two men indicated resentment about times when they felt bombarded with feminist literature or under personal attack by equal opportunity conversations. One said that there needed to be more men in teaching and the helping professions. Another explained the need to be comfortable and proud of being male, and ready to keep learning. He claimed there was nothing about which women and girls could not talk to men.
Three men and seven women had held administrative, professional stream or program responsibilities, four post-1994. They spoke of their responsibilities and achievements proudly, and in the context of communal professional identity and the preservation of the tradition of school social work.

Some narrators questioned gender as a factor in school social workers’ reticence to advocate for themselves.

*Maybe it is because we are predominantly women. I don’t know. It would be interesting to wonder about that. That’s part of it.* (N2)

It is difficult to understand the complexities of gender implications for school social workers over several decades, and this discussion is left with questions rather than conclusions. Only one narrator described specific gender discrimination, a finding inconsistent with the apparent need for Victorian state government equal employment opportunity legislation and programs implemented in 1990 (Public Records Office Victoria).

### Defining “Profession”

Without being prompted to do so, one narrator purposefully incorporated into her stories a definition of “profession”, as she had arrived at it through reflection and study, defining the shared knowledge aspect of professional identity, along with necessary connection with colleagues, past and future; the induction of newcomers; and respect for the knowledge held by those with experience. Tacitly, the narrator claimed the position of “elder” as an aspect of self and professional identity.

*A profession is made up of people who feel they have a discrete body of knowledge, which they are prepared and willing and keen to pass on to other people, so that they too can join the profession. And how does a profession know that they are a profession? Who do they refer to? Well, they refer to their own tribal elders and seniors, and to the body of the membership.* (N3)
Professional Identity

How they narratively constructed and named themselves professionally distinguished school social workers from other social workers and other professions. Professional identity was determined by ecological systems perspectives on analysis and interventions according to values, purpose and the school setting. Practitioners have strived individually and communally to construct and re-construct professional identity.

When the support centres closed and we were fragmented away from each other, we had to basically stand alone and find our feet... I sat down and thought: Well, what is it to be a school social worker? (N13)

The social justice goal was central to school social worker professional identity, at the core of which was a focus on the student in the learning environment to remove barriers to education, especially for those children and young people who were vulnerable, disadvantaged or marginalised. Professional identity incorporated ecological systems perspectives and generalist social work knowledge, methods and skills. Extended specialist knowledge included schools as systems; education history and policy; pedagogy and curriculum; children and young people’s environments.

Specialist, multiple methods intrinsic to school social worker professional identity included: consultation and professional development for teachers on matters of curriculum content, student learning style, relationship building and behavior management. With access to the school community, school social workers could work creatively with individuals, small groups, whole class groups, parents or the wider community. They could respond to student and school issues broadly, through planning a combination of prevention and early intervention activities, complex casework or school community development.

Professional identity was individually claimed and communally recognised and enacted. Those who had claimed knowledge as their own for intuitive practice even in unfamiliar situations, identified themselves as school social workers and
made connections with others in the stream of continuity representing the past, present and future in the tradition of practice.

Professional identity flourished over time through dynamic interaction with and contribution to both the context of service delivery and the knowledge and skills for practice.

(I) started calling myself a school social worker probably in the last five years maybe. Part of that was about actually feeling like I was one, and had the experience and knowledge. (N14)

Although it has not been widely recognised as a specialist field in Australia, school social workers recognised their unique professional identity.

There are no streams in our social work training, well, none that I know, where school social work is a stream. So it’s not seen as separate, like hospital social work, in Australia, which I think is a great pity... the best social work I’ve ever done has been in schools, and I do think there’s a particular way of being a social worker in schools. (N11)

Professional identity related to quality practice by binding practitioners in shared values and purpose; theoretical perspectives for practice; methods; and standards for the evaluation of practice. It sharpened practice from a broad social work person-in-environment focus to student-in-learning environment focus; and reminded generalists, that far from being a “Jack of all trades” (N26), they were school social work specialists.

Practitioners were connected by the goal of social justice through educational outcomes, and recognised in one another the same professional attributes, allowing for the narrative interactions that further defined, refined and individually differentiated practice. The recognition that they were specialist attuned them to a particular way of thinking about social work in schools, always ecological systemically, always returning to issues of learning and potential. The experience of professional identity was visceral:
I’m in schools all the time. And I’m thinking about schools, and I’m thinking about wellbeing in schools all the time. (N11)

Professional identity was distinguished by the name ascribed to the field by members, and ratified by the AASW. In the USA, professional identity was blurred by the original title, “visiting teacher” (Shaffer, 2006, p.242, 250). In Victoria, the original “assistants” title did not obscure professional social work identity. Rather, the adoption of the school social worker identity affirmed the integration of practice into the specialist arena of schools. Two papers prepared for a departmental social work meeting discussion of roles are the earliest recovered examples of the use of the terms “school social worker” or “education social worker” (Clemens, 1973; Social Worker Group, 1973f), and minutes refer to an AASW Education Social Work Group (Social Worker Group, 1972a, 1973c). The terms “school social work” and “school social worker” appear to be used more frequently in documents from the late 1970s (Social Worker Group, 1977e; Hodgson, 1978a; Social Work Executive, 1978). Ten years later, the Social Worker (Stream Leader) position descriptions for the new School Support Centres required: “a sound knowledge of school social work practices” (Victoria. Ministry of Education, 1987). The 1991 standards specified that practitioners were “designated as school social workers”, identifying their “legitimate place” within the school system (AASW (Vic) & Hayes, 1991, p.3), and the notice of the inaugural meeting of the AASW (Vic) School Social Work Special Interest Group (AASW Vic. School Social Work Special Interest Group, 1994c) confirmed that title.

Most of the narrators self-identified as school social workers, having transitioned from “social worker” as they increasingly understood that they were engaged in specialist practice, and reconstructed professional identity. They referred to themselves as either “school social workers” or “social workers”. Being part of departmental multidisciplinary teams clarified role differentiation and gave impetus to self-identification as school social workers. One narrator rejected naming his professional identity: “I don’t like being put in a box myself” (N1).
Passion, Commitment, Dedication

The inner intellectual and emotional connection to professional identity gave rise to the commitment and dedication of narrators. Coherence between personal and professional values, identity and confidence that school social work practice facilitated improved outcomes, led to professional satisfaction. Narrators spoke of loving their work, even with successful outcomes not always guaranteed.

I very firmly believe that the dynamics of school social workers and the people that worked with them made a real difference in schools... in terms of social justice... I worked, in hindsight... exceptionally hard, actually. The whole area of school social work was a very rewarding area, a very exciting period. I worked with some wonderful people. (N15)

There aren’t many voices of difference in schools. There aren’t many different disciplines, especially ones that have a change agenda, and a justice agenda. So I think school social work can do all of those things. (N11)

I would think of particular strategies that I could use with individuals or families and want to come to work (on the weekend) to write those down... and I get emotional about it because the thing that I believe, strongly believe, is that you need to provide educational pathways... Because that can be the ticket out of economic, cultural and social deprivation. (N7)

I go along wanting to be there, not because I have to be there... I’ve always liked working with children. I’ve always wanted to work with people who face a lot of barriers, because I think it’s tough, really tough... I think apart from what families and students have gained it also gives you some satisfaction that you may have been able to achieve something... Also, there’s lots of disappointments. (N22)
I’m personally invested in all this, and if you start working in a particular profession pretty young, your whole personality gets to be part of it, and to rely on it. (N3)

I love working with young people, children and the times where you see change, that’s just incredibly rewarding... I was in a shop and this girl yells out: “You remember me? You remember me from (school)? Look at me now,” she said, “I’ve got everything together.” So, it was like “Oh wow!” (N25)

School social workers were not overwhelmed by the sadness of children’s lives, but recognised their strengths, and had confidence in their own perspectives and skills to tackle barriers to learning.

I’m passionate about the kids I work with, absolutely passionate. I love the privilege of hearing their stories, and always absolutely amazed at the resiliency of kids and what they deal with. And I love the variety, I love the fact that... it is truly systemic work, that you can actually make a difference at all different levels, whether it’s looking at something whole-school, or whether it is actually looking at an individual in the context of their development, actually trying to make change in the classroom, or in the school, or in their family or whatever. I love running groups and we do a lot of group work in our area, so I love the fact that we have the creativity and the freedom to do that. And I also love working in with the community agencies, so I have really strong links, because I have been there for such a long time with our agencies. So pretty much the happy place to be. (N14)

Working towards goals they valued, by way of varied and challenging activity, several narrators had stayed in school social work for more than ten years. Issues addressed were “really interesting” (N20), “never boring” (N21). “The sky was the limit” with “great opportunities” (N16) for innovation, and ample flexibility to incorporate personal interests into broad practice.
I certainly didn’t come thinking I’d be here for so long. But the reality is I really like it, I really like what I do. There’s enough change, it’s stimulating, it’s challenging without too much stress. I don’t like too much stress, but I do like challenges... So there seems to be that right balance.. (not) feeling that I’m bored or stuck. (N12)

..it’s a job where you get a chance to acquire a lot of skills... you’re in a position of being able to draw on just so many different areas... (you can) find space to pursue those interests, which is pretty much what I’ve done through my career and probably is the reason why I’ve stayed so long. (N5)

It was “a creative job” (N26). Moreover, it was: “great fun, really good fun” (N6). School social workers enjoyed being able to work independently, with the “creativity... to go off on a tangent” (N14) and to make decisions that they deemed to be in student interests.

Being opportunistic in a way about how you use the setting to make a difference for young people. So it’s a rich, rich environment for really creative work... the most creative and interesting and challenging social work I’ve ever done has been in schools. (N11)

Crises of Morale

Narratives of commitment, dedication and passion for school social work did not present “just a romantic view of it” (N16). It was hard to meet one of the core goals of social work.

I left my training feeling that... we were capable of thinking at the macro level, systems. A lot of the problems of society were part of the system. And therefore you should be addressing that. Well, of course, I don’t think I ever had an opportunity to influence “the system”. (N17)
There were stories of difficult interpersonal and organisational situations; complex, difficult cases where change was elusive; workload stress; critical incidents including suicides; and threats of violence.

This particular family... I remember they tried to run me over but anyway, they reversed on me (and) I jumped out of the way.....I can feel drained just from the day, though, and the craziness that it brings sometimes. You just think: Gosh, I need to get out of here.  
(N6)

There’d been a suicide in the school... when this boy was in year 10, and I made a commitment in my own mind that I wouldn’t leave the school until that cohort had finished year 12... I saw that cohort through because I felt I had to. And it was only when they’d finished that I realised that I’d almost been holding my breath for 3 years until they finished... I just thought: I just want to step back from one-to-one work. I don’t want that sense of anticipatory anxiety.  
(N11)

Low morale accompanied the 1994 changes that undermined both multidisciplinary teams and school social worker collegiality. One narrator described the negativity of her student field placement supervisor at that time:

Social work was going backwards in schools, and not very valued... I think she’s quite a great social worker and I think it was more a sign of what was going on around her within the department, and how it was impacting.  
(N22)

While many felt that the school social work stream was under threat, one narrator integrated survival tactics by way of personal interests into his work; and three took time out and returned with renewed energy.

It was a great year out... I realised how much I enjoyed working with children, and working with schools and education, and how boring
working was, as an administrator. It just wasn’t me. I hated it, so I was very happy to come back and work. (N13)

Many experienced low times, but the passion and dedication to “making a difference to kids’ lives” (N12) and looking at the positives outweighed concerns.

Whilst you know there are other things that are happening that aren’t so good.. I feel as though the direction is a positive one. If I didn’t think that, I probably wouldn’t be here.. If I felt that we were sort of just one step forward two steps back. (N12)

Multiple Professional Identities

The study found three main areas of multiple professional identities, each having its own characteristic coherences or tensions.

Social Worker-School Social Worker

Narrators referred to themselves predominantly as school social workers, but school social worker professional identity depended upon social worker identity for its co-existence. They were firmly grounded in value-based, ethically guided practice, knowledge and skill base, and AASW practice standards.

I’m a social worker to my fingertips... I just love social work. I think it’s a noble profession. I do. And I tell everyone who asks: I’m a social worker. (N11)

(I’m) very pleased I’m a social worker. I describe myself as a social worker not a teacher, and yet I’ve got two education degrees... Whenever I fill in my census I’m a social worker... (N1)

I really strongly identify as a social worker. I’m proud to be a social worker and the values and the knowledge and the contribution that
we can make I think is unique... I’m passionate about being a social worker and like to talk to other social workers. (N6)

Some narrators had always been interested to work in schools. For others that goal crystallised through social work studies and field placements. Three joined school social work when no longer able to tolerate government positions where bureaucracy had overtaken social justice. Four with experience in youth justice or child protection saw education as having greater potential to support children and young people. Two narrators worked initially in other fields, with the deliberate intention of taking up school social work when it became available.

The specialist school social worker professional identity grew beyond but essentially incorporated the core social worker identity. Narrators described the assumption of specialist school social worker identity as a gradual process.

I think when I first came in, I probably just saw myself as a social worker working in schools... (N12)

About two years into the job I realised that school social work was a particular and specialised role that I thought I understood pretty well... how different that was to working in perhaps a non-government agency or a hospital. There are some similarities but there’s some huge differences, too. (N4)

Once identifying themselves as school social workers, narrators appeared to have become passionate about that role and identity. Only one was conflicted about whether school social work was different from social work. None suggested that the school social worker professional identity was an alternate identity, nor that there were any inconsistencies in social worker-school social worker identity.

This research had deliberately elicited stories of school social work, but anticipated more claims for “social work”, rather than the consistently declared affirmations of a specialist school social worker professional identity, strongly supported by the content of multiple narratives.
Teacher-School Social Worker

Shared values and goals gave consistency, but there was also significant tension between the school social worker and teacher identities. As they increasingly adopted their school social worker professional identities, seven narrators, formerly teachers, said that they integrated useful knowledge; sublimated judgmental attitudes; and rejected didactic, authoritarian and disempowering behaviours that were associated with their teacher identities. Only one had been appointed to a school with joint teaching and social work responsibilities.

The narratives of two former teachers recruited as social workers by way of study leave in the 1970s reflected their teaching experience, but strongly represented their school social worker identities. There was no evidence that their official “teacher-social worker” title made the struggle to reject certain teacher characteristics more challenging.

Narrators believed their teaching experience had been advantageous for confident transition into schools and on-going practice. Even though it was somewhat “annoying” (N11), ex-teachers noticed they were generally more readily deemed as experts, and most had used that status as a last resort to facilitate credibility and acceptance of recommendations in schools.

Although their narratives clearly identified the value of a former teacher professional identity to their school social work, they were adamant that it was not essential for others. Narratives that exemplified the benefit of teacher experience were somewhat dissonant with that assertion. By the same token, the narratives of non-teacher school social workers did not reflect practice weakened by the lack of first-hand teaching knowledge and experience, although one acknowledged classroom behaviour management an area for further learning.

*I actually do still find (it) quite challenging to provide that sort of information in the classroom... I've got some basic sort of strategies ... I find that quite challenging really.* (N6)
Former teachers had been wary of the potential identity confusion in the familiar school environment.

I became a “teacher” again for a little while. And I slipped into it scarily quite quickly, and became, I wouldn’t say punitive, but part of the system that allows it to happen... (N1)

The moment I walked back... I thought: This is where I belong... When I was doing my training, at one stage... I found it very difficult to make that shift in the way the teacher thinks as compared to the way the social worker thinks... I suppose in teaching more directive and even autocratic... I just had one patch where I found it really tough and then I suppose I trained myself to see things differently. And now... I don’t have a problem with it. I can sort of marry the two and I think there’s a role for both. (N22)

They understood the “attached disciplinary” (N11) function within teaching. School social work theoretical approaches and skills changed the nature of the relationship with the student, where the teacher role had been replaced by that of “caring adult”, who knew how to listen (N1).

One narrator had been assigned classes in the core curriculum.

I was probably a better teacher because I brought that set of understandings around relationship and building rapport and managing potential conflict and all of those things. (N11)

Negotiations around the dual teacher-school social worker and client-student roles paved the way for clarity in potential confusion.

On the very odd occasion... you might have to act in this sort of disciplinary way with a kid who was in your class who might also be someone you were seeing in your other role. And what I would do is always sit down and talk to the young person about that. “In this situation we are working in this way together and that means we
have to do certain things differently. And I know you know me in this other role in this way”... I’d really try and work with the young person to make sure they understood that. (N11)

Former teachers had become school social workers, and were proud of that identity, while respectful of teacher colleagues.

Social work is so much more respectful... in its thinking... Being a social worker doesn’t mean that being a teacher is bad, it’s not that at all. (N1)

School Social Worker-Psychologist

Three departmental narrators had completed psychology qualifications. None had been dissatisfied with school social work. To facilitate confidentiality, since there are only three, they remain unidentified (N/U) in this and related sections. Several others with psychology majors expressed no regrets about not pursuing the psychology path.

The narratives of school social worker-psychologists did not present role confusion. Each described the acquisition of additional knowledge; cognitive assessment skills and sanction. They had been motivated to refine their knowledge and skills in the area of learning and teaching; to take the opportunity for psychologist registration; and to expand their pay and career options. Two completed training under the supervision of psychologist colleagues while they were employed by the Education Department; another completed studies externally, with clinical supervision. Two accessed higher psychologist grade and salaries, and one was given a higher duties allowance to add assessments into the existing social work role. In the opinion of one, most psychologists took a narrower individual focus despite making claims for a systems approach, using a more restricted frame than social workers.

These narrators indicated a strong, consistent relationship with the school social worker identity and the desire to locate themselves within the tradition of
practice. None had sought to abandon their school social worker identity, especially values including social justice; social work approaches and skills; and systems perspectives as core elements they brought to psychology.

\[ I \text{ have not changed many of the fundamental... approaches to helping... A lot of the training I had in social work, particularly school social work, still very much informs the way I practice psychology. (N/U)} \]

... perspectives and values, and how I work is actually just all based on the social work... It’s not like you can dump your other self really. To me I felt like I had the role of the social worker and really, the only thing that I fitted into that was some cognitive assessments ... and probably building into that to my knowledge set about learning difficulties, disabilities, teaching strategies... rather than leaving anything behind... Having the perspective of seeing someone... connected to lots of various things in their lives that need to be looked at, not just the individual, that has stayed with me. And I think I still value that as my social work bit into the role. (N/U)

Primary loyalty to the social worker identity had led one to a certain amount of guilt relating to the adoption of a psychologist identity, confessing to being “very ashamed” about having self-identified as “psychologist” on the basis of higher “kudos” (N/U) and credibility; and parents’ fear of “the welfare” in the guise of social workers. They all advised clients of their dual status, and signed off on formal documents as “psychologist” or “social worker” according to the requirements of the situation.

The collected narratives revealed a difficult story within the community of school social workers in the 1970s, when management made serious efforts to bolster the Education Department psychology-guidance stream by soliciting eligible school social workers.
Teacher Social Workers with psychology majors have been offered the option of an assessment unit in 3rd term which would enable them to have promotion by joining the Guidance Officer structure.

(Social Worker Group, 1977c)

One of the narrators indicated that several of the group thought they could be more influential in the organisational environment if they acquired psychology accreditation. Their peers argued that such a move would reinforce the lower status and power of school social workers. The collegiate group recognised personal advantages in psychologist pay and career structure, and felt loyal to their professional colleagues; but they also feared for the integrity of school social worker identity and the ongoing tradition of practice.

This aroused much feeling within the meeting, being seen by some Social Workers as a denigration of the social worker qualification and role in CGCS, and further evidence of the divisive effect among staff of career differentials and speculation and uncertainty re salary and structure. At the same time it was recognised (that) such an opportunity was in the personal interest of particular individuals concerned. (Social Worker Group, 1977c)

In professional narratives collected thirty years later, there were clues to feelings of betrayal; the urgency to justify oneself; and even temporary disruption to firm friendships in perceived defection, although one narrator stressed that those with psychologist qualifications continued to deliver good social work services. The move was perhaps so emotionally fraught because it impacted on professional identity for all. Because school social workers were personally committed to their social justice principles and unique practice, joining the dominant side, where guidance officers reportedly thought of social workers as “handmaidens”, would have been individually and communally challenging. The depletion of practitioner numbers must have been galling, especially when teacher-school social workers turned psychologists had entered under a study leave scheme, supported by the social workers to strengthen their stream.
Building Professional Identity

Social Work Qualifications

Professional identity was an active process of construction, rather than a tailored mantle to be donned. It was developed in dynamic interaction with and contribution to the context of practice. It encompassed acquisition of and contribution to school social work knowledge, through individual study and reflection, and communal discussion of ethics, theory and effectiveness.

The acquisition of narrator school social worker identity began with initial exposure to theoretical perspectives and generic practice at five Victorian and two interstate universities. Two completed the Diploma of Social Studies at the University of Melbourne in the 1940s. Most recently, five had completed the Bachelor of Social Work between 2001 and 2008. Narrators noted changes in course content over time, and differing theoretical orientations between universities. All credited their social work education for the emergence of the social worker professional self; and for some, the earliest signs of the school social worker professional identity.

Professionally qualifying social work courses had been selected according to accessibility, distance, off-campus and part-time study; or content and perspectives consistent with individual interest, purpose and orientation. Emergent professional perspectives were shaped by recognisably differently theoretically focused courses. Those who had completed very early casework focused courses learned systems and community development perspectives from colleagues who had graduated later, and observed the progressive changes in the Melbourne University course, and differences in later established courses.

Melbourne social work in my experience, was quite different in its orientation, certainly when I did it. And certainly the students I had from Melbourne I found quite different from Monash and quite different from Latrobe. Interesting. I mean not basically philosophically different, but very much in terms of the focus... I think at Melbourne, probably the focus was more family welfare and individual counselling. (N18)
The mid-1970s Melbourne University course had a broad scope consistent with contemporary social ethos and the political leanings of students.

*People like Delys Sargent... were well ahead of their time. A lot of these issues they were pushing around disadvantage, disabilities including issues surrounding women. So I think the social work course wasn’t just the traditional case work model...We were very lucky... to have teachers there who... saw social work broader than that, and were in the political climate, which at that stage was very exciting.* (N15)

One narrator had transferred to another university in order to access a social work course more consistent with personal political stance.

*... it just didn’t suit me... I felt I was much more radical than the course itself because I was into direct action at that stage... And the (second) course was structural so I was really into that... they talked about privatisation... social policy... so I was happy with that.* (N7)

Guest lecturers or student projects prompted aspirations for a specifically school social worker identity. One narrator completed a school social work elective at Melbourne University in 1978 or 1979. Latrobe University had a school social work elective around the same time (Glasson, 1978), but otherwise, children and young people in schools were barely mentioned. Supervised field placements were very highly valued as uniquely establishing skills and knowledge. Some narrators had completed their field practice in a school or student support setting, and had determined that this was the field they wanted to pursue, either immediately or when opportunity arose.

*I did one of my placements as a school social worker, and my supervisor from that has been very influential for me, and I still keep in touch... I had a pretty good idea from that experience in that placement, what to expect... I deliberately chose to work in education because it was potentially a lot more rewarding.* (N24)
... it was the start of my career in working in schools, so you’re really trying to absorb as much information as possible because it is a new experience for you. (N8)

Academic study and field practice equipped graduates with practical knowledge and skill that gave them confidence to approach school social work in system-wide multidisciplinary support services and individual school settings.

Social work education is certainly very different (from) other streams... a whole lot goes into our education. Social policy... social justice is a big part of it, community development, human development... and the theoretical background... a really strong focus on practice skills. And I think that lends itself really well to working with schools. (N24)

School social worker professional identity began to take shape within the organisational setting. Professional and peer supervision, co-working, mentoring, and professional development could lead new practitioners through induction to on-going support, as they acquired experiential practice knowledge.

**Induction**

Induction was prioritised until the closure of School Support Centres in 1993. John Hall had secured the appointment of a senior social worker in 1955, partly to provide induction and supervision (Hall, 1955). Minutes of social worker meetings 1970-1981 and other documents show departmental commitment to state or regional induction and training, with social workers as a collegiate group actively engaged in planning and implementation of programs and the production of an orientation kit (Social Worker Group, 1980). Retrieved notes document a cross-disciplinary session: *Establishing Yourself in a School*, presented by school social worker Shirley Ambrose (Ambrose, 1980). Induction and early supervision for initiates were highly valued.
I had a great supervisor... the senior person provided weekly supervision... there was an orientation course once a month for a full day... (They) drew on... other professions like psychologists and curriculum consultants to come and do presentations... I think there might have been a group of about 15 or 20 (social workers)... we got to know each other really well, and that was a great way of getting into school social work. (N5)

From 1994, when most departmental school social workers were dispersed to school sites, “ideal notions about collegiality and support” (N14) were exploded and induction at the discretion of local management and individual practitioners was more haphazard. “Thrown in the deep end” (N12), a novice lone worker relied at first on principals defining her role (N12). As a consequence of their own poor induction, some narrators had been motivated to integrate the support of new colleagues essentially within leadership or co-worker responsibilities.

I was so vulnerable. I could have been doing anything... I certainly didn’t have a clear understanding of what my role was... I was on my own... I look back and it was a bit of a blur, I don’t know how I did it... I was rudderless, I was just meandering along. I’ve always put a lot of work into induction... everything that I would have dreamed of when I started. (N14)

School-employed practitioners were welcomed into the Education Department school social worker group in the 1970s. In the 2000s, they were independently responsible for their own orientation, sometimes supported by departmental school social workers or community-based peers. With little opportunity for on-site induction and support, school-employed social workers took their cues from the vast “jig-saw” (N8) of student issues, staff expectations and possible interventions.

I was still learning, I was just walking the place, trying to get a sense of what they needed, how to do it. (N26)
In the absence of formal induction, narrators’ personal orientation reading included materials produced by departmental school social workers (Victoria. Education Dept, 1985b); AASW school social work practice standards (AASW, 2011; AASW (Vic) & Hayes, 1991); and the 2006 draft standards circulated as guidelines for consultation and feedback. Welcome to School Social Work (Aldemir & Town, 1995), written by social work students under the professional supervision of Heather McLeod, traced a continuity within the story of school social work in Victoria, by referencing the 1985 orientation kit and the 1991 Practice Standards for School Social Workers.

Departmental policies and guidelines relevant to school social work and other support services have been among prescribed reading. However, in those periods before departmental web-site access, when documents had been shelved, out of date or forgotten, or there was no colleague to pass on information, there was little direction, except for some American and other international school social work literature not always relevant to the specific Victorian setting.

When I looked at the latest document (practice standards 2011) I was really excited, because I thought: Oh, where was this information when I was practising? (N23)

Where there was no “planned, coordinated process for induction” (N24) for new social workers, they needed to create their own professionally specific induction opportunities; and absorb themselves in practice-based learning. Previous social work, for example, in child protection, provided coping skills in new, complex and stressful situations. Local social work networks and special activities such as practice and issue forums; university linkages; email networking; cross-disciplinary and inter-agency meetings were found useful.

... seeking out support from colleagues, joining the AASW and being a part of the school social work group was part of that, and also getting along to professional development that I thought really were relevant to the role. (N24).
Professional Supervision

Professional supervision nurtured the blossoming professional identity, by linking with experienced practitioners, to reflect discursively and dialogically, on the application of theories to practice, and to develop the personalised knowledge and creativity to approach each new student difficulty. Supervision allowed for “robust conversation” (N26) that challenged personal practice.

Social workers experienced elsewhere, found the general lack of commitment to on-going, regular professional supervision to be strange, professionally unsatisfying and organisationally remiss. Without policy mandate and resourcing for professional supervision to support the quality of service; client protection; and employee wellbeing, school social workers could be left to fend for themselves, or convince management to provide it.

*I look back to my earlier days, and I think: Oh, what was I thinking?*  
... I probably wouldn’t have even known what to get extra training and knowledge in, because I didn’t know what I didn’t know! (N23)

*I remember having to argue and lobby, and I had to present a paper*  
... (and) they were able to see that it was important. And I had some fairly major incidents in those first years, I look back and I think: Whoa-oo! I was very naïve. (N14)

By 1970 there was no “direct regular professional supervision” (Professional Officers: Psychology and Guidance Branch, 1970). Regular state-wide meetings of school social workers until around 1980 were recalled by one narrator as akin to peer supervision, and minutes of meetings record case and program reflection and knowledge development. The School Support Centre structure (1988-1993) had included senior positions and provision for professional supervision, all of which was disrupted by the professional isolation for many in the 1990s.

*I think ensuring good supervision is one of those things that got lost in all of those changes. That probably would be something that needs to come back.* (N23)
I really struggled, because I would be in an office on my own. I would have nobody to bounce things off or, you know, deal with the awful things that you might hear that you would just like to talk to someone about. So for several years it was very isolating and lonely. Very hard to do the job often. (N25)

With no supervision routinely provided, an individual school social worker asking for professional supervision could be regarded as “not coping” (N14) by principals with no understanding of the professional requirement, leaving the social worker “completely isolated” (N14).

The importance of professional supervision for new practitioners was demonstrated by narrators who selected memorable casework examples located in their early practice, replete with vivid and extensive details, their own thinking and emotions, and lingering ethical and intervention questions. One focused on the intricacies of a 25 year old story for more than 30 minutes within the interview, returning to it on several occasions. This early stage of professional identity development, with its confusion, challenges and contradictions, was ripe for the learning afforded by professional supervision.

Many narrators indicated the importance of professional supervision and willingness to engage in the process. However, only 4 of 15 narrators practising school social work at the time of interview said they were receiving regular individual or group professional supervision. Three more had accessed it in the past, mostly privately sourced and self-funded. Several were relying on collegiate debriefing, needs-based external consultation, peer supervision and support. School social worker professional identity was nourished within discursive, communal environments.

Talking to other school social workers definitely on the rare occasions that I get a chance to do that, about practice, will definitely inform me of how I do certain things... I always gravitate towards the social workers... It’s almost like we feed off each other and we say: “Oh, have you had this happen in your school. How did you deal with it?” (N6)
One narrator whose current position allowed a state-wide perspective, judged that school social workers employed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development were most unlikely to be provided with time and resources for professional supervision. Two narrators included the provision of professional supervision within their management responsibilities, and one of those continued to access supervision.

Only one of the contemporary practitioners described a carefully constructed, well-resourced professional supervision program whereby every school social worker in that team had access to internal individual and group supervision; and external supervision.

Around 2010, with the appointment of regional Stream Leaders and the development of supervision policy, school social workers collaborated to put processes in place, but narrators found it an illusion after all, wrought by government and organisational change and budget cuts. One described a complex, collaborative structure of departmental supervisors, shelved almost as soon as it was begun, when governance of Student Support Services was returned to principals in 2012.

The findings revealed a discrepancy between the numbers of school social workers who believed in the importance of professional supervision and those who actually accessed it. Lack of organisational support and the high cost of privately sourced supervision contributed to low engagement. Additionally, within the hectic rhythm of work, supervision needed to be made a priority within heavy workloads and unexpected crises.

School-employed social workers were acutely aware that professional support and supervision were crucial to “decompress” from “adrenaline-charged” work (N26), and avoid the risk of “burn out” (N6). School-employed social workers were quite isolated from the professional collegiate support afforded to teachers, and their unique contextual issues required: “support from someone working in a similar position” (N8). Even with prior departmental experience, being in the school community, both collaborating with and directly accountable to the principal or delegate, required “a whole learning curve” (N6). They
particularly required supervisors who understood the nature and intensity of being part of the school community and a member of the school staff.

... structured supervision, that provides you with accurate and appropriate advice, which I certainly think that you need to seek when you’re first starting out in working in a school, because you are trying to deal with some clashes between school expectations and social work expectations. (N8)

Acquisition and Consolidation of Knowledge

In the absence of a body of Australian school social work specific literature and other learning opportunities, the knowledge for specialist practice was acquired through individual determination and communal responsibility to nurture and protect the tradition of school social work practice. The personal relationship with knowledge essential to professional identity could be seen initially in self-motivated learning, particularly through the “successes (and) failures” (N23) of practice experience and “on-the-job learning” (N5) alongside colleagues and mentors.

Professional reading provided orientation to practice or updated knowledge. The Literature Sub-Committee of the 1970s social worker group sought journals and books and ways of accessing them, and circulated reading lists and reviews (Social Worker Group, 1970a). This is particularly remarkable since there were no American school social work journals until the late 1970s, and the first textbooks appeared in the 1980s (Fisher, 2009, p.195-196). Even today they are not easily accessible in Australia without university affiliation, and narrators were using a wide range of generalist social work and other literature to augment the knowledge within the practice standards and available school social work literature. Digital access and the internet have increased text options.

I certainly love reading because it just sharpens your practice. And it’s very easy when you’ve been in a role for a while just see it with a bit of a film over your eyes rather than in a way that keeps you asking questions. (N11)
Formal professional development opportunities were accessed by narrators continually developing their knowledge. Several referred to departmental and external training workshops available until the early 1990s.

..there was training provided by the department in some areas in relation to behaviour management, assertive discipline, AIDS and the impact it was likely to have on schools, how to best manage that. And then there was external training that was provided around family therapy, family work. (N4)

In the 2000s, narrators had accessed training delivered within the state education system, and including matters such as: classroom and school-wide behavior management programs; the Program for Students with Disabilities; autism and ADHD. They had participated in workshops provided by community agencies and private consultants, where they considered new knowledge and skills applicable to the support of students. Local or regional network meetings or participation in AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group discussions of theory and practice issues had provided the opportunities for school social work specific professional development.

Narrators represented a group highly motivated towards further training and education. Three narrators had completed social work Masters and Doctorates by research, though not in school social work topics, and only one had stayed in school social work. Several had studied at graduate certificate, diploma, bachelor and masters levels in: public sector management; public policy; clinical psychology; education; family therapy; mediation; and careers counselling.

**Reflection and Practice Wisdom**

Reflection was the internal dialogic, self-aware narrative processing of practice experiences, thematically overlaid with school social work values, theoretical perspectives, and practical knowledge, that seeded and nourished professional identity. Reflection developed personalised knowledge and practice wisdom that were at the heart of professional identity, and allowed intuitive practice.
An external observation might stimulate improved understanding and practice. One narrator had opportunity to work with families desperately seeking food and accommodation for that night.

*And I thought, now imagine if we’d been thinking as a school social worker, knocking on her door saying: Now I want to talk to you about Johnny’s reading... That struck me very strongly, that maybe we were living in a little fish-bowl in there, our little enclosed school world... it really hit me hard... I was much more tuned in to people’s general situation. I didn’t assume that this was their primary goal at that moment in their life... how their child might be functioning at school. (N17)*

Narrators revealed a pattern of thoughtfulness about practitioner effectiveness in bringing about change. Some wrote about issues underlying practice, kept for personal use; distributed to teachers and other professionals; or shared with colleagues in social worker meetings, as recorded in retrieved minutes of meetings.

Narrators presented many instances of satisfying, creative successful work with individual and groups of students, their families, teachers and school. There was also acknowledgement of falling short of intrinsic school social work goals. Narrators understood personal and professional positioning within wider school and societal environments, where individual and family difficulties were becoming more complicated, and where change and success following intervention was becoming more elusive.

*Working with schools and family and little person, all three together, depending on what the issue is... it’s a very complex role... as the caseload got fuller and heavier, the ability to work as effectively as I wanted to got diluted as well. (N23)*

*I don’t feel that I do make enough of a difference. Certainly there are times when I experience a lot of compassion fatigue and frustration with politics and that whole issue of the tensions of*
trying to support young people or students when schools are not
doing their part of the work as well. (N14)

Reflection was integrated as planful consideration, based on experience, into
good practice.

Even though you might’ve been doing (complex cases) for a long
time, sometimes there’s new situations and you sort of think: OK, I
need to think about this. I need to be clear. (N12)

The confidence to deal with any situation developed over years, so that school
social workers would know almost automatically what they needed to do: “all
this knowledge and tools and tricks up my sleeve” (N25). That did not, however,
exclude doubt-ridden moments.

I still sit there sometimes and think, damn, how am I going to do
that? What’ll I do now? What do you do about that? (N25)

Even if it did not eliminate doubts, practice wisdom brought the confidence of
knowing how creatively to apply theory and knowledge to each new student
learning situation, and marked the essence of school social worker professional
identity.

I remember not being as confident and having to go and read up on
different things and different strategies and just try them out. I
don’t know when the change was… maybe a few years into it… I
probably felt like: OK I’ve seen this issue before or something
similar. I’ve got a few ideas. Or you start to see some stuff you’ve
dealt with before. It’s never totally the same, but you can get a
general sense or you’ve got relevant information prepared or you’ve
got different strategies that you know have worked in the past. (N6)
Maintenance of Professional Identity & the Tradition of Practice

The maintenance of a school social work tradition of practice depends upon communication between past and present practitioners who acknowledge shared professional identity attributes; and contribute to the building, development and sharing of knowledge. The tradition of practice is only made manifest when school social workers recognise and communicate their shared professional identity as resonant with the past, and are able to assume continuity to project it into the future to connect with practitioners yet unknown. Narrators’ visions for future school social work service delivery (Chapter 7) arose out of the core of professional identity, where values, theory, knowledge and skills had been applied experientially to practice, processed and integrated by reflection and collegiate discussion, and distilled into practice wisdom and professional confidence.

*I’m very optimistic about the future for school social work. Obviously I would like to see a stronger commitment to the role of school social work in schools and a more defined commitment.* (N24)

This study outlines some of those communal activities that have preserved the profession and driven it forwards. The study itself will ultimately stand as one of those touchstones in the past-present-future flow, although the narrative constructed by this study, and other documents brought into the public arena, will always be open to both affirmation and contestation by formal research or school social worker critique. Several narrators recognised their participation in the research as contributing to tradition, by documenting the past, and handing on stories to future practitioners.

*..the work you’re doing is really important in the contribution to school social work. There hasn’t been enough research into it.* (N24)

*I just think any opportunity, it’s something I really enjoy doing, and I’m happy to pass on any information about what we do, if I know... it can promote opportunities for social workers in the future.* (N12)
The things that I’ve dealt with, I wish that I had kept a diary, and you could write a book about the things that we have experienced in the work. (N14)

Contribution to Knowledge

The development of professional identity occurred within both private reflection and communal dialogue that ultimately informed school social work practice.

I’m in schools all the time. And I’m thinking about schools, and I’m thinking about wellbeing in schools all the time. So yes I still do think of myself as contributing to the work of school social work. (N11)

Victorian school social workers cited in the literature review, those represented in the retrieved documents, narrators, sharing a strong professional identity and understanding how they were guided by values, theories and knowledge for practice, have presented their ideas into the collegiate community for consideration and challenge in a process of knowledge-building. Possibly hundreds more, names now irretrievable, have shared in knowledge-building.

From the mid-1970s through to the end of 1993, there was confidence and enthusiasm in shared professional identity and the collaborative development of knowledge.

... it was a very dynamic group… we wrote position papers on values in social work; we had an advisory group… where we met and looked at the models of school social work practice in Victoria… So we were practising social work, but we were also conceptualising, at really what amounted to a very significant level. Lots of school social workers were not only doing the job, but they were thinking about what they were doing, and it was really the model of practice and theory getting integrated… It was a really, really good group of school social workers in Victoria at that stage. Lots of energy. (N15)

With no formal archiving, much of the writing of school social workers has probably been lost, but we might hypothesise that during the two decade period
described above, school social work was consolidated and strengthened, so that communal knowledge development continues to inform practice.

In 1971, Psychology & Guidance Branch social workers requested a meeting via a letter to Len Tierney, to recommend that an introduction to working with schools be incorporated into the University of Melbourne Social Work course (Social Worker Group, 1971a). Probably the first actual school social work elective in Australia was introduced at Melbourne University in 1978, as a collaborative representation of their knowledge by Victorian practitioners. John Hodgson and Janet Patford played significant roles in its introduction and development. Twelve 2-hour weekly sessions were prepared and presented by departmental and school-employed practitioners: Patford, Hodgson, Marilyn McInnes, Pam Holden, Sheree Cooke and Marg Keegel, with the backup of other colleagues. Emphasising the multi-disciplinary team approach, the course covered: the context of school social work and an introduction to values; perspectives and knowledge for school social work; and school social work and teachers (Hodgson, 1978a; School Social Worker Group & Hodgson, 1978; Social Worker Group, 1977a).

A Latrobe University elective titled: “Social Work Practice in School Settings” (Glasson, 1978), approached schools as sites for community development. It included the economic and political functions of schools; Illich’s “deschooling society”; community; schools as organisations; access to power; social worker roles; potential values clashes; and theories for implementation of practice.

School social workers Les Halliwell, Helen Murray, Trish McNamara, Uschi Bay and Marty Grace were recalled as contributing knowledge back into generic social work through academia. One narrator had held sessional teaching positions. There may have been others not found among collected documents and narratives.

The refinement of professional identity and the contribution of knowledge back into the arena of school social work practice has continued through consultation and writing processes to develop practice standards and position papers, directed into the AASW and Victorian education system. Despite the writing integral to practice, none of the currently practising school social workers mentioned their own authorship or archiving.
Most mysterious is that without significant formal processes to do so, Victorian school social workers have developed and communicated knowledge for practice over decades so that narrators in this study have been able to demonstrate a shared professional identity and tradition of practice. With no specialist academic training, and generally disregarded by those with the power to define fields of practice, Victorian school social workers have engaged in communal activity and discussion to build knowledge and ensure the continuation of their practice. Narratives and documents showed that conversations between co-located colleagues; in professional supervision; at school social worker meetings and the AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group have challenged, re-theorised and perpetuated knowledge. Individual and communal professional identity have been preserved through reconstruction in the context of evolving social work and school social work theories, standards and practice, social theory, theories for intervention and Victorian government student wellbeing and learning policies.

Evaluation of Practice

Evaluation informs effective practice; helps consolidate the various elements of professional identity individually and communally recognised; and comes to the attention of stakeholders outside of the school social worker community. Narrators described a social work process including evaluation of the outcomes of intervention, but acknowledged lack of consistency and rigorous methods.

_They need to build in evaluation of their work to everyday practice. Whether it be collecting data or whether it be some more qualitative evaluation, where they take the time to interview the people that they work with or they look at pre- and post-measures or either do it themselves or get someone externally to help them do it._ (N4)

It should not be assumed, however, that school social workers did not engage in evaluative reflection on the effectiveness or otherwise of practice. It was on the basis of evidence generated by those reflections that narrators refined their practice: it was evidence-based, even if data were not concrete and recorded.
Narrators spoke evaluatively. They acknowledged the potential for casework to be “a band-aid approach” (N2, N14, N21, N27; Anonymous, 1971) without effecting environmental change. Even success could leave the school social worker uncertain: “I didn’t do anything, except the principal thought I’d worked some magic!” (N2). With outcomes not immediately achieved, schools were open to negotiating new approaches, since: “change doesn’t happen overnight” (N17).

There was personal and professional disquiet about the recurrent referral of particular students; the inadequate brief interventions and infrequent school visits inherent in the departmental service context; and systems inflexibly structured and often unable to support students with problems.

.. I used to feel like I was doing it on my own and we were always just doing band-aid work and responding to crises or issue after issue, but nothing was changing. Whereas I think schools think a lot more systemically now than they used to. (N14)

I used to sit there and I’d feel defeated, and I’d feel that my skills weren’t good enough because I couldn’t make a change for this child, and then sometimes I’ve had to sit and look at that file and say: Well, four people have gone before me, and none of them have succeeded. What makes you think that you’re going to be the one to make that big difference? (N25)

One of the principles of school social work was that improved student learning required school change. School development, whether in the micro-setting of the student-teacher relationship, the classroom, or the school policy environment, was a complex task. Departmental school social workers had been variously able to effect school change. Narrators saw School Support Centres (1988-1992) as the most productive in terms of influencing whole school learning and wellbeing cultures. During the 2000s, narrators had varying degrees of influence, depending on individual school policy in relation to wellbeing and learning; good relationships with receptive, welfare-oriented principals and teachers; and flexibility within school cultures.
I’m not always confident I can change the environment. I’d like to think I can, ideally, but no not always... so many factors that come into that... I think we’re successful some of the time. (N14)

Although narrators indicated that school social workers engaged in evaluative reflection and discussion, some acknowledged the gap in their own practice, and that formal evaluation of practice, whether individually, communally or academically undertaken, was missing from the tradition of school social work.

**Student Supervision**

Student supervision introduced and recruited potential initiates into the tradition of school social work; contributed specialist school social work knowledge into the broader field of social work; and boosted student support resources in schools. Supervisors were challenged to clarify purpose and effectiveness, and to question their own professional identity within the education environment and its expectations:

_The more I was working with, or struggling with students who were coming in for placement, the clearer it became in my mind... what we felt we could contribute legitimately to children’s school experience, that had to always be the measuring stick for what we were doing._ (N3)

Social workers in the *Psychology Branch* were supervising student placements (internships) as early as 1950 (Hall, 1950b). Since then, school social workers have consistently provided professional field supervision for several Victorian universities. Interns were critical observers of disempowering school processes, teaching and relationships: this, in turn, challenged field supervisors to facilitate empowering learning on placement.

It could be “absolute agony” (N18) to challenge elements within the professional identity social work students had begun constructing for themselves. Academic results and theoretical knowledge did not necessarily guarantee practice skills
with “introspective and self-analytical” (N18) awareness of their suitability for the profession.

Narrators had experienced for themselves the value of field placement in their knowledge-building in the early stages of their professional identity development and took seriously the responsibility to provide similar opportunities. Student supervision in the school social work setting was satisfying. It strengthened the professional identity of practitioners who questioned and honed their own knowledge and skills; and placed them actively in the stream of tradition especially as it flowed towards the future.

**Collegiate Connections and Networks**

Isolation was one of the greatest concerns shared by school-employed social workers and lone practitioners in multi-disciplinary departmental teams. Professional identity flourished in connection to others who shared similar attributes. Isolation, lack of feed-back from colleagues and not knowing how others managed, led to self-doubt.

Even for those connected to others, time to talk and reflect was limited. One narrator described the research interview as a rare opportunity for communication between school social workers.

> You don’t actually know if what you’re doing is what everyone else is doing. You know what I mean? Like, I haven’t had the opportunity to sit and listen to what you do. (N14)

There could be an emotional drift into disillusionment when there was “no-one to bounce from, no-one to tell you that’s happening” (N13); when the essence of professional identity was being subverted by factors within the context of practice; or when the workload was too high and there was no collegiate support to stave off compassion fatigue and the expectation to keep going. Feedback from schools and clients was helpful, but dialogue with peers clarified difficult situations, for example, where the practitioner needed to set realistic expectations.
You’ve got to set your own boundaries. And it’s really hard to set boundaries in that contextual framework because no one really understands. (N14)

School-employed social workers were isolated; not networked under an umbrella organisation. They needed to talk with others who were working closely with the principal on a day-to-day basis.

I talked to myself in my office a lot!... I’m glad I’ve got my own space because I need that... I want to be able to talk about some of this. I suppose because I’ve been through such a turbulent time this year. It would have been great to connect with others that maybe had gone through something similar... how you sort of cope with that. (N6).

Professional isolation did not preclude, but created a barrier to connection with other school social workers. Practice standards; school social work and other journals and books provided remote connection to the professional community.

School social workers were universally appreciative of opportunities to meet in collegiate networks. In the earliest days of school social work, networking was straightforward: there were few centres and a small number of departmental social workers to accommodate.

The earliest retrieved social worker meeting minutes date from 1969, and continue through until 1981, with Education Department services expanding into new suburban and country areas, and the numbers of school social workers increasing. Minutes show that whole day meetings were held every six weeks or so, with the support of management, and included school-employed social workers. The minutes reveal a strong professional culture of peer support; knowledge building and dissemination; and activist advocacy for the profession. They worked collectively, with many members assuming organisational positions or actioning decisions.
With no professional structure for school social workers in the Education Department, the meetings became a site for organisation, peer support and the formation of friendships that have endured more than thirty years.

... (we) set up our own internally organised social work structure, with an elected senior social worker. We didn't have any money, but that didn't seem to matter because, for example we'd visit social workers in the country... at that stage anyway, there was no official senior social worker who could deal with any of the issues... a chance to, I suppose, think about social work ways of dealing with problems; and you knew what other people were doing in their setting and how they were dealing with things. (N2)

Retrieved minutes of Social Worker Group meetings throughout the 1970s, showed school social workers engaged robustly with and contributed organisationally to the Psychology and Guidance Branch and then Counselling, Guidance & Clinical Services (CGCS), established in 1974. They argued for the development of an equitable career structure, including senior social worker positions; and consulted with regard to a restructure of CGCS in the latter part of the decade. Representatives attended organisational subcommittee meetings. The executive met with management and liaised with the unions and the AASW. They made direct representations to the Teachers Tribunal, where they were discounted because they were not teachers. They enlisted the support of the AASW to meet with Brian Dixon, Minister of Education. Frustrated with the lack of progress, they arranged a meeting with journalists from The Age, Melbourne’s major newspaper, to outline the conditions that discouraged experienced social workers; emphasise their contribution to the welfare of children in schools; and stress the economic advantages to the community in the prevention of problems in school age children (Social Worker Group, 1974a).

Together they shared the professional responsibility to develop their own knowledge through casework and school development discussions. Members or visitors spoke on topics such as: working with young children and play; teacher professional development; working with adolescents; ethical and legal issues; group processes; parent education; models of practice; behavior modification;
critique and development of school social work practice. Issues discussed included: school refusal; out-of-home care; needs of migrant children especially those with a disability; working with teachers; participating in the conduct of research. Student supervision was planned; Pam Holden coordinated supervision training workshops. The group evaluated and planned induction programs and manuals for new social workers. A literature group provided reviews and recommended reading. They contributed to the content of the University of Melbourne School social Work unit mooted in 1977 and delivered by group members from July, 1978. They informed and guided their representatives on Melbourne State College teacher course committees; inter-agency, Victorian Council of Social Service and AASW committees. Members reported on Education Department committees and subcommittees, and workshopped papers for presentation at conferences.

Despite a documented record of regular professional development, broad discussion, invited speakers and collegiate sharing of knowledge, some found at times too great an emphasis on conditions, when it was more: “a political and industrial or push group” (N18).

The Director of Special Services (DSS), Mervyn Kydd, attended meetings (Social Worker Group, 1978, 1979) to converse with practitioners on various aspects of their work.

He then commented on what he saw as present unmet needs among the school population, and indicated special concern about insufficient provision for socially disadvantaged and emotionally disturbed children. He stated that he would be looking to social workers, who are professionally concerned with home and social environments, for their views on action alternatives.

(Social Worker Group, 1979)

Despite Kydd’s support, in a memo dated 28 April 1981, Alan Farmer, then acting DSS, precluded stream meetings under a new professional development policy, and specifically cancelled the social worker meeting set for May 1st (Farmer, 1981). Farmer was reported by narrators employed at the time to be less
favourably disposed to school social workers. The already distributed agenda for the next meeting had included an hour of business; professional development on “Trends in Basic Family Patterns” with a speaker from the Institute of Family Studies; and afternoon discussion of industrial issues, with a union report (Social Worker Group, 1981).

The minutes of meetings up until this date clearly indicate that school social workers were vigorously involved in service management improvements; building knowledge and theory for school social work practice; and promotion of their profession. They had the support of departmental psychologist managers and local officers-in-charge.

This study has found little documentary evidence of social worker meetings associated with the 1980s. A private file of handwritten notes and other departmental and union updates from the 1987 period of transition to School Support Centres indicates that social workers were giving their input and briefing one another. The Social Workers Orientation Kit (Victoria. Education Dept, 1985b), and the Practice Standards for Schools Social Workers (AASW (Vic) & Hayes, 1991) include evidence that school social workers were communicating across centres, maintaining a collegiate community. Narrators recalled school social worker meetings and training: one had attended orientation for new social workers in the mid-1980s; two recalled meetings to consult with Lynne Hayes in developing the 1991 practice standards. With devolution of management to regions, School Support Centres (1988-1993) possibly facilitated more localised networking about which this study has not found documentation.

Isolation, loss of professional voice and despondency followed the closure of School Support Centres. Poor morale, feeling unsupported and undervalued, led to disenchantment and discontent. Practitioners in one region talked together only when regional management called them together for occasional administrative meetings. Elsewhere, meetings were overwhelmed by debriefing:

...disempowerment, disrespect, obnoxious treatment... that my colleagues in social work were having to... deal with on a day-to-day, and week to week basis. (N13)
Some managed to claw back collegiate connections through networking at a regional level, where one group managed to affirm professional identity and the tradition of practice in the face of the most difficult practice context.

We had someone from Melbourne Uni come in, a couple of social work staff, run this session with us and we just wrote up on butcher’s paper all our experiences as a group. I think it was a time when (Liberal Premier) Kennett had been beating us over the head and we were all feeling down. And so we started working in pairs and writing up all our experiences as a social worker and the interesting thing was just what proportion of the walls it filled, where we put up all these butcher’s paper sheets, and it was quite affirming to see the breadth of experience in schools that people had. And also to know what experiences other colleagues had had. (N5)

Despite the shattering of professional connection and the crises of morale, professional identity remained strong, and school social workers protected their tradition of practice. The return to regional departmental management in following the election of a Labor government in 1999 gave opportunity for the re-introduction of regional school social worker meetings, some of which continued beyond the 2012 return to principal governance. However, this study has found little evidence since the early 1990s, of the vibrant networking and opportunity for school social worker participation in policy and program development of earlier years.

**Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW)**

Departmental school social workers are required to be fully qualified and eligible for membership of the Australian Association of Social Workers, which embodies the core social worker identity. Some narrators considered membership vitally important; many opted not to join on a perceived high cost-low benefit basis. Irrespective of actual membership, narrators referred to the AASW Code of Ethics and the AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers that encompass the values, knowledge, skills inherent in professional identity; and trace the tradition
of school social work practice through reference to earlier standards and assumed application to future practice.

Minutes of social worker meetings in the early 1970s refer to separate AASW Education Social Work meetings, although more details have not been found in the course of this study (Social Worker Group, 1972a, 1973c).

The AASW (Vic) School Social Work Special Interest Group (SSWSIG), later renamed Practice Group (PG), was established in response to the closure of School Support Centres and the cessation of possibilities for professional networking, and has continued until the present. Some currently practicing narrators participated in the Practice Group. Others were not given management permission to attend, or were prevented by workload or travel limitations.

Attendees at the inaugural SSWSIG meeting on the 27th October, 1994, chaired by Heather McLeod (Australian Association of Social Workers (Vic) School Social Work Special Interest Group, 1994a) included Kristel Thorpe, John Frederick, Andonnia Gotsi, Barbara Sturmfels, Janelle Wilson, Chris King, Carol Blackett Smith, Lorraine Stabey, Kim Lisle, Trish McNamara, Pam Kemeys, and Marty Grace. They affirmed aims consistent with the maintenance of professional identity and tradition:

- Networking and support for State and Registered (Catholic and Private) School Social Workers cross the state.
- Raising and strengthening the profile of School Social Work across the state.
- Professional Development.
- Assisting to implement professional practice standards in School Social Work across the State.
- Some linking of industrial and professional concerns.

Barbara Sturmfels stressed the importance of affiliation with the AASW to give the group “legitimacy, credibility and potency”, especially at a time of significant organisational change. The SSWSIG would provide collegiate interaction similar to the 1970s school social worker meetings, with an added
advantage of AASW auspice. The meeting considered Department of Education issues such as the reduction of school social work positions; and concerns about out-sourcing to individuals or agencies without specialist school social work understanding or experience (AASW SSWSIG, 1994).

As the Practice Group continued, the emphasis on dominant departmental issues was not always relevant to school-employed social workers, who nevertheless appreciated the value of communal connection.

*I do get ideas and information and I hear what’s going on within the department, even though it doesn’t necessarily impact on me in any way. I guess it’s that bond of having something in common, and I certainly get some good ideas.* (N22)

One narrator advised against a focus on industrial issues:

*... be a professional body, not to be too caught up in industrial issues... disseminate the (standards) more readily, do some more professional development... perhaps break them down into bite size pieces, and distribute them that way. It’s hard when it’s a voluntary group and it only meets from time to time... I think we’ve got a good platform there, and that would be a good direction to go in.* (N9)

Despite an emphasis on departmental organisational matters, the Practice Group has maintained a concern for the preservation of tradition through the protection and development of professional identity. Currently practising narrators attended meetings or kept in touch through emailed agendas and minutes; some had contributed to consultations regarding the draft standards, and all referred to the circulated draft, or to the ratified *AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers* (AASW, 2011).

With pressure to conform to school expectation and other professional approaches, and increasing numbers of school-employed social workers post 2003, the AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group has been a site for the communal recognition and strengthening of shared professional identity.
... it’s that need to work with other school social workers. I didn’t want to become a psych, I didn’t want to become a teacher... working in that culture you can become like that, so I sort of wanted that separate identity... I regularly attended (the Practice Group)... It’s important!... I think the professional networking... the opportunity for new social workers to develop an interest and a passion in what they do, and yes, I’d like to see the group continue. I think that’s probably the most important thing, that there’s something there for new ones... We can so easily lose new workers, and often schools will put new workers into student welfare on-campus positions... You sort of think: Oh, they do need support. (N12)

The process of the construction and maintenance of school social work tradition in Australia seems mysterious because it has not been clearly documented. The tradition of school social work might seem self-perpetuating, but has required the intervention of dedicated practitioners. Several narrators had been members of the AASW (Vic) School Social Work SIG/PG at some time. It is somewhere within the discursive interactions, formal and informal, between long-experienced and initiate practitioners that tradition has been constructed and maintained. The Practice Group, separately from employer systems, provided a network where school social workers, irrespective of their organisational contexts, could connect with those who shared professional identity. The Practice Group has been a site for the development and dissemination of knowledge; and the construction and protection of the boundaries of professional identity. Currently practising narrators, and even some who were no longer school social workers, consistently identified the AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers as the Practice Group’s major contribution to professional identity and the tradition of practice.

Trade Unions

Trade unions supported school social workers in those industrial issues, for example pay, conditions and career structure, related to the organisational aspects of their employment. Social workers’ political and social action orientations have been evident in union membership, another point of school
social worker connection, especially when government policy or management decisions impacted negatively on professional concerns.

_We were all pretty keen on unions. You see, in those days... we were all members of the union. We wouldn’t think of not being a union member._ (N17)

Industrially, school social workers initially had no rights within the Education Department. The Victorian Secondary Teachers’ Association was supportive of social workers, but recommended that the AASW represent them in lieu of their own industrial union, a request refused by the AASW the Teachers Tribunal. With no power to negotiate, the AASW suggested a “work value case” with assistance requested from the teacher unions (Social Worker Group, 1972a, 1974b).

When social workers were made Professional Appointees in 1980, they fell within the gambit of the Victorian Public Service Association, which became heavily involved in negotiations for the maintenance of conditions during the 1987 planning for the _School Support Centres_ (Victorian Public Service Association, 1987). The State Public Services Federation (SPSF) and then the Community and Public Sector Union have represented school social workers industrially from the early 1990s (Australian Association of Social Workers (Victorian Branch) School Social Work Special Interest Group, 1994b; Community and Public Sector Union, 2000, 2011b).

_There have been lots of fights along the way with the union alongside to try and stop certain things from happening: like supervision time going..._ (N5)

Jarrod Dobson (SPSF) joined Special Interest group discussion in December, 1994, covering industrial and professional issues: confidentiality; continuity and effectiveness of service; professional standards; leave; occupational health and safety; and career and salary structure. The executive undertook to forward to the union a position paper on outsourcing which, at the time, was the Department of Education’s favoured model (AASW (Vic) School Social Work Special Interest Group, 1994b).
Some narrators valued their union and professional affiliations, and one lamented declining union membership and the lack of interest of younger colleagues:

..wages are fantastic, they wouldn’t know. They’re not a member of the union, they’re not a member of the AASW which really annoys me. They just think it happened overnight. And I said: It was people like me who went on strike for three months... Don’t take it for granted. (N16)

The Complex Relationship between Departmental School Social Workers and Psychologists

The narratives of departmental school social workers depicted a complex relationship with psychologists or guidance officers, who were the most often mentioned other characters within professional narratives. In spite of mutually respectful relationships with psychologists, school social workers began to feel marginalised in the mid-1960s (Professional Officers: Psychology and Guidance Branch, 1965). The unease continued to be narrated, but narrators did not want to disparage psychologist colleagues, emphasising positive working relationships and long-term friendships with “great” (N27), “outstanding” (N15) psychologists and guidance officers. Clearly, however, at least a few individual psychologists and guidance officers had unreasonably exercised their personal or organisational superiority.

Education Department psychologists were originally required to be experienced teachers: there were few qualified and only three eligible for psychologist registration in 1966 (Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.3). Non-psychologist teacher assistants were given the “courtesy title of Guidance Officer” (Sturmfels & Cailes, 1978, p.2). Gradually, guidance officer positions were phased out as guidance officers upgraded their qualifications to satisfy psychologist registration, resigned or returned to teaching. Non-teacher psychologists began to be employed.
Psychologists originally dominated in the *Psychology Branch* and *Psychology and Guidance Branch*, through engagement with gendered social practices and an accepted hierarchical structure to which non-teacher, female social workers had no access. The evidence collected for this study suggests there was mutual respect, both personal and professional, between social workers and psychologists. Social workers began to feel disrespected and marginalised with increasing numbers of teachers seconded as guidance officers to assist in the psychology-guidance stream in themed-1960s. The dominance of psychologists within the organisational culture lasted through the change to multidisciplinary teams in *Counselling, Guidance & Clinical Services*, and the equalising professional structures for speech pathologists, psychologists and social workers in the *School Support Centres*.

Several narrators suggested that psychologists were more highly valued by schools because of their defined roles in regard to funding the Program for Students with Disabilities. There was also suggestion that community prejudice against social workers as “the welfare”, and misconceptions about the nature of school social work added to greater principal caution. Some narrators thought that AASW action towards social worker registration with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency would improve their status. The mythology of female social workers as “handmaidens” and “assistants” still lingered in the organisational culture, but inadequately explained relationships fifty years later. The fact that all teacher-guidance officers, male and female, had been assistants to the psychologist officers-in-charge has been virtually obliterated from organisational cultural memory.

Psychologists have been elevated structurally through higher starting salaries, but that fails to make sense of “highly devaluing” (N13) inter-personal encounters with psychologists who saw themselves as “very important” (N20); “superior” (N2); or “the ant’s pants” (N5). Narrators had been told that they had no right to an opinion about student learning; their ideas had been routinely cast aside. Three narrators had considered leaving their positions because of persistent bullying by psychologists. Most narrators had heard the dismissive implication in psychologist claims that they were more valuable because they did what social workers do plus cognitive assessments.
And so we would then go into our meetings which were made up of psychology and social work, and say: Well, we’re doing counselling and program development, and community development and other bits and pieces. And the psychs would say: Yeah, we do that too, plus assessment. (N13)

School Social Worker and Psychologist Roles

Narratives and documents confirmed from 1948 a two decade complementary division of roles. Social workers brought social assessment, counselling and casework skills; understanding of disadvantage; knowledge of systems and negotiation for system change; access to community resources; and extended intervention with families. Psychologists brought their teacher and psychology expertise to assessment and classroom consultation. They worked together as teams; learned from and respected one another.

As role definition became less distinct (Professional Officers: Psychology and Guidance Branch, 1965), teamwork continued as a mode of service delivery, and social workers continued to handle more “complex” and “serious” cases with children and their families (Hall, 1969a). Some psychologists and guidance officers began to work more with groups and families; and school social workers began to work more with teachers, curriculum and school change (Professional Officers: Psychology and Guidance Branch, 1970). Each discipline began to “overlap” into the historical territory of the other. The change was, however, inconsistent, and some narrators gave examples up until the 2000s of psychologists leaving “family work” to social workers.

The narratives of psychologist and guidance officer dominance failed to reflect parallel role expansion; and minimally represented mutual influence on practice. The collection of professional narratives gradually uncovered significant stories of social worker influence on psychology practice, now almost lost to collective memory, particularly the strong psychology background of social workers, and guidance officer training designed collaboratively by a team including a social worker and in part delivered by social workers.
The Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools (Victoria. Dept of Education, 1998a) was seen by several narrators as a statement of the validity of the ecological systems perspective that had been taught in social work courses, consolidated by practice, and now enshrined in policy. Narrators considered school social workers more likely to target environments beyond school and family, into sub-systemic, policy and structural domains. They were seen as working for longer periods of time with students to ensure that supports were in place, and to have a more eclectic approach to intervention.

Psychologists were seen as more likely to “measure individuals against some sort of norm” (N20); “categorising” (N7); focusing more on the individual’s problem, rather than putting them in a complex social context. A school social worker-psychologist said that even though psychologist methods could look superficially similar, they did not operate with the breadth and depth of the systemic approach, nor from the same value base with an emphasis on social justice.

The school social worker-psychologist relationship has been narratively constructed to include the dominance of the latter in a strangely interdependent relationship. It hardly befits either psychology or school social work to define themselves in relation to the other, rather than focusing on separate professional identities that might share some knowledge and methods.

You see we always say “apart from” .. or we couldn’t do testing. So what we really need to do is focus on is what we can do, which is contextual stuff and environmental stuff and links and networks those sorts of things... We need to focus on what we can do. (N2)
Articulating School Social Worker Professional Identity and Tradition

Several narrators stated that school social work was “highly valued” (N24) by schools, but a persistent theme in the narratives of departmental school social workers, irrespective of the era, was the need to raise the profile of school social work, promoting the profession as a “core part” of the student services team (N12), so that schools: “gain a much better understanding of what we can do” (N24).

*I’m really keen to promote the really unique, valuable contribution that social work brings to education. I don’t think our schools kind of recognise... the uniqueness of (our) role.* (N12)

Narratives and documents representing successive cohorts over six decades, of departmental and school-employed school social workers, constructed a well-articulated professional identity, different from other modes of social work practice, and distinguished from other professions in the multidisciplinary setting.

Several narrators had felt perturbed when non-social workers, including psychologist colleagues, made claims to be doing social work. Narrators were protective of the social worker and school social worker professional identities, especially with increased school-based welfare staff, nurses, chaplains and other counsellors, some of whom were described as social workers. School social workers needed to assert their qualifications and specialist roles, with colleagues and managers from other disciplines and with principals who may not be familiar with disciplinary orientations: “*I think that’s when it’s really important*” (N23).

*You’ve got to be really clear about who you are and what your own boundaries are, because they’re often under threat.* (N11)

Departmental and school-employed school social workers alike articulated their practice with clarity. While the early departmental practitioners strongly advocated for industrial equity (Davison, 1959; Padman, 1961), narratives
depicting 1970 onwards described an apparent hesitation to advocate for themselves professionally. In 1972, Assistant Principal Psychologist, John McLeod, fully aware and respectful of social workers’ contribution to learning, urged them to “make clear throughout the Branch” their “areas of expertise”, so that schools could draw on their skills appropriately (Social Worker Group, 1972c).

Documents and narratives confirm that departmental practitioners have been confident to narrate school social worker professional identity communally, with dedication and intellectual coherence. It is surprising, therefore, that they have failed to articulate their practice more widely, hesitating to advocate for their own interests and “making their presence felt more” (N18).

*We’re not particularly good at advocating for ourselves; we’re not particularly good at describing what we do ... I think we need to get better at describing what we do, clearly articulating that... we tend to be a profession that does the opposite to that, we diminish and minimise the importance of what we do.*  
(N4)

Narrators who articulated well their school social work in the interview setting, admitted that they found it “hard to voice it” (N18) more publicly, even though they recognised its importance. Some attempted to explain the reticence for self-promotion within their training and advocacy for the needs of others.

*I really do find (explaining what we do) hard to do, but I’ve also found that the profession is consistently losing ground. We’re not a profession that’s trained to be dominant, and to act as experts. Our training takes us into empowering our clients, into supporting and advocating on behalf of clients... so when we try to advocate or support ourselves as a profession, I think we fall in a heap.* (N13)

*We were trained not to talk about ourselves; we were trained to be actually enabling clients to move away from us rather than towards us... And that is almost self-destructive in the current climate where in fact you’ve got to promote yourself.* (N18)
One blamed lack of political astuteness and lobbying skills. Another suggested that school social workers themselves had not yet fully appreciated the “absolutely huge” (N11) potential of their contribution. Or perhaps professional activity was so intrinsic to identity that it seemed unremarkable, the specifics forgotten in the rush from one day to the next, until a job application or re-classification interview affirmed what had been forgotten: “Oh, I did do that, or I did work on that project” (N5).

A few wondered whether responsibility lay with the predominance of women with lesser social sanction for self-advocacy, although some men expressed the same reserve. Misplaced humility seemed unnecessarily to limit narrators’ acknowledgement of themselves as experts. In fact, there seemed to be two contradictory narratives: confidence in their unique school social work contribution to students and to schools; and a lack of confidence that has grown especially in the departmental organisational setting.

There were several suggestions for preparing school social workers to articulate their profession. Specific training in effective promotion; surveying others in order to identify assumptions and misconceptions; using the AASW to access media support; research to demonstrate effective practice; practitioners doing really great work in the field; and distributing an easily accessible written document for school staff, explaining purpose and practice, were all seen as solid platforms for promotion.

### Conclusion

The research findings have prompted the proposal that “tradition” is the fluidity of professional identity, from the past and looking towards the future, and back again. It is not simply the handing on of knowledge and customs from the elders to the next generation. The notion of tradition can only exist if there are those in the present who self-identify as school social workers, and who make meaningful connection with elements within the past, current and imagined future narratives essential to the tradition. Metaphorically, the tradition of
practice is not represented by the growing links in a chain, but more like a loosely clasped circle to which links can be added, with various coloured ribbons threaded backwards and forwards through the links to differently connect and reconstruct them.

Tradition is only made manifest under the assumption of the future of the profession, without which professional identity faces imminent obliteration. If there are no former or current school social workers who place themselves within the stream of professional identity, then the tradition is a relic of the past, perhaps able to be resurrected only if connection can be made with it by an emerging new generation of practitioners.

Irrespective of any lack of confidence, the school social work tradition exists as an ethos of personal and professional values; theoretical perspectives; engagement with the organisational structure of the school or departmental student services; and rigorous knowledge building and skills development for school specific intervention, that have been narrated intergenerationally through a stream of meaningful connections with school social worker professional identities. Stories of practice have filtered through time from the pioneers and elders to resonate in the present and the next moment, and the one after that, as school social workers connect with the past and future of school social work.
DISCUSSION

9. Implications for School Social Work, Professional Identity and the Tradition of Practice
Chapter 9

DISCUSSION:

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK, PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND THE TRADITION OF PRACTICE

Victorian school social workers are on the cusp of an opportunity to ensure that evidence-based practice and proof of effectiveness truly record and respect the breadth of ecological systemic practice, measurable outcomes, school change and the more intangible student achievements with regard to relationships, personal and social skills development, and empowerment to take control of health, wellbeing and learning.

(Barrett, p.352-353)
Introduction

Little has been formally known about school social work, one of the earliest and continuous fields of professional social work practice in Australia. The research findings constitute the first, albeit loosely woven narrative covering 65 years of school social work in the State of Victoria, including never before published detail from organisational context and practice. School social workers have held and passed on oral and written practice narratives, without the research activity, self-promotion and academic acknowledgement that give rise to the widely acknowledged construction of a field of practice. Its uniqueness as specialist practice is found within specialist school social worker professional identity, incorporating a wide spectrum of generalist practice with the addition of school specific approaches and methods aimed to improve the achievement of student potential through learning.

This new narrative has been constructed primarily through interpretation of the voices of school social workers, as protagonists, witnesses and commentators, as they constructed school social work and professional identity through narrative and documented communal reflection. The study has been limited by the unavailability of more complete empirical data: some lost forever, some inaccessible to this study. Similarly, the selective non-inclusion of information in order to manage the size of the report has left researcher emphases and gaps.

The research was envisioned in the context of a scarcity of literature about school social work, but concludes by correcting that notion out of respect for the thriving tradition and the un-published writings of Victorian school social workers. Epistemological considerations explained acceptable knowledge built through scholarly research in an academic environment, but was also applicable to the pre-existing knowledge gifted to the research as personal and communal intellectual property. Narrators had already interpreted and reinterpreted to find deeper meaning within narrative constructions of context, practice and professional identity. They had already imagined the future of school social work. Narrator knowledge was contributed to the empirical data, subject to another layer of interpretation, across and within narratives and through time, further to build knowledge about the tradition of school social work practice.
Professional Identity and the Tradition of Practice

Through changing social, technological, economic and policy environments, school social workers have forged links on the basis of recognisable characteristics within a shared professional identity. School social work practice is driven by social justice, founded on core social work values, knowledge, skills and adherence to the Code of Ethics (AASW, 2010). Specialist school social worker professional identity is further defined by the school social work purpose of facilitating successful schooling for all students; specialist knowledge; ecological systems approaches; and eclectic, multiple methods specific to the school environment as the arena of practice. This study has generated the new conclusion that specialist school social work is distinguished from other social work practice by the extension of assessment, intervention and evaluation into a fourth area: bio-psycho-social-educational.

School social workers adopt the specialist identity as they recognise a theorised repertoire of knowledge and skills that has come to represent their own practice wisdom. Shared professional identity characteristics draw practitioners together into a collegiate community not limited by time or geography, but dependent upon narrative interaction to describe a tradition of practice. That tradition cannot be documented or updated as a static entity because it is, in fact, a dynamic process. Professional identity and tradition are mutually dependent. If there were none in the present who identified professionally as school social workers, there would be no tradition. Rather, there would be a collection of stories, interesting artefacts of former practitioners with no descendent lineage to engage in the knowledge and practices of forebears.

The tradition of school social work practice can be represented by the repeated patterns, adaptations and innovations in purpose, theoretical approaches and methods of intervention. It is not linearly cumulative, but given life through the medium of professional identity, and constructed through meaningful discursive transactions between past, present and future practitioners as professional experience and knowledge are re-theorised and reconstructed. Recording the tradition of practice gives greater access to time and place beyond immediate
individual and communal experience, and facilitates discursive interaction with the wider professional community nationally and internationally.

Recognising themselves within a tradition of practice reminds school social workers that their efforts to remove barriers to learning fit within a logical, theorised framework, to which their own innovative interventions can be added. More importantly, the access to a documented tradition offers a challenge to engage in more robust individual and communal reflection for the purpose of refining and keeping meaningful and relevant the theories and practice that are essential to school social work.

Victorian school social workers themselves have for a long time felt part of a tradition of practice. Missing, however, is the scholarly inquiry and evaluation of practice that enrich and further develop professional identity and tradition in a changing world. The high degree of interest to contribute to this study is perhaps indicative of the lack of prior opportunity to recount experiences and document ideas for a wider audience. A major recommendation of this study is for future writing, research and other record keeping to provide greater opportunity for school social workers formally to document and evaluate their practice, reconstruct professional identity, and add to the tradition of practice.

The Organisational and Policy Context of Practice

Interaction with and contribution to the organisational context of practice is essential to school social worker professional identity. However, school social workers have had little opportunity to contribute to organisational decision-making post 1994, thanks to fragmentation consistent with “new public management”. Some narrators had responsibilities at a local level, and were able to foster staff participation in decision-making. Student Support Services has not had the regular meetings or channels of communication that facilitated the active contributions of school social workers documented in the 1970-1980s. On the other hand, school-employed social worker-narrators in the 2000s tended to be integrated into the organisation of the school, with close working
relationships with the principal and staff, and responsibility to shape the school’s wellbeing program.

The impact of changing Victorian and Federal governments is especially clear from 1972 onwards. In the final moments of editing this report, the Federal Government’s 2014-2015 budget announced the planned cessation of the “Gonski” funding model that re-distributed additional Commonwealth contributions to support schools in the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas (Ferrari, 2014). Student welfare positions have been removed from the National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program, irrespective of the preferences of school communities (Australia. Ministers’ Media Centre: Education Portfolio, 2014). Many school-employed social workers will potentially lose their positions, leaving school communities with less capacity to provide professionally delivered prevention and early intervention services. Meanwhile, the Victorian State budget has announced the end of the Maintenance Allowance, ending support that has existed in some form for more than fifty years, helping the poorest families with assistance for uniforms, excursions (field trips), camps, swimming and other special programs, to ensure that students can stay engaged academically and socially without having to protect their parents from additional expenses (Victorian Council of Social Service & Richards, 2014).

Moreover, the proposed federal budget’s inherent economic, social and educational policy has harsh implications for the construction of adolescence and loss of independence, with young adults again bearing the brunt of political and economic imperatives. Until the age of thirty, they will be ineligible for six months for unemployment benefits unless in education or training (Australia. Office of the Treasurer, Hockey, & Cormann, 2014), irrespective of work record, existing qualifications and family responsibilities, and potentially condemning the most vulnerable to poverty and homelessness (Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, 2014). A nation that 40 years ago publicly funded free school and university education, has seen the gradual erosion of that universal right. As the result of a budget designed by senior politicians who were the recipients of free post-secondary education, aspirations towards university education as a result of school learning outcomes promise to be quashed for many school leavers, by crippling fees and loans, and the withdrawal of Commonwealth funding from the
At state level, the considerable problems associated with political manipulation of school education also impact on school social work. Social workers are trained to operate within those public institutions where policy and organisational changes apply. However, organisational oscillations between principal governance and professional management, and associated relocations, according to the proclivities of changing state governments, have required school social workers and their colleagues in Student Support Services to contend with extraordinary structural changes within the management of service delivery. The politically driven diversion of government resources towards structural change, and the threat to the continuity and quality of school social work service delivery is unreasonable. It weakens the potential to achieve the basic requirement for wellbeing as a pre-condition for learning that has been understood and written into policy over many years in Victoria.

It is hard to achieve greater school social worker voice against the machinations of government in resisting unnecessary, politically-motivated change. However, it is ethically encumbent upon school social workers and the AASW to continue to agitate for adequate resourcing and continuity for school social work. Thus far, there is no evidence that activists from the ranks of those who identify as Victorian school social workers have ascended to political careers to infiltrate and influence political parties.

**Issues from Practice**

Despite changing governments, new policies and structures, school social workers have individually and communally engaged in the development of new knowledge and grappled with the dilemmas of practice.
Who is the Client?

Lack of consensus in variously interpreted definitions of “the client” is an intriguing anomaly where the ethical practice of social work prioritises the rights and interests of the client in situations of disadvantage and marginalisation (AASW, 2010, p.8, 25). Australian practice standards identify the student as the client and focus of attention, and the school as one of the targets for change (AASW, 2011, p.12). Identifying the school as client fails to recognise the differential between the student and the school sustained by its organisational power; and reconstructs the collaborative professional team efforts towards improved student learning as a school social worker-client relationship.

Regardless of differentiated interpretations, it is important for the school social worker professionally to define “the client” in any situation, but especially where there are conflicts of interest between students and school systems. Allowing others to define “the client”, or taking an inconsistent approach to its conceptualisation, even with allowance for situational interpretation, risks disruption to autonomous, empowered and empowering school social work.

Beyond questions of social justice, an alternate view of “client” in professional settings might cover schools that engage school social workers as consultants on systemic change, arguably in the ultimate interests of the student population. As time to review the AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers (AASW, 2011) draws near, research, communal reflection and theorising will allow more complete consideration of notions of “the client” as it relates to students, their environments and the broader systems that impact on them.

Theoretical Perspectives for School Social Work

Casework and school change narratives from the 1970s onwards provided conclusive evidence that school social workers have operated from systems or ecological systems perspectives, which they have brought into the multi-disciplinary setting to influence and inform the conceptualisation of student support service delivery.
As listener-researcher and analyst considering the content of theoretical discussion, I venture to propose that for many, ecological systems perspectives have become integrated into practice wisdom, but have lost the sharp intricacies of theoretical specificities. Professional development might, therefore, be directed towards revision of ecological and systems theories, as well as other theories mentioned by narrators as useful for school social work practice, such as narrative and structural theories. In particular, the application of critical theory might give renewed critique to assumptions about empowering practice within schooling, amidst institutions such as the family, welfare, politics and a capitalist economy that conserve social division, inequity, disempowerment and marginalisation.

I questioned the degree to which my thinking and writing on the basis of research findings had come to accept the primacy of the ecological systems perspective, prevention and early intervention, even though work is primarily allocated on the basis of individual referrals. I reflected on some of my own cases, and took the question to the school social work practice group peer supervision, where it was agreed that even if counselling an independent young person in a clinical setting, school social workers implemented therapeutic approaches in the context of ecological systems concerns that impacted individually and academically. This would be the subject of a fascinating future study.

**Models for School Social Work**

School social workers cited preference for the model of service delivery outlined in both the *AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers* (AASW, 2011) and the updated and still currently used *Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools* (Victoria. Dept of Education, 1998a) with their emphasis on prevention and early intervention and an ecological systemic approach to practice. Such a prevention-focused model is familiar to school social work practitioners as an ideal, and has international standing (National Association of Social Workers, 2012; School Social Work Association of America, 2013, p.4-5). However, in Victoria, strict adherence to this model has been precluded by the emphasis on complex intervention and casework.
Ecological systemic case-planning included associated preventative and early intervention measures in the classroom, curriculum, playground, school policy and procedures. Nevertheless, for many departmental school social workers, prevention was a minor activity. While departmental policy and school social worker preference are consistent on the matter of prevention and early intervention, complex intervention prevails, primarily through casework, referral and case management. School-employed school social workers, on-site and responsive, are more able to offer universal prevention and early intervention services.

In Victoria and internationally, school social workers have noted the increasing numbers of children and young people impacted by more complex personal, family and social problems. Few schools have their own, usually part-time, school social workers, and departmental practitioners who may be responsible to service the needs of 10-20 schools and sometimes more, will continue to be called to work on urgent cases at the complex intervention level for the most serious, obvious or disruptive cases. In 2013, the AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group proposed an aspirational school social worker to student ratio of 1:350. There has been no reliable, centralised mechanism to collect Victorian government school system numbers since 1994. Wellbeing and learning policy enshrined to encompass a model requiring emphasis on prevention and early intervention, but with inadequate numbers of school social workers and other support staff, will continue to be subverted by demands for complex casework.

This study has confirmed specialist school social worker understanding and reconsideration of practice according to professional standards and changing social and educational environments (AASW, 2013, p.13). However, school social workers are directed within their host settings to provide particular services, and it is their daily responsibility to negotiate roles within a model for practice according to the ethical code and school social work knowledge and methods. With a casework emphasis spanning 65 years, but with claims for activity in school change and development, prevention and early intervention, it becomes essential to research and understand the level and factors within adherence to the espoused model, and properly to define and evaluate school social worker influence on student and school factors to improve learning outcomes.
Specialist School Social Work and Community Partnerships

Intrinsic to school social work over many decades has been a commitment to school-agency collaboration, pursued informally and through the establishment of inter-agency protocols and school-site service delivery. Schools are logical sites for service delivery related to problems faced by children, young people and families, health and mental health issues. Internationally and in Victoria, governments are encouraging community partnerships for the delivery of services, but also promoting the contracting of community agencies to deliver hitherto state provided services. This study has shown that school social work is a unique and specialist practice, giving cause to challenge such “out-sourcing” policies.

Community services are essential collaborators in student wellbeing, but are different from and do not replace the specialist school social work knowledge and methodologies, which link intervention back into teaching and learning environments and school cultures, jointly targeting individual problems and systemic barriers. Specialist school social worker expertise ensures the continuity of care between schooling and other services, and uniquely fosters the essential wellbeing of the child or young person not simply as an end in itself, but as a mediating factor in the achievement of potential and maximised chances for social justice through academic outcomes.

Specialist School Social Work Practice, Professional Qualifications and Further Education

Narrators and the research findings have made a claim for school social work as specialist practice on the basis of schools as host settings; the specific purpose of removing barriers to successful learning outcomes; and multiple generalist methods with the significant inclusion of school specific knowledge and eclectic repertoire of interventions. The uniqueness of specialist school social work is seen in the integration of school social work into the curriculum and other programs of the school, and the use of methods such as teacher consultation and professional development; preventative whole-class and small group work; school policy and program consultation and development.
The practice wisdom at the core of specialist school social worker identity has been acquired and claimed through experience, theorised, and re-applied across both familiar and new school social work situations. It is no longer the knowledge of other theorists or practitioners, but constitutes individual specialist expertise, shared communally to construct the tradition of practice. The development of professional identity and the maintenance of tradition inspire the further acquisition of new knowledge and exploration of new methods to enhance the quality of practice and professional satisfaction.

School social work in the USA increasingly requires social work Masters level qualifications, but direct comparison is not necessarily to be made with different Australian university and professional social work education and credentialing regimes. While Australian schools of social work are offering higher degree advanced practice specialisations, a Masters in School Social Work might be an option sought by some practitioners. However, this research does not support the need, at this stage, for pre-requisite studies for entry to school social work. Even those narrators with least experience had transitioned to practice in schools, developed specialist knowledge and theory in practice on a solid base of generic social work training and strict AASW credentialing, guided by colleagues and school social work practice standards, to articulate a well-developed professional practice.

However, this discussion ventures to suggest that professionally qualifying BSW and MSW courses in Australia should include school social work in core content. Firstly, it would prepare graduates for the trend for schools to employ their own specialist social workers as lone professional members of staff. But secondly, school social work has more to contribute to social work in general. A special edition of *Australian Social Work* focusing on working with children (Australian Social Work, 2013), contained no articles from school social work, indicating the need for school social workers to research and document their practice. It also demonstrates a social work educator, researcher and practitioner failure to recognise the school, second to the family as the most significant environment in the lives of most children, and the avenue most likely to bring about improved social justice outcomes. All children, including the most vulnerable, are connected to schools. In a social work curriculum environment where the AASW
is requiring the inclusion of content related to direct practice with children (Zufferey & Gibson, 2013, p.391-393), examples from school social work or topics such as: Working with Schools; School Social Work; or Children, Young People and Schools would be ideally placed within any social work study at qualifying or advanced level. Irrespective of their ultimate areas of practice, graduate practitioners would be better prepared to include the voices of children and young people in assessment and planning; liaise with schools and school social workers; put a high value on learning outcomes; and advocate strategically for clients within the school system. Cross-disciplinary units of study incorporating, for example, social work, school social work, teaching, special education, music therapy or occupational therapy might prepare graduates to work collaboratively in school settings.

School social workers have developed particular expertise in working with students, whose voices tend to be displaced by those of adults, and there is scope in qualifying social work courses for more skilling in direct practice with children and young people. Understanding their experience from their perspective, rather than accepting initial interpretation and problem definition proposed by adults, facilitates planning of interventions for effective outcomes.

School social workers have always offered, and will continue to offer supervised student placements in order to contribute to the learning of new practitioners, and introduce them to practice in schools. The narrators and documents represented a stable workforce of dedicated school social workers who found great satisfaction in their work, and were able to mentor new staff. It becomes important to update the skills of those with long experience and practice wisdom, and to offer challenging, new and satisfying learning experiences.

Currently, there is great need to encourage already skilled and knowledgeable practitioners to engage in academic research. In part, such encouragement also comes from interested academic staff drawing practitioners into evaluation and other studies of practice. Several Victorian school social workers have provided sessional or full-time academic teaching, where other interests and university requirements have led them in new directions.
The contemplation of further study alongside a busy workload is quite daunting. Victorian school social workers have been given no acknowledgement, career or pay incentive for higher than qualifying degrees. Ironically, the schools sector has not encouraged the further academic studies that actually provide the evidence base for practice. Nevertheless, MSW by research or coursework and minor thesis, or PhD by research, would capture and extend knowledge and skills, and contribute to the documentation of the under-represented field. To the same end is proposed a MSW in Writing and Media, where all coursework output is published or otherwise circulated in styles covering: academic journals; reflection; policy, program development and evaluation; the documentation of school social work and its practitioners; record keeping and archiving; journalism; et cetera.

Partly as a result of the process of this study, the AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group has established a relationship with RMIT University, with a view to engaging experienced practitioners in research. It is very early and outcomes are yet to be known. The creation of a body of school social work literature will take time, strategic planning and the commitment of practitioners already overloaded with expectations and workplace accountabilities which do not include academic research. Research, evaluation of practice, theoretical and reflective writing will increasingly document and build knowledge for specialist school social work in Australia, and inform university education for practice with children, young people and schools.

**Induction, Professional Supervision and Professional Development**

The provision of induction, professional supervision and professional development is a requirement shared by the organisational context, the individual practitioner and the professional community including the AASW. School social workers access professional development, workshops and conferences related to particular issues, such as the needs of poor, refugee, out-of-home-care and other vulnerable students; or to interventions, such as trauma-informed practice, therapeutic or group interventions. Perhaps under-estimated is the need to stay updated with pedagogical and curriculum developments,
accountability demands (Berzin & O'Connor, 2010, p.237), and the nuances within, theoretical underpinning and global contexts of policies for learning and student support.

Current service guidelines (Victoria. DEECD, 2012) include AASW professional supervision requirements, yet to be universally organised and resourced. The lack of formal induction and supervision represents a significant weakness in the field. With management devolving to principals, many of whom are unfamiliar with school social work professional requirements, induction and supervision will continue to be haphazard. More isolated, school-employed social workers have even greater need for advocacy on their behalf in order to access professional supervision.

The research identified a strong willingness to participate, although few received regular supervision within the organisational context, and some have made private arrangements. It is by virtue of the strength of social work knowledge and the striving to make connections with others that newcomers have been drawn into the communal school social work discourse, and experienced practitioners have sought and maintained peer discussion and shared learning.

From 2012, the AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group has provided peer supervision, which has regularly included long-experienced and relatively new school social workers from Melbourne and quite distant regional areas. It is intended to enhance professional practice, not to replace professional supervision provided in the employment context. As the consistent body representing school social workers across differing organisational contexts, the AASW must advocate for professional supervision and other professional requirements that underpin ethical and practice standards.

**Potential Contribution of School Social Work to Social Work**

This study was clearly defined in the specialist area of school social work, not other modes of social work delivered in the school setting. Specialist school social workers have rich knowledge to contribute to their professional peers in
School Social Work in the State of Victoria, Australia

other settings. When striving to bring safety, wellbeing and social justice to vulnerable children and families who experience some form of disadvantage, it is essential to factor into intervention their relationship with schooling, as a pathway to personal potential and the choices that give access to a fair share of society’s resources and political processes. Schools generally welcome the assistance of outside agencies, and school social workers are well-placed to interpret the host setting and collaborate with other social workers.

School social workers are especially skilled in the delivery of services to children and young people; and a valuable source of knowledge and skills for generalist social work practice that includes the essential consideration of the education of children and young people. Lacking the profile of their social work colleagues elsewhere, their knowledge and skills have gone largely unacknowledged within Victorian university courses where they might inform the generalist practice of new graduates.

Further Research

If claims for the specialist knowledge and skills of school social workers are to be advanced and accepted into Australian social work, they will need to be described, researched and documented. There is a gaping void where evaluation and other writing should otherwise dwell. The unpublished documents retrieved for this study have lain dormant for up to sixty years, never before serving to detail the tradition of school social work in Victoria. Legitimacy, status and a foundation for the articulation of specialist school social work will be constructed through documentation in peer reviewed academic journals and other publications. The increasing demand for evidence-informed practice requires school social workers to document the evaluation of their interventions, against the goals of student wellbeing and learning, school development and the standards of school social work practice. The richness of knowledge and expertise within retrieved documents and research narratives attested to the wealth of knowledge attached to school social worker professional identity. Australian school social work is a field ripe for further study that will not only
enhance practice, but contribute to the on-going understanding of student issues, and how social work can potentially respond to them.

With minimal Australian research to evaluate the effectiveness of school social work interventions, the profession currently stands at a turning point. Victorian school social workers are on the cusp of an opportunity to ensure that evidence-based practice and proof of effectiveness truly record and respect the breadth of ecological systemic practice, measurable outcomes, school change and the more intangible student achievements with regard to relationships, personal and social skills development, and empowerment to take control of health, wellbeing and learning. The eclectic, creative, responsive approach favoured by school social workers is susceptible to scrutiny and accusations that interventions are not justified by prior evidence. The testament of experience and reflection that is incorporated into practice wisdom can be less highly regarded than quantitatively measurable outcomes, statistically proven by research design using treatment and control groups (Constable & Massat, 2009, p.142; Franklin & Kelly, 2009, p.48), claimed in some jurisdictions to be more “scientific” and credible than qualitative measures

Significantly, although research is one of the six main areas of practice (AASW, 2011, p.7), it was rarely evidenced in narratives and documents, and where mentioned, mostly as aspirational. The lack of research and evaluation stands as a huge deficit in Australian school social work. However, that same deficit leaves space for school social workers to move forward to create research designs that access empirical data including relational and complex factors representing multiple environments, levels of intervention, and wellbeing and learning outcomes.

The Context of Practice

This study of school social work in Victoria makes no claim to an exhaustive history, although it has represented school social workers from every decade from 1948. Other narrators and documents might have uncovered different stories to add explanation and provide missing pieces of the jigsaw. The organisational narrative produced in Chapter 6 interpreted the meanings that
school social workers gave to their experiences and knowledge. The new narrative stands confidently behind the rigour with which it was produced, but ready for challenges and reinterpretations that will keep it alive as a link in the past, present and future chain of tradition, as school social workers reconstruct that part of professional identity created in dynamic interaction with the context of practice. Hopefully, further research will contribute to the story of school social work in Victorian government and non-government schools systems.

The unsettling organisational changes wrought by government change in Victoria have impacted on school social workers personally and professionally. A serious examination of the quality of service of school social workers and their colleagues under circumstances of considerable change is warranted, both to analyse professional resilience and to inform government policy about the impacts of organisational change directly on student wellbeing and learning.

One of the most pressing details to explore is an audit and study of school social work services across Australia. Because of the broad scope of this research covering context, theory and practice over 65 years, it was decided not to engage in a comparative study, interesting though that would be, in order to establish a more detailed body of knowledge about Victorian school social work. In the meantime, Lee (2012) has produced her snapshot of school social work in Australia, almost two decades after Mahony’s (1995) study of school social work in Victoria, both of which represent valuable quantitative and qualitative information and guide more frequent studies to update our understanding of the field.

**Student Culture and Diversity**

Chapter 1 established the research within the area of professional school social work experience, as it informed an understanding of professional identity and the tradition of practice. The review of the literature in Chapter 3, and the findings in Chapter 7, have made reference to student issues and problems in their cultural settings, without deeper exploration within this particular study.
Discussion: Implications for School Social Work, Professional Identity and the Tradition of Practice

Schools represent very diverse populations. Difference begins with learning styles, abilities, life experiences and interests, all of which should be factored into teaching and school social work practices to help students achieve their potential. Students might be at the nucleus of several intersecting cultures, for example: socio-economic, Koorie, migrant and ethnic, child and youth. Cultures are not homogeneous, but the ecological systemic approach to school social work assessment gives good access to understanding often multiple and complex student problems and vulnerability, family and cultural contexts.

Victorian education policy (Victoria. DEECD, 2012) and the AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers (AASW, 2011) require schools, school social workers and other professionals to respect and value student diversity. This study did not explore the validity of the assumption that respect for and working with individual difference and culture is integral to school social work practice. Narrators spoke of working to undermine the cultural labelling and assumptions that misrepresented and limited the potential of students; and working at the intersection of schools, families and communities to build partnerships to support student learning within cultural diversity. The actual nature of culturally respectful school social work, and its effectiveness according to learning and cultural criteria, begs evaluative research.

There is no evaluation of decades of Victorian school social worker intervention towards school engagement within cultures and social practices based around intergenerational poverty, poor educational background, unemployment, under-employment and family disruption; sometimes intersecting with criminality, biker gangs, illegal drug and ice sub-cultures, frightening violence and home invasions. Within those neighbourhood cultures are families and groups struggling to resist the dominant culture with alternate values and practices to protect their own and other children. It has been argued that a focus on poverty as culture, rather than the structures that perpetuate it, risks justifying repeated government intervention and control (Parrott, 2014, p.105-106). If the purpose of school social work is the removal of barriers to educational outcomes, evaluation of interventions needs specifically to demonstrate that school social work has contributed to better school engagement, equity and achievement for poor students.
Some schools represent Koorie students, usually in comparatively small numbers, often disconnected from traditional country, but with strong kinship bonds and often the support of community elders. When working with Koorie students, school social workers liaise with family, elders and organisations, departmental Koorie Education Support Officers or community-based Koorie kinship care and family support workers. The school social worker works with individual students, groups and families, but equally ensures that curriculum includes the stories, imagery and experiences of Koorie students; that teachers are well-informed; and the school is connected to the local community and supports. It is well beyond time to evaluate and publish the extent to which school social work interventions are indeed culturally and individually appropriate to Koorie students’ interests, academic and cultural learning needs.

Similarly assumed rather than evaluated is quality school social work with immigrant, refugee and asylum-seeker students who have experienced the trauma of war, upheaval from home, dangerous journeys, detention on crossing Australian borders and hostility from some quarters of society. Victorian school populations now include Sudanese, Burmese, Maori, Indian, Afghani, Russian, Iraqi, Samoan and many more. An ecological systemic approach to bio-psycho-social-educational assessment, including the voices of children and young people, considers complex problem definition, often in multiple personal and cultural contexts, rather than relying on cultural labels, myths and pre-conceived generalisations about teaching, learning and school social work intervention. Many school social workers hold within their practice wisdom the evidence of effective practice, which needs to be exposed to the scrutiny of formal evaluation.

Respecting child sub-culture includes listening to, understanding and respecting children in an adult dominant world where they are often “told” and questioned; and appreciating their natural resilience in the most difficult of school, home and family circumstances. School social workers need to find the meanings in their shared cultural stories, play and fantasies; understand their friendships and fights; and appreciate their interests. Youth subcultures include neighbourhood, peer group, gender and sporting affiliations, with strong behavioural expectations and sanctions for non-conformity. The resilience of many in the
face of mean-ness, bullying or sexual harassment cannot be underestimated. With rapidly advancing digital technologies, high school students are more likely to face cyber-bullying, and more able to use social media as a tool for engagement with school, supporting friends or independently accessing social or helping relationships. The cultural relevance and effectiveness of school social worker interventions, including the on-line and social media environments, are worthy of future research informed by sub-cultural groups of young people themselves (Boyd, 2014).

Preparatory sub-cultural research, perhaps by interview or focus groups, can establish the context for relevant assessment and planning (Barrett, 2010). Only evaluation will actually indicate whether school social workers are culturally sensitive and able to bridge any divide between school, child, youth and community cultures, in order to ensure that every child is socially, emotionally and educationally engaged.

**Barriers to Learning**

School social workers and researchers with a school social work orientation are well-placed to identify personal and social problems, emerging trends and cultural impacts among children and young people. Barriers to learning may be located within students or their environments, for example: school curriculum, policy and practices; peer and friendship groups; family; community and neighbourhood; child and youth subculture; attitudes to gender and difference; language and culture; future social, economic and employment options. Children and young people are keen to be heard and willing to contribute to research that informs adults. Preparatory sub-cultural research can be integrated into school social work assessment and planning; and inform school culture change and teacher professional development. Qualitative research by way of guided focus groups allows students to set the thematic agenda, and adds texture to quantitative school climate questionnaires based on preconceived issues (Barrett, 2010).
Research that builds knowledge about the lives of children and young people will contribute to education policy and program development, but will particularly enhance the informed base for school social work and other practice.

Professional Issues

Narrators expressed the need for the evaluation of school social work intervention, but were not confident about its design and completion. Social workers have been trained to be accountable to their clients, their colleagues and their organisational contexts, and have used reflection, discussion and supervision to achieve this. This study has concluded that school social workers accept the requirement within practice standards to engage in research including the evaluation of practice, but that they are uncertain how technically to begin. This has implications for professional development. It is the responsibility of the community of school social workers; social work educators; and the AASW to facilitate knowledge-building for the evaluation of practice.

In the service setting, research might: clarify and evaluate the provision of professional supervision; clarify definition of “the client”; evaluate models of practice and actual adherence to them; explore issues of workplace bullying and ageism; raise questions of work-load occupational health and safety; consider the impacts of performance management practices under varying organisational structures; explore service management arrangements; and many more of the so far undocumented issues for research and theory development in the Australian context.

Comparative Studies

With school social work a burgeoning field internationally, trans-national sharing including research has become redolent with possibility. The inclusion of Australian and Victorian school social work in comparative international studies would serve knowledge-building to inform and enhance school social work locally and overseas, in its various stages of development, in its conceptualisation and practice. It would invigorate and bind together those who share internationally
the school social worker professional identity, albeit with variations related to local welfare and education regimes and social circumstances.

An unexpected finding of this research was the connection in 1949 between Victoria and the USA, by way of the study tour including Victorian educator Jack Cannon and social worker Lyra Taylor. American school social work texts have influenced Victorian practitioners, who have more recently accessed USA and international websites and conferences. Interestingly, 2014 is the 20th anniversary of both the School Social Work Association of America and the AASW (Vic) School Social Work Practice Group. It would be intriguing to conduct comparative studies in Victoria and the USA, in differing social, organisational and policy environments, with parallels in school social work trajectories. I have been interpreting aspects of documented USA school social work from well outside its actual context, leaving much scope for misunderstanding. However, there appears to be consensus that school social work engages ecological systemically with school, family and community, to improve learning outcomes, facilitate school development, and ensure equity. There are many similar student problems and some that are nationally specific. The same concerns are expressed, for example about the trend to focus on individual work and the impacts of economically driven “out-sourcing” or “contracted services”.

There are major differences in credentialing; professional organisation, teaching and research; educational policy; and socio-cultural ethos represented by “The American Dream” and the Australian “fair go” discourses. Different imperatives were apparent when I presented a workshop entitled Integrating Qualitative Research by Focus Groups into School Social Work Practice at the St Louis SSWAA conference (Barrett, 2010). With regard to qualitative data as evidence of multi-systemic, multi-tier school social work practice, USA practitioners appreciated within Victorian examples, especially student voices, the colour and depth of information and its appropriateness the evaluation of school social work practice. Even though qualitative methods did not meet the evidence required by their school boards in an environment where empirical data was assumed to be quantitative, a few participants planned to trial the addition of qualitative
material to their statistical reports, as a more genuine representation of the complexity of school social work.

Victorian school social workers have the knowledge and tradition ready to inform comparative research exploring similarities and differences to develop new knowledge, even while having far to go in the documentation and evaluation of their own practice. They would welcome the co-research suggested recently by Allen-Meares and Montgomery (2014, p.108).

### Professional Identity and the Maintenance of Tradition

School social workers narrated a strong professional identity and located themselves alongside others within a long tradition of practice. The inability of many to articulate more publicly that professional identity, despite the desire to do so, is quite anomalous. Meanwhile, they have continued individually and communally to reflect, theorise and develop new approaches to practice, in consolidating the tradition of practice.

### Professional Lack of Confidence

Policy and organisational changes implemented by changing state governments have sometimes left school social workers feeling undervalued. A pervasive psychology dominance in the service context and a bias in some sections of the community have impacted on the confidence of many, despite respectful and friendly team environments, where superiority is subtle, rather than enacted through intentional disrespect or bullying. Where psychologists claim some of the same perspectives and methods, school social workers have found it difficult to find a confident voice to articulate the specific nature and uniqueness of their practice, and to assert their role.

Additionally, school social work cultural expectations appear to have included humility, sublimating personal and professional needs, and not engaging in self-advocacy. This has resulted in a failure to promote strongly the profession within education, and also within the community and literature of social work.
Especially when services are fragmented or practitioners are isolated and there is little opportunity to meet with colleagues across the state, more robust practitioner writing and research and on-line networking might facilitate the confidence that grows with discursive linkages and opportunity to place oneself within the broad school social worker community.

**Shattering the Cultural Myth**

Some school social workers themselves have perpetuated by repeating the organisational cultural myth attributing their experience of lower status and uncertainty about their on-going roles to their original appointment as both female and “Assistant to the Psychologist”. The unexpected findings of this study, have led to the conclusion that it is time to shatter the myth that has become such a potent narrative undermining school social worker professional identity. The Teachers Tribunal employed all non-senior teachers, guidance officers and social workers as “assistants”, but vocabulary does not describe the harmonious, respectful, complementary partnerships between newly emerging professionals: social workers and psychologists. The dominant marginalising narratives have had their airing and should now be laid to rest.

The alternate narrative of this research portrays social workers as essential actors in helping to sustain departmental student and school support services through three decades when very few qualified teacher-psychologists were available and teachers recruited as guidance officers had minimal psychology studies. Moreover, social workers brought to the service management environment essential knowledge and skills, for example counselling, for which psychology graduates and their guidance officer assistants were initially unprepared.

Psychologists sometimes claimed to do what social workers do, with the addition of testing. The school social worker-psychologist relationship has been narratively constructed by both parties to include the dominance of the latter, rather than focusing on the shared and unique contributions of each to student support, according to professional values, theoretical perspectives and
knowledge. After all, cognitive assessments could be outsourced, obviating the need for psychologists. If school social work is psychology without the assessments, then how did narrators construct differentiated, uniquely theorised practice? School social workers in Victoria need no longer to perpetuate a culture where they define themselves in comparison to psychologists.

It perhaps requires a little more boldness, a little more confidence, a refusal to accept or repeat the “assistant” and “hand-maiden” stories, and preparation of a handy response for those moments when the school social worker feels limited or wrongly defined within schools or the multidisciplinary setting. Assertiveness can be awkward, especially if in a less powerful position or, indeed, needing to maintain a cooperative working relationship. The core social work value of respect for individuals can sometimes feel at odds with challenging respected colleagues in advocating for one’s own professional position.

School-Employed School Social Workers

For their part, school-employed school social workers, negotiate roles and expectations according to the perspectives of changing school principals, within uncertain funding prospects. They are not plagued by organisationally generated self-doubt, and potentially enjoy with principals close working relationships, mutual respect and trust. They are, however, subject to political and school-based decisions about funding.

Increasing numbers of social workers employed by Victorian schools without experience or theoretical knowledge for the schools environment, are susceptible to restricted role definitions imposed by principals, and risk isolation from others who identify as school social workers and adhere to its practice standards. The focus on students as learners may be lost, if schools specify the student or the family as the problem, precluding the complexity of student and school circumstances within an ecological systems perspective. Some narrators with departmental experience had experienced role limitations, but already held strongly theorised positions about school social work; their professional identity was strong; and they had collegiate professional support.
Discussion: Implications for School Social Work, Professional Identity and the Tradition of Practice

School-employed school social workers need support, induction and professional supervision as they build their roles to include all arenas of intervention. Supervisors need to appreciate the particular characteristics of school-employment, and the subtleties of difference compared with the dominant departmental practice.

Articulation of Professional Identity and the Tradition of Practice

Whatever the derivation of the frustrations, doubts and crises of confidence, it is time simply to assert the achievements of school social work. Despite representing a strong, consistent professional identity, narrators found it difficult outside of the community of school social workers to give voice to who they were, despite the fact that their narratives clearly showed a pattern of unique professional practice determined not solely by their actions, but how they theorised and planned ecological systemic assessment and intervention with students, families, schools and community. They knew that their practice was specialist, different from other social work, and different from the practice of psychology and other disciplines. The inability to articulate to others such a clearly narrated, strong professional identity is anomalous.

This study has shown that Victorian school social workers are already long-established specialists, with a “body of specialised knowledge and skills” (Lee, 2012, p.568). What remains, is not only advocacy and marketing, but continuing incursion into the decision-making processes where curriculum priorities, support services and career structures are determined. School social workers have always interacted with and contributed to the context of their service delivery. They have always understood and advocated for the connection between wellbeing and successful learning outcomes within the school curriculum. In Victoria, the connection between curriculum and student wellbeing is now written into policy and resourced. The best advocacy for, or marketing of school social work, will be found within documented evaluation and research to link school social work practice directly with improved health, wellbeing and learning outcomes.
The Host Setting Irony of School Social Work

As the study progressed, I was increasingly un-nerved by a striking irony at the intersection of school and school social worker interests. That school social workers are interested in school change and development as well as individual, group and family counselling and support is a double-edged sword. While it accurately conceptualises of the practice of school social work, it may sound challenging or offensive to teachers and principals for “outsiders” to suggest that their schools need improvement, even though that notion is consistent with State and Federal education policy. Even at the casework level, the suggestion that teachers try a different approach to engage a student implies a criticism. School social workers could find themselves in a constant state of anxiety in case their invitation is revoked.

The relationship between school social workers and schools is a delicate balance requiring transparency and negotiation. Essential to the definition of school social work is the inclusion of school curriculum, policy and practices as possible impediments to student learning outcomes. This casts the school social worker as a welcome guest in the host setting, in the role of challenging the systemic status quo, and has led to discomfort for more than one departmental school social worker. The continuation of the school social work service to Victorian schools depends not only on the individual practitioner’s ability to negotiate individual school settings, but on the profession’s ability to negotiate the schools system and its power-brokers.

School social workers who are advocating for students and agitating for changed school programs and procedures, will be at times a source of annoyance, and it would not be unexpected for a principal or teachers to prefer a more “compliant” caseworker or counsellor. The school social work role in the host setting can be a site for creative tension within collaborative relationships, where the impacts of professional differences are mitigated by shared wellbeing and learning goals. It would be fascinating to explore further the crucial school social worker-principal relationship, and the extent to which it influences decisions about the continuation of school social work services.
Contribution to School Social Work Knowledge

Professional identity and the tradition of practice are maintained by dynamic interaction with and contribution to the context of practice; a personal relationship with theory as it develops in practice; and the communal discursive activities that shape and define professional identity and give substance to the notion of “tradition”. This study has shown that, to date, reflection, individually and communally, have rarely been more widely documented. On a solid foundation of specialist knowledge, practitioners have provided collegiate support and peer supervision, and initiates have been mentored.

The recommendations throughout this chapter urge Victorian school social workers to begin more actively writing, publishing and presenting workshops and conferences papers specifically in the area of school social work practice, continually to build and contribute to their own specialist knowledge and to inform more widely the social work community.

Documentation and Archiving

This study has highlighted the steps that can be taken to support the confident articulation of the school social work tradition of practice essential for its preservation into the future, including the safe storage of school social worker writing that has helped shape professional identity. Handed into the study were reams of documents, some to be returned to the owner, and some put into my safe-keeping for post-research archiving. The documents are rich with data, most of which could not be included in this study, but which await further mining.

The first step is the simplest, yet often forgotten: to ensure that all documents designate the school social worker-author and the group or purpose, with the date and year. Secondly, multiple storage, archiving and access need to be guaranteed. Digital storage is not necessarily safe into the future when we have already seen the rapidity of technological change: most of us cannot now easily access documents stored on floppy disks. Before discarding paper repositories, we need to ensure that web-sites and the new digital systems will be retrievable.
With other media such as digital audio and video recording easily accessible, school social workers and their narratives of practice might easily be preserved to strengthen the links in the tradition of practice from the past through to the future. This study has collected the professional narratives of un-named school social workers. Ideally, a future project will record the stories of identified pioneers, activists and passionate school social workers.

The Professional Community

The school social workers in Victoria have always sought communal action and discussion as they developed and reconceptualised their practice. Initially, it was simple to bring together the four or five social workers in the Psychology Branch. In the 1970s, as numbers increased, and with the support of managers, school social workers left their centres for a day every six weeks or so, to meet together, joined by school-employed social workers. With the dismantling of School Support Centres at the end of 1993, there was no longer an organisational structure to approve or support for school social worker meetings. In their regional and local settings, school social workers have sometimes made their own arrangements for communal interaction.

The AASW (Vic) School Social Work Special Interest Group, now known as the Practice Group, was established to provide a forum for industrial and practice issues. Affiliated with the AASW, it has been the only consistent forum for school social workers in Victoria for almost two decades. Even though it responds to departmental proposals and industrial issues, it is nevertheless an AASW practice group affiliated with the Victorian branch, and responsible to promote the Practice Standards for School Social Workers (AASW, 2011) and other professional matters. The Practice Group has a role, still to be fully enacted, in maintaining the tradition of practice through professional development and research, and developing links with school social workers in other states.

The community of school social workers is international, with increasingly accessible opportunities to attend conferences or engage in research. Professional identity is strengthened in the context of a global community, and the interaction between long-standing and emerging traditions of school social
work practice. In the past, a small number of social workers were included in the International Teaching Fellowship exchange program (writer’s recollection) operated collaboratively by Victorian (Victoria. Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013k), UK, USA and Canadian education departments. The re-establishment of a similar program would be an exciting opportunity for international connection.

The Future of School Social Work

The tradition of school social work practice assumes discursive connection in an evolving process where the past, the present and the future are interdependent, and linked by those who share professional identity. The narrators were aware that they were using moments in the research interviews to recall and construct past experiences for relay to other school social workers past, present and future, to social workers generally, and to other interested readers. The strength of their professional identity reflected belief in the future of the profession.

This study has focused on the field of practice and professional identity defined by the AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers (AASW, 2011), and on those specialist school social workers who identify with the standards. Since its beginnings in the post-war reconstruction years, Victorian school social work has maintained its role through changing social and educational policy environments, and the ideological decision-making of political power-brokers. Victorian policies post-2000 have firmly established the link between wellbeing and learning, and between vulnerability and school non-engagement. Students have the right to equity and excellence, irrespective of disadvantage or diverse needs.

School social work will continue to claim its place in a changing society with multiple problems and increasing inequities, so long as social justice and a fair share of community resources continue to be, for almost all, contingent upon learning outcomes and pathways to further education and training. School social work is the only mode of social work practice that targets the systemic complexity of school support and development alongside direct practice with students and families. Among other student support disciplines, school social workers are unique in their commitment to social justice and an ecological
systems perspective most appropriate for facilitating access to fair and equitable learning environments and the opportunity for excellent outcomes consistent with student diversity.

As they imagined the future of school social work, narrators agreed that the focus on school engagement and learning was essential. Irrespective of practitioners’ moments of doubt in the organisational context, they have never wavered in their commitment to their purpose, nor doubted their general effectiveness, even when reflecting on certain frustrations and failures. Core social work values, generalist and specialist practice, ecological systemic perspectives, and multiple methods with an emphasis on prevention have always given school social work a logical and valuable place in education.

The greatest challenge of the future is to ensure that school social work asserts its relevance as a discipline in the support of student learning, in order to secure its role in an evolving social and technological environments. It must resist conceptualisations that limit student problems to the individual and the family; continue to advocate for improved curriculum and school processes; and agitate against structures that maintain the marginalisation of those who are poor, from diverse family backgrounds and cultures, or who learn with physical or cognitive differences. School social workers should remember their core commitment to: “reducing poverty... and creating communities that promote a positive quality of life for all” (Brooks, 2006, p.74).

In reality, Victorian school social work could be decimated by a single government decision to out-source all student wellbeing services to community child and family support, mental health and counselling agencies, without access to school system change nor the specialist knowledge of school culture, policy and practices. School social workers need to maintain an analytical perspective on the economic and political factors that drive governments towards the privatisation of assets such as schools and student support services that currently ensure the rights of all children and young people to quality education, irrespective of their ability to pay. With policy moves towards community partnerships and school-linked services, school social workers need to stay at the forefront of project development to advocate for their role as experts in the
nexus between student wellbeing and learning, school and community. They are the only social work practitioners who focus deliberately beyond health and wellbeing to create school environments and foster relationships wherein children and young people can learn, for their chance at social justice and a “fair go”.

### In Conclusion

While my naïve purpose may have been to find and document the tradition of school social work, I discovered that the research was an integral part of a process that has its origins with the social work pioneers in 1949, and threads its way through time to engage current practitioners as they negotiate their professional identities and make plans for the future.

The recommendations of this study fall in large part to school social workers themselves, to articulate, advocate for, research and evaluate their practice, hopefully generating interest in academia and the broader social work profession. Above all, it will be necessary to hold firm to the social justice ideal in a society increasingly fractured by unemployment and poverty.

The findings of this study have been based on narratives found within documents or performed in research interviews. Well before collecting the research data, I had been powerfully influenced by collective memory through oral practice, both formal and informal, that helped me to identify as a school social worker. Many stories have been lost with the destruction of documents; many stories have sunk into the dark abyss of lost memories. Legacies are nevertheless enshrined, and school social workers who are currently practising need to keep the tradition of bio-psycho-social-educational practice vibrant and alive through documentation, evaluation and research, as continuing discursive interaction and narrative reconstruction.


Barrett, C. (2010). Integrating qualitative research by focus groups into school social work practice. Paper presented at the National Shool Social Work Conference, St Louis, USA.


379


Burrage, A. (2013). School funding reform (SFR) and SSSOs: Discussion paper - August 2013. Distributed by email: Student Support Services, Central Peninsula Network, DEECD.


Davison, R. (1959). *Submission to the Victorian Teachers' Tribunal by assistants to the departmental psychologist (social workers)*. Retrieved from Hall’s papers.


385


391


392


School of Global Urban and Social Studies RMIT University. (2012). *Social work in schools: Setting the context for a school based placement*. Melbourne: RMIT.


394


397


Thielking, M. (2006). *An investigation of attitudes towards the practice of school-based psychological services* (Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology), Swinburne University, Melbourne.


Appendices
Chris Barrett (PhD Candidate)  
Health Sciences - Social Work  
Ph: xx  Email: xx

Prof Marie Connolly (Supervisor)  
Melbourne School of Health Sciences, Department of Social Work  
Ph: xx

Project: "School Social Work in the State of Victoria, Australia"

You are invited to participate in the above research project, which is being conducted by Chris Barrett (PhD candidate) and Prof Marie Connolly (supervisor) of the School of Social Work at the University of Melbourne. Your name and contact details have been provided by past or present School Social Workers in Victoria, or by other informants who have been aware of your practice in the field of school social work. This project will form part of Chris Barrett's PhD thesis, and has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

We are inviting past and present School Social Workers in Victoria to contribute to this research project. The aim of the study is to document more than 50 years of School Social Work in Victoria, and to investigate the nature of and influences on practice. Should you agree to participate, you would be asked to contribute through an interview of 1-1 ½ hour duration. The interviews will be digitally audio-recorded to facilitate data accuracy. In the event that only a telephone interview is possible, the interviewer will send you a written copy of her notes for your approval before they become part of the data for analysis. With your agreement, you may be contacted at a later date for clarifications or further brief comment on the emergent issues.

The interview will seek information about the contexts of School Social Work employment and practice. You will be asked to reflect on methods, tasks and issues in your own practice that give insight into your theoretical stance, and shed light on the various influences that impact/impacted upon your work. You will also be asked to complete, together with the interviewer, a written/ graphic recording tool that will help clarify some of the issues related to employment environment and influences on practice.

Approximately 30 people will participate in interviews. This is a small number, which may allow someone to guess your identity. Your name and contact details will be kept in a separate password-protected computer file, only to be accessed by the researcher. Except as explained in the two paragraphs below, in the thesis you will be referred to by a pseudonym and any identifying information will be removed or disguised, in order to minimize the risk of identification. Your ideas and direct quotes will be attributed to that pseudonym.

In order to acknowledge the participation of individual School Social Workers within the historical record of the development of School Social Work in the state of Victoria, participants who expressly give their consent will be acknowledged and named with the dates of their service in the thesis document, separately from their comments. This process will protect anonymity in relation to information provided, but will place names
in the public arena and identify them as contributors to the findings. Example: The research acknowledges the contributions of all interviewees, including: Anne White 1954-60, Bea Brown 1979-85, Celie Black 1975-88, David LeBrun 1998-2004, etc.

In the interests of developing a historical record, it is possible that the development of School Social Work in Victoria would be better described, and its pioneers and practitioners appropriately acknowledged, by naming interviewees who have contributed particular information. Example: Anne White described her office environment. “There was no electricity and we had to use candles and lanterns in the dead of the freezing Melbourne winter! We had to supply our own wood for the fire. We used to heat some of the left over school milk on the wood stove to help warm us up after the bone-chilling walk back from our schools.” The naming of interviewees as contributors of direct quotations, ideas or information, will be contingent upon their specific written consent for particular references and inclusions. Such material with an accompanying consent form will be presented to the participants for their consideration after the processing of data, and during the drafting stage of the thesis.

Interview data will be kept in the School of Social Work for five years from the date of the submission of the thesis, before being destroyed. Once the thesis arising from this research has been completed, a summary of the findings will be available to you on application to the School of Social Work. The results will be presented to the AASW through the School Social Work Special Interest Group, and may also be reported more widely via publication and conference presentations.

Please be advised that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw at any stage, or to withdraw any unprocessed data you have supplied, you are free to do so without prejudice. The researcher is not involved in the ethics application process. Your decision to participate or not, or to withdraw, will have no impact on your dealings with the ethics committee, and will not affect any applications that you may submit later for approval.

If you would like to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by considering the three sections of the accompanying consent form, signing it as appropriate, and returning it to the researcher. Chris Barrett will contact you to arrange a mutually convenient time for an interview, at which time you will be free to clarify further, and to continue or withdraw.

Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact either Chris Barrett: email; phone #; or Prof Marie Connolly, phone #. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073 or fax: 9347 6739.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Barrett

HREC Number 060169X.2
INFORMED CONSENT

I have read the accompanying explanation of the research. I agree to participate in a digitally audio-recorded interview providing data for the study. I understand that I may be contacted later for clarification or further discussion.

I understand that the researchers intend to protect the anonymity and the confidentiality of my responses to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law. I understand that I am one of quite a small number of interviewees (approximately 30) which increases the risk that someone could guess my identity. I have read the description of the project, and understand that I have the option of consenting to have my name included under the conditions as outlined.

I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should I wish to withdraw at any stage, or to withdraw any identifiable unprocessed data I have supplied, I am free to do so without prejudice.

I understand that my consent will be given by signing one or more of the three sections on the reverse side, and that when returned, the consent form will be retained by the researcher.

HREC Number 060169X.2
CONSENT

I give permission for my words and other information provided by me, with no identifying information, to be included in the thesis, reports, conferences, journal articles, publications and other appropriate circumstances where the practice of School Social work is being discussed and/or promoted.

Name: _________________________________________ (Please Print)
Phone: _________________________________________
Email: _________________________________________
Signed: _________________________________________
Date: __________________________________________

CONSENT

I give my permission for my name and dates of my school social work service to be listed in the thesis document, separately from my comments, and that my inclusion in such a list will become part of a public documentation of school social work practitioners. I understand that I am free to withdraw this permission at any stage prior to submission of the thesis.

Signed: _________________________________________

CONSENT

☐ Tick if “YES”  ☐ Tick if “NO”

In the interests of the historical record, I am willing to consider giving permission to name me as the contributor of information or direct quotes. I understand that any such reference identifying me will be with my specific written consent approving the particular material intended for inclusion. I understand that such material with an accompanying consent form will be presented to me for my consideration after the processing of data, and during the drafting stage of the thesis.

Phone: ______________________
Email: _______________________

REQUEST FOR A COPY OF REPORT OR SUMMARY PAPERS

[ ] Please forward to me a copy of the final report by email
   Email: ________________________________________________

[ ] Please forward to me a summary paper by mail
   Address: ______________________________________________
Appendix C
PROFESSIONAL HISTORY QUESTIONNAIRE

To be completed during interviews

Interview No # .

1. Age Range (tick one)
   [ ] 20-29  [ ] 30-35  [ ] 36-39  [ ] 40-45  [ ] 45-49  [ ] 50 and above

2. Gender  [ ] f  [ ] m

3. Tertiary Qualification  date
   ______________________  ___________
   ______________________  ___________
   ______________________  ___________
   ______________________  ___________

4. Did you train and work as a teacher before (or after) school social work? (tick one)
   [ ] No
   [ ] Trained but not employed as a teacher
   [ ] Yes, trained and practiced. If yes, how many years did you teach? _____ years

5. Have you been appointed from within the teaching service eg as Student Welfare Coordinator
   [ ] Yes  [ ] No

6. Dates and Organisational Structure of Employment (space below for categories not covered)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Melb. City / Suburbs</th>
<th>country / region</th>
<th>state system</th>
<th>private system</th>
<th>employed by individual state school/s</th>
<th>employed by individual private school/s</th>
<th>employed by non-govt agency</th>
<th>Total (years/months)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other_______________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
SCHEDULE OF QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION (example)
The purpose of the research is to bring together a history of the development of School Social Work in Victoria, by drawing on the experience and ideas of practitioners themselves. We’ll cover the methods and tasks of your work, and common issues requiring school social work intervention. I’ll also be asking you to think about your beliefs, assumptions and theoretical underpinning for your school social work. We’ll also talk about organisational and policy issues as they impact on your practice. You should feel free to add any particular concerns or insights that are important to you.

QUESTION 1
To begin, let’s start by completing the first part of this recording sheet together so that I have an idea of your training and the dates, organisational and social context of your school social work.

QUESTION 2
I’d like to ask you to recall and discuss a memorable example of your school social work practice, and we’ll use it as a starting point to launch into an exploration of the issues that are significant to you in your understanding of school social work.

QUESTION 3
Can you recall an example of organisational or policy change, across the state, sector, or within your service / school / agency, or some problematic issue within your work environment, that impacted on your position or your work.

QUESTION 4
We haven’t covered .... Could I ask ...? (Refer to list of topics in researcher guide.)

QUESTION 5
If you had the resources, how would you plan and implement a School Social Work Service in individual schools or across a region or state?

QUESTION 6
Is there anything else that you would like to add to the research before we finish?
RESEARCHER GUIDE

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT
Motivation, prior interest or preparation, either formal or informal for a school social work position
Induction, on-going professional development and supervision
Collegiate support (school social workers)
Peer supervision and consultation
Other practice discussions with school social workers
Ideas for School Social Work education, induction, professional development, support

CORE PRACTICE
Main personal/social/educational issues addressed
Methods and tasks
Proportion of preventative/early intervention / intervention / emergency management?

POLICY
Student welfare policy: state, federal, local ...
Impact of policy change

DEFINING SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK
Purpose and appropriate focus of school social work
Theoretical frameworks
Particular beliefs or assumptions about School Social Work practice
What were the influences that contributed to defining School Social Work practice.
Describing the “client” and others involved in school social work.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE PRACTICE
Helpful and hindering factors
Membership of multidisciplinary teams
Other professions
Host environment issues
Practicalities ... number of schools, caseload, travel, etc.
Personal experiences and interests
Impact of change eg organisational, resources, staffing, social, political, personal ...

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK EXPERTISE
School Social Work as a special field of, or specialty within social work
Differences from /similarities to social work in general or other fields of practice
Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:
BARRETT, CHRISTINE

Title:
School social work in the state of Victoria, Australia: 65 years of student wellbeing and learning support

Date:
2014

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/42062

File Description:
School Social Work in the State of Victoria, Australia