The Relationship of Social Work Education

to the Readiness for Practice

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Abstract

The author's aim in this study is to explore how recent graduates from the University of Victoria's School of Social Work program relate the relationship of their social work education to their readiness for practice. Recent graduates were defined as those participants that have been graduated one year or less. The data was broken down into three themes consisting of the following: *the linkage of theory to practice, the linkage of practicum to practice and the linkage of courses to practice.* Under the three themes the findings were presented in terms of strengths, weakness and challenges. Overall participants responded favourably that they have been able to relate their social work education to their readiness for practice.

Introduction

When I first began my Masters degree I began to ponder about my research topic. Having worked in the United Kingdom much research has taken place and continues to take place about the link between education and practice. Prior to obtaining my Bachelor of Social Work degree from the University of Victoria I had been involved in the social services field for a number of years. I had acquired a Social Service Worker certificate and had worked for an agency that supports children, youth and families on northern Vancouver Island. Having worked in the field I was eager to further develop my knowledge and skills and felt ready to undertake a Bachelor of Social Work degree. I returned to university as a mature student and envisioned that I would acquire a good grounding in both the theoretical and practice based skills which underpin social work practice. All through my undergraduate degree in social work I kept wondering when I was going to gain advanced skills to practice. It was not until my practicum that I was able to begin the process of integrating theory into practice most notably through comprehensive assessments that I was required to undertake through my practicum in the United Kingdom. In reality it was not until after I had left university and began my career as a social worker that I was able to fully integrate theory and practice. This led me to consider whether there was a gap between education and practice and if there was a gap what steps would be useful in terms of better equipping newly qualified social workers for practice.

Literature Review

For me the relationship between Social Work Education and the readiness for practice is a complex interchange with many more factors involved than I initially realized. The Literature Review I completed for this project highlighted the knowledge and theory debate, the tension between education and the workplace, the complexity of transference from the classroom to practice, the transition process from the classroom to the field placement to the work place. Then there is the effect of the neoliberal agenda and the move towards managerialism. The neoliberal agenda can be described as privatization, decentralization and individualization. Privatization had two main themes first that services would be "better delivered and maintained through market mechanisms and the price system "(Brodie, 1999, p.40). Second privatization allows for private sector investment, which we are told spurns the economy into economic growth. "Neo-liberalism has been instrumental in dismantling the post war welfare state and in changing 'common-sense' notions about the responsibility of the state to citizens and of citizens to each other" "(Brodie, 1999,p.38). The "new managerialism is the primary administrative strategy for accomplishing the shift from the welfare state to the neoliberal agenda. The discourse of new managerialism includes attention to efficiency, accountability, quality and outcome measurements "(Todd & Schwartz, 2009, p.2). I feel that the neoliberal agenda and managerialism contributes to the tension between student expectations and employer expectations.

When the different aspects of the articles are looked at the single thread that ties the articles together is the impact of the move towards the neoliberal agenda and postmodern concept of power. Fook proposes that "The idea of a connection between knowledge and power is a postmodern one, in that it is argued that whatever group controls the way things are seen in some ways also has the power to control the way things are" (2002, p.37). Is this the dilemma that produces the tension between education and the workplace? "The separate worlds of theory and practice have been built in this way in line with the hierarchical spilt between professionals and service users and researchers and the practitioners. Constructing theory and practice as separate entities, and privileging one over the other, serves to preserve dominance of researcher over practitioner views and professional over service user perspectives"

(Fook,2002,p38).

When looking at the articles they appear to imply that educators are imparting on the students the theory that the educators think is applicable and required for social work practice. Fook speaks of "critical reflection as unearthing deeper assumptions or presuppositions" (2004, 17) if we dig deeper into tensions between theory and practice raised by the various articles can the underlying cause of the tension between education and practice, the issues with transference from the classroom to practice, the transition process from the classroom to the field placement to the work place, the uncertainty/certainty debate which ties into measured outcomes and the tension between student expectations and employer expectations be linked to power? Is the

tension between education and practice really the tension between educators and the bureaucratic system?

Raising standards Social work education in England 2007-2008, (2009), by the General Social Care Council. This report looks at how the implementation of the new three year social work degree which replaced the Diploma in Social Work has been performing. In addition to looking at how the new degree is performing in terms of social work education and training the General Social Care Council (GSCC) is looking at serious questions which "are being brought to the fore about whether all social work graduates are confident and competent to practise in the workplace, in one of the most demanding graduate environments" (GSCC, 2009,) The report has 51 key findings and recommendations. Of the 51 key findings and recommendations there are five areas which pertain to my research topic. The first one is " Social work education and training must be considered a core part of developing a workforce equipped with the skills, knowledge, resilience and flexibility to ensure protection to vulnerable people and to respond to a challenging landscape of service delivery" (GSCC, 2009, p.ii). The second area is "Qualifying may be a 'once in a career' moment, but learning is continuous. In social work, the link between the lecture hall and the workplace is the key to developing the capacity of able and confident social workers who can support individuals to transform their lives" (GSCC, 2009, p.ii). The third area focuses on employers "there are still unrealistic expectations from employers of what a Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) can do in their first role" (GSCC, 2009, p.vi). The fourth area is on placements and states that "placements are vital in order to prepare students for practice and a lack of good-quality placements undermines the quality of the degree and the student

experience" (GSCC, 2009, p.x). Finally the report states that the degree should provide the foundation of learning and acquisition of skills, values and the knowledge for a graduate to enter the workforce. At the end of their initial training, students should be competent to practise. However it is only through a supportive working environment, including supervision, good management and opportunities for continuing professional development (including Post Qualification (PQ) specialist training) that they will develop practice proficiency and practice wisdom" (GSCC, 2009, p. xii).

The GSCC report does highlight incongruence between the recommendations and what is occurring in practice. " The outcomes of practice learning quality assurance reported by HEIs (higher education institutions) during this reporting period are at odds with emerging reports from students and employers of poor-quality placements experiences, poor levels of practice assessing and ill prepared qualifying students" (GSCC, 2009,p. lx). A report that I recently read may illuminate the disparity between the GSCC report and the views of students and employers. *The Protection of Children in England: A progress report* (2009) by Lord Laming made a series of recommendations to the National government regarding the progress that had been made to safe guard children since his inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbie. The Victoria Climbie inquiry was not only similar but paralleled many of the events which lead to the death of Michael Vaudriel and the Gove inquiry. Since the high profile death of another baby only known as "P", Lord Laming was commissioned to provide an urgent report on the progress being made across the country to implement effective arrangements for safeguarding children. The Department Health (DOH) which is responsible for children, schools and families in England responded to the report in a

letter to social workers by saying that " Lord Laming's report does not focus on social workers alone, but social workers are clearly crucial to the protection both of vulnerable children and of adults in vulnerable circumstances" (DOH, 2009). The DOH then announced in the same letter that they will:

- Ensure all newly qualified social workers starting this year will receive a year of intensive induction, supervision and support;

- Introduce from this year on a new Advanced Social Work Professional status, initially for children and family social workers, so the most highly skilled social work practitioners stay close to the frontline, with better career progression;

- Expand the graduate recruitment scheme and attract qualified social workers back to the profession;

- And ensure, overtime, that all practitioners can study on the job for a Masters level qualification (DOH, 2009).

I feel that the report by the GSCC highlighted some important issues regarding the importance of education providing good foundation knowledge and that in social work like many other professions learning must be a continuous process. The report also highlighted the importance of providing transference of knowledge from the classroom to the work place. While Lord Laming's report appeared to highlight that the transference of knowledge from the classroom to the workplace was lacking, the DOH has taken the recommendations from Lord Lamming's report and has pledged to support the transference of knowledge and the continuous learning process to ensure that social workers are able to protect societies most vulnerable children.

The United Kingdom under the previous Labour government embraced the move towards the neoliberal agenda. Efficiency, accountability, quality and outcome measures have been built into the assessment process and the way services are delivered. As social workers adapt to the business model of providing services to children and families this model takes precious time from their frontline duties of protecting vulnerable children. Social workers are expected to do more with less and less. The two articles above impart on the reader that social workers need to pursue further post graduation training and skills to be able to protect vulnerable children. There is no mention of the ideologies or policies of the neoliberal agenda that social workers need to comply with or the lack of resources or services that are available to children and families. It is easier to produce reports suggesting how to improve social work practice rather than look at the systemic failures under which social workers must practice.

John High is Acting Manager, Operations of Family and Youth Services in South Australia and has borrowed the title for his article from the barrow boy's song *Yes we have no bananas* (2001). John High writes about how he would like graduates of social work degrees to have some basic skills especially given the complexity of social work. He outlines the following as basic skills he feels that graduates should possess: "staff who can produce clear and precise case records that can demonstrate the rationale to explain and justify the decisions that have been taken, refined assessment skills and good conflict resolution and negotiation skills" (High, 2001, p.7). He states that "a number of recent graduates said that they have found that they did not spend enough time during their course on child and adolescent development and this deficit has

become very apparent now that they were out in the field "(High, 2001, p.7). He reported that a number of team leaders felt that recent graduates had "below average report writing skills that resulted in poorly structured reports with ill-informed arguments" (High, 2001, p.7).

John High did not clearly state how he gathered this information. There were no identified cases or scenarios with which to base his findings on. My question is whether this article describes the view of a frustrated manager who was unable to recruit suitable staff and if so then it is questionable whether what is described is generalized to similar case studies? Two of the points mentioned in the article are the same difficulties I encountered in my practicum, that being the lack of knowledge about how to undertake an assessment and how to write up a child protection visit that was going to court. I would like to reiterate that I did learn these skills, although at a basic level during my practicum. So were the student's' practicums at fault or was there a lack of transferable skills taught at school or a combination of these?

Although the article *Some Problems of the Recent Social Work Graduate in the Integration of Learning,* (1968) by Myrna M. Weissman is quite dated, I felt that it has some valuable insights. The research described, examined the application of learning and how recent graduates transitioned between student and professional status and the adaptive processes that newly qualified graduates go through. The research took place over a four year period where newly qualified social workers were asked to keep daily diaries of their experiences and reactions to their first six months of employment. Ideally if time permitted using diaries to collect data would be a more comprehensives way to

proceed with my research than survey method as the diary would appear to provide a more comprehensive picture instead of a snap shot in time. The diaries were broken down into eight themes, reality shock, impact of illness, diffuseness, team relationships, role, ancillary service, earn by doing, and initiation for prevention. The following provided a summary of each theme.

The **reality shock theme** is related to conflict between the norms and the standards that were learned in school and those found in employment. The conflict in this theme occurs when the students were faced with the reality of practice and what was learned in school. Some examples given by students were; " I tended to expect some continuation of my recent academic experience" and " to present myself to others in this new job as a competent and mature worker while at the same time learning necessary skills and techniques pressed upon me by their new job was difficult" (Weissman, 1968,p.139).

The next theme was the **impact of illness theme**, in this theme the social workers discussed what the impact of their client's illnesses and the reality of their ultimate death had had upon them. The social workers discussed how ill prepared they felt for this part of the work and how they had to grapple with their own feelings of depression and personalization of death.   The next theme was **diffuseness.** This theme dealt with "the diffuseness in role, knowledge and function" (Weissman, 1968, p.139). Social workers were experiencing inner turmoil because they had not had any experience in dealing with many of the situations that confronted them. One worker summed it up "Where am I at the end of the month? Where do I belong? How do I belong? What do I do?

"(Weissman,1968, p.140). Under the **role** theme the new social workers expressed that they often do not know what their role is. One student reported that she experienced anxiety because of unclear boundaries in her new role and how other professionals perceived her.   The **team relationship** theme relates to the complexity of the team dynamics. The new social workers felt that they were not readily accepted by the team members.   One new social worker reported that "the aspect that has been most difficult in working on the unit is being part of the team" (Weissman, 1968, p.140). The **ancillary theme** has to do with the realisation on the part of the social worker that when working as part of a medical team that the social worker was not the primary agent. Some of the statements that conveyed this theme were " my reaction was to get upset when Social Services was not being involved " and " the social worker was put in the position of having to prove usefulness and value" (Weissman, 1968, p.141). **Earn by doing** was the next theme and "this theme has to do with the workers' realisation that team approval, role definition and job satisfaction are ultimately measured by the workers performance" (Weissman, 1968, p.141). The final theme was the **initiation for prevention.** It dealt with the confidence of the worker to initiate preventative and public health aspects of the job without the initiation from the team. Statements to demonstrate this theme were "I have begun to anticipate problems in prevention efforts" and "the setting requires a rather reaching out type of casework" (Weissman, 1968, p.141). The conclusion of this research was that students " expressed an incongruity between their educational experience and the requirements of their job" and " workers had considerable difficulty during their first six months accommodating to the shift in role, fitting into agency structure, in diffusion and communication of social work knowledge, in

team relationships" (Weissman, 1968, p.142). Although this data was collected over four years the diaries mainly discussed the incongruence in the beginning part of their careers. As the article is quite dated there is a strong likelihood that social work education has changed considerably since 1968. I did like how the data was presented in themes with quotes from the participants.

Thinking through Quality in Field Education: Integrating Alternative and Traditional Learning Opportunities (2009) by Sarah Todd & Karen Schwartz. This is a recent Canadian article that "look(s) at two intersecting imperatives in social work and university education and how they shape our thinking about quality in field education "(Todd & Schwartz, 2009, p.1). This article discusses the shift from the Canadian welfare state to that of the neoliberal agenda and how workers are expected to do more with less, work to measurable outcomes and apply the new managerialism concepts of the neoliberal agenda. The "new managerialism is the primary administrative strategy for accomplishing the shift from the welfare state to the neoliberal agenda. The discourse of new managerialism includes attention to efficiency, accountability, quality and outcome measurements "(Todd & Schwartz, 2009, p.2).

" One aspect of the new managerialist approach that has received particular attention within social work in Canada has been the proposal that social work practice and education be assessed in terms of 'competencies', measurable skill sets that constitute competent social work practice. However, we are interested in another aspect of new managerialism, which is the concern with creating measurable, concrete

standards of quality to which social work education must align "(Todd & Schwartz, 2009, p.2).

This research used a grounded theory approach with a qualitative methodology. Posters and information letters were distributed to students completing their practicum and also to field supervisors. "A convenience sample involving 11 students and seven field supervisors were involved in the study "(Todd & Schwartz, 2009, p.6). The participants were given the option of completing a questionnaire or if they had the time an in depth interview. "As consistent with grounded theory approach, the data was analyzed using an 'open coding' procedure in which specific codes were used to categorize the experiences of participants "(Todd & Schwartz, 2009, p.6). The findings were categorized into five themes, but the only one that I felt was relevant to my research was the **Quality in connection between school and placement theme**. "Students experienced their placement as of high quality when, in the field seminar and in their placement, they could clearly see the links between their classroom learning, their placement, and their vision for themselves as a professional social worker"(Todd & Schwartz, 2009, p.8).

This article could provide valuable insight into why students feel that there is incongruence between their education and practice. From my experience in classes the majority of students enter social work to 'help people' or for 'social justice reasons'. Since social work in Canada is moving towards the new managerialism concept of the neoliberal agenda are students feeling the incongruity between education and the

requirements of the job because the field of social work is rapidly changing to embrace the global context of the neoliberal agenda?

Great Expectations: The Growing Divide between Students and Social Work Educators (2009) *by* Aiden Worsley, Nicky Stanley, Phillip O'Hare, Anne Keeler, Lorraine Cooper & Clare Hollowell. This article examines one aspect of a longitudinal study that evaluated the experiences of students undertaking professional social work programmes in the United Kingdom. The aspect of the research that the authors chose to look at was "the students' experience of assessment "and more specifically "it examines how students experience the process of learning assessment" (Worsley et al, 2009, p.1).

The authors used data from the Social Work Evaluation of Learning project longitudinal study that was in its second year of a four year study. This project tracks students through their social work programme and into their first year of employment. A quantitative questionnaire was used to gather demographic and background information. Further information was gathered using focus groups, but these authors only focused on the area of assessment.

In the United Kingdom assessment skills are one of the key foundations of social work practice. Every child who is involved with Children's Services is required by law to have a Core Assessment completed within a limited time frame of 35 working days. This time frame starts from the time that the child has its initial contact with Children's services. These Core Assessments are required for children in need of safeguarding and children deemed in need of services. Services or court proceedings cannot

commence until these assessments are completed. Not only are Core Assessments a requirement of a social work practice but so are parenting assessments, pre-birth assessments and any other assessments deemed appropriate by the court system. "The issue of assessment is the focus of this article but its investigation suggests a growing divide in the expectations of social work students and their educators" (Worsley et al, 2009, p.2).

Assessment has become big business in the United Kingdom; Social Workers in private practice make a living on preparing assessments for the court arena and it appears that the United Kingdom is clearly embracing the new managerialism style of social work. The data from this research suggests that "a 'business gap' is developing within social work education structures between theories of adult learning and the rising tide of higher education profit environment" and that "social work education appears to be in danger of creating a disenchanted group of students who experience assessment as unresponsive to their needs and expectations or, at worse damaging to their self esteem" (Worsley et al, 2009, p.9). This has raised the "question about how the qualifying degree brings together the opportunities for practice learning with the development of social work knowledge, skills and values within an academic learning environment" (Worsley et al, 2009, p.2).

Suggestions from this research about how to prepare students for assessment are "students need to make (and be helped to make) links between uncertainties in academic exploration and uncertainties in practice. This might involve a critical understanding of the tension evident in practising in a social context (a risk averse

society) that focuses on the notion of eliminating risk through such mechanisms as proceduralisation and reference to evidence based practice" (Worsley et al, 2009, p.11). I can relate to this passage as I had to take the initiative to learn the more complex area of assessments on my own. I was always worried whether my assessment was right and did I assess the risk appropriately especially given my complex case load. As the article suggests social work practice is not characterised by certainties, but rather likelihood based on the balance of probability. The practice of social work occurs away from the academic environments where demands are put on social workers (especially newly qualified social workers working for the Ministry of Child and Family Development) to frequently work in more critical child protection environment which ironically demand sound judgement and the capacity to assess risk and manage it both professionally and personally. I would suggest that it would be a balancing act between practise and education to provide students with the knowledge base required for assessments in the more complex areas of mental health, learning disabilities, domestic violence and psychiatric disorders such as personality disorders, while teaching them risks and reducing their stress.

The Induction of Newly Appointed Social Workers: Some implications for Social Work Educators (2008) by Greta Bradley. This article looked at the process of induction that newly appointed social workers must undertake in the United Kingdom and the experiences of the process on newly hired/newly qualified social workers. Although every new social worker must undertake induction recently qualified social workers are suppose to undertake an intensive induction which limits the types of cases they are

allowed to hold. Recently qualified social workers are supposed to be limited to child in need cases for a period of two years.

While this article does not directly relate to my research project the one piece of information that may be relevant is " whilst additional, planned and structured support is needed within agencies, the challenge also remains for qualifying programmes to anticipate the pressures that newly qualified workers are likely to experience. Students who have been exposed to the technique of critical reflection that involves exploring deep-seated assumptions that impact on practice and raises issues concerning the exercise of power, oppression and discrimination, may be in a better position to prepare for work in agencies working under pressure" (Bradley, 2008,p.360). This article suggests that if newly qualified social workers have been exposed to the technique of critical reflection in their education then they are more likely to be able to understand the managerial and political impacts on practice and be able to adapt better to their new role. The research suggest that as the role of social workers adjusts to the neo-liberal agenda, education programs need not only promote the practice and knowledge base required for practice but impart on the students the skill of critical reflection to enable the students to meet the demands of practice. As the role of social workers adjust to the neoliberal agenda so must the educational institutions they must teach more with less.

The data was obtained from a small study of 10 newly appointed qualified social workers. The methodology was qualitative research. The data was gathered using an interview with a semi-structured format using open-ended questions, which allowed the author to probe deeper into the responses from the participant. The author talked about

"staying close to the data is the most effective way of maintaining the quality and vibrancy of the findings" (Bradley, 2008, p.354).

   A SWOT analysis of social work education in Canada (2001) by Anne Westhues, Jean Lafrance & Glen Schmidt. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The move towards the neoliberal agenda in Canada and changes in social work practice brought about this research and subsequently the current paper outlines the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of social work in Canada. " Strengths that were outlined included a holistic practice orientation; the linkage between theory and practice; regulation and certification; a generalist approach to practice; increased relevance of social work education; high quality social work programs; a continued demand for social workers; and the values of the profession" (Westhues et al, 2001, p.35).   The "weaknesses include a lack of professional identification; an inability to promote the profession; the diffuse knowledge base of the profession; conflict between the values of social action and social control; a lack of preparation to manage the stress of our work; insufficient aboriginal, visible minority and multicultural members of the profession; and for aboriginal people, that social work can be seen as a residual effect of colonization" (Westhues et al, 2001, p.35). Five threats and five opportunities emerged from the analysis. The five threats included neoliberalism; increasing identification of social workers with the bureaucracy; increasing managerialization; increased community responsibility for service delivery; and interdisciplinary. The five opportunities included design of cost effective programs which meet the needs of people we serve; exercise of responsibility for advocacy; development of managerial competence in social workers; extension of job

opportunities through privatization; and articulation of social work competencies" (Westhues et al, 2001, p.41).

This research reflects the changes in social work practice as Canada moved from the welfare state to the implementation of the neoliberal agenda. Many themes evolve from this research both positive and negative, but the theme that is relevant to my research is the **linkage between theory and practice**. This theme was identified as a strength in that there was good linkage between theory and practice.

Revisiting the Knowledge Base of Social Work: A Framework for Practice (2007) by Pamela Trevithick.   This article discusses the "interweaving features: theoretical knowledge (or theory), factual knowledge (including research) and practice knowledge (Including practice/practical/personal knowledge and experience)" (Trevithick, 2007, p1233). This article has left me reflecting on the concept of knowledge as the author presents a complex intertwining of theory and knowledge. I often thought of theory and knowledge as being similar and this was echoed by the author "knowledge and theory are sometimes used interchangeably but they are rarely defined in social work texts and in guidance documents that regulate social work education in the UK" (Trevithick, 2007, p1213). The author suggests that "acquiring knowledge is a much more in-depth undertaking than theorizing because knowledge involves gathering, analysing and synthesizing, different theories (explanations) in order to arrive at some kind of tentative understanding, hypothesis or judgement. However, in some contexts, the emphasis on understanding –or knowing about something –can mean that the ability to put knowledge into action-knowing how-can easily be ignored as a key area of knowledge

and overshadowed by more scientific and abstract forms. Yet social work, knowledge needs to incorporate 'both practical and theoretical knowledge' knowing about and knowing how" (Trevithick, 2007, p1214). The author uses the figure below to show how knowledge, theory and factual knowledge intertwine.

Knowledge Framework
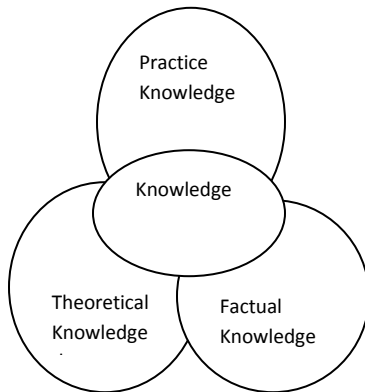
This article provides an in-depth analysis of how knowledge is "acquired, used and created within social work" (Trevithick, 2007, p1233). The question that arose for me is how do we take the theoretical knowledge and factual knowledge and then transform it in to practice knowledge for a diverse group of social work students. In undertaking assessment work or evidence based practice, social workers need to be able to transfer theory and factual knowledge into practice knowledge and I believe that this is again where the tension lies between theory and practice how do we get from the classroom to the work place.

Knowledge and Reasoning in Social Work: Educating for Humane Judgement (2006) by Carolyn Taylor and Sue White. This is a UK based article that looks at social work education from a different perspective. The authors contend that traditional education

teaches social work students to reduce the uncertainties of practice by focusing more on the sureness of a situation. The authors " argue that this focus on making certainty out of uncertainty glosses over the ways in which both knowledge and practice often propel practitioners towards early and certain judgements when a position of 'respectful uncertainty' might be more appropriate" (Taylor & White, 2006, p. 937).

"This issue of certainty/uncertainty creates a particular challenge for social work education" (Taylor & White, 2006, p. 944). As discussed earlier in the United Kingdom assessment work is becoming a core feature of social work practice. With the move towards this type of practice, education has been changing to meet the need of assessments and evidence based practice work. The authors contend that this way of education leads to the producing of certainty in practice. Taylor and White are not arguing "that theory should be dispensed with because of its interpretative flexibility. This is neither desirable nor feasible; rather, we are arguing for the necessity to interrogate carefully how we use theory, to what purpose and to what effect" (2006, p. 941).

The authors suggest that "curriculum include a shift away from didactic forms of teaching towards problem-based and enquiry and action learning models and the use of experiential techniques which allow for opportunities for practice within the classroom, e.g. using role play with standardised clients; curricula increasingly emphasize the importance of critical reasoning and critical reflection." (Taylor & White, 2006, p. 949).

Social Work Education: Tackling The Theory-Practice Dilemma (1984) by Rosaline Barbour. This research also looked at the theory- practice debate but with a different

slant. This was a two year longitudinal study with 20 social work students from the United Kingdom on their CQSW course (diploma in social work). The methods included participant observations at formal meetings, classes and informal gatherings and semi-structured interviews, which focused on the professional development and attitude changes of the students (Barbour, 1984). Barbour reports that "Students, too, regarded the integration of theory and practice as one of the major objectives of training and their concern to achieve this ideal permeated their entire experience of the course" (Barbour, 1984, p. 558). One aspect of the debate between practice and theory that this research looked at is that of student   expectations. She found "students' efforts towards attaining this goal were also hampered by the perspectives which they themselves brought to bear on the training" (Barbour, 1984, p. 557) and that "social work students have a high expectation of courses, hoping for a 'set of receipts for instant success'. Insofar as the course was seen not to be providing knowledge useful for solving people's problems, students perceived a perplexing misfit between theory and practice" (Barbour, 1984, p. 559). While students were in placements they were exposed to supervisors and other social workers who were "sceptical of the theory which is taught in social work courses, and who emphasized instead the value of experience" (Barbour, 1984, p. 561) and when students "observed that placements were not providing a tie-up between theory and practice, it is of interest that their criticisms were of theory (variously defined) rather than of the social work practice of the agency" (Barbour, 1984, p. 561).

I found this article interesting in that it looked at student perspectives of the theory-practice dilemma and how supervisors and experienced social workers can affect the student's perception of the theory- practice dilemma.   Barbour suggests that the

practice-theory dilemma is a "fraught relationship" (1984, p. 576) but suggests that field supervisors help students to critically examine the practice-theory dilemma and that educators take the debate up in the classroom to enable students to be better prepared for this dilemma (Barbour, 1984). This research provides yet another angle to the dilemma of the relationship of social work education to the readiness for practice.

Bridging the Gap Between Classroom and Practicum: Graduate Social Work Students in Health Care with Older Adults, (2003) by Denice Goodrich Liley, PhD, ACSW. This research involved thirteen second year MSW students and looked at the student's perception of their preparedness between the classroom and their medical practicum. The students were interviewed three times during their placements and then a one year follow-up telephone interview was conducted.

While this research does not apply to BSW students it still looked at the relationship between the classroom and a medical placement. In the beginning interviews all thirteen students felt" that their course work has not prepared them for exactly what they believed they would be doing "(Liley, 2003, p.209). " All the students felt they had developed strong practice skills and knowledge, but that they needed to learn how to apply knowledge and skills to the medical setting, specifically mentioning health care with older adults and the medicalization of ageing" "(Liley, 2003, p.209).

The article also raised the question of student's expectations of their programs. During the student's initial interview they all felt unprepared for their field placement but by the final interview the students "expressed feeling less unprepared" "(Liley, 2003, p.211). A question for me would be are students placing too much emphasis on their

classroom experience instead of realizing that the value of the field component is to link the classroom to the reality of work environment.

As stated earlier the relationship between Social Work education and the readiness for practice is a complex interchange with many more factors involved than I initially realized. The articles looked at many different aspects of this relationship, however for this research project I have chosen to research a limited population, that being recent graduates from the University of Victoria's School of Social Work and explore their perception of the linkage of theory to practice, the linkage of practicum to practice and finally the linkage of skill based courses to practice.

Method

My aim in this study is to explore how recent graduates from the University of Victoria's School of Social Work program relate the relationship of their social work education to their readiness for practice. I defined recent graduates as those participants that have been graduated one year or less. This research was conducted in accordance with the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board to ensure the wellbeing of participants.

In developing the research questions I wanted to ensure that the participant's voice was heard. "To ensure that the best and most important questions are asked, we recommend that surveys be developed with and for the research participants involved. This not only adds a spontaneity and uniqueness to such surveys but keeps the

researchers close to the data and encourages close contact with research participants"
(Kirby and Mckenna, 1989, p. 74).

The questions for the survey were in part influenced by my literature review and from the piloting of the questions to colleagues. I sent a draft of the questions to four colleagues practicing in four different areas of social work. Three colleagues practicing in the area of child protection, mental health and family support responded with suggestions and clarity to produce the final set of questions for the participants. These were the final questions that were presented to participants.

1. I have read the project consent form attached to the email and by selecting the yes box below, indicate consent to have my responses used in this research project.

2. Which area of social work are you employed and how long have you been employed? Child Protection, Medical, NGO, Other.

3. Do you have any previous experience in the social service field; if so what is your length of service and what area of practice (e.g. children services)?

4. Do you think that you are able to transfer various theories into practice? (Areas of theory might include but are not limited to Anti-oppressive practice, attachment theory and change theory.) Please give examples.

5. Do you believe that your practicum experiences have helped you transition from the classroom into your role as a social worker? Please explain.

6. Which courses did you find the most helpful and why?

7. Which courses were the least helpful and why?

8. Were you mainly an on campus student (over 50% face to face) or mainly a distance education student (over 50% online courses)?

9. Do you believe that you are supported as a social worker by your employer?

10. Do you have anything else you would like to share about the impact of you learning as a student on your career as a social worker?

Graduates from the University of Victoria's School of Social Work email list serve were contacted via the front office staff. The general email sent to graduates explained the parameters of the research, the estimated amount of time for responding and the consent form. The email then directed applicable participants, those meeting the newly qualified criteria to, Survey Monkey, an on line survey tool, if they wished to participate in the research. This format allowed the participants to answer anonymously and allow their voice to be heard. With the School of Social Work's diverse distance education population an online survey was chosen to allow participants from various geographical regions to participate. The survey was posted on Survey Monkey from November 30, 2009 until January 13, 2010.   All eighteen of the participants indicated on the survey form that they had read the attached consent form sent in the initial email.

Eighteen participants responded to the survey. Six reported being employed in Child protection, five reported being employed in the medical field, four reported being employed in a non governmental agency and three reported being employed in other areas. Five of the eighteen respondents reported having no previous experience in the social services area; the other thirteen participants had varying years of experience from three months to twenty years. Thirteen participants classified themselves as distance educations students, having completed over fifty percent of their courses on line. Five participants classified themselves as on campus students, having completed over fifty percent of their courses on campus. Eight of the participants believed that they were supported by their employer; seven believed that they were not supported by their employer and three participants believed that they were supported by their direct line manager but not by their employer.

Results and Discussion

The data was broken down into three themes consisting of the following: *the linkage of theory to practice, the linkage of practicum to practice and the linkage of courses to practice.* Under the three themes the findings will be presented in terms of strengths, weakness and challenges. It is hoped that presenting the findings in this way will be more beneficial for the School of Social Work in their strategic planning and allow the participants to have their voice presented through the research findings.

The Linkage of Theory to Practice

Strengths

When the participants were asked about their ability to connect classroom theory to practice eleven responses indicated that they were able to transfer theory to practice. Some of the participants explained how they were able to use theories in various parts of their jobs such as when interviewing clients, one participant explained how they have incorporated anti-oppressive practice not only in their practice but also in their day to day life. Another participant explained that they take what they need from each framework and apply it to their practice. Finally another participant explained that working within theories has allowed her to work within child protection guidelines. The theory that participants mention more consistently than others was Anti-oppressive practice (AOP). The participants in this theme were able to articulate how they are able to use AOP theory in their every day practice and as the research by Bradley suggests "Students who have been exposed to the technique of critical reflection that involves exploring deep-seated assumptions that impact on practice and raises issues concerning the exercise of power, oppression and discrimination, may be in a better position to prepare for work in agencies working under pressure" (2008, p.360). The participants also mentioned change theory, addictions theory, trauma theories and First Nations theory.

Weakness

The weakness in connecting theory to practice was commented on in seven responses. Some of these comments are consistent with the research presented by

Barbour in "that many social work students have a high expectation of courses, hoping for a 'set of receipts for instant success'. Insofar as the course was seen as not to be providing knowledge useful for solving people's problems, students perceived a perplexing misfit between theory and practice" (1984, p559).   One comment pertained to the fact that the participate felt they could not relate theory to practice because they were working in a special needs daycare, however I would suggest that several theories may apply to this environment. With regards to AOP two participants expressed that AOP theory is not transferable to child protection because government legislation can be oppressive and AOP is unpractical on the frontline. Other comments consisted of theory is not real life, theories are common sense. Two responses commented that it had been up to the individual to relate theory to practice.

Challenges

The majority of the participants commented that they covered various theories in their course work. The incongruence between the transference of theory into practice came in how some of the participants expressed their ability to transfer theory to practice. While some of the participants were able to clearly articulate how they transfer theories into their practice other participants appeared to believe that theories were not useful in social work practice. The challenge for social work education would be to ensure that graduates understood the transference of theories into practice and explore how this translates into practice within various work settings whether the settings are government, health or non- governmental agencies (NGO). It is up to the student to take

the classroom knowledge and transfer this into practice however it would be prudent for educators to ensure that students understand the transference. "Facilitating learning that will help social workers to deal with uncertainty raises challenges for social work educators. If they are to equip social workers with the skills to exercise ' wise judgement under conditions of uncertainty ' they will need to recognize the ways in which both theory and popular knowledge are invoked to make unequivocal knowledge in case formations" (Taylor, C. & White, S., 2006,p. 937).

The Linkage of Practicum to Practice

Strengths

In this theme the participants expressed how their practicum experiences helped transition them from the classroom into their role as a social worker. Fifteen responses indicated that the practicum helped participants transition from the classroom to practice and can be summed up by one of the respondents "the practicums were by far the most effective and powerful learning that was in my BSW" (#3). Other reasons given by participants are that the practicum gave them the opportunity to experience different areas of social work, increase their practical skills, observe other social workers in action which helped link the classroom to practice and increased their knowledge in how to begin navigating the bureaucracy of the various systems in which social workers practice.

Weakness

In three responses, participants felt that their practicum did not help them transition from the classroom to practice. The reasons given were that it was felt that practicum opportunities and training was poor and one participant linked the lack of transition to having to create their own goals and then fit these goals into the expectations of the BSW program.

Challenges

The three participants that expressed that their practicum did not help them transition from the classroom to practice were all distance education students. Given the large geographical area that the University of Victoria's School of Social Work distance education program covers there is the potential for students to have limited access to practicum opportunities. The challenge in this theme would be to ensure that new students with potential limited practicum opportunities due to personal circumstances or the area in which they reside have all the necessary information to make an informed decision.

The continued challenge in this theme is to ensure that field placements are not eroded due to system challenges as quality field placements are seen as an important educational piece, and as one participant reported " greater connection between educators and employers in regards to field practice and development would have been better" (#1). This is echoed by Liley "There is a strong need for alliances within fieldwork. The social work educational arena and the field practice site must partner to assist social work students in their transition to professional practice" (2003, p.215).

The Linkage of Courses to Practice

Trevithick (2008), describes the three different types of knowledge that are intertwined to produce social workers knowledge base, "theoretical knowledge, factual knowledge and practice/practical/personal knowledge" (p. 1217). In this theme there was a mixed review from participants as to whether their practiced based courses provided a link between the classroom and practice. There was no overall consensus as to what courses helped the participants in their practice, just as equally there was no consensus which courses were the least helpful to participants.

Strengths

The participants highlighted the majority of the courses that the School of Social Work has to offer as being helpful to their practice. The reasons given linking the knowledge gained to practice varied, some personal some professional. The various reasons given were that the courses provided specific knowledge that the participants believed they were lacking , such as First Nations perspectives, trauma, disabilities, law, research, policy, substance, mental health, AOP, and child welfare to name a few. Some participants also felt that the above named courses were more relevant to practice. Other participants commented that the courses allowed them to understand themselves as well as other people's perspectives. Two of the participants highlighted the teacher as the reason given that the particular courses were linked to practice in an effective manner.

Weakness

The participants highlighted the following courses as not being helpful in their ability to link knowledge to practice. These included child welfare courses, law, AOP, mental health, research and First Nations perspective courses. Again the reasons given were varied, teachers that were non-existent on line for over a week and teachers that were only open to feminist views, some participants believed that in the AOP course they were being oppressed because they believed that they were not allowed to be heard and others believed that there should have been a separate AOP class for minorities who had been oppressed. Other reasons given are that child welfare courses were not relevant to the frontline, mental health was too clinical and too large a subject and courses were repetitive disorganized and redundant.

The responses for this theme were very interesting in that courses that some participants identified as helpful in linking knowledge to practice were also identified as not being helpful in linking knowledge to practice by other participants. In reviewing the data there appeared to be no single common denominator. Although I cannot explain the contradiction a plausible hypothesis might be that the participants all have diverse backgrounds with prior knowledge and interests and it is possible that the students were seeking different skills and knowledge from their courses based on their individual backgrounds and interests and therefore responded accordingly to the question.

Challenges

Some of the participants commented on how it would have been helpful to have a more balanced approach from their instructors and more balanced course content. While participants commented that AOP did help inform their practice, some of the

same participants commented that they believed that that they were being oppressed because there was only one view allowed in the classroom of a particular instructor.

Some of the students may have believed they were being oppressed because of the delivery method and how their views were perceived. "For knowledge to be valuable, it has to be relevant and presented in a form that is capable of being used "(Trevithick, 2008, p.1229).

The challenge in this category would be to ensure that practice knowledge does not becomes useless and that it is presented in a form that allows all students to find relevance in the rapidly changing face of social work, the erosion of the social work skill based and the continued tension between education and practice. "Practice knowledge is , in effect, the way 'book knowledge ' is transformed and made relevant and useable" (Trevithick, 2008,p.1227).

Limitations

When the author discussed the topic with colleagues and the general public the limitations of this research became more evident. Due to time constraints this research was limited to how BSW students from the University Of Victoria School Of Social Work related their education to practice. This tiny piece of the puzzle was chosen because of the author's own questions upon entering her final practicum and the ongoing research

of the General Social Care Council which is the governing body for social workers in the United Kingdom of which the author is registered with and receives regular updates regarding their ongoing research. This research does not include employer's views, the views of social work colleagues or the University of Victoria's School of Social Work faculty. The participants were chosen from the School of Social Work's graduating classes. Given the unique mix of streams at the School of Social Work this research most likely cannot be transferred to other Schools of Social Work. The data is also presented according to the author's own interpretive view of the data. The research is limited to the standardized questions asked and the answers given may reflect how the participants were feeling about their current work situation at the time of completing the survey. Finally a participant responded to a question and then qualified the answer by remarking that "hope this doesn't skew your stats!" (#16). This raised the question as to whether some of the participants answered the questions with what they perceived that I wanted the data to represent.

Discussion

As stated previously the literature review highlighted a complex interchange between Social Work Education and readiness for practice. The review highlighted the knowledge and theory debate, the tension between education and the workplace, the complexity of transference from the classroom to practice, the transition process from the classroom to the field placement to the work place.

The aim of the study was to explore how recently graduated students from the University of Victoria's School of Social Work program viewed how well their education prepared them for practice. Social work practice is a highly diverse and complex field. When a student graduates and begins to practice they need to incorporate their formal learning with the real world of politics, budgets, lack of services, power, policy and practice. The reality of Social Work practice is that difficult decisions have to be made frequently in situations where there are few resources or supervisory support. Many Social Workers genuinely believe that they are going into practice to empower clients, provide choices but find themselves having to perform tasks which may not enable them to practice the way they have been prepared.

The data gathered from the participants identifies that approximately sixty-one percent of the participants have been able to transfer theory to practice and eighty-three percent believe that their practicum helped transition them from the classroom to practice. In her article Weissman, describes a theme that she has labelled as the "reality shock theme" (1968, 139). This theme is related to conflict between the norms and the standards that were learned in school and those found in employment. The conflict in this theme occurs when the students were faced with the reality of practice and what was learned in school. Thirty-nine percent of participants believed that they were not able to transfer theory to practice. These participants may be feeling the incongruity between education and their employment or "reality shock theme" (Weissman) not because of their education but because their employer ascribes to the managerial concepts of the neoliberal agenda.

Seventeen percent of participants reported that their practicum did not help them transition from the classroom to practice. In their research Todd and Swartz found that "Students experienced their placement as of high quality when, in the field seminar and in their placement, they could clearly see the links between their classroom learning, their placement, and their vision for themselves as a professional social worker"(2009, p.8). It is possible that these participants did not believe that their practicum was a good fit with their vision of the kind of placement they wanted or that they could not see the links between the classroom and practice.

The final question asked participants if they would like to share anything else about the impact of their learning as a student on their career as a social worker. The responses seem to be a better fit in the discussion section of this research rather than presenting the data in the weakness section given their conflicting comments. Some participants expressed in the final question that their education has had a positive impact not only on their professional life but also their personal life. Some of the participants expressed concerns about their practicum, but these same participants had responded favourably that their practicum had helped them transition from the classroom to practice so their comments are confusing to this researcher. Two participants expressed that they do not feel adequately prepared to practice from their BSW program, another participant expressed that she only feels able to practice given her "long and relevant background" (#16) and another participant expressed "it would have been a more balanced educational experience to take a more holistic approach to

practice" (#12). The final response indicated that "it wasn't until I actually 'got out in the field' that I realized the gaps in my education" (#12).

If we critically reflect on the statements by the participants who feel that they do not have the skills to practice, they may have experienced the frustrations of their practising colleagues who have to adapt to a rapidly changing work environment, budget restraints and huge caseloads. I include a December 2009 poll that was commissioned by the General Social Care Council in the United Kingdom which produced the following results. Practicing social workers were asked to comment on the skills of newly qualified social workers this is an excerpt from the poll "Your responses to the poll in our December newsletter showed that a majority of you felt that the newly qualified social workers (NQSW) you had worked with lacked key skills when entering the workplace. Over 200 of you said that NQSWs needed more training in 'risk analysis' followed by 123 of you stating that they needed more experience of working with different groups of service users; 94 said newly qualified workers need more training in 'assessment frameworks' whilst 64 pointed to problems with 'communication skills' " (General Social Care Council, 2010, p.7). Were some of the participants exposed to this type of dialogue in their current work environment or practicum and has this impacted how they feel about their ability to practice. I cannot imagine having just graduated only to find that some of my colleagues believe that as a new social worker I did not have the skills to practice. More of a concern is that as a new social worker I would be hesitant to ask a colleague for support knowing that there is the potential that they believe I do not have the skills to practices. After responding favourably to the question regarding the value of practicum were these participants exposed to comments from their new work

colleagues? Finally while some of the participants expressed that AOP theory was too extensive it may paradoxically be the extensive critical reflection which enables the participants to successfully navigate the changing roles for social workers.

Conclusion

Similar to what was found in the literature review the data also highlighted the complex relationship between Social Work education and the readiness for practice. Some of the participants highlighted the knowledge theory debate, they believed that the theory they were taught was helpful and articulated how the theory supported their practice, other participants believed that the theory they were taught was just common sense or not real life. The majority of the participants indicated that their practicum was essential for transitioning from the classroom to practice but some participants indicated practicum did not help them transition from the classroom to practice and in response to the question about the relation of practice based courses preparing participants for practice there was a mixed review from participants as to whether their practice based courses provided a link between the classroom and practice. Overall participants responded favourably that they have been able to relate their social work education to their readiness for practice.

Recommendations

The researcher is aware that the Bachelor of Social Work Program at the University of Victoria has implemented a redesign of core BSW curriculum providing more of a focus on practice skills. This research was conducted with participants that completed

their BSW under the previous curriculum and while some of the recommendations may

not be relevant to the new program I believe the participant's voice should be heard and

have therefore put forth their recommendations as follows:

1. Update and maintain Practicum database.

2. Provide more counselling courses.

3. Provide courses with content on gerontology.

4. Provide courses on ethics, codes of ethics, moral distress and realistic barriers to
    work.

5. Design an internship /residency model for practicum.

6. Provide more field work.

My recommendations would be that as social work practice is facing budget shortfalls,

increased workloads and the adoption of the managerial style of social work that

includes goals and outcome measures that surveys with employers and students be

undertaken regularly to ensure that students and employers are able to offer feedback

to ensure that knowledge, theory, and practice skills remain relevant in this rapidly

changing field.

Personal Reflection

As I reflect back on my practicum and the research from the literature review I can

concur with Barbour in that I was one of those students who wanted a 'set of receipts

for instant success'(1984, p 559). I left the classroom with a knowledge base and was

unsure how to transition my knowledge into practice. Through my practicum I had to

undertake Core assessments which help transfer my knowledge base into practice. For

me practicum was an influential part of my social work education.

Appendix

Question 1

I have read the project consent form attached to the email and by selecting the yes box below indicate consent to have my responses used in this research project.   18 yes

Question 2

Which area of social work are you employed and how long have you been employed? Child protection 6, Medical 5, NGO 4, Other 3

Question 3

Do you have any previous experience in the social service field; if so what is your length of service and what area of practice (e.g. children services).

1. Yes, previous experience. I started working in women's centered services one year before starting the BSW and while pursuing my BSW.

2. No

3. 20 years supporting youth and adults with developmental disabilities, anti-poverty work, rape crisis centre, literacy volunteer, community activism

4. No

5. 5 years, prevention and voluntary services

6. I have worked 16-20years in group homes for mentally challenged adults and have worked as a "relief" community social worker in Kugluktuk in the NT for three weeks in 1996

7. Volunteer experience in supportive, informal counseling role with women's mentoring group. I have been involved with the group for 3 years.

8. volunteer and practicums with community agencies such as Aids Vanc Isla, Transition house, Food Bank, Eureka club house, Hospital extended care unit

9. No

10. 8 years working with street entrenched individuals

11. No

12.	I have three years experience in employment services where BSW are sought by employers, however none in social services specifically.
13.	16 years working with sexually exploited youth, street entrenched women and youth. Youth coming out of care of MCFD. Women and children in transition houses.
14.	At risk youth, seven years, working in an outward bound kind of capacity
15.	worked in a group home for children who had been apprehended by MCFD while doing my degree
16.	I have worked 3 months with children who have special needs. this was not considered a social work job though
17.	No
18.	yes - extensive experience see answer 2 - mainly child welfare, also have 2 1/2 years family support experience and 4 years crisis line experience

Question 4

Do you think you are able to transfer various theories into practice? Areas of theory might include but are not limited to Anti-oppressive practice (AOP), attachment theory and change theory). Please give examples.

1.	Definitely. Currently I work with marginalized women who are HIV positive. I draw on AOP theory daily in my position given the intersecting layers of oppression these women face.
2.	Yes
3.	Yes. I was most attracted in my studies to these theories: AOP, feminism and post-structuralism and tend to combine them in practice. I work for VIHA Home and Community Care . I am the relief coverage for two sole charge SWs. Since each of them is the sole voice in her office completed committed to a biopyschosocial practice while surrounded by the medical model (RNs, OTs, PTs, SLPs and CHWs), we advocate for people's right to make their own choices whether or not the medical staff think it is the "best" choice. At the same time, we point out that sometimes "choice" is a very relative term given that many of the clients who are on the SW caseload are isolated, poor and have failing cognitive capacities. In that instance we may validate and support individuals and families to express their disappointment/outrage at the dearth of "choices" they encounter given the political and financial climate we exist in right now in BC and Canada.

4. Anti-oppressive practice in working with families struggling with poverty and hunger.

5. I have found that theories aren't real life

6. Working for a DFNA, I will be able to implement a variety of theories such as First Nations theory, Feminist theory and Anti Oppressive theory to name a few.

7. I am able to transfer theories into practice. AOP is a foundational theory and other theories such as change theory and attachment theory are more challenging to transfer because they are more focused, narrow in application--therefore, I don't use ideas and concepts with the theories every day.

8. Yes. I work with children whose families are struggling with addictions, historical trauma (Aboriginal people: generational trauma, addictions, loss of culture). Children in families struggling will have difficult attachment and may show signs of attachment through behaviours (stealing, lying, low impulse control--which could be misdiagnosed as ADHD or other disorders). When working with families I am aware of trauma, theories of addiction/diagnosis, theory of change, and AOP. Working within these guidelines and theories allows me to work within Child protection guidelines to better support families and keep children safe.

9. Yes

10. -

11. The AOP theory is so overdone and in practice is a nice idea but rarely able to be used. Uvic is well aware of working on the front line, the stress, the clients we serve and AOP is so unpractical.

12. AOP has been the most often referenced in my practice however as noted in my practicum eval: "Systems theory, feminist and structural theories (structural: Mullaly (1997): "…social work cannot transform society; it can only contribute to its transformation"(189). … conscious-raising (170) … guiding principle for structural social work practice is that everything we do must in some way contribute to the goal of social transformation" (165).

13. Yes, AOP is always present in my practice as is the change theory.

14. I think each person takes what they need from each framework and applies it to their practise. For some work especially CP, AOP isn't always achievable because government legislation can be oppressive. I guess you just try to find some kind of balance and try to be true to ethics that govern you

15. Certain aspects of AOP are certainly integrated into not only my practice but my day to day. I think I figured out how to integrate this once thrown on the front lines

as when I was in school I often had difficulty understanding how it would translate due to a serious lack of practical skills learned in the classroom.

16. if I could find work in my field, perhaps I could. Most of it I would consider common sense, less so theory that I have applied.

17. I am able to use various aspects of AOP in my practice. I use AOP when responding to referrals and interviewing clients. Unfortunately, I am limited in how I further use AOP in my practice since I am bound by the confines of the system in which I work.

18. the theory is helpful but it was almost entirely my own to relate to the field - BSW field training was poor - I recommend a physician / residency model instead of what we have currently

Question 5

Do you believe that your practicum experiences have helped you transition from the classroom into your role as a social worker. Please explain.

1. Yes. My practicum has opened many doors and networking wise, placed me where I need to be. That experience has yet to turn into a paid position because there are few jobs in my chosen field (human trafficking identified positions) but I am hopeful a contract will come through in January in which I will use the skills and knowledge learned in my practicum and apply it in a policy oriented human trafficking position.

2. Yes

3. Yes and without them I would never had any opportunity to do this work at all--and even that would not have been enough had I not lived in the north. What I am referring to is that since UVic offered not one course in either gerontology or medical SW in my time (despite the direct requests of myself and others), the only way I could really get exposure to elder healthcare was to do both my practica with HCC. I needed to find out if I would like it as much as I imagined I would. To be fair, my profs were flexible enough to allow me to direct much of my independent (not group) work towards my chosen area of interest. I used my papers to research this area as much as possible before doing the practica. I was then able to show my skills and passion in the workplace and be seen to be a good candidate for a relief position. To sum up, my practicum experiences were THE essential link between my interest and my opportunity to work. However, the competition for jobs is so fierce that SW students in more urban areas might still not be able to make the leap regardless of talent.

4. Yes. My placement with a school counsellor reinforced that it was the career I wanted to have for myself. It provided a lot of insight into what I could expect from such a career. My placement at a local women's shelter enhanced my understanding of Aboriginal issues and supports in the community.

5. yea, i was able to get the practical skills

6. My last 2 practicums were at a Native Friendship Centre and at a child and Family Services Authority. These two practicums at the end of my academic coursed really transitioned me into my current work area by helping me acquire practical experience in First Nation workplaces and in Child Welfare are.

7. Yes! My practicum experiences were invaluable! The opportunity to see social work in action, so to speak, allowed me to link theory to practice as an observer before I began my practice. Now that I am practicing I am constantly looking for ways to observe how other social workers practice (I see this as a part of life long learning) as part of linking theory to practice.

8. My practicum experiences were beneficial. School teaches theory, practicum allows student to put theory into practice, to make mistakes, and to learn how to go forward and learn (before becoming the "expert.")

9. yes, hands-on, practical experience. valuable learning from practicum supervisors

10. no.
very limited opportunities.
felt that opportunities were entry level.

11. Yes, I did a child welfare practicum and that is where my real skills started to develop.

12. Absolutely!! My practicums were essential for transitions from classroom to practice.

13. Only in that I found a practicum in a hospital, as I had not worked in a clinical environment. If I had not got into a hospital I would have had little experience from the BSW program.

14. Sure, however I didn't feel the school was very supportive. I was also somewhat upset that we had to pay so much to set up our own practicums. I think MCFD should be more active in the practicum process; it's in their best interest to work with students and not just look forward to some free labour.

15. somewhat, however my practicum was a lot different than my current role but

it did start to prepare me for dealing with bureaucracy and working with people day to day.

16. The practicums were by far the most effective and powerful learning that was in my BSW.

17. My practicum experiences have definitely helped my transition from the classroom into my role as a social worker. First and foremost, my practicums allowed me to engage and work with a variety of populations. This has carried over into the people and groups with whom I work in child protection. Specifically, many of my clients are dealing with addiction and mental health issues. Since I have previous experience with these areas, I have tools and knowledge that allow me to better and more appropriately engage with these populations/groups.

18. no - I created the goals and all aspects of my practicum and had to fit these aspects into the expectations of the BSW program - did my practicum in youth probation as I had already done most other social work roles

Question 6

Which courses did you find helpful and why?

1. 323 for theory
354/451 because I work with Indigenous populations
318 because I am a teaching assistant and it helped me a whole lot when grading papers

2. disability course was good as well as some of the
first Nations classes

3. SW 469 (intro to disability studies) because I thought hard about the effects of aging on ability and the eventual loss of ability we all face and also because Jeanette was SO engaged (exceptional); and the 300 level First Nations course (to finally get a half decent understanding of the actual history that is bearing down on the neighbours I serve at HCC) and the foundational course (theory and on-campus element) for the political/critical thinking. Also loved the law courses--I knew that understanding legislation would be essential.

4. Addictions because it is a huge problem in my community. Aboriginal courses as I am in rural Northern Alberta and we have a large Aboriginal population.

5. the indigenous specializations courses, because they provided a safe place to debrief

6. Many of the Indigenous courses were very helpful to me, as well as the Anti-Oppressive theory course and the Child Welfare courses that i took. The research course and the social work and law courses will be of benefit in the future i am sure.

7. 323, 318, 460, were most helpful to me because a broad expanse of issues were linked to theories. This helped me to consider my unique perspective regarding a certain context or situation because the focus wasn't so narrow. In more specific courses, such as disabilities, law, Indigenous issues, the specific focus felt confining at times and I was afraid to use an incorrect term or reference.

8. I took the Aboriginal stream of social work. All the classes were beneficial because they allowed me to really understand my life and the lives of the people I want to work.

9. disability studies, mental health, additions, legal skills, Indigenous studies - all because of theories and perspectives that were previously unknown to me

10. Mental health, trauma, and addictions courses.
Because they are relevant to real life and the work I do.

11. Indigenous studies, substance use but the most useful was child welfare practice. 323 was abusive and Uvic should really look at the instructors they are hiring.

12. As I'm working in a hospital, I found my 'interdisciplinary' class extremely helpful. This class greatly increased my respect and appreciation for the impact, disciplines - working in harmony, for the client/patient - could have in achieving the best outcome for patients. I believe I work better with the medical staff because of this class. Other classes that were helpful were: the two Aboriginal classes, because I had very little knowledge of Aboriginal issues (my knowledge was intellectual, the 2 classes brought up more heart knowledge; also child protection classes (I learned decisions can be hard, however the legal process is clear and must be respected.

13. I really enjoyed the global economics course. I think this course made one relate to how global economics effects us at the macro and micro levels and how we contribute to the economy. It brought politics and how we as SW can bring about change for our clients and community. It made social work so much broader than just helping. It showed ways in which we can help empower clients to become more involved in capacity building for themselves and community. Loved this course and think it should be a core course. As a young SW I was not interested in politics, but as SW we need to know how our choices affect us locally and globally.

14. Disabilities course was also awesome and another course that should be a core course if it isn't. This course really opened my eyes to different beliefs of the deaf and other people with disabilities. Has helped me in my practice working with people who have acquired a disability and their thought process in dealing with it.

The indigenous studies where excellent. I felt it gave a very rounded view of how colonization has had horrific affects on generations of aboriginals. I also enjoyed the child welfare and law courses, they helped me to see how legislation can be oppressive. Probably that's what sparked my interest in working with policy and how it can be changed

15. I really enjoyed the research class felt it gave me a thorough understanding of the research process, however this does not necessarily translate into practice. The first nations policy class was very helpful in understanding the proposal process. and the child welfare in working on case conferences and working with other professionals in order to ensure the best care for the client.

16. HSD Special Topics: Trauma with Yvonne Haist - this was the first course that offered practical skills, and 451 Indigenous policy because I learned so much about how policy impacts social issues.

17. SW 323, 354 and 451 were the most helpful. First off, SW 323 really allowed me to focus on and dissect those concepts that I had otherwise taken for granted. I was able to critically reflect upon those concepts and therefore enhance my understanding and appreciation in how I worked and work with clients. As well, it allowed me to contextualize the situations that I work in. SW 354 and 451 were helpful because in-part, they allowed me to increase my knowledge with respect to Indigenous Peoples and incorporate ways whereby I could work with said Peoples more anti-oppressively. Secondly, I was able to dispel many stereotypes that I had learned and accepted throughout my personal development. I was able to replace these stereotypes with correct information, an enriched understanding and expanded knowledge of Canadian Indigenous populations. Further, these courses allowed me to prepare for my current work with Indigenous Peoples in child protection.

18. many were interesting - don't recall specific courses but AOP studies were useful - heavy UVIC feminist focus was at times oppressively enforced and prevented me from having my own view which is egalitarian

Question 7

Which courses were the least helpful and why?

1. 350B possibly.

2. none really

3. Ironically, I have to say the foundational course (hope that doesn't skew your stats!) because it lacked practical skill building and basic knowledge of MHSD systems which most SWs will have to engage (ie. MHSD applications, barriers, policy) and counselling--and the lack of courses on medical SW or gerontology. Also, many of the courses (interdisciplinary, disability focused on child welfare slant which forced my view away from my interest or even general SW). Any online course in which a prof is absent for days or weeks also qualifies--I knew of several--this would never be forced upon campus students. Unacceptable.

4. Social Work A and B as the material was very dry and tedious.

5. AOP. is was just a root for frustration. there should have been a different class for people who are minorities or other groups that have lived with being oppressed.

6. I don't think I can point out any courses that were least helpful, as all social work courses that I have taken will accumulate to assist me in general.

7. Indigenous Policies. The course was an overlap between 318 and Indigenous Issues.

8. All were helpful

9. 323 AOP & 351 Critical Research Skills - because of teaching methods and styles of instructors, also redundancy in course material

10. research.
very disorganized and poor supervision.

11. Most of the courses were repetitive other than the ones mentioned in #6.

12. The least helpful class, for me was Mental Health. I find this a huge subject, it is unfamiliar to me and I think I needed the information divided into 2 classes. I felt I only learned enough for me to realize how much I didn't know and I feel uncomfortable at the thought of working in that ward now. Many students, including me felt we were ill-prepared for the DSM quiz (most of us did poorly) and as a result I feel my confidence is now lower than if I was better able to dx mental illness.

13. Mental health was too clinical and appeared to be more for nursing students. Would be better redone for SW students.

14. I didn't find any of the courses unhelpful, I guess the one i dreaded the most was 318. Only because it was the research course, however it turned out to be really helpful. I just think there was alot of reading and not much hands on. I think there needs to be more work in the field, so that new practitioners will have a better understanding of what field they want to pursue.

15.	my 323 class was useless. I do not thinki i learned anything that was brought to my practice and learned way more about AOP in my other classes.
16.	The two law courses because it was just facts and facts that I have already forgotten, and 323 because it was mostly filled with drama and very little about learning to be a social worker. In theory the drama could led us to have learned about group process, but this was not really facilitated.
17.	SW 350A/B, SW 475/476. Neither of these courses prepared me for the work that I am currently doing in front line child protection. SW 350A for example appeared to be a bunch of general concepts thrown together to make up a course. SW 475 and 476 could have been combined into one course. Neither course provided me with any knowledge that can be directly applied to my current work. While the topics covered and explored are valid, the approach taken was incredibly idealistic. It is important to also note that there are limits to AOP when working in a system like child protection. The system does not allow you to take the time to dissect one's social location and how that impacts and contributes to their current situation(s). The work is also crisis driven and reactive as opposed to proactive. Therefore, while it's helpful to engage in critical inquiry through online discussions and paper writing, a more balanced approach to course content delivery that recognizes real life systemic limitations would also be helpful.
18.	feminist courses where the profs were not open to views other than feminist - I believe feminist views are important however these views can become oppressive themselves if they are used improperly

Question 8

Were you mainly an on campus student over 50% face to face or mainly a distance education student over 50% on line courses? 5 on campus, 13 Distance Education.

Question 9

Do you believe that you are supported as a social worker by your employer? 8 yes,

7 No, 3 other

| 1. | Yes --in respect to the interdisciplinary team and regional manager, but VIHA makes it very hard to grow in that I cannot attend regional SW meetings unless I am on a paid day, even though I am willing to go unpaid to decrease my isolation and |

be current with VIHA SW and because seniority issues mean I will have to work for years before I can compete as an internal applicant--they will lose me first; also need more SWs in rural areas

2. Somewhat

    I couldn't write in above, but i have only been at my current employment for three
3. weeks, but I already feel supported as a social worker by my colleagues and employer.

4. need more education and support

5. Yes by my Clinical Supervisor but not by the hospital. There appears to be a lack of knowledge as to what we do.

6. by my employer definitely, but not by the bureaucracy I work within

7. I am not working in social work

Question 10

Do you have anything else you would like to share about the impact of your learning as a student on your career as a social worker?

1. No

    I felt very supported by the practicum team which really helped me segue from student to employee. They gave an in-person nudge to VIHA to take on students which directly affected my prospects and they were great mentors in the seminars. I wish we had had more significant discussion about ethics (so maybe in a more structured course setting, codes of ethics, and moral distress). Also some talk about rural versus urban work (VERY different) and maybe a workshop on how to go about getting a job and some realistic description of barriers to work.

    I think my long and relevant background was pivotal in my ability to do this work
2. and to get this work. I am sure that if I had done this same degree the same way when I was 20 years younger (as many of the students do), I would NOT have been adequately prepared for this work. I had already enough background experience that I could make cold calls, do assessments, do interviews, do basic counselling, support people in grief and loss. I didn't get most of that from UVic. Maybe I expect too much? But even if I had done my degree on campus, the course offerings would have been the same.

    JUST FOR YOU: Great topic and I wish you the best success in your work and studies.

3. I feel that the Bachelor of Social Work program and courses will and are of benefit to my current employment and career as a social worker. Being able to take the BSW from UVIC especially has been helpful. I have really enjoyed the Anti-Oppressive philosophy of the University and the school of social work itself.

It seems that the CYC degree offers more education in counseling approaches and employers seem to value this aspect of the CYC degree over SW. I feel this is an area that the school of social work needs to pay attention to--especially in these difficult economic times when there is great competition for jobs.

4. While it is true that Indigenous issues are extremely important to social work practice in BC, there are areas of social work that are getting missed, such as the area of counseling approaches. Other cultural areas, such as South Asian cultural issues are important to examine in relation to social work practice. I felt that due to the strong focus on Indigenous issues, other important areas were missed. It wasn't until I actually 'got out in the field' that I realized the gaps in my education...again, lifelong learning...but it would have been a more balanced educational experience to take a more holistic approach to practice.

5. Yes, social work teaches theory and not enough practical strategies and experiences. Distance education along with mainly theory made it difficult to go into a child protection job. I did not feel prepared adequately for the job. There needs to be more interviewing skills taught.

6. Practicum placements needs to be better researched and recruited. Practicum database needs to be better updated and maintained. Excessive amounts of critical analysis from an AOP perspective and lack of practical, hands-on practice in classroom setting.

7. It seems that Uvic has received information about their SW program before but yet the program does not seem to add a practical aspect to it.

8. Question #2 would not allow me to specify how long I've been employed as a social worker. I graduated this summer and have been employed since October 22, 2009 as a casual social worker for Interior Health in our local hospital.

9. No

10. Getting a BSW just made me want more education. So off to grad school I go

11. I appreciate everything I learned in the school of social work and feel it has had a significant influence on my life as well as shaped my practice.

12. I really believe that there was a lot of good learning about self reflection and self location in the UVIC BSW program. I do not however feel at all prepared to actually be a social worker in the working field, from this program. I feel that my skills in counseling and working with clients was very neglected in the program

and I do not feel confident in what skills I do have, to really do this work yet.

13. No.

    UVIC was at times oppressive in their push to be anti-oppressive - within the workplace these views are helpful, however, greater connection between the educators and employers in regards to field practice and development would have
14. been better - in regards to my career, unfortunately my BSW is not recognized much further than my previous BA given I was previously delegated with my BA - BSW did provide some useful thoughts and ideas within day to day practice, just wish there was more of that

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