It's Not a Bad Field … We Just Need People to Come and Do Great Things:

Exploring Social Work Education as a Platform for Transformative Learning to

Prepare Students for Practice in Child Welfare

By

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Abstract

This study explored social work education as a platform for transformative learning to prepare students for practice in child welfare. Child welfare workers provide services that require a vast array of knowledges and skills related to complex individual, family, and community situations. Despite social work being the predominant profession in child protection, there is a gap in research on how social work education prepares students to make a difference and be effective in this field. Using a qualitative research approach, twenty-eight interviews were conducted with three main groups: front-line child welfare workers with social work degrees, social work educators teaching courses related to child welfare, and key informants in leadership and administrative roles related to child welfare delivery systems. Using constructivist grounded theory analysis, findings highlight the need for social work education to prepare students for day-to-day practice and social change. Transformative learning experiences happen through: experiential and peer learning, critical thinking, self-reflection, self-care, and the field placement. Multiple perspectives, realistic portrayals of the system, safe spaces, and a commitment to life-long learning help support transformative learning. This study provides recommendations for a model of social work education that helps students deconstruct oppressive paradigms and learn alternative more culturally responsive approaches to child welfare.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

The child welfare system is one of the most common areas of practice for social work graduates; yet there is a lack of understanding within the profession and academia about how to prepare students for this critical and complex work. Child welfare services are highly legislated bureaucratic systems that present unique challenges for social workers, with expectations between helping and controlling. Without sufficient preparation and support, this setting can be overwhelming for new workers, compromising practice ethics, and contributing to high turnover. Social work education has a responsibility to respond to the needs of the field and engage in addressing social justice issues of the time. At present, the child welfare system in Canada continues a dangerous legacy of colonial dominance that interferes with protecting and promoting the well-being of all children and families. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) identified child welfare as a top priority in their Calls to Action (TRC, 2015; see Appendix A). Exploring the role of social work education in transforming the child welfare system to deliver more fair and equitable service is necessary to decolonize child welfare and actively work towards reconciliation.

Child welfare practices are complex human processes that need definition within current political landscapes. Child welfare is broadly understood as a system of care toward the overall well-being of children and youth, and their families. In social work, the term *child welfare* is often used synonymously with *child protection*. Child protection is the authorized government system for investigating and responding to child abuse referrals. Child protection activities and the involvement of social workers delivering this mandate are perceived within the narrow scope of only making decisions about whether to remove children from caregivers. To be sure, child protection work is part of the child welfare system; however, the child welfare system is made up

of many teams of workers from various disciplines engaging with families at all levels of risk and circumstances. It is a growing and evolving field requiring innovative responses, and commitment to just practices.

In Canada, and in the prairie provinces specifically, the child welfare system is struggling to transition through a familiar crossroads. The International Federation of Social Work stated, "Social workers believe that social protection should be transformational, built from the real needs of all people and the realisation of all people's rights" (IFSW, 2016). Despite previous reforms and growing public awareness, more Indigenous children are in care now than during residential schools or the 60s scoop. Child welfare advocates have likened this to continued cultural genocide (Choate et al., 2021). Recent reports of large numbers of unmarked children's graves at residential school sites across the country should awaken everyone to their responsibility for truth and action.

The overrepresentation of Indigenous children and families in the child welfare system is alarming (Fallon et al, 2021; Manitoba Families, 2020) and there is an urgent need for more culturally relevant responses (Lavergne et al., 2008). Child welfare workers are increasingly responsible and accountable to provide a variety of services that require a vast array of knowledges and skills related to complex individual, family, and community situations rooted in oppressive systems. Despite evidence that structural challenges such as poverty are connected to child maltreatment, these broader issues have gone unaddressed (Fallon, et al., 2021; Sinha et al., 2011). Although social work is the predominate profession dealing with these social concerns, significant gaps remain in the research on how social work education programs prepare social workers to make a difference and be effective in this field of practice.

Social work educators help students obtain the knowledge, values, and skills necessary to navigate this field of uncertainty with hope and integrity. The profession of social work, social work education, and child welfare are interconnected domains, which have evolved throughout time, shifting back and forth between traditional and progressive models (Ives et al., 2015; Westhues, 2005). Rooted in Eurocentric ideology each of these domains are criticized for maintaining oppressive structures (Dominelli, 2002; Dumbrill & Green, 2008). Child welfare systems have become broader and more complex (Gilbert et al., 2011). In 2016, the federal government set a plan in motion to transform Indigenous child welfare (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2017). Provincial reports that followed in the prairies identified the importance of social work education and training to implement new child welfare practice and policy effectively; including building stronger partnerships between universities and agencies to meet local needs (SFNFCI, 2017; OCYA, 2016). It is necessary to explore how education impacts child welfare social workers' ability to engage with child welfare service users as well as address structural concerns.

Although researchers have established a connection between social work education and child welfare practice (Hartinger-Saunders & Lyons, 2013), evaluating the effectiveness of social work education and how students obtain and develop skills remains under-researched (Brown et al., 2003; Wilson & Kelly, 2010). What precisely about the social work education experience effects developing workers remains unclear (Bagdasaryan, 2012; see also Franke et al., 2009; Mason, et al., 2012) and whether increased knowledge and enhanced skill acquisition among workers predict safety, permanence, and well-being for families (Hartinger-Saunders & Lyons, 2013). Current research has not included social work educators as participants to gather information about their experiences and how students are being taught about child welfare. Kufeldt and Mckenzie (2011b) noted the need to better connect research, policy, and practice.

Child welfare is an essential service in our social welfare system and social workers play a significant role in providing service, education, and research that will support the well-being of children and families (Kufeldt et al., 2021). Regehr (2013) called on social work programs to "lead the way in developing creative approaches" in assessment of learning outcomes (p. 71).

In preparation for this study, I met with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Indigenous community leaders working in child welfare in Winnipeg, Manitoba. A common theme emerged for cultural learning and humility to be "infused" throughout social work education rather than covered as a single topic or class. Those leaders agreed it is necessary to better understand how social work education can create transformative learning required for critical and culturally relevant practice in child welfare (Jones, 2009); that promotes social justice, as well as the safety and well-being of children, families, and communities. Although social workers are working hard in child welfare (Redmond, 2014), current approaches have not been effective enough to reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous families (Fallen et al., 2021). Child welfare remains a colonial intrusion not to be trusted by many Indigenous communities (Ives & Thaweiakenrat, 2013; Thibodeau & North Peigen, 2007). The research presented here promotes a framework for transformative learning that prepares students to be open and knowledgeable about alternative ways of practicing child welfare to transform the field.

Problem Statement

Social work education and child welfare systems stem from Eurocentric colonizing paradigms. This heritage continues to influence policy and practice. Social work education is responsible to consider how it can be a platform for transformation in child welfare for more just and culturally responsive policies and practices.

Research Questions

My main research question was exploring: *how can social work education be a platform for transformative learning to prepare students to work in child welfare?*

Other related questions that helped inform this study were:

a. Which specific knowledges and skills are necessary for future child welfare social workers?

b. How is social work education transformative?

c. How is learning in social work education transferred to practice in the child welfare field?

d. What would a model of social work education look like to prepare students for critical transformation in child welfare practice and policy?

Purpose of the Research

The aim of this study was to help elucidate how social work education is delivered by developing a theory that helps explain the *process* of teaching and learning for this area of practice. It sought to give participants in the field a voice to speak into social work education development that is based on their experiences, bridging gaps between education and the field, and linking theory to practice. Findings about how learning is transferred to the child welfare field offers guidance about how and what is and should be taught. The study brings together social work educators' ideas and concerns for teaching about child welfare that could make room for collaboration between educators, child welfare service providers, and community advocates.

Another purpose of this research was to explore the possibilities for transforming child welfare practice *through* the platform of education. As mentioned previously, child welfare systems across Canada are being called to task right now to address over-involvement with Indigenous families. This research challenges the dominance of Eurocentric ways in education

and child welfare to prepare students for alternative practices that are more community and culturally based. The significance of this research is that it provides guidance for social work education programs to respond to challenges in child welfare in a more meaningful and active way, which impacts service to children and families.

Situating Myself

Learning about Indigenous ways of knowing has taught me to think more deeply about how my personal journey is connected to all my relations and my responsibility to others (Absolon, 2011). As a non-Indigenous researcher exploring a topic that affects Indigenous Peoples profoundly, I humbly acknowledge my limitations and express my ongoing responsibility to learn about Indigenous ways of knowing. Being accountable to Indigenous Peoples for me, requires that I am committed to interrogating my privilege and seeking to be uncomfortable as I listen deeply and look for opportunities to participate in repairing injustices. McGuire-Adams (2021) advised non-Indigenous researchers need to turn the mirror inward through critical self-reflection and "develop their settler-colonial identities to become settler allies" (p. 769). The following is a brief reflection about my connections to this research topic.

When I graduated as a new social worker in 2003, I knew I wanted to work with families. My own life experience had led me to believe that families or some construct of family, whether biological or not, was important to our well-being. My impression was that child welfare was as family focused a field as you could find in the practice of social work. I am not sure I understood the protection aspect of child welfare initially and was determined to get a position with a Children's Aid Society (CAS). I began as an initial assessment worker (protection worker) in 2003 at York Region CAS in Newmarket, Ontario. After about one year I moved to Barrie, Ontario and worked at Simcoe CAS until 2012. I always worked in the intake/investigator role of

conducting initial assessments/investigations after a referral came into the agency and usually carried family files for about 30 days until they were either closed or referred to another worker for ongoing services. Occasionally, due to workload demands at the agency I would carry longer term family files and children in care files. When I did my Master of Social Work (MSW) in 2007, I completed my placement with our agency's long term care department, working with children and youth. I conducted a review at that time regarding our agency's use of psychotropic medications with children and youth in care. I was a worker during the introduction of a new model that aimed to shift the Ontario practice paradigm toward prevention (2004 Transformation Agenda in child welfare introducing Differential Response in Ontario). Also, during my time at Simcoe CAS, there was an initiative for anti-oppressive practice and the creation of a First Nation, Metis, and Inuit (FMNI) team. All these experiences helped me begin to develop an understanding of the complexity of an evolving child welfare system and the dynamics of frontline *protection* work.

I enjoyed working in child welfare very much. I felt that it was challenging, and important work and I believed it was a good fit for me. I enjoyed meeting new people, building helping relationships, and working in crisis situations. I had some understanding of the authority I represented and made efforts to listen and understand people's experiences. I was especially interested in the power dynamic within child welfare. What stood out was the potential to help as well as influence children and families. I had the authority to remove children, but I was also the first contact that many of those involved had with the system. It was my responsibility to engage the family and help them begin to tell their story. I set the stage for their involvement in the child welfare system, and in that I realised there was important influence and responsibility. What I thought, said, and wrote carried significant weight. This led me to an interest in teaching and

how we prepare social workers. Through my own experiences and observations, I began to suspect that a worker's knowledge, values, and skills had a direct impact on a service user's experience and possible success. I worried that a family could have different experiences depending on the worker assigned. At that time my research interest began with the intention to identify the things workers were doing wrong and the potential harm caused. As I continued to learn, my approach and research questions evolved. I wanted to understand the role of social work education in preparing social workers, to better support educators and social workers in the child welfare field in meeting the needs of service users. This reframing from a problem-based approach to a more strengths-based focus was a result of using a more critical lens and a deeper understanding of the complexity of child protection work and the challenges presented. Learning about this delivery system on multiple levels and the political, economic, and cultural factors that impact discourse regarding policy and practice in child welfare helped shape my evolving curiosity.

In 2012, I transitioned from frontline protection worker to full time social work instructor at Booth University College. I quickly realised I had moved from one position of power and authority to another. As an educator I have the opportunity and responsibility to teach developing social workers and therefore I have an important influence on service delivery. Developing courses about anti-oppressive approaches to practice and research expanded my understanding for new ways of teaching and learning that were transformational. Conducting this research brought together these two areas of practice that I am passionate about. My hope is that the findings will help to fill a gap in understanding the potential for social work education to better prepare and support social workers entering the child welfare field. Kovach (2009) stated, "we know what we know from where we stand" (p. 7) and throughout this research process, I aimed

to understand how I am a piece in the puzzle toward true allyship (Bennett, personal communication, 2016).

Learning with Indigenous Peoples

Looking at social work and child welfare in Canada requires critical reflection on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches. Embarking on this journey required me to situate myself clearly as a non-Indigenous person seeking to understand and contribute to improve upon systems that have negatively impacted Indigenous Peoples. In preparation for pursuing this research, I sought to learn about Indigenous ways of knowing to help test my analysis of child welfare and social work education in a culturally responsive way and in the spirit of reconciliation. I sought out readings by Indigenous scholars and presentations by Indigenous Peoples. I completed a course on Indigenous methodologies, met with Indigenous leaders in the community and engaged with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers. Knowledge Keeper Sherry Copenace, Ojibways of Onigaming First Nation, a faculty member from the University of Manitoba Master of Social Work Indigenous Knowledges (MSW-IK) program was a supportive Indigenous advisor throughout the research. These Indigenous perspectives are necessary sources of knowledge for understanding the role of social work education and the preparation of social workers for work in child welfare.

Definition of Terms

The Child Welfare System

In Canada, the *child welfare system* has been governed by provincial legislation. The governing child welfare legislation in each province and territory sets standards for child protection services which are similar across the country. This study focused mainly on social workers working within the child welfare system in Manitoba and schools of social work in all

three prairie provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta). Although child welfare policy and practice share common features across the country, different geographical areas present their own unique strengths and challenges regarding child welfare. The prairie provinces share similar historical and current experiences related to child welfare.

However, Manitoba has engaged in a unique process of devolution to give governance of child welfare services to Indigenous Peoples (Milne et al., 2014). This resulted in the Manitoba system dividing into four Authorities: The General Authority, The First Nations Northern Manitoba Authority, The Southern First Nations Network of Care, and The Metis Authority. Each Authority is made up of numerous agencies and departments. Jewish Child and Family services also have their own branch which falls under the General Authority. The Southern and Northern Authorities cover specific geographical areas with offices in rural and urban areas. The province of Manitoba has a central intake agency called All Nations Response Center (ANRC) that receives initial referrals for each Authority and transfers them to the appropriate agency. The intention of the devolution process was for each Authority to remain under the Provincial Act but have their own authority to deliver services. This opportunity for self-governance however has been limited (MacDonald & Levasseur, 2014).

The federal government is responsible for funding child welfare services on reserves, which funding was found to be discriminatory and inadequate, in 2016 by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, 2016). In 2021, *An Act Respecting First Nation, Innuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families* became the first federal law to "recognize Indigenous People's jurisdiction over child and family services" (Walqwan Metallic, 2019). This means Indigenous communities have a means to develop their own child welfare laws that are prioritized over provincial child welfare legislation. In Manitoba, Peguis

First Nation launched their new legislation, *Honouring Our Children, Families and Nation Act.* on March 2, 2021. This is a promising new direction for Indigenous child welfare however, concerns regarding inadequate funding and implementation remain (Fallon et al., 2021).

Protection workers are workers on the frontline investigating referrals of abuse and neglect and carrying family and children in care files on an ongoing basis. Most child welfare agencies require protection workers to have a social work degree; therefore, social work has a significant voice in the delivery of child welfare services. This study focused on social work degree graduates working in child welfare protection roles and for clarity are referred to as *child welfare social workers* throughout this document. In Manitoba however, the title social worker is protected by *The Social Work Profession Act* (2009). Although, child welfare workers are encouraged by the provincial registration body to register, not all agencies require it, and it is not provincially mandated. Therefore, it can not be assumed that child welfare workers, even with a social work degree are registered social workers.

Social Work Education

The *Bachelor of Social Work* (BSW) degree is a generalist degree, meaning that when one graduates from this program, that one will have a set of transferable skills that qualifies them to work in a wide variety of practice areas. Students may complete the degree in four years, or if they already have a degree, they can complete a shorter after-degree program. In either case students are expected to complete two field placements during the second half of their degree prior to graduation. Usually, a core curriculum is in place with some individual choice for elective courses on a selection of specialised topics. A course in child welfare is usually not a requirement. Some BSW programs in British Columbia have a specialization in child welfare or

a post-Baccalaureate diploma in child welfare. The Canadian Association of Social Worker

Education (CASWE) sets the standards for social work degree accreditation in Canada.

Indigenous Peoples in Canada

Referring to *Indigenous Peoples* as a single group can be misleading. There is no one

Indigenous population or worldview and the terms Indigenous or Aboriginal can have different

meanings depending on the context. *Aboriginal* refers to Indigenous Peoples in Canada and has

been used in legislation, however it is being replaced by *Indigenous,* which refers to the original

inhabitants of North America and usually refers to First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples

(Baskin, 2016; Younging, 2018). Indigenous groups represent a wide variety of unique cultures,

traditions, and languages. Like any culture, people will experience their culture and identify with

it in different ways and to varying degrees. Many Indigenous scholars acknowledge that

Indigenous Peoples share similar challenges, and it is possible to consider some common ground

when considering an Indigenous worldview (Hart, 2002). The term Indigenous is used primarily

throughout this study; however Aboriginal is used as well when used in the literature cited.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The focus of this literature review examines the history and current state of social work and child welfare to consider social work education as a platform for critical change in child welfare. The review is organized into four main parts. The first section describes the theoretical underpinnings that framed this research. The second is a brief history of social work, social work education, and child welfare to understand the roots of the research problem. The third is a critical examination of the spectrum of child welfare paradigms that have emerged, and the fourth is a critical examination of the delivery of social work education and preparation of social workers to work in child welfare. A summary is provided to illustrate how this critical analysis has led to the need for this research.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework describes the lens I used throughout the research process. Just as a telescope focuses on different data than a microscope, different theories attend to differing details of culture and individual experience. The theoretical framework serves as a "blueprint …

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework
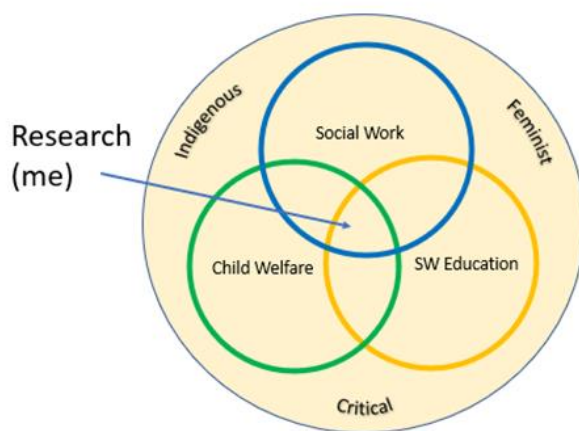
a conceptual basis for understanding, analyzing, and designing ways to investigate a problem" (Grant & Osanloo, 2014, p.16). As illustrated in Figure 1, critical, feminist, and Indigenous theories informed my study of this topic and helped shape the research questions about the transformative possibilities of education for child welfare (hooks, 1994).

The delivery of child welfare services at any given time reflects certain values and assumptions about children and their well-being that are influenced by economic, political, and cultural factors. These assumptions create a preferred practice model through which child welfare services are delivered. Social work education reflects different orientations as well, based on privileging certain knowledges that support dominant ideologies and discourse. Dominant discourses,

> refer to the discourses that are most influential in shaping power and knowledge relations in health and welfare services. They shape the institutional contexts of practice, determining the forms of knowledge that are valued, the types of services and the power/knowledge relations between the service provider and servicer user (Healy, 2015, p. 6).

Child welfare and social work education in Canada is heavily influenced by neoliberal philosophy. Neoliberal forces support the transfer of government responsibility for social services to the private sector, promoting managerialism practices that prioritize efficiency over relationships (Lavalette, 2011; Strier, 2019). In child welfare, "because neoliberalism transforms structural impacts into personal responsibility, the preoccupation with protecting individual children from the abusive or neglectful actions of individual caregivers, almost always mothers, excludes consideration of political questions about race, class and gender inequalities" (Carriere & Strega, 2015, p.13). The use of critical, feminist, and Indigenous theories considers the possibilities for social work education to challenge oppressive ideologies in social services.

Critical theory helps put in perspective the gains and challenges that face the child welfare system in Canada. Mullaly (2010) described critical theory as a,

macro theory that examines social structures, institutions, policies, and processes with

respect to how they treat all groups in society; it contains an explanation for social

problems and a political practice to deal with them … it is concerned with moving from a

society characterized by exploitation, inequality, and oppression to one that is

emancipatory and free from domination. (p. 16)

Using a critical lens requires "analysis and transformation of power relations at every level of

social work practice … oriented towards understanding the structural conditions that impact on

the genesis and maintenance of social problems and in which social work practitioners operate"

(Healy, 2014, pp. 183 - 184). Healy (2014) described the following characteristics of critical

social work theory: acknowledge power differentials in relationships, understand how social,

economic, and political systems impact helping relationships, commitment to solidarity, and to

"the transformation of the processes and structures perpetuating domination and exploitation

within human service system and broader social structures" (p. 185).

Using a critical lens seeks to understand how structural injustices are at the root of the

problems social service users face and the role of social workers toward changing these systems

(Healy, 2014). It recognizes the structural social processes that influence policy and practice and

offers a critical and self-reflexive framework for understanding the dual nature of child welfare

services as both oppressive and protective. Child welfare is highly politicized. A critical theory

lens is used to analyse the contested discourse regarding child welfare paradigms and the

assumptions each makes regarding children, families, and caregiving. Despite promising new

approaches in child welfare, concerns continue to grow about overly intrusive practices and

overrepresentation of minority families and people living in poverty (Antwi-Boasiako, 2022;

Fallon et al., 2021). Anti-oppressive frameworks have been developed for child welfare practice

(Yee et al., 2015); however, linking theory and practice remains a challenge when practicing social work in child welfare (Dumbrill, 2003; Wilson & Kelly, 2010). This research looks to social work education as a means for bringing the goals of critical social work theory and anti-oppressive practice to the field of child welfare.

Indigenous frameworks add an additional lens necessary for this analysis. Education and child welfare systems have been used as tools for colonization (Sinclair, 2004); therefore, a decolonizing approach to social work education (Clarke et al., 2012) and culturally restorative child welfare practice is necessary to prevent continued harm (Simard, 2009). Understanding Indigenous ways of helping and Indigenous worldviews regarding children, family and communities can help reshape how social workers are prepared to work in child welfare. Hart (2010) explained Indigenous worldviews are relational, and "key within a relational worldview is the emphasis on spirit and spirituality and, in turn, a sense of communitism and respectful individualism" (p. 3). Wilson (2008) explained *knowledge* is also relational: "Indigenous epistemology is our cultures, our worldviews, our times, our languages, our histories, our spiritualties and our places in the cosmos. Indigenous epistemology is our systems of knowledge in their context, or in relationship" (p. 74). This relational worldview is a way of being based on respect and reciprocity (Wilson, 2008). Kovach (2009) explained an Indigenous perspective requires "recognizing the colonial influence in knowledge paradigms and revealing how Indigenous ways of knowing have been marginalised" (p. 76).

Indigenous social work is about building relationships with communities, "it is this way of relating – rather than a way of practice" (Gray et at., 2013, p.10). Gray et al. (2013) stated decolonization requires social work "acknowledge its complicity and ceases its participation in colonizing projects" (p.7). They explain decolonization,

recognises and credits the strengths and contributions of Indigenous knowledges,

traditions, and practices … accepting Indigenous Peoples lived experience as a starting

point when searching for solutions to the problems and issues they face, which in many

instances are also relevant to non-Indigenous Peoples and global problems. (p. 7)

Tuhiwai Smith (2012) stated, "decolonization must offer a language of possibility, a way out of

colonization" (p.204). Anti-colonial social work works toward decolonization, privileging the

experience and worldviews of people who have been colonized (Baskin, 2016). Social work

educators need to engage in this process of decolonization so that anti-colonial and Indigenous

social work can become more dominant in social work curriculum. Brokenleg (2017) advised

educators must consider differences in learning; a western approach prefers knowledge (mind)

and an Indigenous approach values formation (heart learning). He described Indigenous learning

as something in your entire being. Chewka (2021) reflected on practicing social work from an

Indigenous lens, "to do things in a good way meant I was demonstrating the teachings in my

actions" (p. 214). He explained this requires "combining your heart and your mind – something

not typically taught in social work education" (p. 214).

Feminist theories draw attention to inequality, oppression, and abuse that results from a

Eurocentric patriarchal society promoting power-over dynamics in relationships (hooks, 2000).

Child welfare systems reflect a dominant discourse in society regarding inequality towards

women that needs to be deconstructed (Krane, Krane & Carlton, 2013). Dominelli (2009) stated,

"in child protection, parent is a substitute word for mother" (p. 32). It makes sense then to use a

feminist lens to examine social work education and how students are prepared to work in child

welfare. Feminist theories bring attention to the "individual and sociopolitical levels of social

work assessment and intervention … incorporating feminist and empowerment approaches in

practice will provide social workers with the knowledge, values and skills most likely to promote human rights and social justice" (Turner & Maschi, 2015, p. 151). Mainstream thinking narrowly forces us to think in terms of good and bad. It promotes a one size fits all approach toward child welfare where best interest of the child is defined by Eurocentric notions of individualism (Bala, 2011; Regehr et al., 2016), influencing policy and practice. Feminist and Indigenous theories acknowledge multiple ways of knowing, and that one way does not have to be mutually exclusive of another but can co-exist. A critical and feminist social work lens examines intersectionality and the social, economic, political, and cultural aspects of child welfare and social work education. Feminist educator bell hooks explained the feminist classroom should provide the opportunity for each student's voice to be heard and valued, using teacher power to confront domination and create new ways of learning together (hooks, 2009).

These theoretical underpinnings helped me to conceptualize how to explore the research problem (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Each provided a separate analysis for deconstructing and working toward social justice in education, policy, and practice. They each call for action, moving beyond understanding to realize the possibilities for transformation and change.

History

The history of the profession of social work, social work education, and the development of the child welfare system gives context for examining how discourses evolved regarding perceptions of children, caregiving, abuse, and the role of social work in child protection. The impact of European settlers on Indigenous children, families, and communities must be understood when considering how students should be prepared to work in child welfare.

History of Social Work as a Helping Profession

Elizabethan poor laws of the 19th century were characterised by determining whether a person was deserving of help based on a moral code (Chappell, 2014; Hick, 2010). This focus on the individual is deeply rooted in Eurocentric ideology that influences social work education and practice. Heinonen and Spearman (2010) describe the Charity Movement and the Settlement House Movement that emerged as a response to social challenges brought on by the Industrial Revolution. Each movement organised helping efforts in different ways and laid the foundation for the profession of social work. The Charity Movement organised helpers following a medical model that developed case work to provide aid to individuals through relationships. The Settlement House Movement developed community and advocacy work focused on oppressive structures in society as the cause of social problems. These different beliefs about how to respond to individual and social issues have continued as part of the discourse within social work. They are represented within various degrees throughout fields of practice providing a wide range of helping services from casework to community work.

History of Social Work Education

One criticism of social work in the early 20th century was that it lacked a clear educational foundation (Flexner, 2001). Initially training was provided within agencies; the shift to a university setting emerged with intentions to became more scientific (Hick, 2017). Jennissen and Lundy (2011) describe the history of social work in Canada and the development of social work education. The first school of social work was established in Canada at the University of Toronto in 1914. In the early days, programs were heavily influenced and accredited by the United States and faculty were divided between social work's focus on social reform and

casework. In 1926 the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) was created and contributed to the discussion on social work roles and education in Canada.

As social work established itself as a profession and the demand for social workers increased following the depression and World War Two (WWII), social work educators struggled to agree on curriculum standards. At that time, most social work educators in Canada were trained in the United States, where the casework model was dominant. Social work faced resistance within Canadian universities to be recognised as a rigorous field of study. It was the determination and resilience of educators during this time that helped forge social work education that followed.

In 1971, Canada parted ways with the United States for accreditation and standards and established what is now known as the Canadian Association of Social Work Education (CASWE). The introduction of structural social work theory in the 1970s helped shift the scope of practice back toward social reform; since then, anti-oppressive and anti-colonial approaches to social work have been developed.

History of the Child Welfare System in Canada

Perceptions of Children

The history of the child welfare system specifically is no less interesting. Definitions, boundaries, and dimensions of 'child' depend on the social location of the definer and "reflects the socio-political constructs of the time" (Cech, 2015, p. 31). Ives et al. (2015) describe three stages that reflect how mainstream perceptions of children have evolved in Canada. First, from colonial times to the 19th century, children were economically valuable objects and parents had ultimate authority. There were no laws to protect children from abuse or neglect. Then, after confederation children became seen less as possessions and more as vulnerable persons with

developmental stages and need for protection. The state became responsible for intervening when parents could not provide adequate care. These interventions were justified as resulting from the parent's failure and not because children had inherent rights. The third stage was heavily influenced by the atrocities toward children during WWII and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (UNDRC) in 1959. This shift in thinking saw children as subjects rather than objects, reliant on parents and the government to uphold their rights. Children also became understood as social capital, "workers in training" (Cech, 2015, p.45). Some of the current trends in child welfare in Canada might suggest the underlying ideology of children as objects continues today.

Prior to colonization, Indigenous cultures had their own unique worldviews on children. Anderson (2000), through exploring her own cultural roots, learned from Elders that children are sacred gifts; they are the heart of the community, and it was considered an honor to have responsibility for them. In Indigenous cultures, responsibility for children was vested in the whole community. Therefore, giving birth or blood relationship, is not required to become an auntie, sister, or grannie (Anderson, 2000). This contrasts with the mainstream focus on children as property of their parents.

The Development of the Child Welfare System

The child welfare system began as a "child saving" movement: the first Society for the Protection of Women and Children was opened in Ontario in 1891 (Jennisen & Lundy, 2011, p. 2). The focus was on orphaned and neglected children (Barter, 2001; Crosson-Tower, 2011) who were institutionalised for their own good and to reduce risk to society (Barter, 2001). Late 19th century reform brought attention to the vulnerabilities of children as well as efforts to protect them (Bala, 2011) and home settings became preferable to institutions, although the philosophy

of social control had not changed (Barter, 2001). Provincial legislation was further developed, establishing government responsibility for children and overtime, child welfare workers gained greater authority from the state to intervene, and the process became more legalised (Bala, 2011).

However, the effort of government agencies to act *in loco parentis*, did not result in child-saving that was equitable or even helpful for many. From the 1880s well into the 20th century, the Canadian government was engaged in an aggressive attempt to assimilate Indigenous Peoples through residential schools (Hanson et al., 2020). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) stated, "In establishing residential schools, the Canadian government essentially declared Aboriginal people to be unfit parents" (p. 7). Baskin (2011) explained the residential school system, "led to the decline of parenting skills as children were denied their appropriate parental role models" (p. 5). Social workers in the child welfare system participated by using the schools as child welfare placements (Milloy as cited in Blackstock, 2011b).

Unlike provincial funding programs for the rest of the child welfare system, funding for Aboriginal children on reserves comes from the federal government and has been consistently lower than what is provided to non-Aboriginal children (Blackstock, 2011b; Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013). In a landmark ruling in January 2016, 10 years after the initial complaint was filed, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found the Canadian government to have been discriminatory toward Aboriginal children (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, 2016). After further delays by the Canadian government, an *Agreement-in Principle* was reached in January 2022 that hopefully leads to a binding agreement "to safeguard First Nations children and families from Canada's longstanding injustice, discrimination and inequality, and that positive change can finally be made" (Blackstock, 2022).

The impact of colonization, funding formulas, and the trauma of residential schools produced a wave of Indigenous children who were removed from their homes even as the residential schools were closing (Strega & Carriere, 2015). This period, known as the 60s scoop, saw an increase from 1% of Indigenous children in care to 30-40%, often placed with white foster homes or adopted to white families (Strega & Carriere, 2015). As previously mentioned, the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (UNDRC) in 1959 shifted the perception of children from objects to subjects with human rights and the concept of "best interest of the child" became the guiding principle in child welfare (Bernstein, 2016). The identification of Battered Child Syndrome in 1962 and mandatory reporting helped further formalise child protection services (Bala, 2011). Awareness about the scope of child protection and child and parent rights in the 70s and 80s led to a Family Preservation Movement and least intrusive measures being introduced into child welfare legislation (Ives et al., 2011; Mannes, 1993). In response to so many Aboriginal children being taken from their communities, Aboriginal groups advocated in the 1980s for change and began to develop their own child welfare agencies (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013). Currently there are more than 120 Indigenous agencies across Canada (Fallon et al., 2021).

Barter (2001) explained that despite the evolution of child welfare from a child saving orientation to a more family and child focused approach, the underlying structural issues of poverty and power imbalances kept child welfare limited "to cope with symptoms" (p. 266). In the 1990s, a risk model for preventing future harm was introduced to child welfare (Christianson-Wood, 2011; Swift & Callahan, 2009). Although the risk assessment tools within this model provided some welcome guidance (Swift & Callahan, 2009), they also created a more

scientific approach to child welfare that was judgemental and rigid (Barter, 2009). Christianson –

Wood (2011) cautioned,

> Risk assessment has become increasingly appealing at the policy and managerial level.
>
> At these levels, it is promoted as a helpful adjunct to assessment and intervention.
>
> However, clear guidelines and protocols need to be established for its use. One
>
> investigation of decision-making in child protection found that inexperienced workers
>
> exhibited only superficial awareness of the concept of risk assessment; as a consequence,
>
> they were unable to weigh various factors and apply them to practice (Drury-Hudson,
>
> 1999). (p.382)

The pendulum between perceptions of children and parents' rights and least or more

intrusive interventions in child welfare continues to shift back and forth depending on

interpretations of best interest of the child. Recent alternative approaches to child welfare include

flexible and culturally relevant responses that take a preventative approach. This includes

connecting families with resources and supports, assiduous efforts to keep children with their

families and emphasizing the relationship between service users and the child welfare worker.

Risk assessment and child safety, however, is still the priority and child welfare practices

continue to be seen through that dominant lens. The dual nature of child protection work, to help

and to control, can be challenging for social workers to reconcile, especially when considering

the social barriers that impact most child welfare service users. Featherstone et al. (2021) stated,

"we know that for the majority of families within existing child protection systems, child welfare

concerns are a product of a complex interplay of factors and are rarely driven by adults' intent to

cause anguish to their children" (p. 162).

Shifting Child Welfare Paradigms

The Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal (CWRP) describes child welfare as "a set of government and private services designed to protect children and encourage family stability. The main aim of these services is to safeguard children from abuse and neglect" (n.d., para. 1). Different child welfare paradigms have evolved as dominant political discourses responded to economic and societal changes, and developments in knowledge about children. Implicit in those discourses are varied values and assumptions about children and their well-being which create a preferred model or orientation through which child welfare services are delivered. Freymond and Cameron (2006) found definitions of child maltreatment and how societies respond,

> grow out of specific histories and social configurations … every child and family welfare configuration is created out of a need to balance a common set of system design requirements. All systems must come to terms with similar challenges and choices. It is the nature of choices made, and the balance struck among competing priorities, that give each approach to child and family welfare its unique profile. (p. 3-4)

A study by Gilbert et al. (2011) in the mid 1990's examined child welfare systems in nine developed countries including Canada. The results identified two main orientations to child welfare: *child protection* and *family service*. Within these orientations, they looked at four dimensions: how abuse was defined, response to abuse, role of the child welfare worker, and out of home placements. Fifteen years later, they repeated the study and found that child welfare systems had expanded and become more complex. Shifts occurred within countries previously oriented toward child protection to family service and vice versa. They credited a neoliberal agenda and globalization as contributing factors. They also identified a third orientation had emerged: *child focused*. A similar project by Freymond and Cameron (2006) comparing child

welfare models internationally identified the same main orientations of child protection and

family service. Freymond and Cameron (2006) added a *community caring* model which followed

Aboriginal approaches to child welfare in Canada and New Zealand. Table 1 summarizes some

of the key characteristics of different child welfare models reflected in the literature. The child

welfare system in Canada has attempted to shift from a child protection model, however this

model remains dominant.

Table 1

Models of Child Welfare (adapted from Barter, 2001)

Child protection (rescue)	Family Focus (strengthening)	Community Care/Collectivist	Indigenous
Child focused	Consider environnement	System/structural barriers	Relational
Parents responsible (blaming)	Supports parents	Empower families	Children connected to family/community
Reactive/crisis response	Prevention	Social justice	Indigenous ways of caring and helping
	Coordination	Collaboration	
Social control			

A common thread among approaches to child welfare is an interpretation of the concept

best interest. The mandate of child welfare agencies according to the CASW (2005) is to identify

children in need of protection, be least intrusive and always act in the best interest of the child.

Best interest has become a global term used to describe the aim of child welfare policy and

practice. Bala (2011) stated, "child welfare is social work practiced in a legal context" (p. 1).

Best interest frameworks are described in legislation to help courts make decisions (Child

Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). The ideology of best interest emerged from Eurocentric

thinking as an individualistic notion of the child separate from anything else, "the child is seen as

a discrete unit and her relationships are measured in accordance with the degree to which they

are harmful or helpful to her well-being and welfare" (Regehr et al., 2016, p. 112). A challenge for Canadian social workers has been how to uphold children's best interests in an inherently unjust society. Social workers who left child welfare in British Columbia expressed one of their concerns as not being able to act in the child's best interest (Bennett et al., 2009). They explained child welfare practice was not in line with their social work values to the extent they could not comply with legislation.

In response to a federal government initiative to gather information about First Nations child welfare across the country, the Saskatchewan First Nations Family and Community Institute (SFNFCI) completed a large study that engaged 4499 people (surveys, interviews, and focus groups) in the province. Participants included children and families within and outside the child welfare system as well as key informants. The project's focus was to consider what First Nations child welfare could look like rather than be a criticism of the current system. The following five themes emerged as priorities for reform:

1. Reform **programs and services** to be more reflective of local culture and invest in resources to support families and communities;

2. **Honour youth** by providing opportunities to motivate and empower and ensure youth voices are heard;

3. Shift **practice approaches** to reflect First Nations case management, standards of practice and measurement and support kinship and community connections;

4. **Build capacity** for engaged service providers who participate in the community, strategic partnerships, and healthy working relationships;

5. Address **systemic factors** by establishing a national children's advocate, equitable and flexible funding, capital investments and education on the legal aspect of First Nations child welfare (SFNFCI, 2017, p.11).

The SFNFCI report provided a comprehensive approach for child welfare moving forward with a clear message that "the goal of prevention is to strengthen families in the community" (p. 49). The ongoing challenge for realising these solutions is the availability of resources and political shifts that allow for "First Nations specific legislation and care standards" (p. 66). The report emphasized many of the components and characteristics of a community collectivist model (see Table 1).

The SFNFCI report identified the need to nurture "healthy and competent frontline workers embedded in the cultures and traditions of those they serve" (p. 44) and suggested specialised training about the local context. Regarding social work education, the report suggested,

developing relationships and agreements and mentorship programs with local universities … training with best practices could also lead into additional developments around specialized education at the university level. Currently both local university programs are generalist. Other universities with high Aboriginal populations have responded with 1–2-year child welfare specialist certificates, supporting the development of expertise in the field. (p. 61-63)

Many of the recommendations from the SFNFCI study echoed what was identified in a report from the Alberta Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA) in 2016. Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba share similar concerns about overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care. Researchers in Alberta spoke to children and families about their experiences in

the child welfare system. Efforts so far have not stopped these increases, "it is abundantly clear that unless the gap in perspectives between the child welfare system and the Aboriginal community is addressed, there is every reason to believe that Aboriginal children will continue to be overrepresented" (OCYA, p.3). Both reports stated a need to build trust between Indigenous Peoples and government and work toward changing the perception of child welfare. The OCYA report stated, "government must engage with the community in a renewed and respectful relationship based on equality and full partnership" (p. 3).

Current initiatives in Manitoba to address the number of Indigenous children in care address flexibility in funding models, updates to legislation, and more community-based prevention (Malone, 2017). The SFNFCI and OCYA reports identified the need to develop more localized child welfare models. I met with the Executive Director (ED) of an Indigenous agency in Manitoba. They stated their agency pushed forward innovative approaches for many years and the challenge for social work curriculum was to keep up. They described a project with researchers from the University of Manitoba social work department to pilot new training modules that fit the specific needs of the agency. This aligns with recommendations from the SFNFCI and OCYA reports to develop more localized child welfare models. The ED explained the importance of a field component to training where the instructor visits trainees in the field to follow up and look at how new learning is being used. The area of learning transfer in education is something that requires further research. The ED stated instead of using the term "culturally appropriate" when discussing service delivery, agency workers refer to "cultural enrichment" experiences, with the understanding that no one can know everything about a culture. The cultural training provided by the agency does not only focus on colonization and history, but also on learning about Indigenous Peoples before colonization and being able to engage with kids

from this perspective. The ED suggested community specific delivery models should be nurtured as alternatives to the four Authorities model and that Manitoba needs to develop its own unique approaches for practice in child welfare.

Social Work Education

The literature review so far has identified the inter-connections of social work and child welfare throughout history and the influence of dominant neoliberal discourses on policy and practice. Social work education systems mirror some of the same ideological tensions between individual and collectivist orientations in child welfare paradigms. In this section I consider how teaching and learning in social work education can influence social workers entering the field of child welfare. I will explain some of the different paradigms within social work education and some of the pedagogical approaches described in the literature that can help social workers develop critical, feminist, and Indigenous insights for thinking and practicing in child welfare. With this perspective, it is possible to consider how teaching and learning in social work education can influence social workers entering the field of child welfare.

Professional and Progressive

Westhues (2005), exploring the work of Wagener (1986), characterized the "debate about the mission of social work practice between two perspectives: "a professional (or function) perspective and the progressive (or cause) one" (p. 131). Westhues noted that on the *professional* side, social work education would focus on skills, values, knowledge, and interventions. On the *progressive* side, it would focus on advocacy, social justice, structural factors, and developing a critical perspective. The conflict between the two perspectives with respect to preparation for practice centered around what theories should be covered and whether a generalist or specialist outcome is desired, "those most identified with the progressive perspective argued that our job is

to teach how to resist the oppressive structures in workplaces rather than to better prepare graduates to meet the needs of these workplaces" (Westhues, p. 138). Pelech et al. (2014) stated "social work education should be shaped by the times and the critical issues faced within modern society" (p. 249). Due to high caseloads and an increasing social control function, child welfare is an example "where such resistance was warranted" (Westhues, 2005, p. 138).

Although social work has a long history as a helping profession, "paradoxically, social work in England and Canada has simultaneously long been critiqued for its benevolent imperialism in the delivery of its services" (Spolander et al., 2011, p.818). Despite outside appearances, "analysis of social care soon reveals evidence of a staunch conservative ideology in shaping the direction of social welfare and social work" (Spolander et al., 2011, p.819). This illustrates the need within social work practice and social work education to consider the individual and the social, economic, and political landscape. Richards et al. (2005) describe the ethical dilemma faced by social work educators, "should we teach students to communicate in a way that conforms to the priorities and pressures of current practice? Or should we retain the focus on inter-personal skills and on engaging with the worlds of service users" (p. 409).

The challenges related to the professional and progressive dichotomy are not unique to Canada. Wilson and Campbell (2013) explored academic perspectives on what needs to be done to improve social work education in Northern Ireland. One of the concerns identified was inadequate teaching of anti-oppressive practice. One participant commented, "I think there are tensions there, because on the one hand we want them to be fit for agency practice and on the other … we want them to resist" (p. 1016). Another concern was that learning had become too prescriptive, "hampering student's ability to learn the social work craft" (p. 1016). Regarding structures that support practice learning, one participant stated, "the system has become overly

centralised and bureaucratic, which makes change difficult and may inhibit creativity and innovation" (p. 1017). These tensions are particularly relevant to the study and practice of child protection.

Undergraduate social work degrees are sometimes referred to as generalist degrees, meaning social workers are learning, "general knowledge and skills that they can apply to particular situations" (Payne et al., 2009, p.8). Leslie and Cassano (2003) refer to a generalist approach as a "two-edged sword" (p. 367), on the one hand "the generalist practice method model has provided a legitimate framework for the inclusion of empirical knowledge and theoretical concepts from other disciplines to be incorporated into the social work education process" (p. 368). On the other hand, they argue it has created barriers to creating a knowledge base unique to social work and developing a clear social work identity.

The Canadian Association of Social Work Education (CASWE) stated, "the curriculum at the Baccalaureate level (BSW curriculum) provides students with knowledge and skills for generalist practice" (2014, p.9). According to Kufeldt and Mckenzie (2011) in child protection, "front line practice is arguably the most complex of all social work tasks, particularly in child welfare, yet it is too often carried out by workers with limited experience and without adequate training, education, and supervision" (p. 566). They recognised a course in child welfare is not part of the core curriculum in Canada and explained, "decision-making in child protection is very often a life and death issue … any decision or intervention in childhood has lifelong consequences … should we not therefore allocate this work to the best and most experienced of workers?" (p. 567). Pelech et al. (2014) suggested the time is now to develop new models for social work education. Technology offers increased opportunities for e-learning and an expanded student base, social work programs can respond to "niche interests … social work programs, and

their faculty members, may then teach to their strengths and further integrate their research and teaching activities" (Pelech et al., p. 251). The Prairie Child Welfare Consortium (PCWC) is an example of a partnership between the prairie schools of social work and provincial child welfare departments sharing resources and knowledges. The PCWC E-Learning committee brings together faculty members with specialized knowledge in child welfare to offer a variety of courses for social work students that meet specific learning needs in the field (e.g., reconciliation, residential schools, FASD, and addictions).

In Westhues (2005) opinion, we have moved toward a more progressive position since 1971 when social work education was described by CASSW as "identification with professional social work and a commitment to learning, scientific enquiry, and ethical responsibility" (CASSW, 1971, as cited in Westhues, 2005, p. 142). In 2014 the CASWE standards stated, "The mission of social work education, at Baccalaureate and Master levels, is to promote excellence in social work education, scholarship, and practice with a human rights and responsibility and social justice focus" (p. 2). The vision and mission published in 2021, states,

> CASWE-ACFTS envisions an economically, socially, and environmentally just world based on humanitarian and democratic ideals that demonstrate respect for the worth, agency, and dignity of all beings. Achieving such a vision calls for critical analyses of power relations, the dismantling of inequitable social structures, and solidarity with populations that experience poverty, oppression, and exploitation. (p. 3)

There remains however some disconnect between social work education and practice as social workers work within the current neoliberal framework. This gap is taken up in the discourse on social work education and regulation.

Competency Based Social Work Education

Campbell (2013) described regulation, practice, and education as the three sectors of social work in Canada. She explained they have always overlapped to some degree; however there has been the greatest distance between regulation and education. Part of the reason for this is related to different epistemological assumptions about social work and how competences are understood (Campbell, 2015). Campbell's (2015) break down of the responsibilities of each sector helps one to understand their separate yet interconnected roles. The CASWE, as regulator, is responsible for "promoting excellence in social work education" and is responsible to "serve and protect the public interest" (Campbell, 2015, Appendix A). She explained, "educational standards are aspirational while regulatory standards are practical" (Campbell, 2015, Appendix A). Yet, excellence in the delivery of social work education serves to protect the public interest as well. Friction between the sectors of social work arise when the varied ideological approaches to understanding social work come into play.

One such area of significant tension between social work education and regulation arises in the discussion about competency-based models. The 1994 Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT) and the 2001 sector study catapulted social work into a debate regarding competency that was led by the regulatory associations (Barter, 2012). Detractors of this philosophy, Rossiter and Heron (2011) stated,

> the entire project of competencies arises not as an effort to improve professional
> accountability but as a mechanism for operationalizing trade agreements … it is
> necessary to understand competencies profiles as neoliberal in character and effect … the
> foundations of social work – thinking, reflecting, and making complex judgements –
> cannot be represented in the form of competences. Competences, by definition, eliminate

the intellectual and ethical foundations of the profession in favor of rudderless behaviors.

(pp. 305-306)

Kovacs et al. (2013) described competency-based education as part of an accountability movement that "focuses on the outcome rather than the process of learning" (p. 230). They explained this creates a norming approach to education, "that seeks to identify, promote, and evaluate the competencies that are involved in performing tasks according to desired standards. Quality control is the goal" (p. 230). The relevance for child welfare is that competency models for social work education have been found limited in preparing graduates with capacity for working in complex situations, particularly where there are elements of uncertainty and ambiguity (Kelly & Jackson, 2011, see also Lymbery, 2003).

Supporters of competency-based education see it as a link between education, workplace, and public accountability (Kovacs et al., 2013). Stokes (2016) questioned educators' resistance toward competency-based evaluation since the transfer of learning in field placements is often assessed this way already. Bogo et al. (2011) claimed Canadian educators are behind in accepting competence-based models because they have an outdated understanding. They acknowledged that the historical context of competence models as behavioral and positivist could create a robotic approach to social work. However, new models have been developed that support a holistic approach including, "not only performances of behaviors but also reflective, cognitive and reason processes or competence" (Bogo et al., 2011, p.276). Bogo et al. (2011) referred to findings from two studies on field instructors' perceptions of student competence in micro and macro settings,

In both studies the link between the cognitive processes involved conceptualizing practice and the performance aspect of choosing and enacting skillful behavior was clearly

evident. To break this link and solely identify behavioral skills renders competency

models superficial. To focus exclusively however on the cognitive and subjective

processes of the practioner ignores the essence of professional practice – how practioners

ultimately use what they know in the real world of practice with clients and communities.

(p. 278)

Aronson and Hemingway (2011) argued that the "job ready" student produced by a

competence-based model of education will not be prepared to respond critically to the current

neoliberal agenda (p. 281). They appreciate social work's unique value base with its capacity to

seek out structural inequalities; they caution against economically driven motivations toward

competency-based models that jeopardize the integrity of the profession. These are political

decisions related to a larger philosophical debate (Aronson and Hemingway, 2011). Jennissen

and Lundy (2011) stated, "Social work education must be responsive to the economic, social,

and political conditions in which social workers practice" (p. 223). This does not mean preparing

social workers simply to cope and adjust; nor does it mean producing what Beddoe and

Adamson (2016) described as the 'ideal graduate', trained to be a perfect fit with the current

workplace. Social work students should learn that the field and workplace they are preparing to

enter may be both resisting and fostering social inequalities. This is certainly the reality reflected

in literature regarding social work and child welfare practice.

Although other professions may have adopted competency-based models, some question

whether the models are transferable to social work (Fook, 2011). Barter (2012) explained that

social work is more than the provision of services; he refers to social work's code of ethics

which commits to the "needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed and/or

living in poverty" (CASW, 2005, p.3). He advised, "this particular interest requires a definition

of social work and social work education grounded in critical thinking, anti-oppressive practice, human rights, relationship building, research, social action, social change, negotiation, flexibility, and interdisciplinary advocacy and collaboration" (p. 237). Fook (2011), having worked in Australia, the U.K, and Canada, asserted she has an insider's perspective on the politics of competency debates, which remind her of earlier debates about Evidenced-Based Practice (EBP). Fook suggested an analysis of the discourse to better understand who is to benefit and what is to be excluded,

> In thinking through social work in competency terms, there is also a danger that the discussion becomes polarized and reduced to conceptions which do little justice to how social work is perceived, experienced, and enacted by long serving and dedicated professionals. Whoever coined the term "competencies" and whoever limits the discussion to that framework is also consigned to never seeing outside it, and never creating new frameworks. We are confined to a room built by someone else. (p. 296)

Fook concluded that the debate is about power to define social work. She recommended working toward the possibility of co-creating a new room to explore the potential of creating "complex competences" (p. 297). This would certainly be a less divisive approach then appears to be the current situation. An opposition to competency models is not an argument for incompetence (Boudreau, 2015). Bogo (2013) described competence as "a *lens* through which to understand profession practice, a *guide* for designing educational programs, and a *framework* for assessing learning" (Slide 2). She described a holistic approach to competence for social work that includes meta-competencies (cognitive, affective, relational, reflective) as well as procedural competences (operational, behavioral, skills) (Slide 3).

This debate frames the scope of what educators teach and how they seek to influence developing social workers, which affects the field and ultimately service-users. The challenge remains that, even if social work as a profession can strike a balance and create a holistic competency model, the political and economic structures of society do not view competences in this balanced holistic way. It is difficult in any kind of competency model to maintain a resistance to managerialism. Competency models for education may provide a stronger link between education and employers but may not prepare students to be equipped to sustain advocacy when practice in the field is not meeting service users' needs or addressing structural inequalities. Kelly and Jackson (2011) recommend open dialogue and extensive consultation for developing social work education programs for child welfare practice,

> A great deal of empirical and theoretical exploration therefore underpins academic programmes which to some extent harvest not only empirical evidence but also forms of collective expertise, tacit and experiential knowledge. All of this influence's major decisions around curricula content, modes of delivery, forms of assessment, pedagogic frameworks and so on. (p.490)

Educators are facing the same threat of managerialism in the university setting (Brown, 2016) as social workers are in the field; educators can understand these pressures well. In thinking critically about competency-based education, educators are practising what they are teaching. Competencies are not inherently bad, but the risks they pose are significant and should not be ignored. The editors of the Journal of Social Work Education stated,

> as social work educators, we need to engage a new generation of social workers in the knowledge and skills necessary for competent practice at all levels of intervention on behalf of vulnerable members of our society. We need to re-examine our curricula to

ensure a balance of micro-, mezzo- and macro level skills, and we need to develop new

pedagogies for new times (Robbins et al., 2016, p.159).

Kelly and Jackson (2011) noted that research is needed to understand what kind of

education processes develop the workers necessary to meet the needs of the child welfare field,

whether our "initiatives are fit for purpose" (p. 491).

Connecting Social Work Education and Child Welfare

McGuire and Lay (2007) looked at the relevance of social work education to child

welfare; they found social work education strengthened workers' commitment to child welfare,

improved their ability to apply new learning linking theory to practice, and developed self-

efficacy. Schools of social work in British Columbia have created a Bachelor of Social Work

degree (BSW) with a specialization in child welfare or a post BSW certificate (Pierce et al.,

2014) recognizing specific knowledge and skills related to this field of practice. Partnering with

child welfare agencies to deliver these specialised programs has been a step toward decolonizing

social work education and providing more culturally relevant education opportunities for

Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Pierce et al., 2014). Pierce et al. (2014) found these

learning opportunities helped increase the number of Aboriginal social workers working in child

welfare. These programs have a required number of child welfare courses and a final year field

placement in a mandated child welfare agency (University of Victoria). In 2015, The University

of Calgary offered a one-time Master of Social Work degree with a focus in child intervention

through a partnership with the Alberta Child and Family Services Division (University of

Calgary). In conversation with Dr. Dorothy Badry (personal communication, February 4, 2022),

a faculty member involved with this program it was very well received, however it has not been

offered since. There is a need for research to explore the success of these specialized programs further.

Partnerships between universities and child welfare agencies have created some unique learning opportunities for social workers and have the potential to influence policy and practice in child welfare. Strand et al. (2015) researched promising innovations in child welfare education in the US. They described a BSW rotation placement in child welfare where students spent time in a direct service agency as well as in a policy agency within the same placement. Participants reported the benefit of seeing policies in action and being able to bring a policy perspective to their micro practice. Strand et al. (2015) described another promising initiative that included core competency child welfare training as part of social work education curriculum. This required regular meetings and collaboration between faculty and child welfare departments with the intention of preparing social workers for a career in child welfare. They found participants stayed longer; however further research is required to evaluate the long-term impact on retention.

Anderson and Briar-Lawson (2015) advised that advancing university and child welfare partnerships require relationships built on trust, vision, reciprocity, and ongoing evaluation. Such partnerships allow for more alignment in workforce development, intentional partnership designs, and shared purposes that can be more contextually relevant to specific communities and the needs of service users. Another avenue for universities to move to support child welfare agencies and worker development is to tailor research to agency needs (Mathias et al., 2015). Lery et al. (2015) described joint university/agency research projects that engaged students to bridge the gap between research and practice and invited agencies to welcome innovation in response to challenges. Levy et al. noted Evidenced Based Practices (EBP) are not fully

developed in agencies; by teaching workers how to use data and understand how workers' efforts are connected to outcomes will contribute to continuous improvement in local contexts.

Riebschleger (2015) studied what social work students need to learn for rural child welfare practice. That review of literature identified thirteen key areas for social work curriculum: self-efficacy, poverty and barriers for service users, advocacy, use of informal resources, trauma informed services, cultural humility, generalist person in environment and strengths-based models, critical thinking, ethical decision-making models, dual relationships, leadership, university community collaboration and child welfare field placements. Research is needed to understand how learning about each of these topics is then transferred to the field.

Most research available about social work education and child welfare practice is related to specific teaching designs and partnerships between educational institutions and child welfare agencies in the US. This is important information; however, it seems to reflect the priority for preparing graduates that can hit the ground running. There is a lack of literature related to the integration of important knowledge, like Indigenous worldviews and knowledges, and skills like those mentioned by Riebschleger that impact critical social work practice in child welfare and outcomes for service users (Chateauneuf et al., 2016; Walmsley, 2005).

Social Work Education as a Platform for Transformation

Payne (2015) described social work education as the "process of preparing people to practice as social workers and developing their capacity to practice through learning and personal development" (p. 775). He asserts that social work education is both a process and a social institution comprised of life experiences, academic learning, and career lifelong learning (p. 775). Social work education responds to the social needs and anticipates services needed in society by preparing students to work in a variety of helping roles. Milliken (2017) described

university education as a "commitment to transformation through developing intellect, broadening awareness, encouraging questions that unsettle and transform, and pursuing holistic development that attends to students' emotional, psychological, and spiritual wellness" (p. 201). Transformative learning as described by Mezirow (2003) is "learning that transforms problematic frames of reference – sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (p. 58).

Mezirow's theory of transformative learning assert higher education's responsibility to help learners realise their capacity for critical reflection (Mezirow, 2003). Jones (2009) stated,

> For social work educators operating from a critical, emancipatory perspective, transformative learning theories offer an analytic framework for understanding the frames of reference of their students and a guide to developing teaching practices with greater potential to lead to significant individual and social change. (p. 21)

Critical, feminist, and Indigenous pedagogies offer alternative approaches to social work education that promote transformative learning.

Social work education is directly related to the development of future child welfare workers and the transformative nature of education is therefore a platform for change in child welfare policy and practice, "how we learn determines how we practice" (Giroux, 2011 as cited in Higgins, 2015). Collins et al. (2009) advised the "core technology in child welfare resides within the worker and his/her ability to engage, assess, provide, counsel, plan, evaluate and make decisions effectively with the family" (p. 41-42). Yet child welfare reform has often ignored the workers who deliver services (Steib & Blome, 2003, p.748). Research that engages the experiences of these frontline workers is necessary.

Education and Relational Learning

Gitterman (2004) wrote about the "nature of learning and teaching … what is to be taught and how it is to be taught" (p. 95) in social work education. He argued that educators need to focus more on the 'how' and making connections between concepts and real-life experiences (p. 95). Gitterman described an integration of subject and student-centered education that increases opportunities for the acquisition of learning as opposed to more traditional subject centered approaches where the educator is the expert. This fits well with critical, feminist, and Indigenous pedagogies. One criticism of social work education as it stands is that it presents an idealised view of child welfare. Beddoe and Adamson (2016) recommended a relational and interactive experience for educating resilient practitioners. They explained this shift in thinking "requires an interactive and contextually aware approach that provides opportunity for students to link and develop existing knowledge, skills, capabilities and reflective capacities with the new challenges of social work practice" (p. 344). Beddoe and Adamson (2016) suggest that beyond skill development, this approach helps develop resilience through social work education for sustained practice in the field. Retention of social workers is a well-known challenge in child welfare (Healy et al., 2009). Resilience arises from teaching about self-care, safe use of self, capacity for deep reflection, importance of supervision, realistic expectations, and a sense of mission and purpose (Beddoe & Adamson, 2016).

Gitterman (2004) described education as a journey in which the educator and students are learning in collaboration. This reflects the relational aspect of social work practice and social work educators modeling what they teach. Relationships in social work practice take place in various contexts. In child welfare the relationship between social work and service user is in a mandatory setting which presents unique challenges that student's need to be prepared to

navigate. Edwards and Richards (2002) stated, "there is a crucial need to shift our professional focus from the development of the self to the development of the self-with-others" (p. 44). They described a relational pedagogy based on mutual engagement, empathy, and empowerment through "a meaningful connection between the student and teacher" (p. 44).

Education and Reflexivity

Social work educators need to continuously examine the ongoing discourse around politics of social work (Webb, 2000). Drawing on the writings of Foucault, Webb (2000) described a "situated model of power" (para 2) which seeks to recognise the broader social context in relationships of power, and the influence of power in relation to discourse. Social workers "enter into an elaborate field of power relations and use many different types of power to achieve their ends". Webb (2000) argued that good social work practice is to,

> understand how power operates in social work relationships; to uncover it in one's own
> and other's practice. To do this is to engage critically in the pursuit of just and
> empowering relationships … without critical practice and political criticism, you cannot
> have good social work practice. (para. 13)

Webb (2000) asserts this approach cannot be limited to the classroom but should be a part of everyday practice. This is a challenge for social work educators to practice and model critical reflection and provide a space for social work students to do this as well. Fook (2007) stated there is not enough focus on such critical reflection in education. Fook (2007) described critical reflection as,

> a process (and theory) for unearthing individually held social assumptions in order to
> make changes in the social world. In our approach, then, reflection is more than simply
> thinking about experience. It involves a deeper look at the premises on which thinking,

actions and emotions are based. It is critical when connections are made between these assumptions and the social world as a basis for changed actions. (p. 14)

A critical social work approach is a way of being, a commitment, a constant analysis and engagement in the discourse of how we come to know and experience living. Social work education can play a key role in creating an environment in which people learn about and engage in critical theories, so they become reflexive, constantly, and consciously questioning the source and beneficiaries of particular perspectives. In doing so, social workers create a new narrative that influences decision makers and child welfare practice.

Child welfare researchers in the United Kingdom (UK) have described a social model for child welfare based on the capability approach (Gupta et al., 2016; Featherstone, et al., 2016). This approach arises from the social model of disability which "captured the idea that people with disabilities were not disadvantaged by physical impairments, but by the barriers to well-being that result from social inequalities and the negative attitudes of others" (Featherstone et al., 2016, p.10). Definitions of child maltreatment are recognized as being socially constructed (or obscured) through time and, "structural inequalities, including poverty, sexism, and racism, have an impact in interrelated ways on people's lives. An individual's agency is recognised, but so are the constraints of interlocking structural factors" (Featherstone et al., 2016, p.11-12). They posed several organizational/individual questions that invite students to critically challenge "the protection narrative that what parents do or do not do is due to rational choices" (p. 12),

- How can inclusive and non-shaming conversations be held about painful issues?
- How do personal values and assumptions influence our work with children and families?

- What impact do wider political discourses have on belief systems and decision-making processes?

- Are practitioners supported to work relationally and reflect critically on practice?

- How are the psychological and material consequences of poverty and other forms of inequality addressed in work with families?

- How do workers use power? Do they compound or disconfirm feelings of shame and humiliation?

- Are there other ways of working with families beyond individual casework and the home visit? (p. 12)

The social model approach, "would recognise power of professionals to promote strengths and enhance capabilities, but also to diminish and destroy (including the power to 'shame') (Featherstone et al., 2016, p.13). Teaching students this model will facilitate self-reflection and awareness for developing a critical social work approach.

Education and Cultural Humility

The traditional standard of cultural competence in social work education and practice has evolved to a deeper way of being that reflects cultural humility and cultural safety (Milliken, 2012, see also Este, 2007). Ortega and Faller (2011) found that a cultural competence model risks placing groups of people in fixed categories based on race and ethnicity and does not account for the fluidity of cultural experiences or social injustices because of cultural differences. Child welfare workers have reported themselves more limited than aware of multicultural practice (Williams et al., 2013). Milliken (2012) explained, "the focus of what is cross-culturally 'acceptable' must move beyond examining 'ourselves' to listening to the world of 'the other'" (p. 101). This kind of engagement is transformative and requires educational experiences that

help social work students, particularly those from the dominant culture to be vulnerable and disrupt the social workers' role as expert (Milliken, 2012).

Long and Sephton (2011) stated cultural competence requires a "skill set, mind-set, and heart-set that sometimes seem so demanding as to be unobtainable" (p. 14). Indigenous Knowledge Keeper Sherry Copenace however, explained to me that social workers should work to be "culturally correct" and wondered why we would not strive for this (personal communication, July 19, 2017). As a social worker it is an ethical responsibility (CASW, 2006). Payne (2014) described cultural competence as,

> our ability to understand and value the social identities that are linked to devalued characteristics. Accordingly, we should educate people to value diversities in society and improve relationships between different social groups, with the aim of reducing the impact, and removing the sources, of misunderstanding and conflict. Practioners would do this by understanding the implications arising from the different cultures associated with different ethnicities and increasing their competence in responding more appropriately to those cultural differences, so that interventions were more appropriate to the different cultures. (p. 377)

Sinclair (2004) stated Aboriginal social work education works toward "cultural relevance" (p. 53) rather than seeking to be cross-cultural (Sinclair, 2004). Indigenous Elder Don Robinson, Bunibonibee (Oxford House) First Nation, proposed that social work educators strive for a "cultural infused teaching framework" (personal communication, November 10, 2017). Elder Robinson indicated this included the importance of social workers becoming leaders where they have opportunities to change policy. He suggested education should focus on these areas so that students have empowerment to influence policy development. Elder Robinson advised the focus

should not be on blaming child welfare systems, rather on how one can help and be a part of change. He stated social workers need to also learn about Indigenous ways of helping and healing. He suggested this shift in thinking and practice can start in social work education courses and that learning opportunities about Indigenous ways of knowing should not be limited to a single course, just one ceremony, or only focus on history.

Education and Perceptions of Child Welfare

Many Indigenous Peoples view social workers negatively because of the history of oppressing Indigenous families, children, and culture. Ives and Thaweiakenrat (2013) shared the following story,

> During a trip north to the Inuit territory of Nunavik in 2008 to promote social work education to a secondary school, students were asked what they thought of when they heard the words 'social work'. The first response was "run for your life!" (p. 239)

The SFNFCI and OCYA reports mentioned previously highlighted the need for the child welfare system to rebuild trust with Indigenous Peoples. This is an important area to which social work education must respond. How child welfare is portrayed in social work education can influence developing social workers. Despite child welfare being a main area of practice for social work, this is not designated as a specialization in most undergraduate social work programs or even required as a course (Pelech et al., 2014). Whether or not a student intends on working in child protection, "child protection is everybody's business" (Holland, 2014, p. 385). Depending on an educator's perception and experience in child welfare, students could obtain different levels of understanding of the child welfare system. Given the significant social injustices experienced by children and families outlined exhaustively in the TRC reports, it would make sense to develop a deliberate strategy for social work education to support child

welfare policy and practice. This would bridge gaps between academia, social workers in the field, and service users. Improved relationships between academia and child welfare agencies could also provide a stronger voice in the political discourse that ultimately decides on child welfare legislation and policy.

Education and Politics

Warner (2015) cautioned that social workers need to better understand their public role, "to articulate the deeper understanding that it gains from working in close contact with those who are distressed and marginalized" (p. 160). The responsibility of social workers is not limited to informing society about the complexity of the work in child welfare. It is also the responsibility of social workers to be,

> the voice that articulates to society what is uniquely visible from this position. This includes a different narrative about those who have been marginalized … that affords service users subjectivity, dignity and most importantly the right as citizens to be seen and heard. (p. 161)

Social workers need to share with others the "politics of suffering" (p. 161). Society generally is very judgemental toward child protection, a view fuelled by media reports, often without context and promoting negative stereotypes (Harding, 2009; LaLiberte et al., 2011; Swift & Callahan, 2002). When something goes wrong in child welfare, public outrage is directed toward the worker and the child welfare system, not the social problem of child maltreatment or poverty (Parton, 2014; Warner, 2015). The angry discourse is controlled by media and used by politicians (Warner, 2015). Warner (2015) argued that more involvement by social workers in the political domain is necessary. Rather than trying to focus on how the media portrays social work negatively, Warner suggested we need to,

spend more time forming closer and more meaningful alliances in the political sphere,

both locally and nationally, along with other groups … it is through these alliances and

the alternative discourses they have the potential to produce that mainstream media

stories will ultimately be reframed. (p. 166)

The focus should be on the misrepresentation of service users and not only the misrepresentation of social work.

Hutchinson and Korazim-Kőrösy (2017) studied interdisciplinary collaboration as a goal of social work education in the Nordic countries. They compared their findings to other nations' welfare models including Canada. They used Esping-Anderson's (1990) typology of welfare models: liberal, social democratic, and conservative-cooperative to explore interconnections between political ideology, policy, and the delivery of social services and therefore social work. The authors stated, "the mandate of social work education is to qualify social workers to work in the welfare institutions in the service of the citizens" (p. 49). Canada was identified as a liberal social welfare model in which social work responds to policy that is developed by government rather than, *vice versa,* social workers speaking into and influencing policy more strongly. In Canada, policy, social work, and social work education have become separated rather than unified as in the Nordic model, where the welfare system and the social work profession synchronously share the same ideology toward social justice. The analysis throughout this literature review suggests social workers should have a stronger voice influencing government policy that impacts social service users. The reframing of social workers public role in child welfare can be developed through social work education. As part of their social work education students can develop the skills for and expectation of political engagement as an integral part of social work practice.

Education and Critical Consciousness

Social work has been criticized for its participation in social control and its risk management focus in child welfare (Scourfield & Welch, 2003; Swift & Callahan, 2009). Sinclair (2004) referred to Freire's work when insisting upon the,

> development of critical consciousness through conscientization … a critical approach to liberatory education that incorporates helping the learner to move towards a new awareness of relations of power, myths, and oppression. By developing critical consciousness this way, learners work toward changing the world. (p. 53)

Dominelli (2009) detailed the different child welfare orientations as reflecting maintenance, therapeutic, or emancipation approaches to child welfare. She stated, "an emancipatory approach recognizes the critical reality that the protection of children touches on issues related to poverty, violence, health, justice, gender, and the community" (p. 274). Fallon and Trocmé (2011) found that decisions in child welfare practice were impacted by characteristics of social service workers; this invited "systemic biases" (p. 68) to skew service delivery. To address this, Fairbairn and Strega (2015) suggested the need for a socially just response that sees beyond the role of protection, using anti-oppressive practice, including critical, feminist and postmodern approaches to child welfare that can be transformative. Barter (2009) stated child welfare systems should consider the "abuse by society" (p. 274). He argued that challenges in child welfare are structural, and colonization is being sustained through the current child welfare system. Barter (2009) argued that a protection orientation creates, "organizational climates that are more rules- and procedures-driven, as opposed to being professionally and clinically driven based on relationship building ... this emphasis reduces the

complex personal, professional, and social issues associated with child protection work to problems of bureaucratic administration" (p. 270-271).

Lietz (2009) suggested deconstruction and integration, critical thinking, reflection, and critical consciousness are essential to a more transformative, critical theory of child welfare. Deconstruction requires the worker to gather and value multiple sources of information. The combination of subjective and objective information helps eliminate bias, requiring that "standardized instruments and practice intuitions be considered, challenged and synthesized in all decision making in order to ensure quality of each decision" (p. 196). Critical thinking helps balance and delay judgement by considering the strengths and weaknesses, and exploring meaning making (Lietz, 2009). Critical thinking considers historical, cultural, and organizational contexts allowing for a more complete analysis of options and consequences related to practice. The Ontario Child Welfare Training Program includes training on critical thinking referred to as "thinking outside the 'tick box'" (PART, 2012, p. 5). Lietz explains that reflection is necessary for engaging in deconstruction and critical thinking. Reflection should occur throughout the entire delivery of service and include the voices of families and children who might typically be silenced by the bureaucracy. Critical consciousness then, "involves a worker's willingness to be reflexive considering his or her own social location" (p. 199). This involves recognizing the power imbalance that is inherent in child welfare relationships and working toward a more shared experience (Lietz, 2009).

Dominelli (2002a) stated,

oppression is socially constructed through people's actions with and behaviors towards others. Its interactive nature means that oppressive relations are not deterministic forces with preordained outcomes. They have to be constantly reproduced in everyday life

encounters and routines for them to endure. Thus, resistance to oppression can always

take place. Moreover, resistance can occur at both personal and structural levels and can

be undertaken both by individuals and through groups. (p. 9)

Social work education can therefore be a catalyst for the development of resistance. hooks

(1994) stated "The classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility … an

openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to

move beyond boundaries, to transgress (p. 207). During a panel presentation at the Council of

Social Work Education Conference (2018), social work educator Jelena Todic stated "the biggest

challenge to me is sometimes I feel hopeless. The classroom is one place where we can model

social equitability – lived experience of what is possible – and this gives me back hope".

As a social work educator, Solomon (2002) described a social constructionist approach to

theorizing child welfare using attachment theory. Attachment theory provides a potential

framework and knowledge base for understanding children's behaviour, which has been heavily

relied on in child welfare. A critical analysis identified the potential misapplication of this

theory, which presents challenges for Indigenous and non-Indigenous caregivers. A key

component of caregiving in many Indigenous cultures is the shared responsibility of extended

family and community. By narrowly using an attachment lens, a worker may not recognise their

needs are being met in a more diversified way than is familiar in the Eurocentric culture. For

non-Indigenous parents as well, the focus on the mother child relationship can reinforce

mainstream expectation about the mother's responsibility to be the primary caregiver, required to

be responsible for any risk. Critical self-reflection is needed by practitioners on "what theoretical

assumptions provide the foundations for taken-for-granted knowledge" (White et al., 2020, p.

81).

Solomon (2002) found that even with awareness it was difficult for students to "disentangle" themselves from the influence of dominant models and assumptions. She used this space to teach and model social deconstruction (p.143). Solomon's (2002) recommendations for a social worker's approach in child welfare was to expose power dynamics openly, include client perspectives, acknowledge privilege and oppressive structures, and create coalitions. Child welfare training has focused more on assessing caregiver risk factors, rules, and procedures (Schreiber et al., 2013) and less on "relational and therapeutic skills that give power to development and growth" (Gerring et al., 2008, p.6). Social workers need to listen to peoples' experience from their own interpretations, to provide a more accurate perspective when completing assessments (Solomon, 2002). These skills can and should be emphasized during social work education.

If a child's best interest is related to well-being and protection from harm, Dominelli (2009) stated, "one would expect that in a society that values children, responses to the former would exceed the latter" (p. 25). Critical social work gives a framework to resist inequalities and evoke transformation (Campbell & Baikie, 2012); however, there is no best approach to child welfare yet (Dominelli, 2009, p.27). Blackstock (2011c) wrote about moral courage in child welfare. She explained the challenges in child welfare are well known and therefore a conscious decision is being made *to* repeat mistakes. Many child welfare scholars cited in this literature review echoed the sentiment of needing to get on with it (Baskin, 2016; Barter, 2009; Dominelli, 2009; Munro, 2010), and that new child welfare policy should come from the ground up as opposed to the top-down approach so far (Blackstock, 2011b, Dumbrill, 2003). Social work educators and child welfare workers have a role in critically thinking about what values influence

how child welfare services are delivered. Service users should also have a voice in imagining more culturally anchored, socially just approaches, that remove structural impediments to safety.

Many child welfare and social work scholars declare that social privations for children and families are far more harmful than parental intentionality; yet, resources are focused more on the latter, without much progress (Blackstock, 2009; see also Featherstone et al., 2006). Payne (2014) stated that, "since social work operates individualistically, and childcare is, in a patriarchal society, carried out by women, child protection work will inevitably involve a scrutiny of mothering, rather than of issues of child poverty" (p. 359). Spratt and Houston (1999) envisioned a child welfare system based on need instead of risk, where professionals were viewed as helpers and involved the community. This kind of reconstruction can begin with social work education.

A criticism of critical theory and anti-oppressive theory is that it does not provide clear enough direction for practice, however the literature explored here described numerous ways to bring these theories to life. Part of a critical approach is to consider relations in context and develop a response that is fitting to that space; this is a never-ending process and a challenge for every social worker and educator. Students need to develop a commitment to this approach during their education and develop skills that will help students sustain a critical perspective throughout their careers. Another concern is that critical theories risk becoming another theory to marginalise other ways of knowing. Agger (2013) cautioned against "replacing one authoritarian with another, albeit in the name of new ideology" (p. 31). Feminist and Indigenous perspectives are necessary for critical approaches in social work because they help deconstruct discourses that allow oppressive paradigms to continue, including critical ones. Social work can push forward

culturally anchored approaches to child welfare and social work education is a platform to help instill these values and skills.

Summary of the Literature

Throughout the literature review, I used critical, feminist, and Indigenous theories to help analyse the history of discourses within social work, social work education, and child welfare. Reviewing these histories highlights the interconnectedness of these three spheres and demonstrates that social work education is one platform to consider for addressing challenges in child welfare and supporting social workers entering that field. Tensions exist between social work values for social justice and the current education and child welfare systems that continue to marginalise. By exploring how education can be transformative for critical change in child welfare in this study, I can offer recommendations to challenge these dominant ways of thinking and practicing.

Child welfare paradigms have shifted back and forth, however, legislation and child welfare policy in most provinces continue to promote a Eurocentric dyadic understanding of family relationships and best interest (Choate, 2018). Social work education reflects a similar colonial approach to teaching and learning that limits opportunities for preparing students to transform oppressive systems (Sinclair, 2004). This research aims to contribute to decolonizing social work education and provide directions for more meaningful relationships and collaboration between education and the field to meet local needs.

The literature demonstrated the potential for education to impact social workers commitment to child welfare and resilience in the field. This will increase retention rates and help social workers apply social work values within mandated child welfare responsibilities. Pedagogies that consider relational learning, reflexivity, cultural humility, perceptions of child

welfare, politics, and critical consciousness are necessary to prepare students hearts and minds for the complex field of child welfare. In this research, I explore the process of how this happens and provides insight for social work education programs to be responsive to challenges that currently exist in the child welfare field, including decolonization and over involvement in the lives of Indigenous Peoples.

This section revealed many hard truths that exist in social work, social work education, and the child welfare system. Social work and education continue to be complicit in oppressive education and social delivery systems, however a sense of hope was also clearly expressed; that through reconciliation efforts, the literature speaks to the possibilities of the future of child welfare, and the transformative nature of education.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

Methodology

My methodology reflected a qualitative research approach based on constructivist

grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory was developed in 1967 by Barney Glaser

and Anselm Strauss from the field of sociology. They explained "theories should be grounded in

data from the field, especially in the actions, interactions, and social processes of people"

(Creswell & Poth, p.82). The literature reviewed demonstrated there is limited research to help

understand the *process* of social work education as transformative for social work practice in

child welfare. A grounded theory approach was chosen to develop a framework for preparing

students to successfully work in this field that is generated from participants' experiences

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). In keeping with the critical, feminist, and Indigenous analysis that

informed the research questions, a social constructionist grounded theory approach developed by

Kathy Charmaz fit well to guide the research process. Charmaz (2008) explained that a

constructivist researcher,

> takes responsibility to locate research relative to time, place, and situation …
>
> constructivists aim for an interpretive understanding of the studied phenomenon that
>
> accounts for context. As opposed to giving priority to the researcher's views,
>
> constructivists see participants' views and voices as integral to the analysis – and its
>
> presentation. (p. 402)

A social construction approach acknowledges how social work, social work education, and child

welfare are always changing and evolving in response to events and interactions (Payne, 2014).

A qualitative approach was chosen to gather more in-depth knowledge and understanding

about participant's experiences in social work education and child welfare practice (Creswell,

2007). Education can be a transformative experience and therefore a deeply personal one. In depth interviews provided the opportunity to listen and understand participants learning stories. The complex nature of social work in child welfare required a research method that gave participants the opportunity to explain and reflect on their experiences.

Given the influence of colonization on education, social work, and child welfare, Indigenous methodologies also informed my approach. Wilson (2008) explained, "research by and for Indigenous peoples is a ceremony that brings relationships together" (p. 8). This provided a foundation for me to understand the relational and reciprocal aspects of research that needed to be at the forefront. Kovach (2010) stated, "to embrace Indigenous methodologies is to accept subjective knowledge" (p. 111). Key aspects of Indigenous methodologies that informed the research process were relational accountability, respectful representation, reciprocal appropriation, and rights and responsibilities (Chilisa, 2012). Using an anti-colonial approach recognizes the continued impact of colonization today as well as resilience and resistance by Indigenous Peoples. The goal of this research is to benefit the participants and ultimately, service users in the child welfare system. Participants were treated as co-researchers and experts, with building relationships at the heart of the process.

Methods

In a qualitative approach, data gathering happens through collaborative interactions (Marlow, 2011). In a grounded theory method, participants are selected because of their experience related to the theory being developed. To address the research questions, I used purposeful sampling to recruit participants from three categories: *child welfare social workers, educators,* and *key informants*. As frontline protection workers, social workers have unique insight regarding how social work education prepared them and the role of transformative

education for social change in child welfare. Social work educators teaching child welfare courses could explain their process for teaching students including their course content and teaching methods. Key informants including leaders in the community who are involved in child welfare could speak to the preparation of social workers in the child welfare field and what is needed moving forward.

Participants

Social workers working in child welfare (*n=7*): had to be recent graduates of a BSW program within the last eight years and have two years minimum experience working in a frontline protection role within child welfare. Recent graduates could recall their education experiences more easily and make connections to their field practice. Having two years of experience meant they were informed about their role and the child welfare system.

I recruited protection workers from across the province of Manitoba and the four Child Welfare Authorities. In keeping with the ethics protocol for this project, I began by writing letters to the director of each Authority explaining the purpose of the research and inviting them to share my invitation to participate with staff (see Appendix D and G). Recruitment was limited to Manitoba because the Authorities cover a vast rural and urban area offering mainstream and Indigenous child welfare services.

Social work educators (*n=8*): had to be a faculty member or sessional who had taught a BSW course on child welfare in the past three years. The course could be part of the core curriculum, an elective, or a field focus course. Faculty members could speak about their teaching experiences and the overall social work education system and academic responsibilities toward child welfare.

To recruit social work educators, I sent e-mail invitations to the deans of the prairie schools of social work (University of Manitoba, University of Regina, First Nations University, University of Calgary, MacEwan University, and Mount Royal University) requesting they share with faculty and sessional instructors that have taught child welfare courses (see Appendix E and H). Since the prairie provinces have only a few universities, and the prairies share similar experiences related to child welfare it made sense to expand recruitment to each of these programs.

Key informants (*n*=13): had to be working in some capacity with child welfare service providers and users (e.g., child welfare administrators, supervisors, community program workers, and advocates). Key informants could speak to various aspects, through different perspectives, about how social work education prepares social workers to work in child welfare. Key informants were not limited to the prairie provinces, however this only applied to one participant.

Key informants were identified by participants and through my personal networks working in child welfare and education. I contacted potential key informants directly by e-mail to explain the purpose of the research and invited them to participate (see Appendix F and I).

A poster was included in all recruitment communication for easy access to information about the research (see Appendix L). I also posted a recruitment poster through the Manitoba College of Social Workers (MCSW) electronic newsletter. Participants were encouraged to share information about the research with their peers.

As outlined in Figure 2 and Table 2, there were twenty-eight research participants interviewed across the three prairie provinces that fit into the recruitment groups.

Figure 2

Participants by Group

Participants

■ Child Welfare Workers ■ Educators ■ Key Informants

Table 2

Participants by Location

Child Welfare Workers	$n = 7$ (25%)	MB
Educators	$n = 8$ (29%)	MB (3), SK (3), AB (2)
Key Informants	$n = 13$ (46%)	MB (7), SK (3), AB (2), ON (1)

Between the seven child welfare workers and four of the key informants, all four

Manitoba Authorities were represented in the sample with participant experiences from both

rural and urban practice. Some participants had experiences working with multiple Authorities.

Many of the educators and key informants had also worked at some point directly in the child

welfare system. Most participants were in Manitoba (14). In the educator group, there were three

from Manitoba, three from Saskatchewan and two from Alberta. In the key informant group,

there were seven from Manitoba, three from Saskatchewan, three from Alberta, and one from

Ontario. Many of the participants experiences fit aspects from more than one of the selection

criteria groups, for example most participants had social work degrees and could reflect on their learning experiences as social work students, and many of the educators and key informants worked in various capacities as frontline workers within the child welfare field previously. This offered rich data "to give a full picture of the topic" (Charmaz, 2017, p. 33). Participants could speak to many dimensions of the impact of social work education and working within the child welfare system.

Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview was used to gather information from participants. Interview questions were provided in advance and the interviews lasted between forty-five to ninety minutes (see Appendix J). A conversational interviewing method that focused on the relationship and co-participation informed my approach (Kovach, 2010). I spent time at the beginning of each interview sharing some of my story about motivations and hopes for the project to build relationships with participants based on collaboration and a deep respect for their knowledge and experience. Given my background in child welfare and social work education, building a rapport with participants felt comfortable. Participants seemed to feel at ease and were very forthcoming in sharing their experiences.

Efforts were made to meet with participants in person to achieve a more personal connection; however, eight interviews were conducted over the phone or skype to accommodate schedules and location. I received a small research grant from the Faculty of Social Work Endowment Fund for travel expenses that allowed me to visit Alberta and Saskatchewan to meet with participants in person.

Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by the University of Manitoba Ethics Board. Reflecting on my positions of privilege, I realised that even with ethical measures in place I am afforded the ability to conduct research from the dominant Westernized approach held as the standard in higher education. Having learned from my Indigenous peers and teachers, I felt bound to a more important measure of responsibility based on relationships. When possible, I engaged Indigenous scholars, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers to provide feedback on my research plan throughout. This helped keep me accountable for "getting the story right, telling the story well" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, p.217).

Informed Consent

The purpose of the study and nature of the interviews was explained verbally and in writing to all participants, and consent was obtained prior to the beginning of any interviews (see Appendix C). Anyone working in child protection may be exposed to challenging working conditions and it could have been stressful for participants to discuss their experiences. As a previous child protection worker, I was able to empathise and support participants in our discussion. Resources for additional supports were offered to each participant (see Appendix K). Participants were not compensated for their participation, however, when possible, tea was offered as a gesture of gratitude for their time. Appropriate gifts such as tobacco was offered when requesting help from Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Interviews were audio taped on my iPhone and a back up recorder. Audio files were transferred to a password protected computer directly after the interviews and deleted from the recording devices. All notes and transcripts were coded so that no names were included on any

documents or written information. Anonymity was strictly maintained (using codes) and all documents were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office and in secure computer files. Contact information was stored in a different computer file and cabinet drawer than the anonymized transcripts.

Most of the interviews were transcribed by me and some were transcribed by an experienced transcriber who signed a confidentiality agreement. After every interview was transcribed, I re-listened to the interview audio myself and reviewed each transcript for accuracy. Transcripts were then returned to participants for review. No requests for any revisions were made.

Data Analysis - Constructivist Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is unique in that it constructs the methods of analysis and analysis at the same time (Charmaz, 2008, p. 403). This requires reflexivity on the part of the researcher to scrutinize decisions throughout the research process (Charmaz, 2008). Although both objectivist and constructionist approaches tend to be a part of any grounded theory research, Charmaz (2008) explained that constructionism takes researchers further through their relativism and reflexivity, "critically examining their construction of the research process as they seek to analyze how their research participants construct their lives" (Charmaz, 2006 as cited in Charmaz 2008, p. 403). A social constructivist approach was used to allow for more flexibility to engage in a process of co-constricting meaning and recognizing the social and political context (Charmaz, 2008; Creswell, 2007). The goal was to both explain and understand how social workers are prepared to work in child welfare through social work education (Charmaz, 2008).

Coding Process

Analysis using grounded theory methods is an iterative process using three main types of coding: initial, focused, and theoretical (Mills, Birks & Hoare, 2014). The coding process used for this study is illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Coding Process
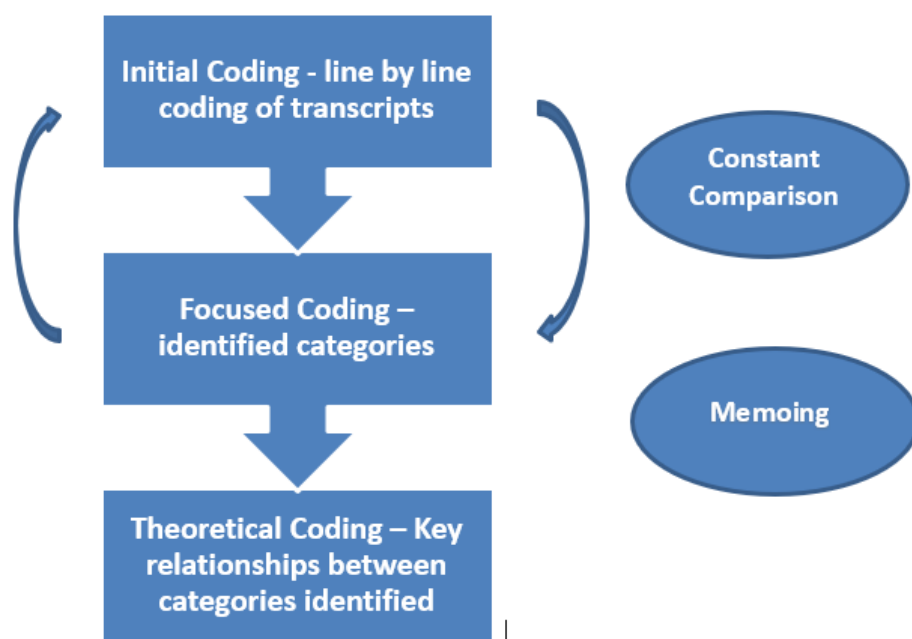
Initial Coding

The initial coding process involves breaking the data into categories for comparison (Mills, Birks, & Hoare, 2014). The researcher *constructs* the codes and examines hidden assumptions to "understand participants views and actions from their perspectives" (Charmaz, 2006, p.47). Charmaz (2006) explained that it is important to remain open during the initial coding to theoretical possibilities and new ideas. Line by line coding is a technique used in initial

coding "to separate data into categories and to see processes" (Charmaz, 2006, p.51). A critical

analysis of the data at this stage asks the following questions:

- What process(es) is at issue here? How can I define it?

- How does this process develop?

- How does the research participant(s) act while involved in the process?

- What does the research participant(s) profess to think and feel while involved in this
  process? What might his or her observed behavior indicate?

- When why and how does the process change?

- What are the consequences of the process? (Charmaz, 2006, p. 51).

A constant comparison method was used throughout, "comparing incidents to incidents,

categories to categories, with the goal of establishing similarities and differences" (Gibson &

Hartman, 2014, p.243).

For the first few interviews, I completed the line-by-line coding in a word document as

shown in Table 3, however the data quickly became overwhelming to manage and I started using

the NVivo data management system to help organise transcripts and codes.

Table 3

Line by Line Coding

Interview Transcript	Line by Line Coding
E1: So, it's good, um, I did my undergrad here right so I'm kind of familiar with the curriculum and what it expects and everything else, I enjoy, I never really envisioned being an educator, but I don't mind it, you know being an academic's good right, you know it's got its pluses and you get to teach! And do research right and be a part of different aspects, so that part I don't mind right.	Imagining future did not include being an educator Enjoying being an academic Teaching is a "plus" Participating in different aspects by researching

Memo – never planned to be an educator, can see the benefit in this role.	
Jen: Mm mm.	
E1: Going frontline, like I know I seen some of the questions um you know I worked with youth growing up, that's that's if I ever had to back in the field it would be with youth, you know probably 12 and under, in that area you know, oh those are great to work with, that's where I started right and you know they're great kids and you know I got to work with the school board, within schools, within different agencies, you know that's probably where I would probably go work with kids but again **I didn't want to work frontline,** ah so that's why I went to school, I said you know that's there's some there's **a lot of issues** and you know I'd **rather go on the other side and become an academic** and you know look at policies and research and and organization stuff, that's where my research is right so you know, it's not too bad, I don't mind it here.	Working with youth in the past Passion for working with youth Working with different agencies Working in frontline was not an interest Attending school to avoid frontline Influencing/changing issues more likely from the academic "other side" Focusing on Policy and Research Feeling satisfied in the work

Focused Coding

Focused coding is a process that advances theory development by examining relationships between categories (Mills, Birks & Hoare, 2014). Charmaz (2006) explained, "focused coding means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data. Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely" (p. 57). This may not happen in a linear way and can cause the researcher to move back and forth through the data as it becomes more explicit (Charmaz, 2006). This is the active and emergent process of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006).

I used several different strategies for focused coding. Within NVivo I was able to review codes and group them together into potential categories. I wrote memos to help define codes,

categories, and relationships. Table 4 is an example of nodes grouped into a category. I also printed codes and memos as shown in Figure 4 for further review to organize and move around before committing to final categories.

Table 4

Focused Coding with Tables

Nodes	Category
Connecting critical thinking to decision making	Developing critical thinking skills
Seeing the bigger picture	
Understanding how historical context impacts practice	
Writing generic case plans without critical thinking	

Figure *4*

Focused Coding with Sticky Notes
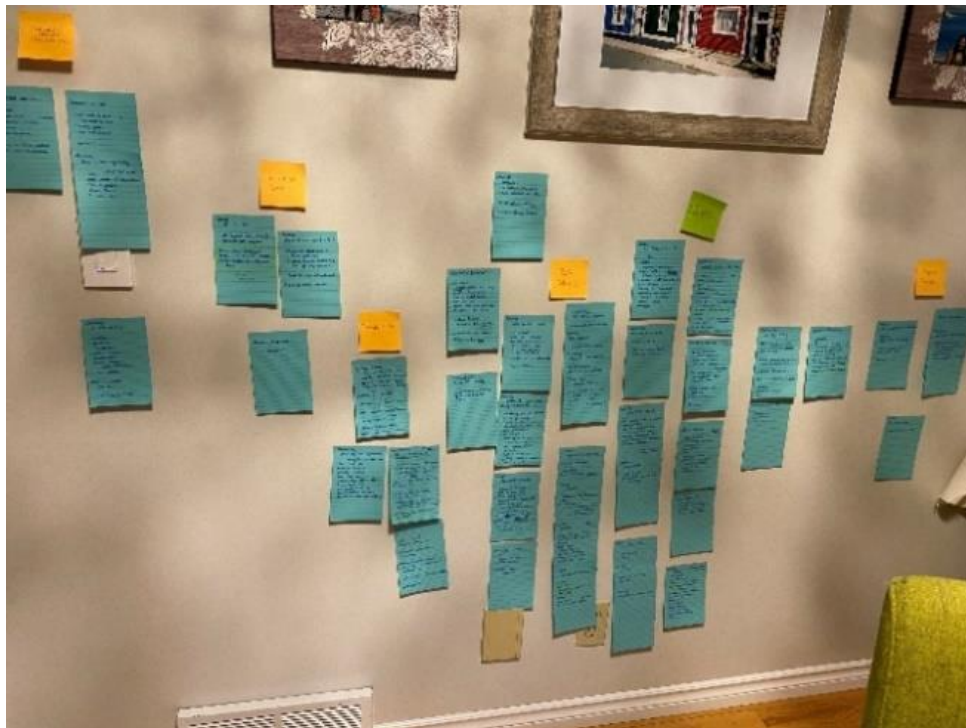
Theoretical Coding

Theoretical coding allows you to develop a storyline that moves toward a theory

(Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this final stage of coding, key relationships

between categories are identified (Creswell, 2017; Gibson & Hartman, 2014). Data collection is

complete when theoretical saturation occurs or when there are no more new ideas coming from

the data (Dey, 2007). The response to recruitment efforts for this study was very positive and

participants were forthcoming with sharing their knowledge and experience. Theoretical

sampling was achieved by returning to interview transcripts to answer questions that came up in

the data and to expand theoretical coding. For example, as negative perceptions of child welfare

became a theme in interviews, I returned to transcripts to examine closer how negative

perceptions developed for each participant and what the impact was on learning and practice.

Table 5 shows how theoretical coding emerged through the coding process. Although presented

in a linear table here, as mentioned earlier the process involved moving and back and forth

between the data.

Table 5

Coding Stages

Raw Data	Initial Coding	Secondary Coding	Theoretical Coding	Memo
I really do think that the education that we have is just like **like a pebble** in the amount of stuff that we have to learn to keep going.	Learning during the degree is just a start. Feeling the degree cannot cover all the content needed to continue in the field.	Ongoing learning is necessary. Providing a foundation to build on.	Developing a commitment to lifelong learning as an ethical responsibility for practice in child welfare.	"Like a pebble" (in vivo code) – good imagery for how much there still is to learn.

Memo Writing and Diagramming

Memos and diagrams are important data analysis tools in grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990) explained that "*memos* represent the written forms of our abstract thinking about data. *Diagrams,* on the other hand, are the graphic representations or visual images of the relationships between concepts" (p. 198). Memo writing and diagramming happen throughout the entire research process. Lempert (2011) explained, "memo writing is the methodological link, the distillation process, through which the researcher transforms data into theory" (p. 245). Lembert (2007) advised memo writing can vary in styles and is a researcher's conversation with themselves as they make sense of the data and develop an emergent theory.

I wrote extensive memos throughout the initial coding process that captured initial thoughts and feelings about the data. These memos helped define codes, facilitated constant comparison within interviews, and documented my reflections on making meaning from the data.

Examples:

Talking circles - connecting personally: *learning has to be a personal journey - need to be engaged on this level for transformation - explain why transformation is important in social work education (unjust systems, history, societal racism/patriarchy) - what do participants say about the kinds of experiences that prompt/facilitate this transformation - under what conditions? What can we set up for/prepare /take responsibility as educators? What impact does this have?*

So called bad kids: *here you can see the participant does not agree with this - understands how kids are labeled and this is not okay. Participant is seeking to make change - shift of thinking - transformative.*

Interview Journal Memos. I kept a reflection journal summarizing key content, analysis, and reflections from each interview. This was created as one document so I could easily move back and forth between interviews for constant comparison within and between interviews. In this journal I practiced reflexivity and captured questions and thoughts for informing future interviews and data analysis. I also kept general notes here defining categories as they emerged. This helped the theoretical coding process as I identified key relationships between categories.

  Examples:

  Once you enter the child welfare system it becomes difficult to achieve certain things. E3 talks about socialization – K6 talks about going back to MSW and learning what you don't have time to learn in the field.

  I felt discouraged when S1 talked about the perception of social workers – nothing good happening if they are at your door. These kinds of discoveries in the data have been challenging, making me question profession that I love, feeling like we are going wrong, but not knowing what an alternative is. Maybe this is a period that is going to finally fill in those gaps ... people with answers to these problems need to have a voice and a platform and if we listen, we just might be able to move forward in a better way.

  Transformation Chart Journal Memos. As illustrated in Table 6, I created a separate chart to capture the process of specific experiences participants shared about transformative learning. This helped in identifying and comparing steps in the learning process and what helped or hindered. This also helped make connections between transformative learning and direct practice implications. I noted perceived impacts on practice (outcomes) and any personal reflection/theory making notes.

Table 6

Memo - Transformation Chart

Method	Actual Event	Change	Practice Impact	Notes
K5: Self-reflection	Listening to women's stories about abuse – understand resilience, complexity of decisions, diversity of human experience Uses this personal experience as an educator to facilitate student self-reflection **You get access to "the wealth of human experience"**	How do I want to be listened to and be understood as a complex human being (not just as a victim) Understanding the contradiction in someone's life Empathy	Not expecting people to be perfect or fit into the perfect response – make the right decisions all the time. Less judgmental	Becoming/Being a social worker. Having access to this learning (stories)

Whiteboard and Doodle Memos. Throughout the analysis process I found creative doodling and drawing out concepts helped me navigate a large amount of data in a meaningful way. Figure 5 shows a whiteboard wall in my home that I jotted codes and categories on to explore relationships and meaning. I also used paper to draw numerous diagrams and pictures to help organize categories, especially during the theoretical coding process. For example, in Figure 6, imagining theory from the data as a flower blooming helped to explore what participants described as a growing process and the kind of environment that nurtured or hindered the

process. Figure 7 is a diagram that illustrates the continuous impact of a negative perception of child welfare.

Figure 5

Memo - White Board Doodles

Figure 6

Memo - Drawings

Figure *7*

Memo - Process Diagrams
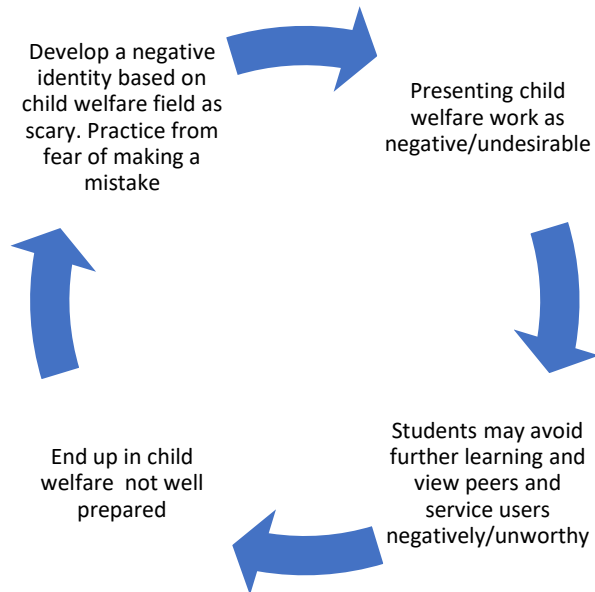
Grounded Theory Analysis Journal Memos. Charmaz (2014) recommends a

methodological journal to capture specific steps and decisions made throughout the research and

grounded theory process. I reflected on strategies used in the interviews to collect data and

decisions made about coding.

> **Example:**

> *I think because my main research question is a "how" it starts out as aspirational and*

> *focused on a plan. My interview questions became more focused when a participant*

> *explained an insight I would ask, and how would you do that, or can you explain a*

> *time/example where that happened? This helped pinpoint those exact*

> *moments/experiences that made a difference – could make a difference.*

Peer Consultation Memos. I kept a journal of meetings with my advisor, committee, and peers who I consulted about the research. Table 7 documents these discussions. I also included conversations with Indigenous Elders and attending specific trainings and events that helped inform the research.

Table 7

Memo - Peer Consultation

Jul 23, 2020	Meeting with Eveline and Knowledge Keeper Linda Dano-Chartrand (see paper notes as well)
	  - Linda talked about the need for social workers "to have to heal" and that we ultimately need to "end suffering" – the idea that everyone is suffering, and we need to address this – "spirit is broken".
	  - Not an individual thing – must do the work that we are asking anyone else to do.
	  - Trauma informed.
	
	Eveline and I discussed categories/concepts emerging from the data.
	  - Helping students cope with not being able to solve all issues in the system.
	  - Need to contextualize – challenge people's perceptions, language "end up in" child welfare.
	  - Jen: "heart of child welfare is about communicating - what people are telling us they need" – not our own needs.
	  - Heart and mind of child welfare.
	  - Our society does not reward self-care.

Aug 27, 2020	Consult with Grounded Theory Workshop Facilitator: Dr. Claire Draucker Keep the process at the forefront – how is learning in social work education transformative, how is learning happening in social work education – how is learning transferred to the field, how do students learn certain skills and knowledges. Think about process questions (rather than thought questions) …

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described reliability and validity in qualitative research as being assessed using the criteria of trustworthiness (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability).

Credibility (Internal validity)

Triangulation. Triangulation was achieved by collecting data from different sources (social workers, educators, key informants, and memos/field notes).

Peer Debriefing. As data was analysed, I met with peers who have experience and knowledge related to social work education and child welfare practice to debrief about the findings and seek feedback.

Member Checking. To achieve credibility and respondent validation, interview transcripts were sent to participants for review and feedback.

Transferability (External validity)

Thick Description. The focus of this research was to develop a theoretical framework that fits social work education and child welfare in the prairie provinces and more specifically Manitoba. Although, there is variation in child welfare delivery systems and social work education programs across Canada, there is enough common ground for this research to be useful in any social work program. It offers a model for research that could be replicated in other social work education settings so that findings more relevant to that context may be discerned. A journal was kept of activities, decisions, and progress made throughout the research process.

Dependability (Reliability)

Audit Trail. As mentioned above, I kept a detailed record of decisions and changes that were made throughout the research process with clear explanations and rationales (Birks, 2014). The research process is laid out in detail for review or replication.

Confirmability

Reflexivity. An important part of the constructivist grounded theory process is reflexivity. Charmaz (2006) described reflexivity as,

The researcher's scrutiny of his or her research experience, decisions, and interpretations

in ways that bring the researcher into the process and allow the reader to assess how and

to what extent the researcher's interests, positions, and assumptions influenced inquiry. A

reflexive stance informs how the researcher conducts his or her research, relates to the

research participants, and represents them in written reports (pp. 188-189).

Kovach (2010) explained, "it is not only the question we ask and how we go about asking them,

but who we are in the asking" (p. 111). I practiced reflexivity through journaling, memo writing,

and consultation with peers and advisors.

When I situated myself earlier, I described my frontline experience as a child welfare

worker and now as an educator and researcher. My background and experience helped me have

perspective about the possibilities in the research process and the data analysis. These

experiences informed my interpretation of the research process and data analysis, however

practicing reflexivity prevented me from forcing any preconceived notions (Charmaz, 2014).

Limitations

One challenge using a grounded theory approach is reviewing the literature without

developing assumptions and the potential for methodological errors (Hussein et al., 2014). Some

critics of grounded theory advise reviewing the literature after analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

I have been studying this topic and the literature in depth as a Ph.D. student. It was important for

me to identify any "pre-conceptions that exist" and "re-review the literature later in the research

process and in light of the discovered concepts" (Xie, 2009, para 22). On the other hand, other

researchers have argued that reviewing the literature is important for developing theoretical

sensitivity,

sensitivity is having insight into the data. The researcher becomes sensitive to what is in

the data through immersion in it, as well as based on the researcher's prior professional

and personal knowledge and experiences. In other words, these insights prepare the

researcher to comprehend and interpret the data. (Hussein et al., 2014, p. 6)

My own practice was to try and step away from the literature during the most in-depth parts of

the data analysis. This helped me to feel immersed in the participants' experiences. After the

main themes were developed, I looked to the literature again to help build on the concepts in the

findings.

This research process hears from social workers, educators, and key informants; however,

recruitment did not include current students or service users. The experiences of services users in

child welfare systems are explored in the literature review and discussion, however service user

knowledge should be an ongoing priority for social work research. Social work student learning

experiences, particularly related to child welfare is less known and requires further research.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the data collected for this study. After careful review and coding of the interviews, several themes emerged. Broadly speaking, the data proposes a core theme of transformative learning as a process of sharing, growing, and changing. The findings are organised here by considering each research question. The chapter begins by exploring findings related to how social work education impacts child welfare generally. This sets the stage for the next section, reviewing the key knowledge and skills participants identified as necessary for child welfare practice. Which leads into the heart of the study, the next section on how participants described transformative learning experiences that impact child welfare practice. In this section, stories of transformative learning are presented in the following categories: experiential learning, peer learning, practicing self-reflection and awareness, and developing critical thinking. The following sub-themes that support and facilitate transformative learning for child welfare are also presented: learning from multiple perspectives, learning in safe spaces, working through realistic/complex scenarios, self-care, and a commitment to life-long learning. Looking at how learning is transferred to practice is summed up in the final section with a focus on field education. Connections between the findings and the literature, and consideration for a model for social work education based on the themes is presented in the discussion section in the next chapter.

Participant's quotations are presented as much as possible to honor their voices and contributions in their own words. In the presentation of quotations from participants, placeholder verbalizations have been removed for sake of readability, as shown below in Table 8.

Table 8

Raw Data Cleaning

Raw Data	Quotes presented in thesis
"You need to listen to other people's truth and other people's journey's because it's not ours **like** it's theirs it's not ours so when you come into a family **like** it's a privilege and so listen, like you have to learn from that" (K3).	"You need to listen to other people's truth and other people's journey's because it's not ours, it's theirs it's not ours so when you come into a family it's a privilege and so listen, like you have to learn from that" (K3).

Research Question: How Does Social Work Education Impact Child Welfare?

Dirty Little Secret: Describing the Child Welfare Field

Child welfare work is widely recognised as complex and difficult work in part because of the negative perception of child welfare. One participant working as a protection worker stated, "nothing good is happening if you have two social workers coming to your door" (S1). According to participants, several factors contribute to this negative perception of child welfare. It may come from their own experiences in the system, which can serve as a catalyst for wanting to enter the field and change it. One participant felt the way child welfare is presented and discussed during classes, "deters people from wanting to even look into more child welfare or like I never want to be a protection worker because I'm not that type of person, I'm not, you know, that type of mindset" (K3). Most participants who had experience working in frontline child protection work stated they had not planned to *"end up"* in child welfare. This presented a concern, that if students could not see themselves working in child welfare, they might not see the need to learn about it at all. Yet, as numerous participants pointed out, most social work graduates will work for some period in the child welfare system.

Participants frequently used terminology appropriate to a battlefield to describe their experiences in child welfare. They talked about "surviving" in the child welfare system and

described it as "scary" and "in the trenches" kind of work. Certainly, there is truth to aspects of child welfare work being scary, complicated, and stressful. Being scary is not necessarily a deterrent, after all social workers are interested in addressing big social problems, but it is not the whole picture either. One educator explained the importance of learning about social work from a variety of sources so students can hear multiple perspectives,

> I worked really hard to try and reframe that. It is a difficult job, even to be portrayed negatively. There's a number of organizational and political barriers that we have to work in, but there's often many rewards. You know, what do we get out of child welfare, when we're working in child welfare, and what are some of the rewards? So again, always bringing that back to sort of balance. (E2)

Faculty should be mindful that if they have limited experience in child welfare or view it negatively, it's important to provide other views, so students can make informed decisions and have opportunities to explore all areas of practice. Social work educators should consider this responsibility to a field like child welfare that is dominated by social workers, regardless of personal experience or interest. If child welfare is portrayed as negative and undesirable work, this may impact how service users involved in that system are portrayed. Whether students end up in child welfare or not, they may work with the same families in other systems. One educator stated,

> we want social workers to enter the field with a foundational belief in the inherent goodness of families, in a belief that families can and do change, in a belief that even the most multi-problem family has strengths, and our job is always to have that foundation of belief, but we always have to balance that with what children need and with ensuring that children are safe. (E2)

Striking a balance is necessary, because participants also expressed the importance of not "sugar-coating" child welfare work. Presenting a realistic picture is necessary to prepare students for the actual work and challenges they will face. This study provides guidance for working toward this balance.

A participant in an administrative role explained child welfare can feel like "a dirty little secret" and she avoids disclosing where she works in public because it's uncertain where the conversation could go (K6). This speaks to the burden negative societal perceptions about child welfare can have on people working in the system.

Part of the challenge is lack of opportunities to share good news stories from the field about when the system works. Due to confidentiality, workers are not able to share openly the stories that show the work they do is important and at times lifesaving. Opportunities to examine all aspects of child welfare should be offered to students during their social work education. As the educator mentioned above stated, the work comes with many rewards as well.

Sink or Swim: Preparing Students for Work in Child Welfare

Understanding diversity among social work students is necessary when thinking about education strategies. Social identity and life experience impact students learning experiences and what they gain from learning opportunities. One educator explained,

> the social workers that are coming out and who are well white I guess middle class, you know younger female, that's whose coming out into to social work and that's whose working with my people and you know what do they know, for lived experience and I think that's detrimental for people or this profession. (E1)

"Detrimental for people" is strong language reflecting the influence of whether students are prepared to work in this complex field where most service users are marginalised. Another

educator questioned how we can really know if students are prepared, "Are they really ready just because they go through a bunch of courses and a couple of practicums" (K5). Participants acknowledged there are certain things about child welfare practice you just can not know until you are in the field and experiencing it for yourself (e.g., workload, child apprehension). One participant compared this to teaching a doctor how to do stitches, but not how to do it for 30 people at once in the emergency room.

Education can also give people permission to feel entitlement and power over others. Talking with one participant about why some workers seem more authoritative, they stated, "I think it comes from, I know better than you because I'm educated, and this is my job, and you don't know because you don't know" (S1). Here the worker is using education to claim power for themselves. It is important during their degree, for students to explore these vulnerabilities and how insecurities can manifest themselves in ways that could cause harm in practice. Working within the child welfare system seems to lend itself to this dilemma.

Feeling Prepared … or Not?

Participants described child welfare as a unique practice environment due to the high levels of bureaucracy, power dynamics, and the complex needs of service users often due to structural and systemic inequities. Most participants expressed concern that students are not adequately prepared,

> a degree is great, and it gives you this base, but it doesn't teach you how to be a child welfare worker … the work is so hard and emotionally hard, and I don't think people are prepared or it. Even with my experience, I wasn't prepared for a lot of how hard it was gonna be. (S1)

Lots of the time people are just like you're hired; you might be able to shadow someone

for a little while and then you're just out there doing it … And it's really unfair to the

worker but especially unfair to the children and families that you're working with. (K3)

Participants described many well-known challenges in the child welfare field, including,

high case loads and isolation as well as larger systemic issues such as racism, sexism, limited

resources, and poor outcomes for youth transitioning out of care. Witnessing these realities for

the first time in the field can be "overwhelming" and "shocking" if not brought forward during

their education. Workers are tasked with making difficult decisions within rigid boundaries and

systems which can limit creativity. Participants talked about the reality of having to "learn on the

job", one person explained,

I think it's the environment in child welfare, how do you stay alive in the bureaucracy?

And basically, a bureaucracy that, you know, if you feel like you make a mistake, you

can go under. Who supports you? Who supports child welfare workers? I think those are

issues. I don't think we do enough on that end. (K5)

Beyond the practical challenges of knowing how to do the day-to-day work, when graduates are

not prepared for working in this environment, the very essence of social work ethics and values

can become compromised because of the stress starting in the field. The foundation of social

work knowledges, values, and skills may be phased out and replaced with a mindset of survival

in a scary system. One participant described the potential to be overcome by the "work culture"

(K4) and the risk of becoming complacent. This can lead to losing a critical lens because it feels

like there is no time for thinking. This participant cautioned, your work can become a

"compartmentalized assembly line" (K4).

Another participant described the potential socialization and "re-education" process that can happen when graduates start in child welfare,

> for students who are not strong as far as their values stance, they're easily swayed and socialized into that system … I think that's one area where we're not doing a good job in preparing social workers because I think too many of them are too easily socialized into those systems where it's about maintaining the status quo, getting power where people can meet their own personal needs, and then just go on their winter vacations every year. So, I think that socialization really tends to quell any maybe social justice advocacy emphasis that individual graduates may have. Yeah, and somehow it gets lost in the mix of now I have my career and I don't want to make waves, because I don't want to lose my job and things are working well so I'll just kind of go along with it. (E3)

This participant suggested education needs to do a better job at openly addressing these power dynamics and helping students learn "the effective use of power and authority" (E3). They explained how difficult it is to create any change at the frontline level, "I would just get in trouble with my supervisor and the manager cause, I would make decisions that are purely in the interest of the children and their families" (E3). This demonstrated the potential barriers in child welfare to fully realise your social work values and practice from a social justice lens. Working in child welfare can feel like swimming against the current and having to navigate an ongoing compromise of social work values. Other participants echoed this and explained the reason they went into administrative, or education/research roles was because they thought that was necessary to effect change in the child welfare system,

> I had several years where I managed a caseload. I supervised and did case work supervision for 3 years, which drove me back to school to do a PhD, cause I thought if

you want to change the child welfare system, you kinda have to be in the position to be able to do that. (E8)

Participants described a variety of challenges facing new social work graduates entering the child welfare system, including lack of training delivered in a timely way, limited support, heavy workload, managing conflict, and operating in such a large system. In particular, the burden in a field like child welfare to act as both a social control and social care agent can be frustrating and overwhelming. Reflecting on these challenges, one participant stated,

you just doubt yourself constantly, you really have to build up your self-esteem and your ability to face conflict, carrying that dual role is really challenging for people in terms of having this mandate to protect children but also, every course I've ever been in they always ask why are you in social work? I want to help people and so you want to help, but then your participants don't trust you and you're constantly in that battle saying trust me I'm here to help. But they always know at the end of the day you carry that power. It's just really hard to balance that, not blurring boundaries, because you grow really attached to people, you see them do well, and as a new worker you take on their failures as a reflection of the work you're doing which we really have to let that go. (S2)

The "battle" here is about the need to know how to engage with families and build trust in a system where you have tremendous power over service users and where that power has at times been abused. This is the nature of the system graduates enter into and the use of battle language illustrates the struggle and responsibility for workers to earn trust. This can be time-consuming difficult work that social work education should be preparing students for. Participants expressed developing self-awareness and communication skills are key. This is examined in more detail in the sections on transformative learning and what students need to learn.

Another consequence of not being prepared is the ability to maintain hope, "you come in with this hopefulness, with this knowledge, and then it can be forgotten with the daily overwhelming tasks that you're faced with" (K4). Workers may feel there is no time to assess structural challenges such as poverty and when they do recognise these barriers, it may seem too big to address (K6). Learning what to do next, how to tackle these systemic problems through action, is an area participant's identified education programs could strengthen for child welfare. Education has focused on how to provide good services to families after they enter the system instead of imagining a different system (K1).

Exploring Child Welfare Courses in a Generalist Program

Child welfare is a main area of practice for social work. Accordingly, it makes sense that this should be reflected in social work education programs. The three main pathways for students to learn about child welfare during their degree are:

- as a topic in a course (typically one unit or case study),

- as a focused elective (on child welfare or aspect of child welfare),

- and during a field placement in a child welfare agency.

Most programs offer a child welfare related course as an elective, however space for electives is limited. In the core curriculum, child welfare may be covered in one or two classes depending on the educator's interest and experience. One educator explained it is impossible to teach the "in and out" of child welfare (Indigenous and mainstream) as part of a class or even in one child welfare class,

> It's kind of woven, but it's not exclusive, it's maybe a week, you know or three hours out
> of 39 hours, only three hours! They're not getting [what they need], but I think they're
> craving it and that's what they want. (E1)

Most participants involved in teaching child welfare courses felt students appreciated the opportunity to learn about child welfare. In my own experience teaching child welfare courses, a common response from students is that they did not want to work in the child welfare field; but after taking the course they would consider it because their views of child welfare were broadened. One educator participant explained if students decide child welfare is not for them following their course, that's a positive thing as well. For another educator, participating in this research prompted a conversation with other faculty about the need for students to learn and understand child welfare to change the system and address issues. Reflecting on their existing program, the participant realized, "wait a minute, this makes no sense the way we are doing it, child welfare is a main aspect of social work right, and if you're not learning any of it then it kind of defeats the purpose" (E1).

The goal of a generalist degree is to obtain a broad knowledge, values, and skills base to work in a variety of settings. And within the degree there are opportunities to pursue learning more about child welfare if the student is interested. As one participant noted, a generalist degree, "gives the foundation around sort of the ontology if you will, ways of understanding why social work exists" (K4). An educator's experience frames the content of a course, highlighting the importance of having faculty with child welfare experience,

> I bring child welfare into all the courses that I teach, that's my frame of reference, not just as a child welfare practitioner, but also the policy development and administrative aspects of child welfare, the more wholesome kind of range than just frontline child welfare practice that a lot of our students will go into. (K1)

This holistic approach shows the breadth of child welfare and may be more effective woven throughout courses as suggested by Elder Don Robinson in the literature review, rather than only

focusing on a child welfare course. Another participant explained that educators continuing to work in some capacity with the child welfare system can also positively impact teaching, "because it's really keeping me abreast of all of the sort of issues that are going on even though I come at it from an academic perspective" (E3).

One key informant with experience working in education and frontline roles suggested it makes sense to focus on broader frameworks for child welfare practice,

> for me one of the key elements is that everything is interconnected, and maybe using a framework from you know a healthy child, within the world health organization sense of healthy functioning, maybe that should be our goal and then you actually see how do our systems and services support a child becoming that healthy person? So, turning it around a bit and then making sure that our social service system is structured so that you know there's no such things as poverty. (K2)

This need to balance the aspirational aspects of education (see Figure 8) with practical learning

Figure 8

Balanced Learning

Aspirational Learning

Practical Learning
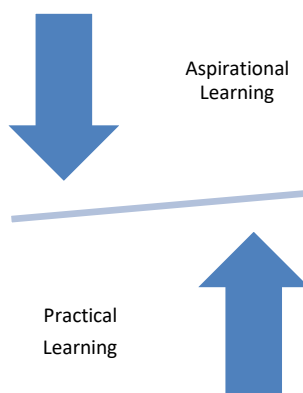
to meet the day-to-day needs of service users was explored throughout the research. An important part of transformative learning is being able to imagine systems differently, recognizing that change is possible and a more just approach to child welfare is worth working towards. However, just as we might imagine a cure for an illness in the medical field, in the meantime doctors still need to be educated to manage symptoms. Care work must continue as we strive toward a cure (E. Milliken, personal communication, October 22, 2000).

As discussed in the literature review, the education system itself is dominated by western Eurocentric ideologies. Preparing students for working in child welfare requires transforming how one understands education. One educator described the responsibility for educators to shape the education system,

> that's part of our job as social workers to advocate within our systems, the post-secondary education system for better pedagogy … whether it's older learners or younger learners, to develop these opportunities here that's not just about what's convenient for us or for the institution. (K1)

Another educator explained they see their role as part of the change, "child welfare is a social work system. We have power and control to change that system, so we need to walk in with the idea that maybe we can do pieces of that" (E6). This in turn models for students how they can approach their work in the field as well.

A generalist degree can prepare students for a start in child welfare, with the expectation that agencies will provide the necessary orientation and additional training required. A concern raised by participants was that training and continued learning opportunities do not always fill this need. Unless graduates return for graduate school, after they finish their BSW the relationship with the university typically ends. In the field, core training may take up to two years to complete and graduates do the best they can in the meantime. One frontline worker lamented, "I feel like everyone I've ever talked to that's gone to core competency training has the same feeling after you leave … you're like, I've been doing it wrong this whole time" (S6).

Research Question: Which Specific Knowledges and Skills are Necessary for Future Child

Welfare Social Workers?

The following is a broad overview of four key areas participants identified as important

knowledges and skills for child welfare practice. I introduce these here as a foundation for

examining the possibilities of transformative

education that is presented in more detail in the

following sections. The importance of

relationships for ethical practice in child welfare

was a common theme across interviews. To

achieve this goal, participants identified the

most important areas to prepare for practice

centered around: communication and

assessment, navigating large systems and

policy, understanding child development and

trauma, and learning about cultural and diversity

(see Figure 9).

Figure 9

Key Knowledges and Skills

Communication/Assessment Knowledge and Skills for Building Relationships

Not surprisingly, participants identified engagement and assessment skills as essential for

building relationships and "getting to the root of an issue" in child welfare practice. One

participant explained that it is less about how much you know and more about how skilled you

are in gathering information,

> I have a confidence in my knowledge to be able to say, I don't know. And I don't know
>
> doesn't mean I can't help, or I can't support, but it does mean I can't know your

experience, and I can't know the way in which answers can be found in your cultural

experience … and so the skill becomes, how do I ask? How do I inquire? How do I

come from a position of I don't know the knowledge? What I know are pathways, what I

know is how to build connections. (E7)

However, a common dilemma identified by participants was heavy workload demands which

interferes with the time and energy required for authentic engagement. One participant stated it

frightens her when she hears workers say they have no time to do clinical work. That means

workers are not using their skills to build relationships that will allow them to understand

people's experiences and work collaboratively. Another participant stated,

we say we're strength-based but even how we write our dictation, how we do all of this,

is very negative-based. We talk about how many times kids run away. We don't talk

about how many times kids actually stay where they're supposed to. (K6)

Workers may feel frustrated that they are not using the theories and skills they learned during

their degree. Participants explained that it would be helpful to learn the local child welfare

assessment format and tools during their education, specifically regarding assessing risk. They

also cautioned about having "grandiose ideas" as students writing assessments and the

importance of being realistic. Workers need to be able to complete meaningful assessments that

clearly connect interventions with goals and outcomes that are measurable. One participant

admitted they often cut and paste the standard *to do* list for a caregiver in a case plan or court

document. Another stated, "I think we operate in such a fast-paced system that, you know, we

intervene, move on to the next one" (K7).

Participants working in protection roles acknowledged the importance of their

interpersonal communication course, even the dreaded role-play exercises for helping develop

their engagement skills, particularly for working in a mandated setting like child welfare. One participant stated, "I mean nobody likes to role play, but I learned so many practical skills in that class and other's I've talked to as well [agree]" (K13).

Child Developmental Knowledge and Skills – Necessary for Assessment

Most participants with experience working in protection roles identified the importance of learning about child development and the impact of trauma for completing accurate assessments and case plans. Participants felt this was an area for improvement in education, especially how this relates to systemic barriers and social determinants of health,

> in terms of the different forms of abuse, I don't feel like that was really talked about in our education … we get to learn them once we're out in the field, but the reality is when you start working in the child welfare field, you actually don't do any training … you just kind of learn as you go. (S5)

> there's just a lot of very social economic issues that are impacting families. But we don't talk about like how children, specifically, are affected by those things, like ever. Even in Human Behaviour like we don't talk about how those specific things impact children. We just talk about this is what the normal development of a child is. (S1)

> that was one of my huge struggles coming out was around assessing family, how do you assess a child's development if you don't even know what a typical child development might even look like. (S2)

Participants acknowledged that understanding how trauma impacts service user's behavior can help explain a lot of what is happening, and workers might be less punitive in their

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response, "a lot of our clients have been traumatized somewhere … We're not trying to punish people. People are acting the way they do because they've been traumatized" (K8).

Policy Knowledge and Skills – Understanding Oppressive Systems

Participants identified the importance of understanding how the child welfare system works within larger political and economic systems. This includes history and the way systems maintain inequality through systemic oppression. A participant working as a protection worker described learning about different ideologies in their policy course was transformative because they learned about different views of human nature, "how do we view society and how that then impacts people's policy making" (S3).

Participants indicated limited opportunity to influence policy, however if students felt better equipped with skills for policy making and analysis this could change. Participants recognised that system level and policy changes are required to address the challenges in child welfare. One participant stated she had numerous peers who left child welfare,

> when I talked to them, it was because they felt that they weren't practicing social work. They had been really sort of institutionalized into this model, this child protection model, and there was no wiggle room for them to make any change, so they felt powerless, so they ended up leaving … I think that it's almost an insurmountable barrier to try as a social worker at the practitioner level to make any changes in the system. (K3)

Participants felt frontline workers should speak into policy because they see how policy impacts service. A participant in a senior administrative role explained the operational and policy sides of child welfare work have a "natural rub" where neither side fully understands or values what the other side is doing. Educators have more flexibility in their roles to share openly with students' critical feedback about what is not working in the child welfare system,

that's a unique position that perhaps I am in … that I have no limitations or boundaries

around what I can talk about because if you're in the field, sometimes you feel restricted

in terms of what you can say and what you can't say. (E5)

For learning, participants stated case studies are important tools for making connections

to larger systems (families) and structures (policies). One key informant stated, "a key element is

the use of case studies and being able to link the individual or family or community with a

broader structural perspective or an understanding of policies that impact social work

interventions and impact families or laws or jurisdictional issues" (K2). An educator explained

case studies should be, "designed to cause students to have to have faced the kinds of decision-

making a child welfare worker is going to have to face" (E7).

Cultural Knowledge and Skills

Participants identified cultural knowledge as necessary for social work practice in child

welfare, in particular Indigenous knowledges. One participant identified the need to move

beyond just understanding to making space for other cultures, "make sure that you're respecting,

and not just respecting but actually creating space for an Indigenous culture" (K6).

Participants described the importance of distinguishing Indigenous child welfare from

mainstream as having its own history, ways of knowing, and ways of caring. As noted in the

literature review, Indigenous child welfare is diverse, depending on different jurisdictions and

community experiences. Social work education has a responsibility to prepare and support

Indigenous social workers who may have additional responsibilities to family, and community.

Many Indigenous social workers return to their communities and become leaders when they are

educated,

Indigenous people, we take up a huge part of child welfare and our kids are being part of

the system, you know and if you're not learning any of it, you're not going to help them,

right? I talked to a colleague of mine last week and he said, you know we need to teach

the students how to get their kids back. (E1)

Teaching students *"how to get their kids back"* demonstrates the transformative potential of

education to restore a wrong. The overinvolvement of the child welfare system with Indigenous

families is a systemic social issue that the social work profession participates in and therefore has

an ethical duty to respond to. Equipping students with the knowledge and skills to know how to

make these changes is part of the responsibility of educators; educators "must answer the call"

(E8). This goes beyond just learning how to work within the current system. Indigenous

knowledges about child-caring and child welfare approaches have not been given enough weight

in social work education and this is mirrored in the field.

One educator shared how they connect learning about cultures and Indigenous Peoples to

personal reflection and awareness in their child welfare course,

talking a lot about Indigenous child welfare, talking about Truth and Reconciliation and

what that really means, what that means for us personally, what that means for us as

social workers professionally and really digging deep and starting with ourselves. What

are our beliefs? What are our experiences? What are our values? … It's always about

continuing to learn but starting with an awareness of who we are and what we bring to

that table; and how, you know, what we know is not necessarily right, and how we need

to really sit with families and learn from them about what their experiences are and what

they need from us. (E2)

Learning with a Twist

Participants described their processes of transformative learning in various ways, however common threads were expressions of *sharing and growing* that led to change (see Figure 10). Learning through relationships by sharing knowledges and lived experiences and supporting one another were ingredients for personal growth and development. This learning contributes to how one identifies as a social work practitioner. Transformative learning that happens during education shifts thinking and impacts practice (shifts behavior), creating space and a foundation for transforming child welfare. One educator explained,

Figure 10

Sharing, Growing, Changing
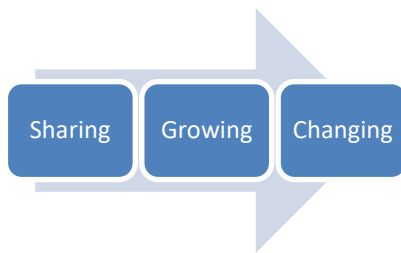
I didn't want to work frontline, so that's why I went to school, I said you know there's a lot of issues and I'd rather go on the other side and become an academic and look at policies and research and organization. (E1)

This participant had reflected on their early field work with kids, "so called bad kids they call them" (E1). They disagreed with this labelling and understood change for these kids required getting to the root of an issue. They wanted to follow a path that would present the best opportunity for change and saw the platform of an educator as having the possibility for transformation, to shift thinking about how one sees themselves and others.

Another educator explained transformation as naturally occurring in all our lives and that social work education offers opportunities to explore this. Through transformative learning experiences we become better human beings, ready to begin social work practice. One participant explained developing a vision of the "ideal" system as an important transformative part of education,

I mean there's a reality-based focus and then there's what would an ideal child welfare system or society look like, I think that's the transformative piece, you may have to work within the reality but you're always aiming, you're always aiming for a better society, a better structure, better policies, and better services. (K1)

Students may not understand what they are signing up for when they start in social work. They know they want to help but may not realise the messiness and complexity of the world and the ongoing commitment for critical self-reflection required. They are not going to be able to just apply a practice and solve a problem. Educators move students beyond that surface level understanding of helping. Educators want to see students grow and learn how to continue evolving,

But maybe the first part in what we do in this notion of transformative social work education is just preparing students for the idea that that's necessary … Always getting them to think about things just differently from what they normally do and continually kind of challenging that. I had a student say, what's the twist? There's always a twist. (K5)

Transformative Learning Processes

Listening to participants experiences and sitting with the data led to the process of transformative learning outlined in Figure 11. As part of the data analysis, I kept a memo journal of experiences when participants described a significant learning event that prepared them or their students for working in child welfare. Participants described engaging in learning activities that confronted them, often in uncomfortable ways to engage in self-reflection. Through this exchange of information or sharing in an experience, students were presented with alternative ways of thinking and doing that facilitated rethinking their position. At this point there may be

some resistance to new learning and change; as well as the possibility for growth and transformation if new learning is applied. This can impact and change the way a person views themselves and the world which ultimately influences how they practice. The following sections explore participants stories about how this transformative learning comes to life in education and what helps or hinders the process.

Figure 11

Transformative Learning Process
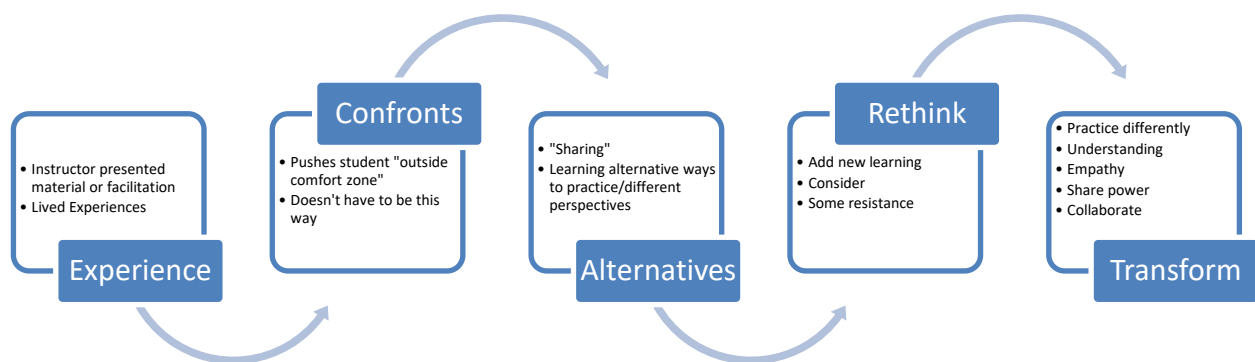
This research shows the important aspect of personal growth that is necessary during the BSW to prepare students for the field, particularly child welfare. Students will have different experiences of growth. However, two areas of transformative learning stand out: students being exposed to a new experience or story and students being invited to share their own knowledge and story. Being exposed to new learning is an experience that students must then confront through deep reflection that leads to self-awareness. Being invited to share empowers students and may also contribute to others learning. This sharing can be the experience another student is being exposed to. As students confront, share, and reflect, they grow and develop. Consciousness raising is happening. The more students have these experiences and are supported in their personal growth, the stronger they are in their identity, values, and ethics when they graduate.

Participants described learning experiences that influence child welfare practice in the following categories: experiential hands-on learning, peer learning, practicing self-reflection and awareness, developing critical thinking, and field education (see Figure 12). Learning from multiple perspectives, learning in safe spaces, working through realistic/complex scenarios, self-care, and a commitment to life-long learning were identified as key ingredients that helped facilitate transformative experiences and feeling prepared to work in child welfare (see Figure 13). Although I've categorised these learning experiences for the purpose of presenting the findings of this study, they need not happen in isolation. Self-reflection and critical thinking happen during experiential learning and vice versa.

Participants advised that educators influence the possibility of transformation in education by modeling what they want students to learn and practice, namely non-judgemental attitudes, ethical behavior, good communication skills, and a commitment to lifelong learning. This is demonstrated by educators in their relationships with others and with students. One participant explained,

> really from the outset I think the instructor, the professor being able to set that stage, their own self locating, having that sort of transparency, regardless of what their experiences have been, help to create an opportunity for people to open up that kind of learning. (K4)

A part of transformative learning in social work education is the process of developing your identity as a social worker. Participants described this process of *"becoming"* (K5) as a combination of experiences that shape who you are, facilitate personal growth, and develop an awareness of who you are in the helping relationship in child welfare. All necessary components for ethical social work that is grounded in social justice. One participant explained,

the real challenge is staying true to your social work roots without getting sucked into what the system needs from you. You know what I'm saying? It comes back to who's your supervisor and who's in your office and all that kind of stuff around support but it's so easy in an agency that doesn't mandate just social workers to do their work, that you just become a part of the milieu around, you know you've got psychologists over here and you've got, and you never really talk about that. You never really talk about your background and so you become just a worker. And by just a worker, I don't mean to minimize the work because I think the models, we've adopted are important but like we talked about before, if your application of a model is not based in social work, then there's a real risk that it just becomes another brokering tool. (K10)

Figure 12

Learning Experiences that Facilitate Transformative Learning
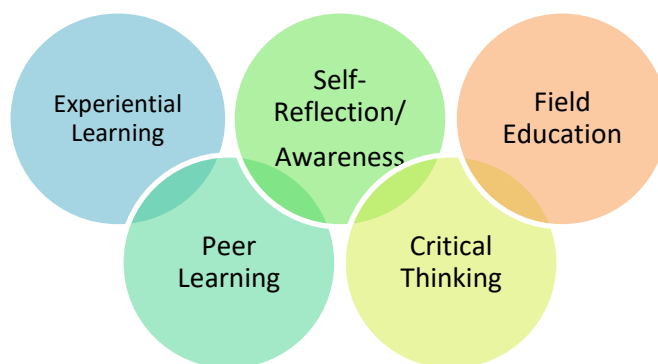
Experiential learning

Participants described how experiential or "hands on" experiences helped to make sense and give purpose to what they were learning. These learning opportunities helped facilitate reflective practices when you could see "something in action". One educator stated, "you can't learn this stuff from a textbook, it has to affect you personally" (E4).

Examples of experiential learning that participants described were, engaging in cultural ceremonies, listening to stories, going on field trips, and participating in a child welfare practicum. Experiential learning helped facilitate self-awareness and develop a social work identity. One participant explained,

> I think it's important, given the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care, that we really embody that Indigenous knowledge, you know how can we come to that as an ally? … Through that experiential learning you know … I think encompassing that knowledge and that understanding, developing that lens is crucial for breaking down some of that micro-racism. (K4)

Another participant described the impact of participating in a sharing circle at the start and finish of each class. The educator sat in the circle as each person had a turn to share. This reminded the participant of the power held as a social worker mirrored by the educator. In practice, this participant stated she is reminded to create opportunities to reduce the power imbalance between herself and the service user.

Educators may feel various comfort levels offering these types of learning opportunities. One participant described some academics as living in an "academic bubble" (K6). Educators may need support and opportunities to learn how to engage in meaningful transformative ways which can come from program and university administrations.

Peer Learning

One of the most significant learning experiences for participants was the opportunity to learn from their peers. *Learning to learn from others* is an important skill that is then transferred to the field in the way students engage in relationships with service users and colleagues. It is transformative in shifting student's thinking in the classroom, but also in practice for how to

build relationships that challenge the social worker's role as expert. This is especially important in a field like child welfare, where social worker's hold such authority. Peer learning helps to build listening skills and humility. One participant explained,

> you need to listen to other people's truth and other people's journey's because it's not ours, it's theirs it's not ours, so when you come into a family it's a privilege and so listen, you have to learn from that. (K3)

Another participant described "group learning" as an immersive experience to really dig deep and build relationships, "there was that opportunity to self-locate and to share, to learn from each other's experiences … it was opportunity to not only learn the curriculum being taught but also from each other … actually scary too" (K4). These opportunities for peer learning and peer teaching help students become more actively engaged. Exploring these kinds of relationships with peers prepares you for relationships in the field. The notion of this being a scary process is important, because in the field this fear could prevent you from really seeking to understand the people you are working with and their circumstances. Having opportunities to practice this during your education and with the support of educators and peers is important preparation. The same participant went on to share the importance of,

> experiential learning opportunities in group work or in the classroom, where social workers as human beings are able to develop more emotional intelligence around how they interact with others, and that whole sort of interconnectedness of you know relationship building, as a foundation for any work that we do with people. (K4)

Some of the characteristics of class discussion that participants appreciated was having space and time to share perspectives respectfully. Appreciating student knowledge as valuable is an important aspect of peer learning. These powerful learning experiences do not have to negate

the value in what educators are offering, rather they offer additional layers of learning that becomes part of the growing process. Educators should be committed to what they hope students will learn as opposed to them only hearing what the educator has to say. One participant explained,

> there were discussions and everyone's opinion was valued. It wasn't always where everyone's opinion was, that's the right one. It was you had as much time to speak as the next person and that was valuable, cause in other courses that wasn't the case, you know. Nobody said a word. The prof was the only person and the only opinion that mattered and really you needed to be able to take everything that they said back to them in papers and in exams, whereas in social work it was more reflections and what do you take from this, and what are you gonna do with this information going forward? And, if you were doing this case, what would you do? And then let's talk about that. So those were helpful tools. (S1)

Group Work. In my experience, students tend to have mixed feelings about group work. It might depend on who is in your group, but the reality is that in the field and particularly in child welfare you will likely work as part of a team that is assigned within the agency and work with an even larger group across systems and disciplines. Learning to navigate group dynamics and find your voice is an important skill. Participants talked about their hesitations toward group work. One participant explained it was because everyone works differently, but acknowledged that might be an argument for more group work,

> I think that it's a valuable tool because we have to work collaboratively with so many different people to be able to do the work that we do. We have to work with schools, we have to work with biological families, we have to work with foster families, we have to

work within the system, we have to work outside of the system sometimes. And to be

able to do that, we have to be able to communicate, and learn how to do that and doing

group work made us do that. So, I think that was definitely a valuable tool. I still don't

like it, but it's valuable. (S1)

Sharing Research. One participant explained the opportunities to present research in

class helped prepare them to continue this practice during team meetings in the field and when

supervising workers. They explained the importance of understanding how research can be used

in the field to answer practice questions when working with families,

I think that's what I'm trying to do is help staff to look at the evidence-based practice, not

to be in crisis all the time cause that's the other option. You're just constantly in crisis,

right? Here, throw a voucher for groceries at it, throw a taxi at it, you know, just throw a

service at it, no thought about the planning. Research gives us the models to create plans

that can be successful. (K8)

Using research in the decision-making process helps expand knowledge of possible

interventions. Many students may only see research as something you do for academic papers,

and not make the ongoing connections to everyday practice.

Practicing with Peers in the Classroom. Participants cautioned about waiting until the

field placement to start "practicing" your developing skills on real people with complex issues

and where you hold a lot of power even as a student. It should be expected that students have

achieved a certain level of skill before working with people in the field, especially where people

may feel vulnerable. Participants talked about the value in building peer relationships in the

classroom with students and teachers to create safe places to ask practical questions, be

vulnerable, and explore boundaries. Otherwise, you could graduate feeling like you're supposed

to know everything, and your work becomes about proving you are the expert. Not being able to admit when you are wrong or that you do not know something can be harmful to service users,

> Like when is it okay to say, you know what, today, I am not on my game and I know if I go to this meeting, I'm probably gonna mess it up, and I should probably not go to that meeting. Or do I have to go to this meeting, how do I get myself back into the mode to be able to handle the meeting. (S1)

Learning from Mistakes. Observing other people's practice is a powerful learning tool. One participant stated, "I think the biggest people that I've learned from are the ones that have practiced so wrong, that I've seen do practice not good" (K3). Participants shared the importance of educators sharing their own mistakes. This is another way that educators can model learning for students. Talking openly about these realities helps to reduce fears about needing to be the expert all knowing worker. It also demonstrates a commitment to ongoing learning and growing.

Learning Beyond Western Frameworks. One educator described the importance of learning developmental knowledge for child welfare practice; however, this is still taught from a western framework. Inviting students to share their worldviews and languages helped facilitate a paradigm shift,

> for students who speak another language, for most of them it's the very first time they've ever been invited to use their language in a presentation. But the empowerment, you can see how someone sort of steps into who they really are when somebody's opened a space for them to use their own language and their own culture. Like you know, students see them in a different light, they see themselves in a different light and it really, it just really adds depth in an experiential way to our understanding of different cultures. (E3)

Inviting a student to share their cultural knowledge and language is validating and empowering, making space for multiple ways of knowing. This may be transforming in a different way for the student sharing then for their peers listening. The experience may be empowering for one student and humbling for another, both meaningful and transformative learning experiences meeting students needs in different ways.

      Lived Experiences. Learning history can be compelling and transformative, however, bringing history to life through lived experiences and stories enhances transformative learning because the learning becomes relational and can not be easily dismissed or forgotten. One participant explained,

> residential schools started in 1840 and they went until this and there were this many of them and ... I mean that stuff isn't gonna help people, but you bring in some residential school survivors, real people, to tell them about their stories and experiences, they're gonna get it. (E3)

Learning from peoples' lived experiences, whether from peers, educators, or guests moves learning from awareness to understanding. Seeking to understand is a necessary skill for child welfare workers to practice in anti-oppressive ways where service users' experiences are valued. Students will realise that understanding is necessary for building trusting relationships and more meaningful intervention plans,

> I think from the very critique of the university structures in themselves and how knowledge is perceived and looking at how experience verses academia can add value to that world of social work, I think is really important to ensuring that all ways of knowing are represented. (K4)

Peer learning involves learning about yourself, learning about others, and who you are in relationships. These examples challenge the notion that the instructor is the only source of knowledge in the classroom and supports the need for educators to learn how to facilitate peer learning in meaningful ways.

Another type of peer learning that was mentioned by participants was the significance of *mentoring* when in the field. If students understand the value of peer learning opportunities during their education, they may be more likely to seek out and participate in mentorship once they enter the field. The mentoring process is explored further in the section about field education.

Self-Reflection and Awareness

One of the more unique and important aspects of social work as a helping profession is the use of self in the helping process. Therefore, it's not surprising that participants talked about opportunities for self-reflection as transformative during their education. I've heard students joke that their social work degree was four years of therapy. If what they meant is, they experienced four years of personal growth then I think the analogy fits. An interesting point in the data was that although individual experiences of self-awareness may stand out for people, it's the ongoing expectation and practice of self-reflection that seems necessary for maintaining thinking and behaving like an ethical social worker. One educator explained multiple self-reflection assignments in various courses throughout the degree helps students get into a routine, "that forces them to look at themselves all the time, although after a while, I guess it becomes a formula for some of them" (K5). This participant went on to suggest that educators could be more intentional in making the purpose of self-reflection more explicit,

It all has to come together, but again I don't think we focus enough on that, make it clear

the connection between every time you write in here about that client, you have to have

all those things in your mind. When you speak about clients in meetings, the same thing.

You really want to represent them; how do you do that and how do you maintain that

commitment to social justice and make sure kids are safe. That's the struggle in child

welfare. (K5)

This educator described the importance of connecting practical skills (writing) with a sense of

empathy and understanding that is related to social work values. When you engage in regular

self-reflection this becomes part of your practice, part of who you are, and not just an exercise.

Engaging in self-reflection may not come naturally to students, one participant stated, "to

me, social work school, it was about feelings and emotions and then looking inward and then

expressing those outward. And I was like, whoa, what is this?" (S1) Participants stories

suggested that to engage in transformative learning, learning needs to be a personal journey and

educators play an important role in facilitating this through their example and teaching methods.

Carefully constructing thoughtful questions for students to reflect on and discuss can facilitate

self-awareness and considering multiple perspectives,

having some very directed questions in circles as a start of the course … really carefully

directed questions that help me to think about sort of my experiences you know how I've

developed my values based on those experiences, be able to take a critical look at that.

(K4)

Learning needs to move into a phase of incorporating your learning and self-reflection into who

you are becoming as a person and how that then influences your practice. The following section

breaks down participants experiences of growing in self-awareness; and the impact on child welfare practice related to engaging in helping relationships and use of power.

Self-awareness and Being in Relationships. One participant described how a simple statement during a learning experience can stick with a person, then they share it with others, and it impacts day-to-day practice transforming how things are done,

> one statement that was told to me that I thought was pretty powerful and gave a different perspective is that when a new client and a worker meet for the first time, they're just two scared human beings interacting, and I like referencing that because it's true, it humanizes it and it's not one or the other and it gets to the power struggle, but these are all human interactions that we're having. (K3)

This statement prompted an empathic response that humanized the interaction between a worker and service user in a child welfare setting acknowledging the power dynamic that exists.

Understanding your own self-reflection journey helps you to listen and understand others which then facilitates self-reflection. Having these experiences in the classroom helps break down fears and prepares students for engagement in the field,

> throughout the degree there were a lot of opportunities to self-reflect, there's a lot of papers that are like reflect on your own experience, like just knowing who you are in terms of where you come from, what you might go into a situation with, so I did find a lot of those self-reflection kind of papers helpful in terms of checking my own biases and knowing where I'm at, that was helpful in the degree. (S2)

Self-reflection leads to self-awareness which leads to trusting relationships. If the child welfare worker can listen and understand they will be able to respond in more meaningful and relevant ways in their work with families.

Self-Awareness and Power. Critical self-reflection has many dimensions, including understanding the role of social work in history and current oppressive systems, as well as understanding who we are as part of the stories and struggles of others, "how the impact of the dominant discourse and whatever sort of time period has had on developing that role in social work for it to be intrinsically involved in peoples sort of personal stories, personal struggles" (K4). One educator described the child welfare system as the "single most impactful method by which society exercises power over the family and over children and over individuals" (E7). Therefore, social work education has a responsibility to prepare students by opening a critical dialogue that challenges Eurocentric beliefs about differences. This participant explained a decolonizing process is necessary to deconstruct assumptions students may bring and to expand their scope. Examining how power exists in child welfare is an important part of transformative education. Another educator explained,

> it's critically important that we're self-aware in terms of our own beliefs, our own biases, our own upbringing, our beliefs about parenting, what's bad, what's good, what's good enough, and that we have to start with ourselves and have a real critical reflection on who we are and what we bring. (E2)

Although, social work education appears to be making gains in offering content for students to learn about history and colonization, making clearer connections between history and frontline practice today is an area for improvement. A participant working in the field explained,

> what will you see going into a home, how might this manifest itself, yeah here's this horrible history, but what are we seeing right now …? I think it creates more empathy when dealing with your participants and understanding that when you ask those questions around their family history and it goes through generations and generations, you

understand kind of where this is stemming from and being able to acknowledge that with them, I think helps build relationships too. I think more understanding and more empathy instead of just being really frustrated just continues the process. (S2)

This participant went on to explain how this could have a direct impact on decision making in the field,

you might look at the family as a whole and trying to aim your interventions at the entire family … you might look at the traumas, informs the kind of decision making or that sort of thing and you do make maybe a little bit more allowances than you might normally would. (S2)

Participants explained they did not understand some of the content they learned in the classroom until later in their practice. Learning about the poor laws for example may not have seemed important at the time, but then they understand the historical context of people being identified as deserving or undeserving and how that thinking has evolved through the residential school system and now the child welfare system. And they are working in that system, one participant explained,

you can actually understand why, like it's pretty normal that families would distrust us, hate us, see us as all powerful, fear we're gonna take away their kids for no reason. So, I think that for me, it's those pieces that have really helped remind me that we really need to think about the history and its impacts ongoing and then what is our role in changing that? (K6)

Working in child welfare, you need to learn how to balance being in a role of social control and social care,

being a social worker isn't about being nice and sweet all the time. Sometimes we have to

set those boundaries pretty clearly. But in order for social workers, you know, graduates,

to get to that point, they have to have done their own sort of work and have to know who

they are. Cause if they're not clear, they're gonna go into a situation with clients in

reaction mode and, you know, their insecurities or low self-esteem issues are going to

subsumed into power and authority stances. (E3)

Educators can share with students the importance of self-awareness, but they also must

equip students with the tools to transfer this insight into their practice. Certain teaching methods

can help facilitate this. One educator explained,

giving them some sort of language about that. So, a lot of our activities, like a beginning

class reflection paper was about Truth and Reconciliation. Our mid-term exam, one of the

long questions on it was about social identity and how might we engage. Like what is

your social identity and how might we engage with a family that has a very different

social identity? How do we do that? How do we still engage with families when there's

differences, that sort of thing? So, sit down with those discussions and dialogue thinking

about it. (E2)

One participant explained how our morals and ethics are expressed through our

communication skills and part of social work education is confronting the incongruences that

you experience within yourself as you learn about multiple perspectives and experiences, "I've

seen some students go through some radical changes where they're less sort of self-centred and

egocentric and really step outside of themselves and step up and become amazing professionals"

(E3).

Learning opportunities for self-awareness can demonstrate for students that they need to

help themselves to help others, "I'm gonna help these other people. The switch is when it's like you have to change yourself to do it" (K5). The consequences of lacking self-awareness can be harmful, which speaks to the importance of social work educators offering these opportunities through their teaching methods and feedback,

> My philosophy fundamentally is if we can't help ourselves, we'll never be able to help other people. And in fact, if we don't know who we are at a really sort of core level, if we're not clear about our values, our morals, our ethics, if we aren't clear about why we do the things we do, why we make the decisions we make, why we react to certain situations, what our triggers are, how we deal with power and authority, if we don't know all of that, we're going to go in and probably perpetually harm, you know, for the clients, for our colleagues, for ourselves. So, in order to really know those things, it has to be quite experiential. (E3)

Teaching methods such as Indigenous learning circles can push students outside their comfort zones and create empowering experiences for students. One educator using this approach explained,

> my goal through this is to empower people to understand themselves as a maturing human being, taking on a really, a profound responsibility to work in the capacity of helping other human beings. To me, that's a sacred responsibility and that's where my Indigenous teachings come in. When we take on that sacred responsibility, there's certain things we have to do to get to that point of even being able to take on that responsibility and then fulfill those obligations that go with it in a constructive way. (E3)

This notion of responsibility that comes with completing a social work degree is something that other participants reflected on as well,

I want to see people come out with a degree, not just, I have a piece of paper that says I can do something, but to really know what that means, that there's a huge, huge responsibility, especially if you go into child welfare. (S1)

Self-reflection and self-awareness are important parts of transformative learning that relates to how you will practice. Doing the hard work of knowing yourself, will help demonstrate the value in doing the hard work to know the people you work with. A participant working in a protection role reflected on this challenge,

it takes a long time of doing it to reconcile it, with who you are as a social worker … you get into social work cause you want to help people and empower them and change the world, and then but there's this one really awful thing that you can do to people, it hurts. Yeah, I don't know how, field practicum, being part of that while there's still support from educators and being able to, you know, talk about it in a classroom environment might have been helpful, being you can go your entire practicum and not have to, so yeah, even just like getting used to people yelling at you, all the time, or you know, when people are telling you to go away and you just can't. Yeah, I don't know how anybody can ever prepare for that. The self-care thing is probably the only way. (S6)

Critical Thinking: No Time to Think!

Critical thinking was identified by most participants as a necessary skill for child welfare practice, especially when conducting assessments and in decision making. One participant described critical thinking this way,

teaching you to think critically, teaches you how to gather your information and understand what's good about it and what isn't good about it, what you can use and what you can't use, or what you should use or shouldn't use. (K9)

Another participant stated critical thinking is learning to see the bigger picture, "sometimes people go in with their blinders on … you have to be able to take a step back and see the situation as a whole" (S2). A worker's ability to think critically can have a direct impact on practice,

> people are not, we're not transparent and we're not as we present to the world. We're far more complex than that. So, figuring out what's going on with clients or with the children in our care takes a lot of critical thought, and it takes time. (K9)

This participant explained learning to slow down the process helped to think things through and not be reactionary. This allowed opportunity for reflection about what personal biases and values may impact the assessment and response plan. However, another participant working in the frontline stated she is so busy there "is no time to think" (S6). Further stressing the importance of critical thinking and assessments, one participant explained,

> You could be leaving the kids at risk. If you're not doing comprehensive assessments, then you're not targeting interventions at the actual need as opposed to what you think the need might be. I remember when I first started, I apprehended a child, court was every Friday morning, and I would sit there on Thursday at four o'clock and I'm like, ok case plan time, and like, does she need some parenting? Yeah, some parenting, go to Triple P, um anger management? Sure, yeah there's lots of DV, they should both go to DV courses, you're not really thinking through - you're doing a real assessment, you're just throwing cobbling together a case plan which the majority of the time it was not reflective of what you were actually worried about, what the bottom lines were around safety. (S2)

Another participant explained,

there's an expectation that you're able to do some basic assessment stuff, but you know

basic assessment requires excellent critical analysis and if you only have assessment

skills that aren't based or founded in critical analysis then you're going to do really

superficial assessments that aren't sound and then probably just end up blaming people.

(K2)

Knowing how to think critically and use research to explain and back up your decisions is

important for ethical practice. Social work graduates are expected to enter the field with a certain

level of critical thinking skills and that this be prioritized more as a learning objective during

their education rather than a priority of training in the field.

Earlier, I mentioned the challenge for social work education to prepare students for

frontline work in existing systems, while also teaching them to critically examine and

deconstruct them. Social work education is about more than skills and being job ready.

Education should bring students to a level of being able to critically analyse the work and system

for a deeper understanding. Developing this critical analysis is an important part of education

that transforms skills, moving beyond superficial skills that could be harmful. One key informant

explained,

when we have good education experiences, it kind of helps to shape some of that

conceptual knowledge of history, and you know issues and critical thinking around things

like best practices or best interest of the child. It gives a forum for deeper critical

thinking, for examination of current legislation, of practices, so it gives opportunity to

deeply dissect some of that … every social worker needs to really understand their role

and that whole lens of anti-oppressive social work so that there's a lot of self-reflection

and critical thinking about that role of power in social work. (K4)

Self-reflection and critical thinking are intertwined as ongoing moving parts that students learn to integrate into their social work identity and practice.

Critical thinking can be applied to what students are learning as well,

part of our protocol was to debunk the presenting, the most valid theories, come up with evidence that puts it under scrutiny, and challenge it, so that was helpful too, to realize that nothing's ever written in stone. It can always be challenged. It's like that critical thinking aspect, you know, *by thinking about our thinking* you know, we can challenge what we see … nothing's ever black and white, it's an amalgamation of the best thoughts that we have. (K8)

One educator described how they bring up the topic of the media to explore perspectives and self-identity through thoughtful discussion questions,

So, is there anything positive that might arise from this being in social media for the family? Is there any consequence of this that could be negative for the family? What about for the agency? Is there anything positive that can come out of this for the agency? Are there any consequences or anything difficult that could arise for the agency as a result of this being in the media? So structuring questions and teachings in a way where they're encouraged, I don't want to say forced (laugh), encouraged to consider both sides and impacts and consequences and have them sort of develop their thinking in that way. (E2)

Participants working in the field stated it was helpful during their education to work through challenging situations in child welfare so students could consider responses within the safety of the classroom. One participant explained their educator facilitated "open discussions around

challenging situations and she would give recommendations around how to move through that"
(S2).

What Helps and Hinders Transformative Learning

When exploring the experiences of transformative learning shared by participants, there were certain elements that appeared to help support the process. These included exposure to multiple perspectives, the creation of safe spaces, presenting a realistic portrayal of the child welfare system, promoting a commitment to life-long learning, and learning self-care/personal wellness (see Figure 13). As with the transformative learning categories, these elements do not happen in isolation, but rather are often interconnected and overlapping.

Figure 13

Ingredients for Transformative Learning Environments
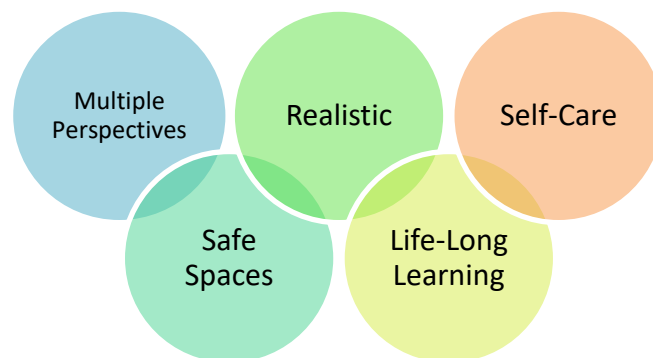
Multiple Perspectives

Social work education is preparing students for human work, which is messy and complex. Preparing students to work within the grey is challenging, especially in a field like child welfare with so many rules and expectations. It might seem easier (safer) to fit families into the boxes provided. Participants explained the importance of learning multiple perspectives and needing to hear certain messages repeatedly,

> I think education can prepare students for just an overview of the child welfare system and an understanding of the complexity and how difficult the work is, that this isn't sort of a black and white field … I give to my students over and over and over again, it's a message of balance, approaching situations and learning with a critical eye and critical perspective and trying to understand things from different lenses … And not necessarily having to agree or disagree but there are different lenses and that's how it is and part of our job, I think as social workers, is to understand those different lenses. (E2)

One participant working in the field explained workers can get tunnel vision and only see one path,

> it's like a power and control thing, the social worker, they have their decision, they have their bottom line, the decision has been made, they've consulted with their supervisor, but sometimes you just gotta like open yourself up, hear their perspective and incorporate that into your plan. (S2)

Creating Safe Spaces

Engaging in the kind of deep self-reflection described so far requires a certain level of vulnerability when you are exploring your own experiences of privilege and oppression. Students need to feel safe to both share stories and listen to them. Creating safe spaces in the classroom

can then be transferred to the field in the way students create safe spaces for the people they are

working with to feel they can share, be heard, and understood. Having these experiences during

their education will help prepare students to be more empathetic. Students may not realise at the

time the significance of their learning until they are in a situation in the field that requires them

to draw on it. Students need, "to have safe environments to be able to practice, to be able to learn

and grow and develop some of the basic skills that they might find useful" (K1). Another

participant suggested brave spaces,

> I'm hesitant to use safe because safe means that we don't challenge. I always use the
>
> word brave, in a brave way that we can be challenging in a way that doesn't diminish
>
> anybody … I want my classrooms to be brave spaces where we can walk in and we talk
>
> about really challenging things in a way that's respectful. (E6)

Some of the way's educators described creating safe and brave spaces were to give students

choices, for example to work individually or in a group. One educator advised avoiding

situations for students to be unduly judged. Another option is to offer journaling assignments for

private reflection and feedback from the instructor to really explore issues in depth. This practice

mirrors what supervision and peer consultation processes can look like in the field.

Committing to Life-Long Learning

A generalist social work degree is about personal growth and understanding who you are

in relationship with others. This is foundational to all knowledge, values, and skills learned.

Since we are developing humans throughout our lives, this learning about how we relate to

others and resolving issues should be ongoing. Most participants acknowledged that the scope of

child welfare is so large that it is impossible to cover everything even in a dedicated child

welfare course. One educator advised they let students know, "this is just the tip of the iceberg" and they have an ethical responsibility to continue learning.

Participants highlighted the importance of cross-discipline learning as students, whether by joining courses or attending conferences, students see a broader picture of child welfare, "beyond just child protection" (K1). These learning opportunities will help instill the value of life-long learning and the value in seeking out opportunities to learn from multiple perspectives to engage with others involved in meeting servicer users needs.

Continued learning is ultimately a personal responsibility after graduation, although there are mechanisms in place to help keep graduates accountable after they enter the field. Training within the child welfare system seems to be focused on procedural knowledge, although some agencies offer opportunities for developing cultural knowledge and self-reflection. If graduates are registered with a social work college, the required professional development hours are a measure for continued learning. Continued learning opportunities should be reflective of what knowledge is needed in communities. This is an area where there is potential for universities and child welfare agencies to collaborate on continued learning opportunities.

One participant reflected on returning to school as a mature student to complete a masters degree after having worked in the field for many years. She explained how younger students new to child welfare seemed naïve, but then realised it was refreshing to reconnect with those initial social work core values and anti-oppressive practices,

> the sad thing for me is that after you get your degree and then you start working, most people, especially in child welfare, they don't have time to read the articles ... I wish there was more opportunity once you're done your degree to have a connection to that academic world, that it keeps you more current and up-to-date and actually reminds you

of things that are core to the values of social work. Cause I think you can easily lose them and forget that, you know, even myself. Like we were talking about rallies, and I'm like, oh yeah, I used to go to rallies, I used to hold posters (laughing), I haven't done that in years. Now I'm on the flipside trying to walk into the building and avoid the rallies on the steps. (K6)

After students graduate with a BSW degree, their relationship with the university and the social work program essentially ends. Some students may maintain relationships with one or two faculty, however there is little attention for bridging the gap between academia and the child welfare field that aims at supporting graduates working in the field. Most students will not return to complete graduate studies but could still benefit from professional development opportunities through university initiatives and partnerships.

In the social work field and child welfare especially, workers will be continuously exposed to new experiences. Ongoing learning is necessary to be able to continue to grow in the transformative ways described here that are necessary for social justice practice.

Mentoring. A generalist degree gives you a beginning set of skills. One educator described the importance of surrounding yourself in child welfare with good people that will support you and facilitate continued growth and learning,

those who haven't had as much experience, I think there needs to be like a really good mentor program, you know in those first couple of years of coming on board, providing social work services, child welfare, any program I mean, definitely a mentorship program should be almost mandatory. (K4)

Another educator explained when they started in child welfare and felt unprepared, they looked for people doing the work well to learn from. As this was self-motivated, a formal mentoring program would ensure new graduates have more support.

Participants expressed the importance of networking and peer support working in child welfare. One participant described feeling frustrated and hurt for a child she was working with,

> I came back to the office, and I was pissed off, so I went and talked to my colleagues. I had some very good colleagues who would walk me through it and say, okay, and who would challenge me. You're being punitive. What's happening with you? (E6)

Presenting a Realistic Picture of Child Welfare

The reality of the challenge's families experience can feel overwhelming for new graduates to take on, one participant shared feeling, "overwhelmed with the complexity and the utter levels of poverty and tragedy, it's like an onion for this family" (K6). Participants talked about the importance of hearing from people in the field about the reality of how hard the work is and hearing from people who have stuck it out, "You gotta tell people how hard it is, and they need to hear from people who just stuck in. It's good to hear from people who have been doing it for 5 or 10 years" (S1). One educator explained,

> child protection is largely about dealing with the vulnerabilities of society and its occupants in circumstances where often the occupant hasn't built the environment that is leading to this damage. And so, we have to be prepared to have these kinds of insightful conversations with students that cause them to look and be able to say, am I prepared emotionally to engage in this hard work, and we don't do it by pretending that this is gonna be easy work. (E7)

Participants shared their experiences of being "shocked" by the reality of the work when they entered the child welfare field. One worker stated,

> 100% just no real understanding of what the workload is. Nobody can ever prepare you for the fact that you'll be understaffed, and you'll have no resources and no money, and you only have 37.25 hours to get everything done, you know, 20 days to see all these people and do all of these interventions. I had the privilege of mentoring many brand new fresh out of school social workers and every time they're just blown away by all the things that nobody told them would ever happen, or the fact that you can never mentally prepare yourself for the first time you go to the hospital and pick up a newborn baby or yeah, being pulled in 20 different directions because everything needs to be done right now, and just how much writing and paperwork is involved … you never realize how much of your time you're gonna spend sitting on the phone, typing emails and writing reports and assessments … I've watched many a new grad cry and tell me that they can't come in the next day or whatever because this bad thing happened. (S6)

Hearing from new workers in the field could bring forward some of the worries and expectations new workers experience in the field. Learning from other people's experience helps students know what to expect and gives them the opportunity to prepare and think about how they will respond before landing in the situation,

> I would invite them to come and talk about their experiences as a new worker and what are the, like where have I stepped in it already and I would have liked to have somebody tell me don't step there, that's a bad move, you know, things like that, I would definitely, yeah, I would have wanted that for sure. (S1)

Self-Care/Personal Wellness: More than a Bubble Bath

Participants identified learning about personal wellness and self-care as an area for improvement in social work education. Participants explained this is often glossed over throughout the program and not given the serious attention it requires, especially in a challenging field like child welfare. At least three participants specifically mentioned self-care needing to be more than just a bubble bath.

Knowing What Pushes Your Buttons and Modeling Self-Care. Participants explained that they are modeling self-care for service users, so it is not just about the self. Participants talked about needing experiences in education to expose them to stressors so that students can prepare for self-care and know how they will cope,

> hopefully maybe in some of their field experiences they might have been exposed to some things that will push their buttons, cause child welfare I always find going into child protection, it will push buttons that you don't even know you ever had … so that students are prepared to cope with that in healthy ways and are able to have those kind of self-care mechanisms, those support systems in place for when they deal with, when they encounter these issues. (K1)

Participants described a limitation in education is when you learn the importance of a concept but not the *how to*. One participant described learning how to debrief as self-care and that he would have appreciated more opportunities to learn how to do this as a student, "It was just, you should do these things. Like you should debrief. You should self-care. You should do those things but no real sort of concrete, here's how that might look" (S1). One participant stated students need to learn how to take care of the actual hard stuff, like knowing when to go to the doctor, set boundaries, and go to a counselor (K3).

Participants explained how self-care influences practice when working with service users who are hard to reach,

> I've seen a lot of workers just stop trying and then people aren't seen for months because they're avoidant and the worker doesn't want to, they don't want to deal with it because it's really stressful … easy to become jaded … people just get so tired of the work and just don't have as much of that empathy or tolerance for stuff, they're really short with people, just really authoritative, yeah, definitely seen a lot of that. (S2)

One educator described building a *toolbox of self-care* by starting each class with a mindfulness activity, "We've talked a lot about that. I start every class with a mindfulness activity for self-care, and the idea being that when we're done the class, they'll have a toolbox of self-care activities" (E2).

Research Question: How is Learning in Social Work Education Transferred to Practice in the Child Welfare Field?

In this section, I consider how participants described learning transfer specifically, primarily through the social work field placement. Many of the experience's participants shared about learning transfer described a *mirroring process,* whereby learning in the classroom could be transferred to scenarios in the field (e.g. peer learning mirrors building relationships in the field, educators modeling appropriate use of power mirrors how workers can work with their authority in practice).

Field Placement in Child Welfare

Participants acknowledged the field placement as providing the opportunity for the direct transfer of learning, offering real life examples to build on classroom learning. The field placement helped give "purpose" to what was taught in the classroom,

hopefully those are safe environments where there's real criteria around what skills will

be developed and how things are monitored and how they will get feedback on their

behavior as they're practising these different skills in the field placements, but I think

field education is really important for some of that. (K1)

Participants suggested ways field learning can be integrated into the curriculum beyond the

formal field placement. For example, students can be sent into the field for course assignments,

go to a place where policy is being made and understand how the policy development

process happens but also how that is being rolled out by going and attending court and

coming back and writing about what that experience is like. (K1)

Being immersed in child welfare as a placement helps with understanding the larger context of

child welfare. Although placements in a child welfare protection agency were highlighted as

important for preparing to work in child welfare, other placements may contribute important

learning as well. One participant talked about the value in a community placement that worked

with child welfare service users and explained it,

did challenge my thinking around what it's like to be on the receiving end of CFS even as

like a community partner. That was really interesting. And there were so many times in

an interview where I just wanted to be like, but you've got to understand all these other

things are happening, but I had to really separate hearing that and just digesting that

information. (S2)

Participants described what helps as well as hinders learning in a field placement. One

participant emphasized the importance of building skills prior to your field placement,

I know people say, well you can practice that in your field placement. No, you can't,

cause you're dealing with real people eventually and they don't want to be practiced on

usually. Sometimes they'll say yes but they really want to say no, and then you kind of

feel like you're just imposing, and you're making them have to endure the fact that

you're learning. (S1)

This participant explained that service users may want someone with experience to talk about

difficult parts of their life.

Because child welfare is a large employer of social work graduates, one participant

described a placement in child welfare as one long job interview,

It's not fair to the student because I want to ask a question, but then I'm worried about, if

I ask this question, are they gonna think that I don't know what I'm doing. You know,

you have all that self-doubt because I don't have a degree yet and I don't really know if

this is it. I think this is it, but I'm not sure. Is it a safe place, and your social workers, but

not every social worker is that safe place, and so, you know, we have all those thoughts

running through our heads when we're gonna ask a question? So, it would be safer to ask

that question in class, cause you've already developed relationships with your classmates

… because we sort of plod along together. (S1)

Students need to demonstrate a certain level of knowledge and skill, while still being offered a

safe learning environment where they can feel free to ask questions and even make mistakes,

"where they can develop some skills, practice, try out different things, and not have there, not be

so stressed that their jobs are on the line, that their careers are on the line, those kinds of things

(K1).

Role of Supervision

Participants explained that the role of supervision during a field placement in child welfare matters. Students require adequate supervision and opportunities to learn beyond paperwork and filing, which become easy tasks to hand off to students in child welfare placements,

> exposing them to as much as possible so that they can see, and the best advice, when I did
>
> my practicum in my BSW, was, I had other peers, they had like, you know, 12, 15 cases
>
> and I had 4 and my field placement person, she said to me, you will learn more good
>
> social work from 4 cases than you will from being burdened under 15 … I wonder
>
> sometimes if we give students way too much to manage, so really, we're just teaching
>
> them to swim rather than actually swim really well. (K6)

One participant explained how students can become disillusioned during their field placement in child welfare when their ideas are dismissed, "I hear this, students probably go back saying, well we tried to do this, but the worker said, we don't do it that way, and that's too bad because then I hope that student realizes that that's just one worker" (K6). It's important to note that education is just one area for improvement in helping new graduates develop the necessary knowledge and skills for this area of practice. Participants explained the field needs to be a place where graduates can apply their social work knowledge. New graduates have fresh perspectives and drive toward making positive contributions. They enter the field up to date on the newest innovations and are eager to share their knowledge. The field should appreciate the value and opportunity these new graduates present and offer an environment to support and encourage this engagement. Unfortunately, it seems efforts are at times put in the opposite direction to dampen

that drive and instead shape new graduates for being as efficient as possible within the existing system.

Field Seminar Course

Participants shared ways the field course or seminar can better compliment the field placement. One example is intentionally inviting field experiences into the classroom to discuss if what they are learning fits or not and working through that, "I might sort of deliver a lecture and then say, does this fit with what you're seeing or what you know or what's happening in your field placement and then we're able to sort of dialogue about the gaps" (E2).

Educators need to prepare students for extreme cases as well as ongoing marginal and or chronic concerns. A challenge for educators can be when classroom learning and field learning present opposing views,

> kids that have been sexually abused and maybe multiple times. How do you actually prepare someone? … She said she came out of the hospital room, and she was visibly upset and her field instructor who was there said to her, suck it up, its child welfare, which is not your best response. Anyway, I did explain to her that I thought maybe that field instructor was probably burnt out, anyway. Yeah, people think burnt out is when you care too much, it's when you stop caring. (K5)

It's important to highlight discrepancies between what is being presented in the literature and classroom, and what is possible in the field,

> So sometimes the literature or the research is up here about what should be happening, and it doesn't always fit with what's happening in the field, and why is that and how do we work within that sort of a thing? So, always having those kinds of discussions and dialogues. (E2)

Participants were sometimes unsure how to answer questions about how learning is transferred. This might reflect a need to be clearer during education about how specific learning impacts practice. Educators should explain and offer opportunities for students to reflect on the purpose of course content and learning activities, whether in class teaching methods or assignments. Creating a productive field placement learning experience requires a safe environment with clear expectations for learning and feedback.

Education and Training

One participant working in a protection role recommended training from the field become part of the degree curriculum. This indicates how relevant the training learning was for knowledge and skills deemed necessary for practice in child welfare, "what trainings could either be more in as part of the degree or even offered at a discount or for free throughout the degree, I know they do ones from time to time, yeah, if it was more standardized" (S2).

Participants expressed interest in more opportunities for students to reconnect or stay connected with academia,

> I think the social work education helps us transform from an individual (focus) to a
>
> broader macro structural level, but I don't know if we're good at, when we train our staff
>
> within child welfare, I don't know if we do that. I don't know if we help connect those
>
> dots for them very well. So, you leave the academic world, you don't really have that
>
> experience in child welfare, then once you have the experience in the child welfare
>
> system, you probably become a little overwhelmed that you've probably forgotten some
>
> key components in your education. So, it's almost like I wish that there was a way to get
>
> that reconnection back to help understand that what you learned in that textbook, actually
>
> how you could apply it. (K6)

Not everyone will be able to return to complete a MSW. Social work education can provide tools

and opportunities to help bring education to the field.

Table 9

Brief Summary of Findings for Review

How Does Social Work Education Impact Child Welfare?
- Perception of child welfare (as negative)   - Preparation of workers (feeling unprepared)   - Role of child welfare courses in a generalist degree (limited)   - Need to balance aspirational and practical learning   - Impacts direct practice in the field
Which Specific Knowledges and Skills are Necessary for Future Child Welfare Social Workers?
- Communication/Assessment knowledge for building relationships   - Child development knowledge and skills for assessment (trauma informed)   - Policy knowledge and skills for understanding oppressive systems   - Cultural knowledge and skills
How is Social Work Education Transformative?
- Learning with a twist   - Sharing, growing and change   **Transformative learning experiences:**   - Experiential learning   - Peer Learning (group work, sharing research, practice with peers, learning from mistakes, learning beyond Western frameworks, valuing lived experiences)   - Self-Reflection/Awareness (being in relationships, using power)   - Critical Thinking   (Field Education – covered under next question)   **What helps:**   - Learning from multiple perspectives   - Creating safe (and brave) spaces   - Commitment to life-long learning (mentoring)   - Presenting a realistic picture of child welfare   - Practicing self-care/wellness
How is Learning in Social Work Education Transferred to Practice in the Child Welfare Field?
- Field placement (role of supervision, field seminar course)   - Education and training

Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

**Building a Theory: A Model of Transformative Social Work Education for Child Welfare**

This research explored social work education as a platform for transformative learning. Drawing on participants experiences, a theory emerged for understanding the process of learning that prepares graduates to work in child welfare; to be effective in performing day-to-day tasks and accept responsibility for social action. Addressing this dual mandate positions social work uniquely for this work because our professional values require service to humanity and the pursuit of social justice, "helping people to accommodate to the status quo and as challenging the status quo by trying to bring about social change" (Epstein, 1999, as cited in Hyslop & Keddel, 2018, p. 2). How this "dual focus can be integrated" however, has not been well articulated or studied (Hyslop & Keddel, 2018, p. 2).

Two areas require urgent attention from social work education. The first is the colonial roots that sustain a child protection paradigm promoting neoliberalism and risk management. This approach to child welfare focuses on individual responsibility, pushing social work "as a mechanism of surveillance and intervention" without consideration of social context (Hyslop & Keddel, 2018, p. 3). The results are overinvolvement with marginalized groups and workers who practice from fear (Fallon et al., 2021; Robertson et al., 2021). Despite social work being the main education for child welfare workers, the second area of concern is the disconnect social workers feel between their social work values, knowledge, and skills, and their work in this field. The helping relationship is the heart of social work practice, however in child welfare, building relationships is marred by power dynamics and mistrust. Social work and social work education are being held accountable for being complicit in maintaining oppressive systems. The call now is for direction and action on achieving these critical changes. Education, in preparing graduates

for the field must play a role in helping child welfare shift to a more just system. The findings

highlight these concerns and offer recommendations for how social work education can

contribute to system change and preparing students for practicing in new ways (see Figure 14).

Figure 14

Transformative Learning Impact on Practice
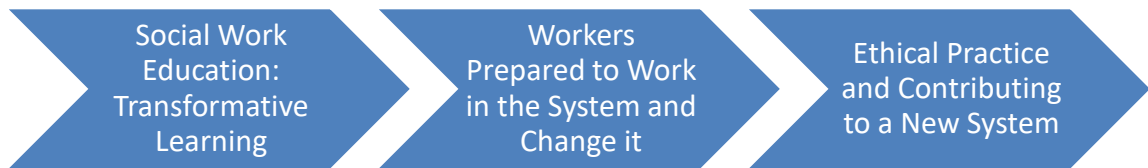
The focus for social work education should be on relationships (learning who we are and

who we are in relationships). Based on participants' experiences, transformative learning

requires experiences for deep self-reflection to understand the relational aspects of how society

benefits some groups over others and realizing complicity as a person and social worker/child

welfare worker. Social work education as a transformative platform is about supporting students

in a process of growth and development that is *ongoing*. Students are asked to,

> do a lot of self-reflection and look at their practice in terms of self and how their values
>
> and beliefs, how their social location might affect the work they're doing. And that self-
>
> reflection, that continual look at self, in context, helps those people through periods of
>
> growth. (K9)

The data suggests the more experiences students have practicing this during their

education offers greater preparation for working in a field like child welfare. Transformative

learning moves beyond just becoming familiar with critical theories and cultural knowledges to

being changed by them in subtle and sometimes radical ways that change the way a person thinks

and practices. Transformative learning is about imagining a different world and commitment to

the ongoing learning and reflection required for transforming oppressive systems. Educators can

facilitate this learning directly through teaching methods, engagement, support, modeling, and making space for student voices.

The environment a student enters after graduation will have an impact on how they apply their knowledges and skills. The findings suggest, the stronger they are in their self-awareness and identity related to social work values and ethics, the more likely and open they will be to engaging in transformative practices. Furthermore, modeling this in the field can have a ripple effect that inspires others to do the same. One might think of transformative learning as a beam of light that spreads outward as you integrate learning and practice.

Diving In: Learning to Sink or Swim

Figure 15 illustrates a D*iving In: Learning to Sink or Swim* model for social work education. During this research I spent many nights sitting with the data poolside watching my kids in their swim and dive programs. My middle daughter is a competitive diver, and part of her learning process is building up the basics of a dive over many weeks until she is ready to dive off the platform. When she exits the water, she receives feedback from her coach, encouragement from her peers, and then she climbs back up the tower and dives in again, incorporating everything new she has learned. I imagined the diving towers as the jumping off points when students enter the field from their education. Significant learning platforms are the BSW, followed by opportunities for professional development, and possibly returning to university to complete an MSW. Using some of the participants language, "we're just teaching them to swim rather than actually swim really well" and "you get thrown right into it" I developed this illustration of how the learning journey can happen for students.

Figure 15

Diving In – Learning to Sink or Swim
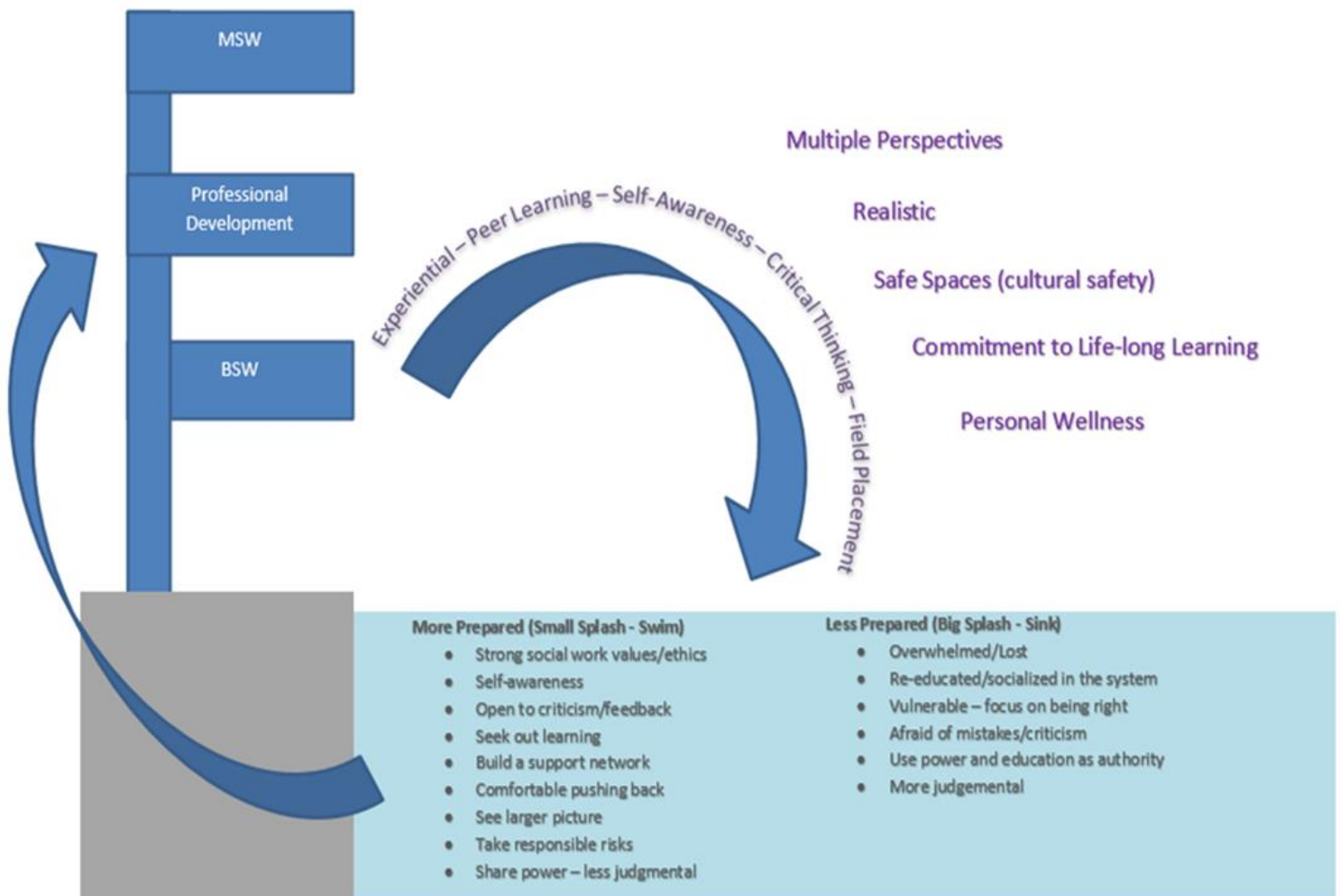
When graduates enter child welfare, the data suggests a possible continuum with two potential fates on each end. On the one end, students who have been engaged and supported regularly in transformative learning experiences will know how to swim in the deep end and identify as *child welfare **social workers***. They will maintain a strong foundation of social work values, have self-awareness and a commitment to ongoing learning. They will build healthy support networks and seek out learning opportunities. These graduates will be open to criticism

and invite feedback as opportunities to grow and continue learning. They will cope with incongruences of being agents of control as well as agents of change and feel comfortable pushing back against the system. These students will resist conforming to the child welfare system. They will use power responsibly and build collaborative relationships. Maintaining this level of engagement in the child welfare system requires ongoing learning through professional and personal development and self-care. The arrows in the diagram represent this continuous commitment to learning and growing, climbing/building awareness, knowledge, and skills and jumping back into the water/work. Following the arrows and the space in which the learning takes place, participants identified the types of opportunities and the characteristics of the learning environment that help support transformative learning.

On the other end of the continuum, if students have less transformative experiences during their education, they may not swim as well. One participant described, becoming "*just a worker*". The data suggests they will enter the field with less confidence or a false sense of confidence and are more at risk of becoming/feeling lost. When this happens, they are more susceptible to conforming and socializing within the neoliberal lens of the child welfare bureaucracy. These workers may feel vulnerable, focused on avoiding criticism and proving they are right. They may use their power and education as authority. These workers may resign or continue working with service users in more punitive and judgemental ways.

In another part of the pool, my other two children swim laps back and forth in their swim club. Their coaches provide direction and encouragement from the side of the pool as they work toward perfecting the various strokes and building endurance for race day. As their movements improve, they begin to work with the water and not against it, they glide along, the body and water working in harmony. Water provided a powerful metaphor through the research process to

think about the possibilities of building capacity and working well in child welfare as opposed to the dangers of sinking or struggling to keep your head above water.

Figure 16

Identity and Relationships in Social Work

Social work education offers a platform for personal growth and transformation that can then be transferred to the field in the way each graduate engages in their work. As illustrated in Figure 16, the data shows that through transformative learning opportunities, students move back and forth through a process of knowing the self, knowing others, and knowing who we are in relation to each other, "we are not separate from the service users with whom we work. We are they" (Weinberg, 2015, p. 234). Through this process students learn how to develop self-awareness about their own self-location and identity. They learn to listen and be transformed through other people's experiences, multiple knowledges, and history. Students move into a place of understanding themselves in relationship with others and within larger systems. This pattern of growing is constantly in motion moving back and forth as we encounter new situations and continue learning throughout our lives. This experience is both painful at times ("I was devastated") and exhilarating/liberating ("we are both just two scared human beings"), therefore self-care and personal wellness is required. The more students are engaged in this process during their education, the more comfortable and confident they will feel continuing this growing and evolving when they graduate and enter the field. Transformative learning helps facilitate developing a social work identity grounded in the profession's values and ethics. Massaquoi (2022) cautioned,

In reality, social work education in the classroom and in the field, whether we like to admit it or not, still focuses heavily on social workers becoming culturally competent with marginalized populations – with the social worker becoming the expert over the service user's life. Cultural competencies such as attending to politically correct language, framing the correct questions that should be asked and regulating and bracketing practitioners' oppressive behaviors allow for the possibility that social workers will have a false sense that they are accomplished and therefore proficient in AOP. In actuality, AOP proficiency is a lifelong endeavor of growth and evolution. (pp.134 - 135)
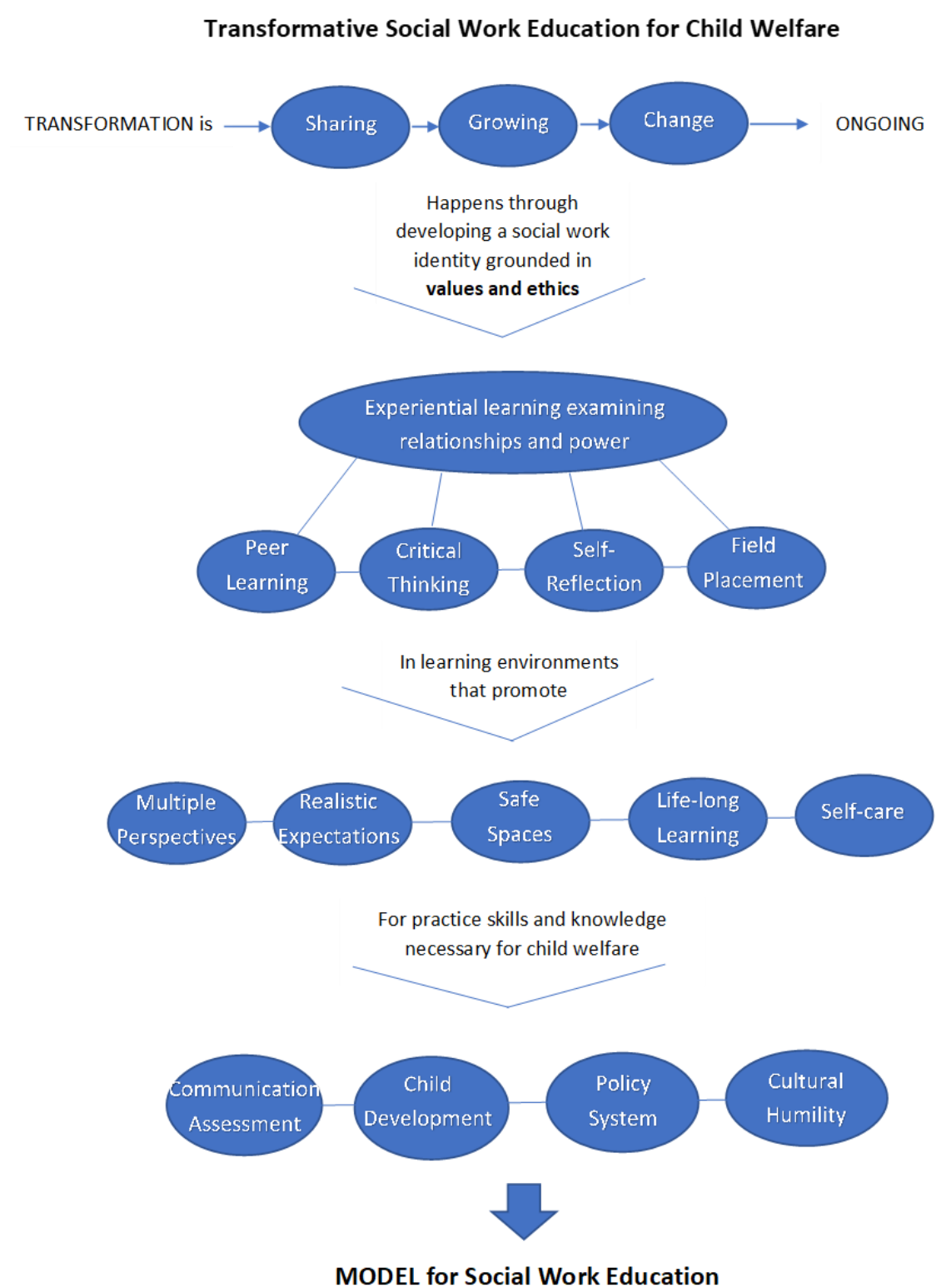
Jones (2016) studied student learning experiences in social work education. He described transformative learning as an experience, "triggered by a challenging situation leading to reflection, evaluation of existing worldviews, and a purposeful re-appraisal resulting in altered meaning perspectives which were subsequently put into action in the world" (p. 217). Using Mezirow's (2009) theory of transformative learning, Jones (2016) highlighted the transformation of "problematic frames of reference … For some learners, this recognition leads to critical reflection and reframing" (p. 218 – 219).

Figure 17 highlights the potential flow of transformative learning as a model for social work education that leads to specific knowledge and skills required for working in child welfare. This framework emerged from the findings presented in chapter four and helps guide and organize the remainder of this chapter.

Experiential learning helped participants find meaning in what they were learning by connecting the purpose and relevance. Linking theory to practice is important because social work is relational and active. Participants added that experiential learning elicited an emotional

Figure 17

Model for Transformative Learning in Social Work Education

Transformative Social Work Education for Child Welfare

TRANSFORMATION is → Sharing → Growing → Change → ONGOING

Happens through developing a social work identity grounded in **values and ethics**

Experiential learning examining relationships and power

Peer Learning

Critical Thinking

Self-Reflection

Field Placement

In learning environments that promote

Multiple Perspectives

Realistic Expectations

Safe Spaces

Life-long Learning

Self-care

For practice skills and knowledge necessary for child welfare

Communication Assessment

Child Development

Policy System

Cultural Humility

MODEL for Social Work Education

response that helped learning reach a deeper "core" level (E3). For one participant, experiential learning helped, "develop more emotional intelligence around how they interact with others and that interconnectedness of relationship building, as a foundation for any work that we do" (K4). Participants mentioned frustration about learning the importance of concepts in their education, but not the *how to* for implementing in practice. Cheung and Delavega (2014) stated experiential learning acts as a bridge that "emerges as a result of the *doing* and connecting the doing with theoretical knowledge" (p. 1071). Drawing on Kolb's learning cycle (1984), they developed a five – point experiential learning model that included role-playing (social worker, service user, and supervisor), observation, and reflection. Students were expected to use theory in their approaches and reflect on their use of self in practice. The model is "effective in that it can encourage student growth in three areas: acquisition of transtheoretical knowledge, training in applying clinical skills, and processing of personal reflections" (p. 1086).

Participants shared how participating in Indigenous ceremonies and learning from Indigenous traditions was meaningful in helping them "embody" new learning. Baskin and Cornacchia (2021) describe circle learning in Indigenous pedagogy,

> helps learners to connect with themselves, classmates, and the world around them. The circle offers support to learners through connectedness and belonging. A bonding occurs among learners over a course because they are not only listening to words but also being receptive to body language … In circles, learners develop a responsibility to each other's learning and build one another's trust. Trust in turn, means that learners can learn through their heart, as well as their minds. (p. 71)

Peer learning for participants meant valuing lived experiences and participating in each other's learning. Practicing skills with each other in a safe classroom environment was important

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for receiving feedback and building confidence. Having a supportive peer network as students transfers to the field in mentoring and other supportive relationships. Despite education's focus on individual learning, social work is about collaboration. Participants described group work and role-play assignments as challenging, but important for developing their communication and relationship skills. Peer learning helped students appreciate the value in sharing and listening to stories that helped build empathy and understanding. Working through fears about differences through peer learning helped participants feel more confident and open in the field when working with diversity.

Self-reflection is a common element of learning in social work education. Participants explained self-awareness as transformational in addressing power in relationships, opening possibilities for engagement, and building trust. The need for social work to build trust in child welfare was well documented in the literature review (OCYA, 2016). Participants explained self-reflection is not a one – time event but rather a routine that becomes part of who you are in practice. Educators described students moving from surface level awareness to deeper understandings of themselves that led to "radical" changes.

Child welfare social workers are making decisions that can impact children and families for the rest of their lives, "In practice, decision-making is a balancing exercise; an inexact process influenced by competing principles and guided by imperfect information" (Hyslop & Keddell, 2018). Workers require critical thinking skills at all levels of practice in child welfare. Drawing on the work of Abrami et al. (2015), Verburgh (2019) identified four approaches for developing critical thinking in social work education: dialogue, authentic instruction, mentoring, and individual study (p. 882). Dialogue involved discussion and collaborative learning. Authentic instruction used realistic problems that are relevant through simulations, role play,

case studies, and dilemma exercises. Mentoring involved coaching and modeling from the instructor. And individual study included readings, listening, writing, and problem solving. This aligns with how participants described learning critical thinking through thoughtful questions, class discussion, complex case studies to work through together, feedback, and modeling from educators and field supervisors. Participants stated provoking readings and reflective writings helped build critical thinking (e.g., Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy MacIntosh).

Participants identified a field placement in child welfare could offer the best experiential learning to prepare students for working in the field, however this was not guaranteed. It depended on how intentional the agency and field supervisor were about facilitating learning and supporting the student. Some participants described well-rounded comprehensive placement experiences where they had a broad range of experiences, eased into responsibilities, and had opportunities to debrief and connect classroom learning. On the other hand, some participants found their child welfare placement was not helpful at all, they were either ignored or felt pressured to take on more than they were comfortable with. Participants who had experience as field supervisors commented on how time consuming this responsibility is and the importance of faculty support. One participant explained, "I'm constantly coaching them … I tell them, I will be constantly evaluating. I will constantly be expecting things from you but the one thing you can always be sure of is that I'll always have your back" (K11). This participant stated her goal is for students to feel confident entering a child welfare position.

The transformative learning experiences summarized so far are facilitated in environments that promote the following learning strategies and environments. As mentioned throughout, child welfare work is broad and complex. Students should be introduced to multiple perspectives that allow for examining the field from different angles and disciplines. The

findings suggest students are not prepared for the *reality* of the field. Participants cautioned against sugar coating learning for child welfare so they are less "shocked" when they enter the field which can lead to insecurity and hopelessness. Participants called for complex case studies where they rely on educator and peer support to work though responses. Findings also showed that workers struggle working within the chronic systemic issue's families face. Since this is most cases in the child welfare system, students need to develop advocacy skills for broader structural change (Fallon et al., 2021). Featherstone et al. (2021) stated, "we know that for the majority of families within existing child protection systems, child welfare concerns are a product of a complex interplay of factors and are rarely driven by adults' intent to cause anguish to their children" (p. 162).

Preparing students for working in child welfare needs to be both aspirational and practical. Findings suggest new workers are hit with three difficult realizations when they start. The first is the obvious nature of working with serious abuse and neglect. The second is witnessing large-scale poverty and lack of resources to address people's needs. And the third is the actual workload – not having enough time to practice social work. Students need to examine the challenges in the current system, imagine ideal practice, and prepare for the reality of the field they will enter. One participant described *funneling theory down to practice* so that it means something in the day-to-day work,

> theory practice, theory practice, theory practice. So, we've talked about, what the research shows, we've talk about the literature, but what does this mean? How does this look in day-to-day practice? I think sometimes the literature, or the research talks about ideal practice, which is good, students need to know what ideal practice is. But then we need to talk about, but what are the realities within the child welfare system, and what

happens when we know this is ideal practice, but we can't do it because of systemic or

organizational barriers. What do we do? How do we manage that? (E2)

Describing a framework for holistic competence, Bogo (2021) suggested "teaching that intentionally and frequently drew explicit attention to instances where students could see the theory in action and where students could examine the practice and deconstruct it using the concepts being taught" (p. 133).

Transformative learning can be a vulnerable and emotional experience. In preparation for this research, I met with the director of a community-based agency working to improve outcomes for children in Winnipeg. They explained in their experience, when service users are given a voice, they provide the best wisdom and education. The director was concerned that social work education has potential to teach social workers they are better and smarter than service users. This is a continuation of assimilation when workers believe their way is better, thinking they are saving the others. The director was not interested in blaming people; they were interested in asking "why"? Their practice method requires "turning the light on yourself". Seeing the current child welfare system as a modern-day residential school, they advised difficult conversations need to happen and we must "stand in it" with humility, courage and bravery. Indigenous youth taught them that it is not just about safe spaces (some spaces will not be safe), we need to also have "brave spaces". Educators need to develop skills for facilitating these difficult conversations in the classroom. Weinberg (2015) stated, "When students come to me and say they are confused and distressed by what they are learning, I applaud and suggest that this may be a sign that they are really grappling with material … Thus, trust rather than safety is the intended environment" (p. 236). Experiencing safe spaces and trust in the classroom is necessary for students to share, listen, and grow in their self-awareness and relationship skills.

Students will learn to value lived experiences which can translate into including service user voices in practice, "anti-oppression requires a power shift outside the casework process so that service users gain a collective power through voice and the ability to influence policy and practice (Dumbrill & Lo, 2015, p. 126).

Participants were open about the stress and challenges working in the child welfare system. One social worker in the field explained dealing with systemic issues is like,

banging [my] head against the wall … I think a lot of workers feel really bad about what we have to do sometimes. I'd say there's a lot of workers who don't agree with what they're doing but you have to do it because it's your mandate and it's your job. (S2)

He et al. (2021) found over 60% of child welfare workers encountered moral distress "when a professional knows the ethically appropriate action but cannot take that action due to internal (personal) and external (institutional) constraints" (p. 1). Participants identified this as an area that requires more serious attention in social work education. The importance of self- care and developing supportive peer networks was a theme throughout the findings. One participant stated, "I think what saved me always is having one good friend at the agency who you can go for lunch with, if you are lucky enough to have that … that was life saving really" (E4).

Child welfare workers are vulnerable to burn-out and vicarious trauma (Salloum et al., 2019). Learning to practice self-care and the importance of personal wellness as a student will help social workers develop resilience and healthy coping skills (Beddoe & Adamson, 2016). Participants described burn-out in child welfare directly impacts service becoming authoritative, judgemental, and distant. Practicing personal self-care activities and stress management can reduce burnout, however Miller et al. (2018) found child welfare workers were only moderately

practicing self-care. They recommended education programs do more to develop good self-care skills and offer continuing education opportunities promoting self-care.

Findings suggest the heart of child welfare is communication – listening for what people are telling us they need. Hyslop and Kenddell (2018) call for open and trusting relationships,

> The more that child welfare workers are distanced from the families they engage with, the more de-skilled and de-sensitized they become. Social workers need to get closer to people. We have been seduced by fear of getting too close, too complicit with the experience of the dangerous classes. The neoliberal social order is reinforced, effectively policed by this kind of bureaucratized clinical practice at a distance … We need to rethink child protection for the sake of children, families and for the heart and soul of the social profession. (p. 10)

Participants identified good communication skills as the bedrock for making progress in child welfare work. Hughes et al. (2016) studied mother's perspectives of their relationships with child welfare workers. The participants recommended, authenticity and genuineness, emphasis on listening skills, empathy, and offering direct support. From a feminist perspective, Turner and Mashi (2014) advised "the focus on human connection and relationship building is particularly relevant for social workers" (p. 5). This type of partnership requires "mutuality, critical self-awareness, collective action, conscientization and collaboration", working with individuals building self-efficacy and empowerment and working for social change at the same time (Tuner & Mashi, 2014, p. 10).

In addition to communication and relationship skills, students need policy and system knowledge. Participants described how easy it is to get lost and overwhelmed in the child welfare field. Educators need to consider for students, "what's really going to allow them to develop as

broad a skill base and sense of understanding, sense of purpose and their role within this larger

enterprise of child welfare" (K1). Regarding transformative learning in social work education,

Jones (2016) described students,

> integrating aspects of ideology critique and social change. For such students their
>
> individual experience is linked to broader social dynamics. They internalize core social
>
> work values, and look for ways to manifest these in practice, but are also concerned with
>
> addressing the causes of social injustice and recognise that full realisation of those values
>
> will require broader social change. In a social work education setting, this group would
>
> contribute a critical, questioning approach and a commitment to modeling action as well
>
> as dialogue. (p. 228)

Participants identified learning about child development is necessary for engagement and

assessment skills in child welfare, however this learning typically comes from a western

framework. Constructs of vulnerability, attachment, and best interest are debated. Daniel et at

(2010) stated an "understanding of the general parameters of development will assist with

assessment of the specific developmental needs of individual children and the planning of

intervention. All assessment requires balancing attention to 'norms' of development with the

needs of the individual child" (p. 11).

Cultural knowledge and skills for working with diversity is necessary for social workers.

The findings support moving beyond cultural competence to cultural humility and cultural safety

in child welfare practice. Gottlieb (2020) described cultural humility as,

> (1) Committing oneself to an ongoing process of compassionate self-awareness and
>
> inquiry, supported by a community of trusted and cognitively diverse colleagues;

(2) Being open and teachable, striving to see cultures as our clients see them, rather than how we have come to know or define them;

(3) And continually considering the social systems – and their attendant assignations of power and privilege – that have helped shape reality as both we and our clients experience it. (p. 3)

One participant explained,

I can't define what culture means for someone else and so to ask what that means and to listen and I think that's not always taught enough, I feel like I keep learning so much more about different areas and different people … it's just a continual learning experience because I continue to meet new people all the time, so I think that's been pretty powerful. (K3)

Milliken (2013) explained that a cultural competence model maintains power for the helper to stay inside their comfort zone, "shifting the culture question to an issue of safety, the person in the helping conversation with the least power, in terms of culture (gender, class, age, race, sexual orientation, and ability also) necessarily becomes the arbiter of what feels safe" (p. 407).

The connections between the findings and the literature presented here in the discussion led to specific recommendations for social work education programs for developing a model for transformative education that prepares graduates to meet the current demands in child welfare. These recommendations are presented in the next section.

Recommendations: If the Child Welfare System is a Problem, it is a Social Work Problem

The following recommendations stem from the participants' experiences about how social work education can prepare students to work in child welfare. They could serve as a guide for starting a conversation within social work programs about the development of an action plan

and commitment for addressing needs within the child welfare field (see Appendix B for related reflection questions). It was not my intention to suggest one true model for social work education that applies to child welfare, but rather to explore what learning processes can be utilized in a local context to prepare and support graduates for the urgent work ahead. If the child welfare system is a problem, it is a social work problem. That is not to minimize the responsibility of government and other institutions needing transformation as well, however social work has a role to play and could influence change in the other areas.

Improve the Perception of Child Welfare

A common sentiment across participants who had experience working in child welfare was that they had not planned to *end up* there. Child welfare did not seem to be at the top of anyone's list for a career in social work, probably in part due to the reasons mentioned earlier regarding negative perceptions. One key informant in an administrative role stated, "new social work grads if they start in child welfare, it's just to get experience and get the job they really want. They see us as the highest employability opportunity but not a career" (K6). This is an urgent challenge for educators knowing the child welfare field makes up a significant portion of the social work job market. The 2008 Canadian Incident Study found most workers in child welfare protection roles had a Bachelor of Social Work Degree (57%) (Lwin et al., 2015). Many students will end up working in this field regardless of interest and they will need to be ready. As one participant mentioned earlier, the greatest risk of not being prepared is felt by service users. In a 2018 Canadian environmental scan of social work in child welfare, participants,

> expressed concern that child welfare is not valued or understood by the social work
>
> profession … Schools of Social Work have historically and continue to devalue child

protection as a field of practice and understand it only as an entry level career path. (p. 79)

Although, a child welfare focused course may be helpful, if students are not interested, they may avoid this elective. Preparing students for working in child welfare will require attention from across the curriculum. Educators should acknowledge that many of the students they are teaching will work in child welfare for some period, probably as their first job and the stakes are very high. Lwin and Beltrano (2020) stated, "social work education is tasked with ensuring that future workers have the knowledge and skills to effectively support families involved with the child welfare system" (p. 4-5).

The potential for social work to influence child welfare in positive ways is obvious. The child welfare system is in crisis and social work can help. If social work programs prioritize this as a social work challenge and responsibility, students might feel compelled to participate. Even if graduates enter child welfare temporarily, they should be prepared to do good work during that time, building trusting relationships and contributing to transformational change toward a more just and culturally relevant system. No helping role should be viewed as a placeholder until something better comes along. Social work values should not waiver based on the system we work in. If students are prepared to work well in child welfare, they will be prepared to work in any field of practice. Students should graduate confident in their capacity for working in child welfare, meeting the everyday needs of families, and transforming the system. Imagine the impact across all systems if students graduate prepared to swim well as described in this study.

Broad Representation of Child Welfare Among Social Work Faculty

Hearing practice experiences from faculty helped prepare participants to work in child welfare. Social work faculties require a strong group of educators and researchers with child

welfare interests and backgrounds to address the needs in the field. Child welfare cuts across all areas of practice. One educator explained,

> there's no required child welfare course within our curriculum, which is unfortunate, because child welfare and social work are a critical junction for which education needs to occur. Whether people go into the field or not of child welfare, they should be exposed to child welfare knowledge as social workers. I believe it's a missing mandatory piece in the curriculum because child welfare affects every aspect of our society. (E8)

Social work educators doing research in child welfare play an important role in collaborating with various groups working with children and families. Research is one of the tools for building relationships between education and the field that can provide more clarity on what is needed. In the introduction, I mentioned child welfare more broadly is about the overall well-being of children and families. Educators and researchers working within this realm and outside child protection will have much to offer in imagining new approaches and systems that focus on prevention and inter-disciplinary approaches to achieve child and family wellness (see https://www.equityforkidsincare.net/).

Privileging of Indigenous Pedagogies and Cultural Knowledges

Learning about the history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and the impact of colonization on children and families is foundational for learning about child welfare. It is one of the TRC calls to action and is included as a core competency requirement in the newest CASWE standards. As one educator pointly stated, "considering 90% of ones separated" (E4) are Indigenous in Manitoba, social work education and learning about child welfare must privilege learning Indigenous ways of knowing and caring. Self-awareness and understanding about social work's continued role in oppressive systems was a turning point for many participants that

influenced the way they practice. Participants described being more empathetic and open to using culturally relevant approaches. Learning through Indigenous pedagogies and from Indigenous perspectives was transformative in addressing power in relationships, developing humility, and being accountable as a helper.

Child welfare reforms have failed to fully shift to respecting Indigenous worldviews, maintaining dominant Eurocentric ideology and inequality. Valuing Indigenous knowledges in social work education will help make these shifts in the field. Kovach et al. (2015) studied how faculty in education and social work programs in Western Canada viewed, "their relationship with Indigenous knowledge systems and the ways in which they are incorporating these understandings into their pedagogical approach as educators" (p. 6). To meet the needs of Indigenous children and families, practitioners coming from education and social work require "a philosophical orientation and practice capacity that respects and actively integrates Indigenous points of view" (Kovack et al., 2015, p. 6). Centering Indigenous knowledges should be facilitated by the academic institution and program,

> There were voices in our study that attested to the complexity of this endeavor, and equally compelling voices that contested the ascription of complexity as being an excuse for avoiding what ought to be a simple social justice imperative … the degree to which Indigenous Knowledges become integrated into undergraduate and graduate level classes remains largely instructor dependent within an established academic culture that is increasingly defined by monetary efficiency factors (Kovach et al., 2015, p. 81- 85).

Support for educators in developing skills and confidence for creating brave spaces for difficult conversations is needed. Reflecting on students having debates in their child welfare class, one educator admitted,

I was intimidated … you don't want to not give them the opportunity to explore these

issues, so maybe a mentoring would have been better in that respect, like working

with someone whose skilled or at least for those classes where you foresee something

getting heated. Cause I think it's important to have difficult conversations and I'm not

great at that personally, cause there's so many topics that are hot spots for students,

especially between like white and Indigenous you know. (E4)

The Inner-City Social Work Program at the University of Manitoba provides an

example of Indigenous and student-centered social work education. This Access program is

designed for students with lived experiences facing structural barriers preventing access to higher

education. Building relationships within the community and offering cultural supports to students

is an integral part of the program. Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies are valued and

supported across the curriculum and program delivery. Staff and students are invited to learn

through Indigenous ceremonies and teachings from Indigenous Knowledge Keeper and social

worker, Linda Dano-Chartrand who is a part of the faculty.

Emphasis on Communication and Practice Skills

Good communication skills are related to building a relationship between the worker and

service user that allows for accurate assessments and case plans. One participant working in a

protection role reflected on building relationships in child welfare, "it's about breaking down

those walls with them … it can be a challenging thing to do, and it takes time but it's huge, cause

rapport is everything with your clients (S5). Numerous participants mentioned their Interpersonal

Communications class as one of the most important courses for preparing them to work in a

mandated setting. Participants identified that child welfare required the highest standard of

communication skills, which serves to benefit social workers going into any area of practice.

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Hughes and Chau (2012) interviewed child protection workers in Manitoba and British Columbia to explore how they build relationships and make decisions in their work with families experiencing domestic violence. They found, "creating and maintaining relationships is crucial to their role in supporting parents", however workload time constraints and parental fear and anxiety about having child welfare involved made this challenging (p. 5). Being able to respond in non-authoritative and non-judgemental ways were important strategies for building relationships, especially for families who had previous involvement. One participant stated,

> sometimes I could not change what the system was doing, but you know, one thing that I had control over was how I interacted with people. I had control over how to interact with kids. I had control over how I interacted with that mom. So, if I could do that in a way that was respectful and made me feel good about who I was as a human being number one and also as a social worker, then nothing could take that away from me. (E6)

Making a Commitment to the Child Welfare Field

As a profession with core values related to service and social justice, social work education programs must commit to prepare students to work in child welfare, support graduates working in the field, and contribute to research and advocacy that meets the needs of the field. Social work is intrinsically intertwined with child welfare and has an active role in developing and maintaining the status quo. Social work has the necessary knowledges and skills to help transform the system. Social work programs should consider developing partnerships with other disciplines for collaboration on addressing child welfare challenges. A stronger alliance is needed between the field, education, and government so these systems are working together. Social work, having expertise in child welfare and skills for building relationships and networking could lead these initiatives. The Prairie Child Welfare Consortium (PCWC) is an

example of this type of partnership, bringing representatives from education, government, and the community together to examine the needs of child welfare. The PCWC facilitates knowledge mobilization to support the field, through child welfare centered course offerings, child welfare conferences, and child welfare publications. With limited resources, the PCWC has made significant contributions fuelled by the dedication of all involved to develop a more just and culturally responsive system. The research findings suggest these efforts should be supported and utilized to further the goals of reconciliation in child welfare.

Participants expressed the disappointment they feel when they graduate with all the hopes and dreams of making a difference in the world and then are met with the reality that none of this feels possible in the child welfare field. One educator stated,

> When we are talking about issues that are facing child welfare today around the over-representation of Indigenous children and racialized children, you could see that people are wanting to do something so that this cycle can be stopped. Then when they get into the work itself, I think it just becomes overwhelming. I think we need to have those difficult conversations … so that we're not working in silos, and we are all working towards the same goal of making better lives for families and individuals and children as well, which is the most important. But it's a difficult transition, to be quite honest, that perhaps a lot of the students are not making very well. (E5)

Social work education programs need to consider how they are preparing students for this reality and how students can respond in transformative ways. This means working with the field as well, so they are prepared to receive students with the skills and imagination to change policy and practice as required. Dumbrill and Green (2008) stated "The power instructors hold in the academy gives them the responsibility to be the voice of change" (p. 499). Social work education

can share some of the burden frontline workers and child welfare administrators feel to change the system.

Action Plan for TRC and CASW Statement of Apology

Blackstock (2011a) explained "reconciliation means not saying sorry twice". Sadly, the 2019 Canadian Incident Study reported "nearly identical disparities as previous studies … First Nations children are three to four time more likely to be reported for a child maltreatment related concern" (Fallon, et al., 2021, p. 3). Social work programs have an ethical responsibility to implement action plans for how they will respond to the TRC calls to action regarding child welfare. Choate and MacLaurin (2018) stated, "We either enter into reconciliation or we sustain colonization" (p. 14). Kovach et at. (2015) found that although progress was being made in social work programs "to have a greater Indigenous presence, it has been a slow-moving process of incremental change" (p. 82). Education systems must build paths toward reconciliation and a focus on child welfare is needed.

In May 2017, the CASWE issued a *Statement of Complicity and Commitment to Change* in response to the TRC reports. The statement recognised social work education's shared responsibility in colonial efforts and offered several direct actions including,

> #8 will encourage and support Canadian schools of social work in revising mission statements, governance processes, curriculum, and pedagogy in ways that both advance the TRC recommendations and the overall indigenization of social work education
>
> # 12 will ensure the planned revision of our educational policies and standards (EPAS2019)
>
> > o   incorporates current and comprehensive knowledge regarding the de-colonialization and indigenization of social work education including, but not

necessarily limited to, the Calls to Action from the TRC, especially those related

to child welfare, education, and health

- o recognizes the distinct nature of Indigenous social work and avoids positioning

  such social work within the context of multi-cultural or cross-cultural theory and

  practice (see statement for complete list: https://caswe-acfts.ca/about-us/our-

  commitment-to-change/).

The recent CASWE (2021) accreditation standards now include core learning objectives about

colonialism and social work, Indigenous Peoples and communities, and anti-racism.

The CASW issued a similar statement of *Apology and Commitment to Reconciliation* in

the fall of 2019. The statement presents the historical account of social work's role in supporting

residential schools and the continued removal of Indigenous children through discriminatory

policies in the child welfare system. Their commitment to reconciliation states, "social workers

must have access to education and information to help advance reconciliation and decolonization

in their own practice" (p. 10).

Choate and MacLaurin (2018) explored pathways to implementing the TRC calls to

action for social work education by conducting focus groups with students and faculty from two

Western Universities. They found that despite participants support for decolonizing and

indigenizing social work education, there was little understanding of how that would happen,

educators felt ill prepared to teach Indigenous content, and there was a lack of institutional

direction or support. Choate and MacLaurin (2018) found students were not learning enough

about the history of colonization and its impact on Indigenous Peoples which left them feeling

unprepared to meet the needs of Indigenous families. Beyond history, participants expressed the

importance of learning Indigenous ways of knowing as an alternative way of thinking and

practicing, "that without a reformed curriculum that is inclusive of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing to inform their developing social work practice, they are at risk of perpetuating oppressive and culturally irreverent practice" (p. 25).

Strengthen Alliances Between Education and the Field

Participants expressed the important role field education can play in preparing them, however this can be ineffective if students feel unsupported. Education programs can ensure field placements are well organized with clear learning goals and regular feedback. Participants spoke positively of trainings in the field; however, these were often delayed. Core orientation training was offered months, sometimes years after graduates start. Participants suggested more connection between degree learning and trainings would be beneficial. Organized communication between educators and the field could help bridge this gap and create more collaboration.

Some participants who had experience as field supervisors shared their passion and commitment for helping students grow and learn. They described this role as fulfilling and as a responsibility to pass on their knowledge and experience. However, other participants reflecting on their student experiences, shared concerns that their field supervisors were disinterested and unavailable which hindered the value of their field placement in child welfare.

Freymond et al. (2021) formed a learning partnership between social work education and the child welfare community to explore the responsibility of preparing students to work in child welfare and how best to teach them. They identified the,

bureaucratic social worker, alienated from a caring, relational self, is gaining credibility. The flexibility and autonomy of front-line child welfare work have largely been replaced with standardized, competency-based procedures that happen regardless of the nature of

the concern or the idiosyncratic needs of families, communities, or young people. (p.

212)

Fallon et al. (2015) described a knowledge mobilization initiative in Ontario that engaged child

welfare agencies and workers in research projects. These efforts valued the insight workers

provided for informing research questions rooted in practice experience. It also facilitated the use

of research in practice and produced numerous informative publications and fact sheets.

Professional Development Opportunities from the University

Social work programs should maintain relationships with graduates working in child

welfare. Some participants mentioned a specialization in child welfare would be ideal, however

many indicated a generalist degree that does a better job of preparing for child welfare would be

best. This fits with participants' expression of child welfare knowledge and skills being relevant

to all social work practice. Participants valued the well-rounded learning offered in the social

work degree and felt it could be strengthened for child welfare by paying attention to the

transformative learning experiences described in this study. Participants also stated interest in a

post BSW specialization in child welfare. Participants talked about their struggle to maintain

momentum when they get into the child welfare field. They explained they do not have time to

keep up with the latest research and even forget what they learned in their education.

Transformative learning needs to be ongoing; you're not finished after you graduate and get a

job. One participant shared how continuing to listen and learn from service users becomes

transformative learning when you enter the field. To help support workers committed to

continued learning, social work programs should explore professional development opportunities

for child welfare.

<center>**Conclusion**</center>

The aim of this study was to develop a theory for social work education that will improve the preparation of social workers for working in child welfare. Currently child welfare is not a specialized focus in social work education in the prairies despite this area of practice being a main employer of social work graduates. The literature shows that social work has a significant role in delivering child welfare practice and responding to the current crisis in child welfare regarding overrepresentation of Indigenous families. This research challenges current oppressive practices in education and child protection and provides a framework for delivering education that is transformative, teaching students alternative ways to approach child welfare.

Using a constructivist grounded theory approach offered flexibility and an interpretive process to co-construct this theory with participants (Charmaz, 2006). The "explanatory power" of constructivist grounded theory helped explain *what* should be taught in the social work curriculum and *how* education can be a transformative platform for change toward a social justice approach in child welfare (Charmaz, 2008, p.408). This is a seed for action plans to implement change that will better prepare and support social workers and ultimately have an impact on the child welfare system and service users.

By engaging social workers, educators, and key informants, the research brought together voices that are often isolated. The analysis and recommendations explain what is needed for preparation to work in child protection from a social justice and culturally responsive lens. Understanding the foundation of how future child welfare workers are educated and prepared to deliver anti-oppressive and culturally anchored services, transformation in child welfare practice becomes possible. Comprehensive reports have outlined challenges in child welfare and the recommendations necessary moving forward. A missing piece was how we teach social work

students to make these critical shifts in the field. The transformative potential of social work education needs to be utilized and this research helps explore how.

This research sets a foundation for collaboration between education and the field that can develop the model further to be more context specific (e.g., developing a social work education program for child welfare in a specific community). Social workers in the field are uniquely qualified to offer insight to educators who are often not on the frontline day-to-day about what the current educational needs are. This research is useful for social work program administration and faculty when creating and reviewing curriculum. It is useful for child welfare administrations and child welfare workers when advocating for specific training and support in the field.

The world has changed since I started this research. The murder of George Floyd by a white police officer in the United States ignited public awareness of racial inequality institutionalised in public policy and service. In Canada, new technology unmasked thousands of children's graves in the backyards of residential schools across the country, bringing attention back to the TRC calls to action. A global pandemic made the world stand still, further exposing systemic injustice based on race, gender, class, age, and health. Rather than a return to normal, The Canadian Women's Foundation is advocating for "resetting normal" by building equality in the pandemic recovery. Featherstone et al. (2021) shared a tweet by Damian Barr to illustrate how the pandemic has brought awareness of inequalities and intersecting oppressions that compound for some families, "We are not all in the same boat. We are in the same storm. Some are on super-yachts. Some just have one oar" (p. 154 – 155).

Freymond et al. (2021) stated,

BSW students must become conscious of their social responsibilities. They need to

embrace change, value reconciliation, and engage as allies when requested. For this to be

a reality, they cannot simply be taught to engage in social work education as consumers

of helping technologies; their role models must be educators and practitioners engaged in

their own work of decolonization. (p. 222)

We need to better understand the dual role of meeting people where they are and at the same

time work for social justice, "Social work has the potential to be about transformation,

consciousness-raising, social change, justice, and liberation, and to manifest hope in students that

we can create more just systems" (Csiernik & Hillock, 2021, p. 3). I give the final words here to

the participant who inspired the title for this project,

I never knew what I was made of and capable of until I came to this position … when

you're in a child and family services position you are a servant to others … self-growth is

when you're helping others because you are joining them in that experience, and they are

sharing that piece of their life with you … I just hope that information can be shared,

that's my goal in life because child and family is not bad. It's not a bad field and if

anything, we just need more focused and committed people with experience, skill, and

knowledge to come in and do great things in this field. (K11)

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Appendix A

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action: Child welfare

1.We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to commit to reducing the number of Aboriginal children in care by:

    i. Monitoring and assessing neglect investigations.

    ii. Providing adequate resources to enable Aboriginal communities and child-welfare organizations to keep Aboriginal families together where it is safe to do so, and to keep children in culturally appropriate environments, regardless of where they reside.

    iii. Ensuring that social workers and others who conduct child-welfare investigations are properly educated and trained about the history and impacts of residential schools.

    iv. Ensuring that social workers and others who conduct child-welfare investigations are properly educated and trained about the potential for Aboriginal communities and families to provide more appropriate solutions to family healing.

    v. Requiring that all child-welfare decision makers consider the impact of the residential school experience on children and their caregivers.

2. We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, to prepare and publish annual reports on the number of Aboriginal children (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) who are in care, compared with non-Aboriginal children, as well as the reasons for apprehension, the total spending on preventive and care services by child-welfare agencies, and the effectiveness of various interventions.

3. We call upon all levels of government to fully implement Jordan's Principle.

4. We call upon the federal government to enact Aboriginal child-welfare legislation that establishes national standards for Aboriginal child apprehension and custody cases and includes principles that:

>   i. Affirm the right of Aboriginal governments to establish and maintain their own child-welfare agencies.
>
>   ii. Require all child-welfare agencies and courts to take the residential school legacy into account in their decision making.
>
>   iii. Establish, as an important priority, a requirement that placements of Aboriginal children into temporary and permanent care be culturally appropriate.

5. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate parenting programs for Aboriginal families.

Appendix B

Reflection Questions for Social Work Education Programs

1. What is the perception of child welfare in our community? What impacts this?

2. How can our program contribute to making sure the perception of child welfare is fair and accurate?

3. How can our program rebuild trust between social work and service users in the child welfare system?

4. What is the experience and commitment by faculty to teach and research in areas of child protection? Child and family well-being?

5. How are faculty with other areas of interest addressing child welfare across courses?

6. If a student does not take a child welfare elective, will they be prepared to swim/work in child welfare?

7. How does your program specifically prepare students to work in systems that operate from oppressive colonial frameworks? How will they cope and be effective in these fields?

8. How are Indigenous pedagogies and cultural knowledges integrated into the curriculum? What is the representation of Indigenous faculty? How are Indigenous faculty and students supported?

9. How are non-Indigenous educators and researchers integrating Indigenous perspectives in their teaching?

10. How is decolonizing and or indigenizing happening in the program?

11. What is your programs action plan for responding to the TRC calls to action regarding child welfare?

12. What is the accountability plan?

13. How can the alliance between education and the field be strengthened?

14. What relationships exist? Collaborative research?

15. Is there a means for sharing information about what is being taught and what the field needs?

16. What opportunities do faculty have for learning how to facilitate brave spaces in social work courses?

17. How do faculty feel about facilitating brave spaces? Navigating difficult conversation?

18. How do faculty create safe learning environments?

19. What opportunities for professional development related to child welfare are available? How can this be improved?

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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Title of Study:
Social Work Education as a Platform for Critical Transformation in Child Welfare Policy and Practice

Principal Investigator:
Jennifer Hedges, PhD Candidate University of Manitoba
E-mail: hedgesj@myumanitoba.ca
Phone: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Research Supervisors:
Dr. Eveline Milliken, Faculty of Social Work (PhD Advisor)
E-Mail: eveline.milliken@umanitoba.ca
Phone: 204-474-6032

Dr. Don Fuchs, Faculty of Social Work
E-mail: don.fuchs@umanitoba.ca

Dr. Charlotte Enns, Mauro Centre for Peace & Justice
E-mail: charlotte.enns@umanitoba.ca
Phone: 204-474-6052

Introduction:
You are being asked to be in a research study and this consent describes your role as a participant in the study. **Participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.**

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose of the Study:
This is a qualitative study to explore how social work education prepares social workers for working in child protection. Despite social work being the predominate profession in child

protection, there is a significant gap in the research on how social work education programs are preparing and supporting social workers to make a difference and be effective in this field of practice. The purpose of this research is interview social workers, educators and key informants to help build a theory for how social work education can be a platform for critical transformation in child welfare policy and practice.

This study will be submitted as PhD thesis. The thesis committee (listed at the beginning) will only have access to anonymous data.

<u>What Will Happen During the Study:</u>
You will be asked to meet with the researcher for a face to face interview. The interview will take about one hour. The interview questions will be provided to you in advance. You will be asked not to disclose any identifying information about the clients or students you are working with.

Social work degree participant: During the interview you will be asked a set of questions about your social work education experience and how it relates to child welfare practice.

Social Work Educator participant: During the interview you will be asked a set of prepared questions about your experience delivering courses about child welfare.

Key Informant participant: During the interview you will be invited to share your knowledge and experience related to social work education and preparing students to work in child welfare.

Interviews will be audio recorded using a digital device for later transcription and analysis. Following the interview, audio recordings will be immediately transferred to a secure password protected computer file on the researcher's computer and erased from the recording device.

In order to maintain **anonymity and confidentiality**, the researcher will be the only person who can identify you with the interview. In order to minimize any risk of connection your name will not be attached to the audio recording or the verbatim transcript. A coding system will be used to identify you that will only be known to the researcher. All documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office and in secure computer files on the researcher's computer. Contact information will be stored in a different computer file or cabinet drawer than the anonymized transcripts.

The researcher may contact you at a later date if clarification is needed on information collected from the interview or to invite you to review your transcript for accuracy.

Follow up interviews: You may be invited to participate in a follow up interview to discuss emerging themes in the data. Participation in follow up interviews is voluntary and a separate consent form will need to be reviewed and signed.

Social Work Educator participants: In following a grounded theory approach, the researcher may invite you to participate in a focus group following your initial interview to help review themes and theory development. Participation in this focus group is voluntary and a separate consent form will need to be reviewed and signed.

Identifying information will be destroyed (notes shredded and computer files erased) within 5 years. If you chose to withdraw from the study, your transcript will be destroyed and removed from the data.

Possible Risks or Discomforts:
Working in the area of child protection can be stressful and it could become difficult and or emotional to talk about challenges in this field**.** The researcher is a social worker with experience working as a child protection worker and educator and will be able to empathize.
You are encouraged to share only what you feel comfortable and ready to share. A list of community resources will be provided to you prior to the interview with information about crisis and counseling supports. You are free to end the interview or take a break at any time. You may also decline to answer a question.

Possible Benefits of Being in This Study:
Participants will be contributing to the understanding of how social work education can help prepare students for this particular type of work, ultimately improving the education system and child welfare system. Participants may appreciate the opportunity to share their knowledge and experiences about the complex work that they do. They may also feel like they have a voice in helping to improve systems and support future social workers.

Findings:
Data analysis and results will be shared in publications and presentations such as journals, books, conferences, and community presentations. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, data, including direct quotes will be shared using pseudonyms or referring to a participant's role (ex: social worker, educator, key informant). The researcher will provide a summary of the research findings and send it to you at the completion of the PhD study. Anticipated end date is December 2019.

Consent:
Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature _____   Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____   Date _____

Appendix D

E-mail message to be sent to the <u>Authorities executive directors</u>

Hello _____ ,

I hope this e-mail finds you well. I am writing to tell you about an exciting research project that I am engaged in as a social work PhD student at the University of Manitoba.

My personal background as a social worker is working in child protection and I have been teaching social work courses for the past 7 years. **This research is exploring how social work education prepares students to work in the field of child welfare in the Prairie Provinces.**

I am hoping to recruit social workers who are currently working in frontline protection roles in Manitoba about their education experience. My hope is that this will help develop a framework for how social work education can better support and prepare future child welfare workers.

The research will involve a one hour interview with interested participants.

As the director of _____, I would first like to gain your support in pursuing this research.

I have attached the consent form and recruitment poster for your review. The consent form describes the study in more detail and outlines the risks and benefits of participation.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Jennifer Hedges, MSW, PhD Candidate
University of Manitoba, Faculty of Social Work
E: mail – <u>hedgesj@myumanitoba.ca</u>

Appendix E

E-mail message to be sent to the <u>deans of social work programs</u>

Hello _____ ,

I hope this e-mail finds you well. I am writing to tell you about an exciting research project that I am engaged in as a social work PhD student at the University of Manitoba.

My personal background as a social worker is working in child protection and I have been teaching social work courses for the past 7 years. **This research is exploring how social work education prepares students to work in the field of child welfare in the Prairie Provinces.**

I am hoping to recruit social work faculty who have taught a course on child welfare in the past 5 years to participate by meeting with me for a face to face interview.

The interview should take about one hour.

As the dean of _____, I would first like to gain your support in pursuing this research.

I have attached the consent form and recruitment poster for your review. The consent form describes the study in more detail and outlines the risks and benefits of participation.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Jennifer Hedges, MSW, PhD Candidate
University of Manitoba, Faculty of Social Work
E: mail – hedgesj@myumanitoba.ca

Appendix F

E-mail message to be sent to potential <u>key informants/agencies</u>:

Hello _____ ,

I hope this e-mail finds you well. I am writing to inform you about a qualitative research study I am conducting about the impact of social work education on front line protection workers in child welfare.

Your _____ (agency/name) came up because of your specific <u>(knowledge, experience)</u>. Someone from your agency would make a valuable contribution because _____.

Participation would involve meeting with me for a face to face interview that should take about one hour. The list of questions will be provided to you in advance.

I have attached the consent form and a recruitment poster for you to review prior to making a decision. The consent form describes the study in more detail and outlines the risks and benefits of participation.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jennifer Hedges, MSW, PhD Candidate
University of Manitoba, Faculty of Social Work
E: mail – <u>hedgesj@myumanitoba.ca</u>

Appendix G

E-mail message to be sent to potential <u>social work degree participants</u>:

Hello _____ ,

I hope this e-mail finds you well. Thank you for your interest in participating in this research project about the impact of social work education on front line protection workers in child welfare.

Participation involves an interview that should take about one hour and we could meet at a location that is convenient for you.

I will ask you a set of questions about how your social work education has impacted your child protection work. The list of questions will be provided to you in advance.

I have attached the consent form for you to review prior to making a decision. The consent form describes the study in more detail and outlines the risks and benefits of participation.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jennifer Hedges, MSW, PhD Candidate
University of Manitoba, Faculty of Social Work
E: mail – <u>hedgesj@myumanitoba.ca</u>

Appendix H

E-mail message to be sent to potential <u>social work faculty participants</u>:

Hello _____ ,

I hope this e-mail finds you well. Thank you for your interest in participating in this study about the impact of social work education on front line protection workers in child welfare.

I am seeking social work faculty who have taught a course on child welfare in the past 5 years to participate by meeting with me for a face to face interview.

The interview should take about one hour and we could meet at a location that is convenient for you.

I will ask you a set of questions related to the content of your child welfare course and your teaching methods for delivery the course. The list of questions will be provided to you in advance.

I have attached the consent form for you to review prior to making a decision. The consent form describes the study in more detail and outlines the risks and benefits of participation.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jennifer Hedges, MSW, PhD Candidate
University of Manitoba, Faculty of Social Work
E: mail – <u>hedgesj@myumanitoba.ca</u>

Appendix I

E-mail message to be sent to potential <u>key informants</u>:

Hello _____ ,

I hope this e-mail finds you well. Thank you for your interest in participating in this study about the impact of social work education on front line protection workers in child welfare.

Participation would involve meeting with me for a face to face interview. The interview should take about one hour and we could meet at a location that is convenient for you.

The list of questions will be provided to you in advance.

I have attached the consent form for you to review prior to making a decision. The consent form describes the study in more detail and outlines the risks and benefits of participation.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jennifer Hedges, MSW, PhD Candidate
University of Manitoba, Faculty of Social Work
E: mail – <u>hedgesj@myumanitoba.ca</u>

Appendix J

1. **How does social work education impact child welfare practice?**

   Prompt or alternative: Can you think of an experience in your education that stands out when you are doing your protection work?

2. **How is social work education transformative?**

   Prompt or alternative: Can you describe a learning experience in your social work education that changed the way you think? What teaching methods were used?

3. **Which specific knowledges and skills are necessary for future child welfare social workers?**

   Prompt or alternative: What courses or learning experiences are important?

4. **How is learning in social work education transferred to practice in the child welfare field?**

   Prompt of alternative: Can you describe an experience in practice that you can link to learning in your education?

5. **What challenges to you see facing new social work graduates entering the child welfare field?**

6. *How would you imagine a social work education model for preparing students to work in child welfare?*

   Prompt or alternative: What do you see social work programs doing well? Where can social work programs improve?

The following general prompts will be used throughout the interview as necessary: Can you tell me more about…, can you give me an example?

Appendix K

Research Participant Resource List

KLINIC: 786-8686 or 1-888-322-3019
24 hour crisis line offers counselling service

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA), Mobile Crisis Service: 204-940-1781
Multi-disciplinary team specializing in crisis intervention, mental health assessment, and short term follow-up for adults experiencing a mental health crisis.

KLINIC community drop in counseling services: 204-784-4067
Drop-in counselling is available at two locations in Winnipeg. Call for locations and times or visit www.klinic.mb.ca

AURORA Family Therapy Centre University of Winnipeg · 204-786-9251
Please access the Mental Health Wellness Guide online at:
http://winnipeg.cmha.ca/files/2014/10/Mental-Health-Resource-Guide-for-Winnipeg-19th-Edition-2015.pdf

Alberta:

Mental Health 24 hr Crisis Line and Mobile Crisis: 1-877-303-2642
Provides toll-free, 24/7 telephone services, which offers help for mental health concerns

University of Alberta Counselling & Clinical Services: 780-492-5205

Saskatchewan:

Mental Health 24 hr Crisis Line and Mobile Crisis: 306-525-5333
Provides toll-free, 24/7 telephone services, which offers help for mental health concerns

University of Regina Counselling Services: 306-585-4491

Invitation to Participate

How can Social Work Education be a Transformative Platform for Change in Child Welfare Policy and Practice?

The purpose of this study is to explore how social work education can support and prepare social work students for a future in child welfare

IF YOU ARE A:

Please consider participating in this exciting research

Participation includes:
Approx. 1hr Interview

Questions will be provided in advance

Social Worker	Educator	Key Informant
• Minimum 2 years working in child protection • Graduated from a social work degree program in the past 8 years	• Faculty in a social work program • Have taught a social work course on child welfare in the past 5 years	• Working with the child welfare system • Expereince related to social work education and child welfare

For Further Information
CONTACT:
Jennifer Hedges, PhD Candidate
Hedgesj@myumanitoba.ca

This research will be part of a doctoral research thesis at the University of Manitoba and a commitment to supporting social workers working in child welfare and for the benefit of the children, families, and communities served. Approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board.

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