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School social work: Supporting children's primary education in the South West of Western Australia

Karen McDavitt

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**School Social Work:
Supporting children's primary education
in the South West of Western Australia.**

This thesis is presented in fulfilment of the degree of
Master of Social Science

Karen McDavitt

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School of Arts and Humanities
2017

Abstract

In many countries, social workers play a role in the education of children. In Australia, this is evident in the state of Victoria which has a long history of school social work. However, it is not the case in Western Australia where there are very few government-funded social work roles in public schools. With the barriers to education rising for increasing numbers of students, the social work profession could be one component in a multi-disciplinary whole that supports students and the broader community so that each child has the best chance of reaching their full potential.

This thesis poses the question: **Is there a role for social workers in regional primary schools in the South West of Western Australia in relation to identifying and addressing external barriers to education?** The term *external barriers to education* is used in this thesis to denote barriers which, unlike disability or illness, are external to the child. The Australian Association of Social Workers' Practice Standards for School Social Workers provide a list of the range of issues that may impact on a student's ability to engage with education, identifying areas where a social worker is well placed to provide support and direction. For the purpose of this study, the focus is on those matters external to the child, such as (but not limited to) family changes, drug and/or alcohol misuse within the home environment, poverty, violence, abuse and neglect, transiency or instability of housing.

To answer the research question, this study first reviews literature pertaining to education, social work and government policy and then explores the experiences of five Edith Cowan University social work students who undertook a field placement in one of three host regional government primary school in the South West of Western Australia. The study also explores the perspectives of five staff from the three host schools and the external field educator who supervised all five students. Data was

collected by way of interviews and focus groups with the participants, with the data then being subject to thematic analysis.

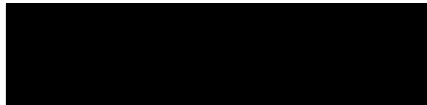
The rich data derived from this study depicts the work undertaken by the social work students, the possibilities for the profession of social work and the implications this research may have in relation to identifying and addressing external barriers to children's learning and education. The findings are distinct and unambiguous, identifying a major gap in the support that is offered to students and their families. This thesis suggests that the gap identified by this study may result in children having reduced possibilities to learn and, as a result, they may be denied life opportunities; a matter which it is argued could impinge upon children's human right to education.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- i. Incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- ii. Contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or
- iii. Contain any defamatory material

Signed _____

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of the author.

Date

7th February 2017

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The time and effort that goes in to an endeavour such as a Master's thesis is not borne by the student alone. I am indebted to so many people for their perseverance, their patience, their belief and their long standing support.

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I am incredibly fortunate to work in an environment where I am surrounded by researchers and to my colleagues, many of which are also my friends, I thank you for your consistent encouragement and support. The informal chats in the corridors where I was able to articulate my thoughts and vent my frustrations have been invaluable, as has the advice you've given me along the way.

To my friends who I have neglected because I have always been too busy. I cannot wait for dinner or a coffee. Just tell me when.

And finally, to those who are my family.

Geoff, your constant cries of "It'll all be good", whilst seemingly void of any real evidence, have actually helped.

To my mum and dad. Well what can one say to those who never seem to doubt, who are unflinchingly by my side in whatever I choose to do, who step in and step up always. If not for you both, where would I be?

And, to the wisest person I know. Campbell, you inspire me every day. You provide the sense to my world. You make me laugh, you fill me with hope for the future of the planet and humanity. You have been the one most impacted by my desire to fulfil my own goals, yet you seem to understand and have encouraged me every step of the way. You manage with my silly work hours, my inattention due to a head full of data, my manic-ness in an attempt to juggle the many hats I wear. But by far, the best, and most honoured hat I wear is that of mum. Thank you my beautiful boy.

Dedication

This work represents the belief my parents always instilled in me, that you can achieve whatever you want; and the reality of that which I now demonstrate to my son – you can.

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Chapter 1: Background to the study

Introduction

The quality of a student's education should not be limited by where the student lives, the income of his or her family, the school he or she attends or his or her personal circumstances.

Australian Education Act, 2013, Preamble.

My interest in the appointment of social workers in schools has developed over a number of years and was heightened during my own teacher training in 2008 when I spent time as a primary school teacher on placement in a regional primary school. It was evident that a number of students in the year three class I was assigned, were impacted by a wide range of socio-economic issues external to the school environment. Most days, if not every day, these students would present at school, the physical place for learning, but they were not necessarily in the emotional space they needed to be in to take advantage of the education available. I found myself drawn to these students; there was an inequity that was not being addressed, but I believed it could be.

Once qualified, I worked at a small rural primary school and had similar experiences. There was one child, a girl of about ten years of age, who I will refer to as Felicity, who had lost both her parents and had very limited family support in the local area. The child had met with the school psychologist on numerous occasions, usually when her behaviour became a concern to the teaching staff. I recall sitting at the staffroom table when the discussion turned to this child and it was again suggested that the school psychologist be contacted and asked to visit and speak with Felicity. I remember the scream inside my head, 'But it's not the child that's broken'. I acknowledge that this was the only option available to the teaching and administrative staff, yet I was aware that this was not the only option for Felicity. Felicity had endured exceptional trauma in her life and

whilst the environment that she was now living in was more than adequate, it was not providing her with what she needed. The school staff shouldered a great deal of the responsibility around ensuring Felicity was able to participate in events outside school, and liaising with family who lived interstate; but it was not the school's responsibility. It was not surprising that, at times, Felicity reacted to her situation with negative behaviours and no doubt there were areas of her life in which a psychologist would be able to help. Overwhelmingly though, it was evident that the social environment the child was in, was what needed support; and that included the school staff, the caregiver, the family connections and the small community.

I began to wonder if the site of education needed to be more than a site for teaching and if a more holistic approach to an individual's education may be more fruitful and have a broader, more positive impact on a student's future. Furthermore, I was curious: if this holistic approach was provided at a primary school level, would disengagement at a secondary level be lessened? If there are external barriers to a child's education and ability to learn, whose responsibility is it to reduce these barriers so that children can be enabled to benefit from the education which is available? If these barriers are not removed, does this impact on the child's human right to an education? Does the Western Australian Department of Education have a role in ensuring that this education is universally accessible, and not merely available on a physical level?

My curiosity has been piqued further by the political climate over the past decade which has seen the funding of chaplains, and at certain points, secular welfare officers to the apparent exclusion of social workers, in both public and private schools in Australia. I have wondered if there is a gap between the role undertaken by school psychologists and school chaplains. Is there a role for social workers who can facilitate a connection between the school, their families, the community and beyond?

Prior to undertaking the Graduate Diploma of Education (Primary) I had completed a Bachelor of Arts (Politics and Government/Geography). Many of the geography units I

took were in the area of human geography, focusing on human rights and social justice and since qualifying as a primary school teacher, I have completed a Bachelor of Social Work. In my current role as a social work lecturer at Edith Cowan University (ECU), my teaching and research work draws on my earlier studies and my areas of personal and professional interest: children's education; young peoples' social and emotional wellbeing; human rights and governmental policy. Thus, it is not surprising that I began to research the area of school social work and suggested to the Social Work Program team that we place social work students undertaking field placement in local primary schools. The program had previously placed students in a select number of secondary schools; however, the placement of student social workers in public primary schools, which did not have formal student support service teams, had not been trialled.

The ECU School Social Work Field Education Program commenced in 2015 with five students and three primary schools. The principals at each of the schools were open to working with the ECU social work team to develop a model that would provide the social work students with the learning they required, assist and support the school in the relevant areas of need and be sustainable. The research for this thesis was undertaken with this cohort of students and the social work and education staff who supported them. In 2016 the number of students hosted by primary schools remained at five, but this was across four schools. Whilst a number of other schools have expressed interest in the school social work program, it is difficult to grow the program due to limited resources.

When children enter a school environment where they are expected to a) function and b) perform to a specified level. These expectations rarely allow for a deep understanding of the personal knowledge and beliefs, or socio-economic environment of the child. What would schools look like if they were informed by a holistic perspective of learning, where an individual is not only instructed to learn, but feels empowered to learn and to carve their character and identity in tandem with this learning; to learn in an environment where their social class, ethnicity and [dis]advantage is acknowledged and respected rather than perceived as a deficit to be judged and treated?

In the latter half of the 1970s, public education in Australia became about equality and opportunity for all, largely due to the Karmel Report of 1973 (Bambach, 1979; Barrett, 2014; Cranston, Kimber, Mulford, Reid & Keating, 2010) and this again became an aspiration in the 21st century with the then Federal Labor Government commissioning David Gonski to review funding for education (Kenway, 2013). The expert panel who developed what became known as the Gonski Report found that:

The challenge for the review is to design a funding model that adequately reflects the different needs of students to enable resources to be directed to where they are needed most. All Australian students should be allowed to achieve their very best regardless of their background or circumstances. (Gonski, Boston, Greiner, Lawrence, Scales & Tannock, p. 29)

But can equality be achieved when each child is on a different playing field? What can we, as a society, do to create a more equal playing field? Why does the education environment focus on passing content on to children, rather than providing the optimum conditions for children to be educated? There seems a sense of, "Here it is, come and get it and if you can't get it, well then that's not our problem as we provided it." It may be time for the question to be asked as to why staffing at schools consists predominantly of teachers. If we are to educate, should we more rigorously examine the environments in which that education occurs, including the social circumstances from which children come to education, and provide the supports necessary to reduce the barriers that impede accessing that education? Should a site for education be comprised of multi-disciplinary professions that support the individual to be mentally, physically and socially open to learning? These are the questions which I have found myself repeatedly returning to ever since my first teaching placement in 2008.

So where do social workers come in? Research evidence indicates there is a link between social and cultural capital and education performance (Acar, 2011; Caldwell & Spinks, 2013; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004; Plagens, 2011). Numerous authors (for example, Acar,

2011) claim that with increased social capital comes increased participation, improved student behaviour and development, increased academic achievement and lower attrition. Social workers can play a role in building social capital; Mathbor (2007), when referring to Loeffler et al. (2004) states that for social work, social capital is defined as “a process of building trusting relationships, mutual understanding and shared actions that bring together individuals, communities and institutions” (p. 360). The concept of social capital is discussed further in the next chapter.

Significance

The proposed study was considered significant for a number of reasons, these being:

- Research has found that 79% of teacher respondents agreed that primary schools were an ideal location from which to provide support services to parents and carers (Webb & Vulliamy, 2002, p. 180);
- there is limited research undertaken into school social work in Australia, and even less so in Western Australia;
- public primary schools are not currently a mainstream site of social work practice;
- a school social worker can help build social and human capital in the school environment, thereby increasing engagement and participation;
- If there are barriers to the accessibility of education then it is incumbent on society to mitigate the effects of these barriers; and finally,
- The AASW Code of Ethics (2010) details the professional value of social justice. It states that social workers must strive to address social injustices and advocate for equality for all. Further, it demands of the profession that social workers identify systemic processes that maintain and perpetuate elements of injustice and inequality and call for change when a violation of human rights is evident.

Purpose of the research

When doing a search for the term 'social disability' the results that appear relate to the disadvantage that some with a physical disability encounter on a social level, social security or the social construction of disability. There are few, if any articles or references to those who are restricted in participating fully in education due to the social environment in which they are raised. In classrooms across the state, teachers are teaching, but does this mean the child is being educated? If the current system of education is not ensuring universal education, then the barriers to this must be identified and addressed.

When the term disability is used, people tend to assume physical disability, or perhaps learning disability, with the focus on the individual as having the disability, in effect pathologising the person. However I would suggest that the social environment in which a child lives could also be acting as a 'disability', in that it is hindering the individual's ability to access that which is available to others. To explain this further and in the context of education, the individual may be physically present therefore access to the school site is possible, but emotionally and intellectually, the child is unable to attend, thereby impeding the child's ability to be educated and to learn.

Although not a school leader, as a researcher in the area of school leadership I am motivated by the following:

School leaders must increase their awareness of various explicit and implicit forms of oppression, develop intent to subvert the dominant paradigm, and finally, act as a committed advocate for educational change that makes a meaningful and positive change in the education and lives of traditionally marginalized and oppressed students. (Jean-Marie, Normore & Brooks, 2009, p. 4)

Research question

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of student social workers, school staff members and the external field educator involved in field placements in regional primary schools where social work students have undertaken field education. The purpose of the study is to consider whether there is a place for social workers in government primary schools in the South West region of Western Australia.

The question that this research aims to answer is:

Is there a role for social workers in regional primary schools in the South West of Western Australia in relation to identifying and addressing external barriers to education?

Definition of terms

Social work

The definition used for this paper will be that agreed to by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2014) and used by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW, 2016a), this being the Global Definition of the Social Work Profession:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

Role

The role of social workers is to achieve the projects and tasks as outlined in the above definition.

Kemp and Holmwood (2012) argue that there is a plurality to a position or a role, dependent on social context and interactions, so whilst this definition of role is accepted, it is expected that the behaviours of, and use of self by individuals will impact on an individual social worker's understanding of the position.

Primary schools/education

Each state and territory in Australia holds the responsibility for education within their own jurisdictions. However all have a non-compulsory year prior to primary, known in Western Australia as kindergarten, followed by a pre-primary year, then twelve years of formal schooling (Department of Education & Training, 2015). For the purposes of this research, it is primary education within the state of Western Australia that will be the focus and therefore pre-primary to year six (most commonly children aged five to eleven years).

External barriers

The AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers (2008, p. 11) provide a list of the range of issues that impact on a student's ability to engage with education, identifying areas where a social worker is well placed to provide support and direction. For the purpose of this study, the focus is on those matters external to the child, such as, but not limited to, family changes, drug and/or alcohol misuse within the home environment, poverty, violence, abuse and neglect, transiency or instability of housing.

This is supported by Murray, Mitchell, Gale, Edwards and Zyngier (2004) who make reference to four factors impacting on the level of student engagement: school factors, individual factors, social factors and family factors. To further clarify the definition used in this study, external barriers denotes those impediments to accessing education that are outside the school and social environment (for example, quality of teaching, curriculum,

gender, ethnicity etc) and do not pertain to the individual (for example, physical or psychological ill health). Murray et al. (p. 9) suggest that family factors include:

- “Large family size
- Family dysfunction e.g. conflict and abuse
- Family break-up and the formation of new families
- High family mobility
- Separation from family
- Parental illness
- Low socio-economic status—low income and educational attainment
- Unemployment”

South West of Western Australia

The south western tip of Australia is known as ‘the South West’, expanding south from the Harvey Shire in the north, to the Manjimup Shire and west to the coast. In all, it covers nearly 24,000 hectares, 12 local government areas and has a population in excess of 170,000, making it the most populated area outside of the state capital, Perth. Whilst there is a substantial mining and agricultural industry, the area is also known for a great deal more, including tourism, viticulture, manufacturing and retail, which contributed \$17 billion dollars to the economy during the financial year ending 2014 (Department of Regional Development, 2014; South West Development Commission, 2016).

Human rights

It is acknowledged that the understanding of human rights is contested, with claims of contextuality, privilege and difference making it difficult to form an absolute definition agreed to by all. Little (as cited in Parekh, 2008, p. 124) contends that human rights “exist independently of human acknowledgement” and whilst it can be argued that critiques of

the human rights discourse and documentation are worthy and justifiable, the basic tenets of respect for human dignity exist independent of such discussions.

For the purposes of this paper, human rights is understood to be that which acknowledges difference yet upholds equality (Hammarberg, 2014). This thesis explores the relationship of human rights to education and is guided by the codified declarations of which Australia is a signatory, these being: Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which states that education is a right for all and that it should be free in the elementary, or primary years; Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which asserts “that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society”; Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which states that education should be directed to “the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential” (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016).

Consideration of human rights and its contested meanings run throughout this thesis, providing a framework for research design, data collection and analysis, presentation of findings and conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have depicted my own personal journey which resulted in the realisation that the education some children were receiving was limited; that despite the best efforts of many in the education system, the external barriers that were hindering a child's access to education were not being adequately addressed. I have then provided detail of the purpose of the research, defined the research question and concepts contained within the question together with the conceptual framework which focuses on human rights. The literature review is commenced in chapter two, with an examination of the history of education, moving on to a discussion of the barriers that may impede a child's access to the education that is available.

Chapter 2: Literature review: education

Introduction

This literature review commences with a description of the purpose of education, followed by a brief history of education in Australia and more specifically, Western Australia. A history of barriers to education is discussed, followed by an examination of the current and existing external barriers to education experienced by some children in Australia and overseas. The purpose of this discussion is to begin exploring the relationship between human rights and the provision of a primary education.

Education

Purpose of education

The first recordings of education indicate that during early civilization the focus for education was preparedness for life within a community, including the expectations of behaviours and social mores that would preserve the social structure (Sifuna & Otiende, 2006). This is evident throughout the ages, in countries such as Egypt, India and China, where the stratification of society was to be maintained and traditions perpetuated in order for social stability to be preserved (Monroe, 1907; Sifuna & Otiende, 2006). Archaic and Classical Greek times provide evidence of a form of public education that catered for a cross section of the polis, yet was restricted to those chosen to participate. This model of selection created exclusion, as those chosen were then seen as superior to those not (Griffith, 2001; Monroe, 1907).

Reid (2010; 2012) claims that there are three purposes to education: democratic, individual and a mixture of the two, being economic. If the purpose is democratic it is said to be for the public good, with schools preparing students for civic participation, as in Ancient Greece (Griffith, 2001). A private purpose places the focus on the individual,

commodifying education whilst developing autonomy and skills for individual prosperity. A combination of democratic and individual purposes has an emphasis on economic goals for society; supplying the labour market and ensuring productivity (Cantor & Englot, 2013; Cranston, Mulford, Keating & Reid, 2010; Reid, 2010; 2012). Historically education has been for the public purpose of society as a whole, with the belief that an educated populace would provide economic and health benefits for all. However, there is debate about whether this is still the case, with some arguing that there has been a shift to the private, in keeping with a neo-liberalist ideology (Cranston, Mulford, Keating & Reid, 2010). Neo-liberalism is a term which describes the dominant economic system in western countries, generally understood to have replaced Keynesian economics from the early 1980s (Sugarman, 2015). The four core tenets of neo-liberalism are understood to be: the importance of the free market; individualism over collectivism, particularly in relation to private ownership; the rule of law-state ensuring individual liberties; and, minimal state intervention (Turner, 2008). These ideological principles support a view of education for a private purpose.

History of education in Australia

In the late eighteenth century, governors of the new colonies of Australia could foresee that the children currently resident, together with the increasing numbers of 'illegitimate' children, were the future for this new world. However, despite the Libertarian Adam Smith theorising that the education of the poor and disadvantaged would reduce delinquent and rebellious activity (Austin, 1972; Partridge, 2014), the British government were not forthcoming with any means with which to provide instruction (Blake, 1977). As such, the governors made use of those in the community that were literate, often the convicts, to take on the role of teacher (Austin, 1972; Blake, 1977). Infrastructure and supplies for the schools were in part subsidised by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel based in England and the London Missionary Society (Hyams & Bessant, 1972; Partridge, 2014). As was the case in Britain, it was considered appropriate that religious bodies would involve themselves in the education of children, particularly those of the lower classes, as

the purpose of education was to uphold good morals, this being the domain of the Church (Partridge, 2014).

Both church and state believed that provision of basic instruction in reading and perhaps numeracy and writing would improve the moral good of individuals, thereby minimising petty crime and “rescu[ing] the children from the ‘sinful’ living of their convict parents” (Hyams & Bessant, 1972, p. 5). As such, land was granted to the religious bodies and the influence of the church increased, with the construction of church buildings doubling as classrooms during the week, thereby strengthening the association between church, state and education. By 1820, the National Schools monitorial system was introduced to the new colony. Earl Bathurst, British Secretary of State for the War and the Colonies, stated the system was the best for ensuring children were raised “in Habits of Industry and Regularity, and for implanting in their Minds the Principles of the Established Church” [capitals in original] (Austin, 1972, p. 8). The monitorial system promoted high achieving students to that akin to teacher’s aide, thereby reducing staffing requirements, and of course cost (Hyams & Bessant, 1972; Mossenson, 1972).

Many of the Australian colonies had in place dual systems of both public schools and state supported church schools, but in the latter half of the nineteenth century this changed with colonial governments directing funding to the non-denominational schools solely. South Australia was the first colony to cease funding to religious bodies for education, creating the Council of Education in 1851 to establish state funded schools (Partridge, 2014), but, as explained below, Western Australia was the last of the colonies to cease such funding, doing so in 1895 (Hyams & Bessant, 1972).

Prior to European occupation, Indigenous people had educated the children, with the curriculum including song, spiritual practice, language, cultural traditions, art and marriage arrangements. With colonisation came exclusion from these traditional practices with many children removed from their parents to reside in foster homes or missions and be taught in the way of the now dominant culture (Gray & Beresford, 2008; White, 2010).

The state education was minimal at best, with the vast majority of Indigenous children receiving no formal education at all. In 1937, an anthropologist acknowledged that:

The present policy is to educate aborigines (mostly mixed-bloods) up to what might be called a 'useful labourer's standard', for to do more, if it were possible, would not help them ... aborigines (full and mixed blood) should not, and can not, be assimilated by the white community. They must live apart ... They cannot become equals of the white race. (Elkin, cited in Gray & Beresford, 2008, p. 205)

History of education in Western Australia

Mossenson (1972) claims that the first primary school in what was known as the Swan River Colony commenced operation the year after the colony was founded in 1829. Whilst initial attempts to foster an education system floundered, by 1838 with the support of Governor Stirling the colony had boys' schools catering for both the "higher orders" and the "inferior classes" (Mossenson, 1972, p.5). However, Rankin (1926) states that the first schools were opened in Perth and Fremantle in 1833, followed in the same year by a school in Guildford and in 1834, provision of education at Augusta and King George Sound (now Albany).

Western Australia struggled to maintain an educational system in the early years and relied heavily on religious organisations to continue to deliver some form of schooling (Austin, 1972; Hyams & Bessant, 1972; Rankin, 1926). As such, funding was provided for both public and religious based education in the state, but in 1855 the subsidy for Catholic education was ceased. Support for other forms of denominational education continued until the *Elementary Act of 1871* when funding for Catholic schooling was reinstated. The *Elementary Act of 1871* based the funding model on a minimum number of students enrolled and was calculated on attendance, thus bringing the Western Australian education system in line with that in New South Wales (Austin, 1972; Hyams

& Bessant, 1972; Rankin, 1926). It was not until 1895 that the state government ceased assistance to the denominational education providers, making it the last of the states to do so, and heralding the doctrine of liberalism with the separation of church and state (Hyams & Bessant, 1972).

With the assent of the *Public Education Act 1899 (63 Vict. No. 3)*, which is referred to in some literature as the *Education Amendment Act of 1899*, Western Australia provided free and compulsory education for all children between the ages of six and fourteen years (Mossenson, 1972). The Act set out the reasons that would be acceptable for a child not attending school, such as during the period of harvest or in times of sickness or infirmity, with this being subject to written advice to the teacher. However, if a child did not have sufficient reason to be absent, it was noted that:

THE Minister may from time to time appoint officers whose duty it shall be to enforce the attendance required by this Act, and the officers so appointed shall be empowered to accost in the streets or other public places, and obtain the names and addresses of children of school age who are apparently not in attendance at school [capitals in original] (*Public Education Act, 1899*).

It would seem that the provision of a free and compulsory education was the aspiration of the Western Australian colony, and later the state. Despite the term 'universal' being mentioned in some of the literature, it is never in such a way that indicates that due consideration was given and processes undertaken to achieve the objective of this education being truly accessible to students from the widest possible range of socio-economic and personal circumstances.

Critique of formal education

As discussed above, the historical purpose of formal education was to enculturate a person into the mores of the society in which they lived, and there is much evidence to

indicate that this is still the case; the political class develop the design, structure and curriculum of schools which advance those discourses that maintain the status quo, with the powerful elite remaining unchallenged (Apple, 1990; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Hinchey, 2004; McInerney, 2004). Aronowitz and Giroux (1986) discuss a number of theories of reproduction, based on a Marxist ideology; economic-reproductive model; cultural-reproductive model; and the hegemonic-state reproductive model. Each model provides a framework for analysing the structures of power within the education system and society more broadly. An influential theorist in the area of the hegemonic-state model, Gramsci described hegemony as the “the ability of one class to articulate the interest of other social groups to its own” (cited in Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 88) and in so doing, place the perspective or worldview of the ruling class firmly in the position of the absolute (Apple, 1990).

Hinchey (2004) suggests that many assumptions are made by parents, teachers and society about a number of elements of education, with the overarching supposition being that the purpose of schools is clear. Yet, Hinchey continues, the purpose of schools is contextual and therefore an assumption should not be made. Instead, individual schools or, in the case of Western Australia, the Department of Education would be well placed to consider, “what exactly, are schools for? That is, what are they supposed to accomplish” (Hinchey, 2004, p. 8). Apple (1990) and Offe (cited in Liston, 1988) contend that the purpose of formal schooling is far more entrenched in capitalism than merely considering context, that it is designed for legitimation and accumulation of capital for the state and other power elites. With the focus of this study being on the external barriers to education, the following claim by Apple (1995, p. 51) is revealing:

By defining large groups of children as deviant (slow learners, remedial problems, discipline problems, etc.), and giving funding and legislative support for special teachers and for ‘diagnosis’ and for ‘treatment’ the state will fund extensive remedial projects. While these projects seem neutral, helpful, and may seem aimed at increasing mobility, they will actually defuse

the debate over the role of schooling in the reproduction of the knowledge and people 'required' by society. It will do this in part by defining the ultimate causes of such deviance as within the child or his or her culture and not due to, say poverty, the conflicts and disparities generated by the historically evolving cultural and economic hierarchies of the society, etc. This will be hidden from us as well by our assumption, that schools are primarily organized as distribution agencies, instead of, at least in part, important agencies in the accumulation process.

Barriers

Historical barriers to education

As previously discussed, the colony that was to become Western Australia struggled to develop due to its distance from the more populated east coast; the coastal land in the West being deemed unsuitable for agricultural pursuits also slowed development (Fletcher, 1982; Mossenson, 1972). With this came difficulty in establishing schools due to a transient, and often isolated and illiterate population; moreover a depressed economy meant that few could afford the costs of schooling (Godfrey, 2007; Mossenson, 1972; Rankin, 1926). An article in one of the state newspapers in 1843, called on the colonial administration to intervene as "it is evident that the next generation of colonists must be inferior to their parents and thus ... a rapid deterioration must take place" until "there would be little to distinguish" the colonist "from the debased and unchristianised denizen of the woods" (Fletcher, 1982, p. 1). Rankin (1926), also referring to the state newspaper, mentions a letter that was published in 1841 which was disparaging of parents who believed that children working the land or tending to animals was more important than attending school.

There appears to be a dearth of literature pertaining to the children and their families in relation to education during the colonial period of Western Australia, with most of that

written being on the political, religious and economic aspects of developing a system of education, rather than the challenges individuals faced.

Contemporary barriers to education

As society and the Australian culture have evolved, the question is raised as to whether our schooling system has developed accordingly. The inequalities that exist on a more general scale within society are evident within schools, and therefore influence the educational outcomes of those individuals experiencing them. Moreover, there is a compound effect as these inequalities may limit future opportunities thereby perpetuating a cycle of inequality (McInerney, 2004). In 2009, school principals of government primary schools across the nation were invited to participate in a study on the purposes of education and the level of enactment of these purposes (Cranston, Mulford, Keating & Reid, 2010). The responses indicated that many school principals considered government schools were now held to a greater level of responsibility when it came to social and emotional wellbeing of students than in the past, and that this onus had once been on others in the community, particularly parents. In the same study a school principal contended that “government schools carry too large a percentage of students from poorer backgrounds, with learning and social issues and disabilities compared with the private system” (Cranston, Mulford, Keating & Reid, 2010, p. 527).

This changing society has created a number of new barriers for children trying to access education. These barriers are plentiful and often multi-faceted, such as physical and mental illness, changing family structure, issues of law and order, poverty and social isolation, coupled with a political climate that embraces neo-liberal policies (Cranston et al., 2010; McInerney, 2004; Smyth, Down & McInerney, 2014). Yet, in a recent survey carried out in the United Kingdom (UK) by Nash and Schlosser (2015), half of the teacher respondents did not believe that there was a relationship between behavioural issues exhibited by students and anxiety or low engagement with learning. Further, other concerns for students, such as friendships and relationships (feeling misunderstood 28%;

feeling disliked by others 38.5%), emotional matters (25.3%) and unstable home environments (38.5%) were not considered to have an impact on behaviour in a classroom by a high (as indicated) percentage of the teacher respondents. Webb, Stewart, Bunting and Regan (2012) refer to data from an independent analysis of a primary school based counselling program in Ireland, which found that the vast majority of issues raised by children related to external matters, while only 25% and 10% related to school and peer related issues respectively.

Rurality and regionality may have an impact on the overall educational outcome of both primary and secondary students, with a study in Victoria indicating that students located in urban areas are, on average, six months ahead of their counterparts from rural and regional settings (Lamb, Glover & Walstab, 2014). Data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2015) supports these findings, with those in rural areas having poorer educational performances compared to the OECD average. Those identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) also have a lower educational outcome than the OECD average (OECD, 2015) which may, in part be associated with the high percentage (68%) of the ATSI population residing in rural, regional or remote locations (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

Education as a public good

It is those students with external learning barriers that are quite often left behind; they do not have a diagnosable disability and yet whilst they may have the intellectual ability to learn, they may not be in a position to do so. Recognising this as an *external* learning disability or a fundamental barrier to learning is not common, and yet conversely, instances of such barriers to learning are commonplace. Dr Ken Boston, former Director-General of the NSW Department of Education, former head of England's Curriculum

Authority and panel member of the Commonwealth Review of the Funding for Schooling ('Gonski review') claimed that:

If children don't get the support they need, when they need it, they are deprived of education as a public good. Instead, they are consigned to the bin of under-achievement, and we fail as a nation to realise our potential stock of human capital (Boston, 2014, para. 42).

If education is deemed to be a public good, by definition this then necessitates that society as a whole benefits (Reid, 2012). Boston describes it as "something that is universally available, although it might have a cost. It is of benefit to all of us, and the benefit to each of us does not reduce the availability of the benefit to others" (Boston, 2014, para. 19). However, in order that every individual can benefit, public education needs to be available to all, in a means by which everyone can access it, engage with it, learn from it and therefore benefit from it.

Boston (2014, para. 42), in the quote above, makes reference to "our potential stock of human capital". Human capital is the skills and knowledge that exist within certain individuals, and just as physical capital (tools and machinery) can increase productivity, so too can the existence of human capital (Coleman, 1988; Hartog & Oosterbeek, 2007). Hartog and Oosterbeek's (2007) research examined the economic return to the individual and the economy in general for each increased year of schooling and found that education increases human capital. Coleman (1988), in his seminal work on social capital, argued that social capital generates human capital. Hence, to increase productivity, human capital needs to be increased and for this to take place, social capital needs to exist.

There is much debate about the term social capital with some claiming it has become far too encompassing (Vorhaus, 2014); nevertheless, social capital is recognised as the relationships and networks that are created based on trust, reciprocity and norms (Allan & Catts, 2014; Coleman, 1988; Smyth, 2004; Vorhaus, 2014). Social capital can be understood in three main traditions, these being bonding, bridging and linking. Whilst

there seems to be a lack of definitive boundaries of understanding for each, in general they can be understood in the following manner: 'Bonding' refers to the relationships between non-diverse groupings, individuals of similar socio-economic standing and as such a reinforcement of homogenous groupings (an example being family); the networks developed between these groups, allowing for a degree of diversity is known as 'bridging' (example being families involved with a church or faith based organisation). The term 'linking social capital' indicates connections that are built between different social divisions, each with a disparate power structure and access to resources (an example being a school community with a diverse population) (Allan & Catts, 2014; Field, 2008).

Social capital has been linked to education in Australia for over a century, with many programs both within Australia and further afield that focus on this concept. In relation to schools, social capital can be defined as referring to the "strength of formal and informal partnerships and networks involving the school and all individuals, agencies, organisations and institutions that have the potential to support and be supported by the school" (Caldwell & Spinks, 2013, p. 164). Three key social capital theorists, Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam claim family to be a core source of social capital and whilst this has been disputed by some, and even contradicted by Putnam himself, the relationships developed within a family environment provide for social learning and bonded social capital (Winter, 2000). Subsequently, relationship building between families, or the home environment and the school can broaden the bonds of social capital and facilitate exposure to "normative behaviors [sic] and encourages a learning environment that increases the likelihood of conventional behaviors [sic]" (Dufur, Hoffman, Braudt, Parcel and Spence, 2015, p. 515).

Bourdieu, and others since have identified that increased capital, be it social, human or economic can increase access to education and parental engagement with both the system and the site of education (Acar, 2011; Dufur, Hoffman, Braudt, Parcel and Spence, 2015; Plagens, 2011; Trainor, 2010). Further, Plagens (2011, p.45) states explicitly that "empirical evidence suggests a link between social capital and higher student and school

performance.” Whilst Allan and Catts’s research focused on social capital within the classroom and Smyth’s (2004) research examined teacher based social capital, others, such as Mozumder and Halim (2006), Trainor (2010) and Winter-Villaluz (2015) have undertaken research in specific educational settings together with the school and broader based community. Israel and Beaulieu’s (2004) study examined social capital in the school, the community and the family and the benefits of building linkages between all three. The findings from each of these studies have indicated that social capital has a positive impact on education.

Education as a human right

The codifying of human rights is not without its critics, with some arguing that the discourse is dominated by those from western and privileged backgrounds (Ife, 2012). Literature highlighting the privilege that exists simply by virtue of being white is plentiful (Hooks, 1994, Connell, 2007; Rothenburg, 2005) and cannot be ignored, however, the conception of human rights dates back to the seventeenth century when Locke and later Jefferson asserted that ‘natural rights’ were an innate part of being human, bestowed by nature or God (Heywood, 1998, p. 48) and it is this concept, in its simplest form, that provides the foundation for what has evolved into human rights today. Little (as cited in Parekh, 2008, p. 124) contends that human rights “exist independently of human acknowledgement” and whilst it can be argued that critiques of the human rights discourse and documentation are worthy and justifiable, the basic tenets of respect for human dignity exist independent of such discussions. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 has since been ratified by the governments of numerous countries who have committed to upholding the universal principles and minimum standards for treatment of all human beings as detailed in the declaration (Reichert, 2011).

The right to education is enshrined in a number of instruments with the human right to a primary, or basic education for children as the focus. Article 26 of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that education is a right for all and that it should be free in the elementary, or primary years. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 13 and Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the child (CRC) both affirm this statement (United Nations, 2016a; United Nations Human Rights, 2016a, 2016b). All documents assert that “education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality” (United Nations, 2016a; United Nations Human Rights, 2016a, 2016b), indicating that education is not solely an academic endeavour. Education is understood to be the means by which individuals may improve their life opportunities; whereby principles of social justice can be realised (UNESCO, 1999).

At the World Conference and launch of the Education for All initiative in 1990 (UNESCO, 2016a; United Nations, 2016b), it was agreed that the provision of education needed to meet the needs of all. An outcome of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) inaugural World Conference on Special Needs Education held in 1994, was the Salamanca Statement, the *Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (UNESCO, 1994). This framework refers to children who are disadvantaged in some way and unable to partake in the general education system. Thus, it calls for an inclusive approach, whereby schools:

Accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups. (UNESCO, 1994, p. 6)

The charter of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) includes advocacy for the education of all children and the promotion of this goal within the context of education being a basic human right (UNESCO, 2016b). In the late twentieth century the organisation commissioned a report to examine the educational

needs moving into the new century. This became known as the Delors Report, after the Commission's chair, Jacques Delors. The Commission implemented a humanistic framework (Elfert, 2015), making statements such as:

The Commission (on Education for the 21st Century) does not see education as a miracle cure or a magic formula opening the door to a world in which all ideals will be attained, but as one of the principal means available to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war. (p. 14)

The Delors Report put forward a vision of education having four pillars, these being *Learning to Know*, *Learning to Do*, *Learning to Live Together* and *Learning to Be* (Elfert, 2015). In order to achieve the diverse learning and developmental objectives outlined in the Delors Report, a diverse range of skilled professionals would be required. Yet in the majority of school jurisdictions in Australia this is not the case.

The World Conference on Education held in Dakar in 2000, reaffirmed the ideals expressed above and agreed upon six 'Education For All' goals which were to be met by 2015 (UNESCO, 2016a). One of these goals (Goal 3) was to "[ensure] that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes" (UNESCO, 2000, p. 8). There is a continuing debate as to whether human rights are universal or relativist, and in the realm of education, such a debate is clear. In the developed world reform has been taking place for some time around inclusive and equitable access to education, whilst in developing parts of the world there is still the fight simply for provision of a basic education (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011; UNESCO, 2015a).

Universal primary education is one of the six Millennium Goals, as contained in the Millennium Project (the Project), which was commissioned by the United Nations Secretary-General in 2002 (UN Millennium Project, 2006). The Millennium Goals had

been agreed upon at a summit held in 2000 with world leaders and high ranking officials from 40 countries coming together to address global poverty (United Nations, 2016c). However a plan to achieve these goals by the year 2015 needed to be developed so that they became more than mere aspirations. Thus, the Project was commissioned so that solutions could be found and progressed. Unfortunately, the year 2015 has passed and the goals have not been achieved (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015a). Whilst the number of children enrolled in primary education has increased, the most recent data shows approximately 58 million children worldwide are not attending school (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015a).

The obstacles for universal school attendance are diverse and most often contextual to the location of the child, approximately half of those children are out of school due to conflict, political instability and extreme poverty (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015a). Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO said:

Business as usual strategies based on more teachers, more classrooms and more textbooks are not enough to reach the most disadvantaged children. We need targeted interventions to reach the families displaced by conflict, the girls forced to stay home, the children with disabilities and the millions obliged to work. But these policies come at a cost. This report serves as wake-up call to mobilize the resources needed to guarantee basic education for every child, once and for all (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015b).

As previously mentioned, under the *Public Education Act 1899 (63 Vict. No. 3)*, it is compulsory for children in Australia of primary school age (most commonly children aged five to eleven years) to be enrolled and attending an approved school. In developing countries, such as those of Sub-Saharan Africa, this is not the case with inequality based on gender, socio-economic and geographic location remaining high; although with a concerted effort from the United Nations and others, this disparity is shrinking. Statistics from 2012 show that the rate of enrolments in Sub-Saharan Africa has increased to 79%,

indicating a 75% increase since 1999 (UNESCO, 2015b). However, a study undertaken jointly by the Brookings Centre for Universal Education and a subsidiary of the Financial Times, 'This is Africa', has found that enrolments across Africa have actually decreased in the latter years of this period and that, perhaps more concerning, the quality of education is so poor in many areas of Africa that approximately 50 percent of those enrolled will not acquire the basic skills for living productive lives (Brookings, 2012).

Gender inequality in both access to, and completion of schooling, remains an issue in many countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa, parity between the genders for school completion is evident in only six of forty four countries (Majgaard & Mingat, 2012), whilst in Afghanistan the Gender Parity Index, being the ratio between male and female enrolments at primary level, is 0.70 which is the lowest of all countries in the data available (United Nations Statistics Division, 2015). Conversely, Australia has a Gender Parity Index of 0.99 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2015) and a public education system that is "compulsory and available free to all", as per article 28(1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 1996; United Nations Human Rights, 2016b).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the purpose and historical beginnings of education, with its original intent being to preserve the social order. Schooling was introduced to Australia in the late eighteenth century to again maintain the ideal of social control via education and to improve the future of those born to convicts or single mothers. The history of education in Western Australia was briefly outlined; drawing on an area of limited literature, based mostly on accounts of where schools were commenced and when. Barriers to education were then considered, linking discussion to the ideal of the provision of education being a public good. In summary, education as a public good has been found to increase human capital, thus increasing productivity, whilst social capital also increases human capital. As such, any means by which social capital can be developed within the broader school

community will potentially result in increased human capital, the consequences of which are likely to be higher levels of engagement with education. The chapter concluded by detailing the human right to education.

Chapter 3: Literature review: social work and government policy

Introduction

Building on the previous chapter which began by discussing the history of schooling internationally and in Australia, followed by the barriers to accessing this education, this chapter moves on to the specifics of school social work. In doing so it provides a literature review of the current context of school social work on the international stage, moving to the history of school social work in Australia, giving consideration to the limited Australian experience. Government policy is then discussed, providing a background and understanding to the current discourse of what is deemed to be important in the Australian schooling system.

School social work

Locating and defining school social work

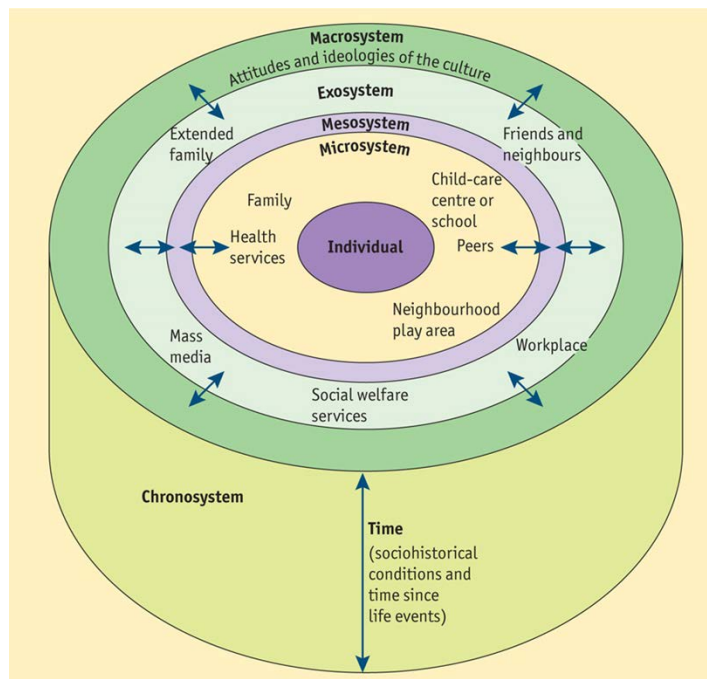
The practice of school social work can be delineated into three levels of intervention, primary, secondary and tertiary level intervention. At the primary intervention, school social work focuses on preventative measures. At the secondary and tertiary intervention level, practice is more focused and individualised (Kelly et al, 2015). Lyons (2008) mentions recognition in the United Kingdom, around the turn of the 19th century, that a basic education was required for all, yet social conditions may impede a child's ability to benefit from such provision.

This is evident when attendance by the individual is compromised due to wider social conditions outside or within the school community, such as experiences of bullying or harassment (Lyons, 2008). Lee (2012) claims that the profession of social work is best suited to deal with such issues as practice is centred on the individual within the

environment, and practices such as Bronfenbrenner's (1979, Figure 1) ecological perspective can be employed to analyse and work within these complexities.

Figure 1. Ecological Systems Theory (White, Hayes & Livesey, 2016).

Ecological Systems Theory places the child, or the individual at the centre so as to examine the relationships and interactions between the immediate and the broader



environment. This is not limited to familial relationships, nor is it mono-directional, instead a holistic perspective is taken so as gain understanding of the whole (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Konza, 1999). Bronfenbrenner described it as “a theory of environmental interconnections and their impact on the forces directly affecting psychological growth” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 8).

Testa (2013, p. 4) asserts, that:

School social workers can employ early intervention, prevention and intervention strategies in areas such as networking, counselling, home and school liaison, and in facilitating and advocating the use by families of school community resources, preventative programmes, professional and administrative tasks, leadership and policy-making and supervision.

The international perspective

The history of school social work has its beginnings in the UK (Barrett, 2014; Huxtable, Sottie & Ulziitungalag, 2012). Towards the end of the 19th century, UK social policy enacted the provision of elementary education for all children. With this came confusion and discord, as many parents had not had their own lived experience of schooling and were encountering poverty and social disadvantage thereby making the links to a school community and school experience tenuous (Burt, 2008; Huxtable, Sottie & Ulziitungalag, 2012). Further, children often provided a much needed source of income and this outweighed any perceived advantages of schooling for many families (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013, p. 19). It became evident that bridges between the immediacy of the family's needs and the long term benefits for the student and society needed to be built, and this responsibility fell to the welfare services within the education sector; social workers subsequently undertook the role (Barrett, 2014; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). The National Association of Social Workers in Education (NASWE) was founded in 1884 in the UK in response to this development and whilst it continues today, the membership base has diversified so that members are not necessarily qualified social workers (NASWE, 2014).

The advancement of school social work in the United States of America (US), whilst taking place slightly later during the start of the 20th century, was also brought about by government legislation and the compulsory enrolment of all children in elementary schools (Kelly, Raines, & Stone, 2010; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). The integration of

students from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds created a challenging environment for schools and an acknowledgement that a holistic approach encompassing students, families and the broader school community needed to take place (Kelly, Thompson, Frey, Klemp, Alvarez & Berzin, 2015; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). This identified structure was akin to social casework, hence the emergence and development of an alternative style of school social work than in the UK (Dulmus & Sowers, 2012; Kelly, et al., 2015).

This early identification with social casework may have been the reason that school social work grew in its professional stature and became a clear field of practice in the US. However, that is not to say that the path has been clear throughout the years, with studies over a number of decades, until the start of the current century, highlighting a clinical model at the exclusion of a structural analysis and person-in-environment perspective (Kelly, et al., 2015). Legislation has been introduced in the US more recently that squarely places social work in educational settings, with both the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) (Replacing the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) stipulating the presence of the profession in schools (Dennis, 2015; Kelly, et al. 2015). Further, the functions of the social work role are based on an holistic model of social work, informing a comprehensive practice, with Lee (2012, p. 554) detailing these functions as “case manager, advocate, facilitator, liaison, coordinator and consultant”.

School social work in the UK on the other hand began with the focus on school attendance and despite having broadened the scope of the role at numerous times throughout the ensuing years, for the most part this is where it remains (Burt, 2008; Lee, 2012). However, other countries with a more recent history of school social work draw on the broad skills and qualifications of the profession. In the 1940s, Norway and Sweden created an educational model that had at its foundation welfare provision, and within the decade Denmark and Finland had adopted a similar model, all with school social workers an integral part of the welfare system (Barrett, 2014; Hatta, 2009). Hong Kong has a long

association with school social work, spanning over three decades and is seen as the most developed of the Asian countries in this area, whilst Korean school social work emerged in the 1990s after it was realised that school counsellors could not offer the breadth and depth of skills that were required (Hatta, 2009).

Interestingly, in a socialist and highly structured country such as China, there are calls for social workers in schools and in the aftermath of the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake a program was implemented that involved trained school social workers (Levine & Zhu, 2010; Liang & Zhang, 2014). Whilst a system of school social work in China is in its infancy, there are signs that the inclusion of the profession in schools is gaining momentum (Levine & Zhu, 2010).

The Mongolian Association of School Social Workers (MASSW) reports that, building on the school social work program that begun in the country in the 1990s, social workers are now in junior (primary) schools. The job description specific to junior schools was confirmed by the Minister of Enlightenment (Mongolian Association of School Social Workers [MASSW], 2015). It is noteworthy that the International School Social Work Conference was held in Ghana in 2013 and Mongolia in 2015 with the next conference being held in China in 2017. With school social work being introduced and developed in many countries (Lee, 2012) the question could be raised as to why it is not in place in all states and territories in what we consider to be a progressive country such as Australia.

The Australian perspective

Much of the literature available that relates to school social work and is specific to Australia was published in the 1970s; since this time the role of school social worker has been in decline due to contestation about which profession is best placed to fulfil the responsibility for social and pastoral care within the school environment. Lyons (2002, p. 211) states “there is [still] disagreement about who should undertake it, the appropriate organisational base and the necessary qualifications.”

The *Australian Constitution* stipulates specific areas in which the Commonwealth can legislate, with the balance remaining the responsibility of the states (*Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1900*). Education is subject to state legislation and therefore, across Australia, the manner in which student health and wellbeing is managed differs (McKinnon, Kearns & Crockett, 2004) and the number of school social workers in public schools is highly variable. As McKinnon, Kearns and Crockett (2004) assert, social work within Victorian state schools is well established, with evidence of varying numbers being employed over the past six decades (Barrett, 2014). When social workers were initially employed by the education department in Victoria, the health department in that state mounted a legal challenge, claiming that the numbers of qualified social workers were not sufficient and as such, only the health department was able to employ those qualified as social workers who could then be 'loaned' to the education department (Barrett, 2014). The health department lost the court battle and school social workers were subsequently employed as part of a multi-disciplinary approach whereby psychologists were responsible for testing students and social workers worked more broadly with the family (Barrett, 2014). This innovative model described by the Victorian Education Department in 1951 provided for:

... a specialised service for teachers and parents designed to help them to cater more adequately for the educational, emotional, and social needs of children. (cited in Barrett, 2014, p. 141)

A survey carried out by the International Network for School Social Work in 2012 found that approximately 150 school social workers were employed in Australia (M. Huxtable, personal communication, October 16, 2015), with the majority of these being in the state of Victoria (Lee, 2012). However, Lee (2012) estimated there were approximately 250 school social workers in Australia, 100 of these in Victoria, 50-60 in Tasmania and the remainder in other areas of Australia, except for the Northern Territory where it was believed there were none. A recent survey has been carried out and it is now (2016) estimated that 400 social workers are employed within school settings in Australia, with

the majority of these still in Victoria, but with Tasmania, South Australia and the Northern Territory now having developed school social work programs (M.Huxtable, personal communication, October 26, 2016). This data indicates that the Northern Territory has established school social work in the preceding four years.

In their study on school social work in New South Wales, McKinnon, Kearns and Crockett (2004) focused on the history of school social work in Australia by reviewing the literature. However, they were hampered in their efforts due to the dearth of literature available, and a decade on, this remains the case. Due to the scarcity of literature pertaining to school social work in Australia it is difficult to obtain accurate numbers of qualified social workers employed specifically in the position of social worker or in roles with a different title (youth worker, chaplain, counsellor), within the education sector and so figures need to be estimated (M. Huxtable, personal communication, October 26, 2016).

The Australian Association of Social Workers states in the document *Practice Standards for School Social Workers* that “school social work is a specific field of practice with particular outcomes related to the primary and secondary student as learner on the road to achieving social justice and personal fulfilment [sic] through education” (2008, p. 6). Hatta (2009) makes reference to the specialised knowledge that a social worker brings when working with systems and multiple “targets of change” (p. 192), whilst Huxtable (1998) explains that social workers advocate for all children with regards to their social, emotional, behavioural and educational needs. This is summarised by McKinnon, Kearns and Crockett (2004) who contend:

The role of schools is not only to educate, but also to provide an environment where the child’s potential is maximized. In order to achieve this potential it is therefore important to involve the child, the parents, the school and the community in the education process. It is evident that the social worker plays an important role in facilitating the links between the

school, community, students and parents. Such links are crucial in breaking down barriers to educational achievement. (p. 245)

The concluding claim in the above quote is supported in the results of the research carried out by Dufur, Hoffman, Braudt, Parcel and Spence (2015) who found that social capital derived within the home environment has a greater impact on delinquent behaviour than that of school social capital and, somewhat surprisingly, peer social capital.

The Western Australian perspective

There is limited literature available that illuminates the historical or current situation of school social work in Western Australia. Anecdotal evidence shows that social workers are employed in some private schools at the primary and secondary level, although more often the latter. It is known that at least one public primary school has employed the services of a social worker, whilst others avail themselves of outreach services such as those provided by Parkerville Children and Youth Care, which is based in Armadale, a suburban area to the east of Perth (Parkerville Children and Youth Care Inc, 2015). Parkerville Children and Youth Care (2015) have been operating since the turn of the last century, with their mission, “[T]o protect, care, advocate and promote recovery for children and young people who have experienced trauma from abuse, to support families and to work with the community to prevent child abuse.” The agency’s School Based Support Service (SBSS) provides counselling, group programs and support to both students and families on the school site. In addition, individuals can be referred to appropriate agencies and services by the social worker employed by Parkerville. The social worker is not charged with visiting families outside the school grounds and is not based at the same school for more than a day or two per week (Parkerville Children and Youth Care Inc, 2015).

Currently a very active practice group for school social work operates under the auspice of the AASW, WA Branch, which promotes and advocates for the profession of school social work in this state (AASW, 2016b). The group was started in 2014 and now meets monthly. A core committee of approximately eight members are regular attendees and contributors, with many more interested parties on the mailing list. Members represent a number of professions, mostly social workers and some members are Department of Education staff. The group has had contact with state politicians from both the government and opposition parties, and continues to lobby for a multi-disciplinary approach to education. Another of the group's priorities is to undertake research to provide an evidence based platform from which to promote the importance and benefits of school social work, as well as a policy context so that school social work within the state of Western Australia, or lack of, is better understood (C.Green, personal communication, December 5, 2016).

Models of school social work practice

In the late 19th century, Jane Addams opened Hull House in Chicago, USA. Hull House, based on the settlement house movement from the United Kingdom, welcomed individuals to reside side by side with workers or volunteers who would support these individuals through times of hardship (Gross, 2009; O'Rourke, 2014). This was achieved by working with the individual in their environment, and examining the broader, structural issues that were at play in an individual's life as opposed to pathologising the individual. Throughout the early 20th century Addams extended this model, identifying that the community was composed of many different facets and that these needed to work together in order to have greater positive outcomes, believing that schools were in situ within the local community and therefore these two elements needed to be integrated (Houser, 2016; O'Rourke, 2014). In the period since the early days of Hull House, what has become known as Full Service or Extended Schools have become common place in countries such as the United States and more recently the United Kingdom, with a great deal of research undertaken to test the claims that greater community integration and

provision of health and social services results in increased parental involvement and academic achievement by students (Biag & Castrechini, 2016; Chen, Anderson & Watkins, 2016; Dyson & Kerr, 2014; Dyson & Todd, 2010).

The Full Service School Model (FSSM) is multi-purpose. However, at its foundation is the connection of child and community, with the aim to enhance the opportunities for learning by providing access to social and emotional, preventative and primary interventions within the school environment (Biag & Castrechini, 2016; Horner & Krawczyk, 2006). Furthermore, these services are extended to parents, bringing the parents into the school setting and engaging them in a positive manner. Research has indicated that parents of children at such schools feel more welcome and participate more in both the social services available to them, and the children's school activities (Biag & Castrechini, 2016; Chen, Anderson & Watkins, 2016). Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory, full service schools seek to create positive change in the different systems that encircle a child, thus creating a more positive and stable environment in which to learn (Biag & Castrechini, 2016; Bottrell & Goodwin, 2011; Chen, Anderson & Watkins, 2016; Houser, 2016). Dyson and Kerr (2014, p. 90) claim that "precisely because extended services and their equivalents are additional to the core business of schools, they are always likely to be vulnerable in times of political change and economic constraint." This then begs the question, *What is the core business of schools? Is it to teach, or to educate?* And if the answer is the latter, then the extended school should not be an addition, but a foundation.

Australia has not fully embraced the Full Service or Extended School model, although there are several variations in a number of states. The *Schools as Community Centres* (SaCC) program in New South Wales commenced in 1995 and was incorporated into the *Smarter Schools National Partnership*, which ran from 2009 to 2013 (Australian Government, 2016a; Bottrell & Goodwin, 2011; Velkou & Bottrell, 2011). This program, which is now funded by the New South Wales Department of Family & Community Services, was hosted by a total of 44 schools across the state in 2014 (NSW Department

of Education, 2015; NSW Department of Family & Community Services, 2014). SaCCs are located in low socioeconomic status (SES) locations, where poverty and disadvantage is the norm (Bottrell & Goodwin, 2011), yet this is not to say that families in locations with average SES do not experience similar challenges.

Western Australia has a history, albeit relatively short, of experimenting with full service schools, having taken the lead in the above mentioned *Smarter Schools National Partnership* when it was signed by all states and the Commonwealth in 2008 (Australian Government, 2016a). Since then, a number of schools have continued with their own models of providing extended services and making links with the broader community. Roseworth Primary School, for example, situated in a suburb of the city of Perth, has partnered with organisations that then co-locate on the school site (Roseworth Primary School, 2016), thus providing greater capacity for the school to tend to needs of both students and the community. The Labor opposition in Western Australia has recently released a consultation paper *Creating strong communities: Full service schools* with the suggestion that the 'Roseworth model' be trialled in other low SES areas in the state (WA Labor, 2015).

Critique of school social work

To be employed as a school psychologist in Western Australia, candidates must have completed a tertiary qualification that provides eligibility to be provisionally or generally registered with the Psychology Board of Australia, together with a suitable qualification in education (Department of Education, 2017a) Currently, school social workers in Western Australian schools need to have a Bachelor of Social Work degree from an accredited tertiary education provider, thus allowing for eligibility to the AASW; however, there is no requirement for a qualification in education. Phillippo and Blosser assert that the positioning of school social work requires knowledge of both professional fields, with Morrill (cited in Phillippo & Blosser, p. 2) defining the interstitial space as “a mesolevel

location that forms from overlapping resource networks across multiple organizational fields in which the authority of the dominant resource network does not prevail”.

It could be argued that the specialist skills required are analogous with those in any particular field of social work practice, be that mental health, child protection, or community development for example. Yet, a critique could be raised that school social workers do not have the required specificity of knowledge commensurate with the environment they are to practice in or the clients they are to work with.

Social work education

All undergraduate social work courses in Australia must be accredited by the professional body, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) and are subject to ongoing monitoring and review. A social work qualification in Australia entails four years full time study (or part time equivalent) in an accredited course at a tertiary level, which must include the following content within the curriculum; mental health; child wellbeing and protection; cross-cultural practice; and practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. The Bachelor of Social Work confers on the holder eligibility to become a member of the AASW (2012). Requirements of the course include two field education placements, each being a minimum of 500 hours, which, at Edith Cowan University are undertaken in the third and fourth years of full time study (or part time equivalent) (Edith Cowan University, 2017). Field education is seen as central to the curriculum and the AASW sets out very strict requirements for the course providers, such as Edith Cowan University, to follow (AASW, 2012).

Each student undertaking placement must be assigned a *field educator* who is a qualified social worker with a minimum of two years post qualifying experience. The field educator manages the student for the entirety of the placement, providing tasks, feedback and educational opportunities, as well as a minimum of 1.5 hours of formal supervision for each 35 hours of placement. If the placement agency does not have a member of staff

qualified to undertake this role, an *on-site field educator* and an *external field educator* who is suitably qualified is assigned and contracted by the education provider (AASW, 2012). The role of field educator is critical and without such, a placement cannot proceed.

A student is also allocated a social worker with a minimum of five years post qualifying experience who is not associated with the placement site; this person is contracted by the higher education provider to undertake liaison on three occasions throughout the placement. A liaison meeting is held with the student, the social work field educator, and the on-site field educator (if applicable) to discuss the student's educational progress and identify any concerns. The entire process is managed by the higher education provider as part of their field education program (AASW, 2012).

The following section discusses the policy context in which school social work takes place.

Government policy

Australian Government

In keeping with the historical foundations of education in this country, arguments and debates related to the funding of the education system continue. As previously mentioned, the *Gonski Review of Funding for Schooling* report was released in 2011, amidst claims of political and ideological bias and a focus on the politics more so than the improvement of education in Australia (Australian Government, 2014; Parliament of Australia, 2012; Shine, 2016). In response to the Gonski Report, the then Federal Labor Government developed the *National Plan for School Improvement* (NPSI) with funding arrangements being detailed in the *National Education Reform Agreement* (NERA) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013); the agreement was to be between state and federal governments. However, not all state governments agreed to sign, leaving the incoming Liberal-National Party Coalition Government with a range of education funding models across the country (National Commission of Audit, 2014a).

The Coalition Government pledged to continue funding all states and territories under the NERA for a period of four years, regardless of whether they had reached agreement with the previous government. As such, the funding model will remain in its current form until the year 2018 (National Commission of Audit, 2014a). As mentioned previously, the states and territories have constitutional responsibility for the departments of education, and their policies and processes within their jurisdiction (*Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1900*; Department of Education & Training, 2016a). As such, despite there being ongoing disagreements about funding for education, the deliberations on how each child can access and meet their learning needs within the South West of Western Australia takes place at a state government level.

In May of 2016, the Liberal-National Party Coalition Government released details of another plan, this one titled *Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes*. It is stated that increased funding does not correlate to better education outcomes and it is more important to determine the areas in which these funds are directed (Australian Government, 2016b). This plan prescribes four areas of focus: quality teaching; school leadership and autonomy; engaging parents in education; and strengthening the curriculum. Within the focus area of parental engagement, the strategies detailed include updating the *My School* website and providing online resources so that parents can obtain tips and be able to support their child's learning (Australian Government, 2016b). A future focus is given of 'Focusing on what matters most and those who need it most', with increased funding being allocated to students from low socio-economic areas, those who identify as Indigenous, those with a disability and those with poor English language proficiency. This is a targeted, and some may argue misguided response, with the emphasis remaining on the teaching quality and the classroom (Australian Government, 2016b; Coffield, 2012; Mockler, 2016).

Perhaps the most prominent policy currently impacting the existence of school social work in Australia is the *National School Chaplaincy Programme* (NSCP). This initiative was introduced by the Howard-led Liberal Government in 2006 and has been in existence in

various forms in the decade since (Commonwealth Ombudsman, 2011; Department of Education & Training, 2016b). The program allows for schools to apply for funding up to \$20,000 to employ a chaplain to tend to the spiritual, religious and social and emotional wellbeing needs of those within the school community, both private, religious based schools and secular public schools (Department of Education & Training, 2016b). In 2011, under the Gillard-led Labor Government the program was amended to allow secular welfare workers to be employed and it became known as the *National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program* (Patrick, 2014). However, with a change of government, the program was again contracted by the Abbott Liberal leadership to provide for chaplains only, with funding being delivered to the states and territories (Department of Education & Training, 2016b; Isdale & Savulescu, 2014).

In *Williams v Commonwealth* (2012), the program was challenged with one argument being that it was unconstitutional due to, effectively, the blurring of religion and state and freedom of religion, as stipulated in s. 116 of the Constitution; this challenge was not upheld by the High Court (Buckland & Sutton, 2014; Patrick, 2014). The second argument was that the funding arrangements were unconstitutional under s. 61 of the Constitution, due to the arrangement for the Commonwealth to directly fund the chaplaincy agencies that employed the chaplains for the state schools. The decision of the High Court was that the funding arrangement was indeed unconstitutional as it was outside the Commonwealth's executive powers (Orr & Isdale, 2013, Patrick, 2014). In the wake of this decision, the Commonwealth Parliament enacted the *Financial Framework Legislation Amendment Act (No 3) 2012 (Amendment Act)*. However, this was again challenged by Williams and the High Court again found in his favour (Buckland & Sutton, 2014; Orr & Isdale, 2013, Patrick, 2014).

As stated above, the program still exists today, despite the National Commission of Audit reporting in 2014 that it should be abolished (National Commission of Audit, 2014b), or funded in such a way that it meets the legal obligations of the Constitution (Department of Education & Training, 2016b), that being that the funds are provided direct to the states

and territories in what is referred to as a tied grant (Department of Education & Training, 2016b; Isdale & Savulescu, 2014). Whilst there are now minimum qualifications that a chaplain must hold and clarification around certain terms that were deemed by the Commonwealth Ombudsman to be insufficiently defined (2011), there still exists concerns about the scope of the role of chaplains and their ability to professionally handle the most common issues brought to them, such as mental health issues, familial relationship problems, grief and loss, drug and alcohol misuse, and suicide and self-harm (Isdale & Savulescu, 2014).

While chaplains may provide a valuable service within the school, there are limits to what can be achieved under this program and the scope within which individual chaplains can work. Yet the existence of chaplains is often provided as the reason as to why social workers or other suitably qualified professionals (employed to provide the broader level of service to school communities) are not included as part of the student and community services on offer.

In 2016, the Commonwealth government provided \$7.41 million to the Western Australian government under the NSCP, with the state government providing a further \$9.2 million for funding of chaplains. This together with \$5.68 million that the state government paid to an external provider to provide ad hoc chaplaincy services, supervision, support and professional development for the school chaplains, totalled \$22.21 million (Department of Education, 2016a).

Western Australian Government

The Western Australian Department of Education's strategic plan titled, *High Performance – High Care: Strategic Plan for WA Public Schools 2016-2019* (Department of Education, 2015a) builds on the previous *Classroom First Strategy* (Department of Education, 2007). Its philosophy is to place “students at the centre of everything we do” because, it continues, “what happens in a classroom has the greatest in-school influence

on student learning and achievement” (Department of Education, 2017b, para. 2). The plan has four strategic aims, these being: success for all students; high quality teaching; effective leadership; and strong governance and support (Department of Education, 2015a). The *Focus 2016: Directions for Schools* document breaks down these aims to identify the actions to be undertaken. A small number of these make mention of the social and emotional wellbeing of students and the partnership between parents/caregivers and school; however, the majority are to do with process within the school (Department of Education, 2015b). Only in the last of these aims in the document titled *Focus 2017: Directions for Schools*, is there mention of the connection and partnership between schools and families. However, the action mentioned is to review the success of current practice only (Department of Education, 2016b).

Interestingly, the Director General, in her introduction to the *Focus 2016* document states, “I encourage school communities to also be involved, and work with their school staff to support and enhance the contribution of public schools in Western Australia”, yet she provides no direction for how school staff would encourage the community to undertake this task and what resources would be available to them (Department of Education, 2015b). The term ‘community’ is mentioned twice more within the document, both times being in a more general context. Bottrell and Goodwin (2011) assert that it is the role of the school to assist in building capacity of the community, particularly in low socio-economic areas or those that hold limited value for education. The statement by the Director-General implies that it is the community that should connect with the school, placing the school at the centre and the onus on families and other stakeholders to engage.

There are no details provided of an evaluation process for the above mentioned strategic plan, and it appears that the previous *Classroom First* strategy was either not evaluated or the report is not available. Without such an examination it is difficult to know if the approaches that are employed are suitable for purpose and whether the desired outcomes are realised.

Conclusion

The chapter commenced by locating and defining school social work and its role historically and contemporarily, both globally and in the state of Western Australia. The introduction of the school chaplaincy program has been, and continues to be, contentious. This chapter has detailed the policies related to this program and reported on other federal and state government policies pertaining to education and, more specifically examined those that refer to community engagement and external barriers to education. In the following chapter, details of how the research for the present study is to be carried out will be provided, together with the theoretical foundations that inform the construction of knowledge on this subject.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

Description of the methodology of the study allows for clarity of the process to be undertaken, the manner in which the researcher constructs knowledge and the prism through which data gathered will be examined. With this in mind, this chapter details the intricacies of this study.

Summary of research design

This study explored the experiences of five Edith Cowan University Bachelor of Social Work students who undertook a field placement in a regional government primary school in the South West of Western Australia in 2015. The perspectives of five staff from the three host schools and the external field educator that supervised all five students were also explored. It was anticipated that the rich data collected from all participants would inform me of the roles undertaken by the students and identify possible links between social work and addressing and identifying barriers to learning in a primary school setting. This thesis also explores, in greater depth than might be expected, the literature surrounding the research question below and for this reason the thesis contains not one, but two literature review chapters.

The study sought to answer the following research question:

Is there a role for social workers in regional primary schools in the South West of Western Australia in relation to identifying and addressing external barriers to education?

To answer this question, I carried out the following:

- Conducted an in depth literature review which explored the areas of education, social work and government policy relevant to the research question; and
- Interviewed:
 - Five Edith Cowan University social work students (age range 20-40 years). Three students were enrolled at the time of the study and two had graduated; each was enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work degree at ECU during 2015 and undertook 500 hours field placement in one of three regional primary schools in the South West of Western Australia;
 - Three on-site field educators; two deputy principals and one principal;
 - Two additional school principals; and
 - One external field educator who provided supervision for the five students.
- Subjected the data collected to analysis using an hermeneutic approach, underpinned by a human rights framework.

The research paradigm

The epistemology of constructivism informed the overall framework for this study. A constructivist epistemology holds that reality is not objective or positive, but is constructed by senders and receivers of information (Crotty, 1998, p. 118). The interplay between the event or the subject and the environment is where a perspective of reality is constructed (Gray, 2009). Whilst this study is grounded by constructivism, it has been influenced by the emancipatory view of knowledge as espoused by Habermas (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 124) who identified what he termed an emancipatory epistemology, similar to critical theory in that interests and ideologies disguised as informative, factual material are recognised as socially constructed. Further, it drew meaning from the data by employing hermeneutic inquiry, which has at its foundations an interpretivist theoretical perspective, and as Crotty (1998, p. 67) asserts “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world”. This was important for such a

study as the school culture is one that has developed over time and, it appears, is hard to shift. As Black (2009, p. 77) claims “education is one subset or measure of a broader wellbeing, yet most Australian schools and systems still operate as though it were an isolated activity.”

Hermeneutics was developed to derive an interpretation of biblical scripture taking into account the context of the period in which it was written (Ezzy, 2002). It has been subjected to many interpretations over time (Ezzy, 2002; Kvale, 1983) and is now utilised in a broader, more diverse manner than originally intended. Whilst the dominant use has been in the analysis of literary text, employing hermeneutics as a tool for analysis of text produced via interview is not unique (Kvale, 1983). In undertaking a hermeneutic analysis of the data, the interpreter, in this case the researcher, must examine their own bias and interpretation of the context and society as a whole. It is acknowledged by the researcher that the interpretation of the text is underpinned by an implicit human rights framework, as discussed in chapter 1. Gadamer’s text *Truth and Method*, published in 1960, discusses the processes of hermeneutic inquiry (Gadamer, Weinsheimer, & Marshall, 2004). Drawing on Gadamer’s understanding, Wernet (2014, p. 234) contends:

The process of interpretation therefore involves a self-examination of the interpreter. Interpretation is no longer seen as the result of a distanced view of a scientific interpreter that leads to an unbiased understanding, but as a dialogue in which different perspectives meet. It is the encounter, the ‘hermeneutic experience’ which leads to a fusion of horizons.

Case study methodology incorporates an in-depth, holistic examination, focusing on the interaction between factors and events within a ‘real life’ context (Bell, 1993; Hird, 2003). What comprises a case is not definitive; however, most authors suggest the subject of the research can be diverse (Hakim, 1989; Bell, 1996; Hird, 2003; Babbie, 2009). Hakim (1989, p. 65) describes five kinds of case study: “individual case histories, community studies, studies of social groups, studies of organisations and institutions, those

concerned with specific events, roles, relationships and interactions.” Stake (2000) claims that a case is defined by its specificity and ability to be bounded within time or space. Discussing case studies, Stake (1995, p. 1) further asserts “we are interested in them for both their uniqueness and commonality” and it is this, Stake’s framework, that is particularly relevant to this research.

In this research an intrinsic case study design, as described by Stake (1995) was utilised. The rationale for an intrinsic case study was based on the unique phenomena of social work students undertaking placement in government primary schools who do not employ the services of a social worker. The case is bounded by: time - being semester 2, 2015; place – being both the geographical location and the school site, and; the profession of social work.

Method

There were three sites included in this study, each a government primary school in the South West region of Western Australia. Two of these sites hosted two social work students on placement and one site accommodated one student only. As noted in chapter three, placement for the Bachelor of Social Work entails 2 x 500 hours of supervised field education; this is undertaken in each of the third and fourth years of full time study (or part time equivalent) for those students enrolled at Edith Cowan University. Each site had an on-site field educator and the students also had an external field educator and a liaison officer assigned to them.

The methods used were semi structured interviews and focus groups; the reason for employing both methods is explained below. Bowen (2009) emphasises that multiple sources of evidence are critical in a qualitative study such as this as they may provide “convergence and corroboration” (p. 28) thus strengthening the credibility of the findings. The semi-structured, in-depth interviews were designed to give maximum opportunity to elicit a rich account of the social reality for the participant.

Leedy and Ormrod (2013, p. 190) make mention of the interviewer establishing a sense of rapport and familiarity with the interviewee so that an honest and open conversation can take place, whilst Regan (2012) points to Gadamer's understanding of authenticity in the sense that the researcher be open to a dialogical process with others. In relation to my study, having existing and positive relationships with all the students and a number of the school staff, facilitated this process. Burns (1997, p. 330) argues that semi-structured interviews allow for the interaction between researcher and interviewee to be informal, with free flowing conversation allowing the interviewee to provide a subjective description of their experience. In my study, by interviewing the student social workers, school staff members and the external field educator, different perspectives of the same placement period were captured.

Participants were invited to take part in the study and consent obtained so as to record the interview for later transcription and analysis. The interviews took place in a mutually agreed, neutral environment where the possibility of distractions was limited, thereby maximising the potential for concentrated and purposive communication (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). As an adjunct to the recording of the audio, handwritten notes were taken, detailing any particular behavioural elements that could provide further insight during the hermeneutic interpretative analysis (Thomas, 2013).

In addition to, and after the individual interviews, a focus group was conducted with all school staff participants invited. Student social workers were invited to participate in a focus group but it was difficult to arrange a date and time when the majority of participants could attend. The rationale for undertaking the focus group process was that it may have stimulated alternative perspectives, drawing further on certain experiences and providing for deeper examination from those involved (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). Further, the dynamics of the group may have highlighted power imbalances and/or allowed individuals to open up further than they did individually, a phenomena referred to as "risky shift" (Thomas, 2013, p. 203).

Recordings from the interviews and focus group were transcribed and the raw data analysed for themes. Stake (1995), in describing this process in detail, puts forward the notion that the researcher must ask themselves why the raw data was interpreted in such a way; how such a meaning was derived. This relates to the process of hermeneutic inquiry and places the onus on the researcher to identify alternatives to the initial interpretation made, accepting that the initial interpretation may be due to possible bias or a pre-existing worldview. Only then, when the process of reflection has taken place can the raw data be coded and categorised so that themes may be illuminated. Coding was achieved by undertaking a process referred to as the constant comparative method, which literally means constantly reviewing the data and comparing it to other pieces of data (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Thomas, 2013).

Ethics

Social research can be fraught with ethical dilemmas and in order for these dilemmas to be minimised, Beauchamp and Childress (2013) developed a set of criteria to be addressed by researchers. These can be summarised as follows:

- Autonomy / self determination (includes informed consent and confidentiality);
- Non-maleficence (not doing harm);
- Beneficence (doing good);
- Justice (are the purposes just?); and
- Positive contribution to knowledge.

These are very much in line with the human rights framework employed throughout this research, together with the guidelines set out in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2015), which identifies the following criteria to be addressed:

- Research merit and integrity;
- Justice;

- Beneficence; and
- Respect.

Consent was obtained from participants by way of written authority, reinforcing the researcher's declaration that each participant freely volunteered without coercion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). All participants were advised of the purpose of the study and how it would be carried out; advised of their right to withdraw or discontinue at any point; and contact details of the researcher and others involved in the research, such as supervisors, were provided should the participants need to make contact (Burns, 1997; Leedy & Omrod, 2013). As I am the researcher and a lecturer of social work at Edith Cowan University, I was mindful of a possible perceived power imbalance with three currently enrolled students in the degree being invited to participate. This matter was raised with those particular participants and the voluntary nature of participation underscored. This study did not form any part of an academic unit in which the students were enrolled. Further, staff from the schools may have felt that if they did not participate that their school would not be considered for further student placements. This was discussed and staff were reassured that this was not the case. Participants were also informed that they could raise any concerns with Professor Kathy Boxall, principal supervisor of the research.

All data collected was de-identified and remains confidentially stored with details of data storage being provided to each participant (Burns, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). An issue that was immediately apparent was two of the three primary schools hosted two students whilst one hosted a single student. As such, data collected has been discussed as being from the students at each case study site with no indication as to whether this was a site with one or two students on placement. It was not envisaged that participants during the interview phase of the study would be exposed to any physical, legal, economic, social or psychological harm (Smith Iltis, 2006). However, information was made available so that if participants did experience a negative emotional response referral to relevant support could take place.

As previously stated, there is limited literature detailing any aspect of school social work in Australia, and even less that focuses on Western Australia. As such, a study such as this will complement what is available and add to knowledge about Western Australia.

Edith Cowan Research Ethics Committee

Approval granted for the period 25 May 2016 to 30 June 2017.

Department of Education

Approval granted 29th June 2016.

The process of obtaining approval to undertake research on the Department of Education (the Department) sites was detailed and time consuming. A number of colleagues who had undertaken research with the Department had provided me with details of their experiences and the delays experienced. An initial phone conversation (post submission) led me to believe that the process would be straightforward and that I had provided all the required documentation, in line with the checklist that I had followed. Unfortunately, there were delays in reviewing the application, followed by difficulties in making contact with the research coordinator for the Department. More than two months after submitting the application, I received an email requesting clarification of certain aspects of the research to be undertaken. It could be considered that some of the questions posed were pertaining to elements of the research that was outside of the scope of the Department's remit or concern (for example: "Why is it necessary to write down the observations of the environment?", "How will what you observe be used in your analysis?"); however, in order to enhance the chances of approval being granted, all questions were addressed.

The locus of power in this situation was firmly in the domain of the Department and if I was to achieve my aim of gaining approval so that I could proceed with the study, my sole course of action was to provide a complete and detailed response that clearly indicated

my knowledge and awareness of what was being undertaken and the serious issues of confidentiality that all participants were required to be aware of, despite my sense that some of the questions were redundant.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided detailed information about the research study. The study is informed by a constructivist epistemology, layered with hermeneutic interpretation. It demonstrates that the researcher is aware that the construction of knowledge is undertaken within the sphere of their own awareness and experiences and that this will impact on the analysis of the data. This awareness has allowed for a more rigorous interpretation of the data. The case study methodology and methods have been discussed, as has the manner in which data was collected. Details of consent, confidentiality and ethics have been provided. The following chapter builds on this by providing a description of fieldwork and data analysis and how the data was analysed.

Chapter 5: Fieldwork and data analysis

Introduction

A social institution can be fully understood only if we do not limit ourselves to the abstract study of its formal organization, but analyse the way in which it appears in the personal experience of various members of the group and follow the influence which it has upon their lives. (Thomas & Znaniecki 1918/1927 cited in Galletta, 2013)

In chapter four I discussed the academic underpinnings of this research study, being methodology, epistemology, method and approaches to data collection. In this chapter I document the fieldwork process; what actually took place, how and why. The foundations of the original design of the study were maintained, however there were a few variations due to availability of participants and reflection on the process. Context to the sites of the case study is provided, although this is kept to a minimum due to being mindful of confidentiality and anonymity, and care has been taken to minimise the risk that individual respondents can be identified. This chapter also focuses on the process of analysing and interpreting that data.

Refining data collection instruments

The process of undertaking research provides a learning experience in and of itself to the novice researcher. Initially I was naïve in my understanding of what was required in order to carry out a study such as this. Preparing what questions to ask the participants provided me with my first awakening; it was not as simple as I had thought it would be and I was surprised at how much research and consideration was required in order to scaffold questions which would have a greater chance of drawing rich responses. Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) claim that research questions are naturally formulated within the worldview and cultural horizons of the researcher, therefore it is important to develop

open questions that do not confine or lead the respondents in a pre-determined direction. This links with the hermeneutic approach, discussed in the next chapter, in which a cycle of reflexivity is employed so as to broaden the horizon of the researcher and not restrict the limits of research.

Following Alvesson and Sandberg's (2013) format of questioning, I wanted to ensure the category of questions that were examined within this study were descriptive, comparative, explanatory and normative. As suggested by Galletta (2013) and Rubin and Rubin (2012), I examined my research question and deconstructed it into components so that I could clearly identify what questions I needed to ask in order to elicit the information that would aide me in answering each component, and then the research question as a whole.

The questions (refer appendices C, D & E for examples) were direct, simple and clear; enquiring about one element only and for the most part, they were open ended (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007; Tracy, 2013). Furthermore, it was important that the questions were not leading, nor did they hold any bias (Bell, 2005). I employed probing and follow-up questioning as this can help the interviewee to delve into their understanding of the response and build upon their initial answer, whilst providing the interviewer with clarity and rich data (Bell, 2005; Galletta, 2013; Tracy, 2013). Tracy (2013) refers to three components of interviews: interview structures, interview types and interview stance. During the data collection I used semi-structured (structure), respondent interviews that tended toward a narrative (types) and employed a responsive, friendship model of interview (stance).

The next initiation process was to carry out a pilot interview using the questions I had written. This was undertaken with two family members, and the result was positive. However, only upon reflection do I now have a better understanding of the importance of this process and would not take it so lightly in the future. My pilot participants had no context for the questions so to them they were adequate and for me the interview script ran smoothly. Whilst I have had only positive comments on the interview schedule, it has highlighted how important this process is to the overall research design. The third moment

of discovery for me was testing the voice recorder in the pilot study but having little investment in the process of recording, except that it worked. During the first formal interview, I felt my anxiety levels increase as I worried whether the recording was taking place. I was hearing these wonderful responses from the participant, but all I could think was “what happens if it’s not working”. From that experience I quickly learnt to have a second recording device operating as a backup, and although the anxiety levels were still elevated, logically I knew the chance of both failing was minimal.

Interviews with students

All student interviews were conducted at Edith Cowan University. Information letters were provided to all the student participants, and consent letters signed (refer sample consent letters, Appendices A & B). Interviews with the students were straightforward as they had one particular context and specific experience on which to reflect. All students were very open to discussing their experiences, both the positive and the negative and provided clear, articulate and well considered responses.

Interviews with school staff

Department of Education staff were accommodating and eager to be involved in this research. Information letters were provided to all the school staff participants, and consent letters signed (refer Appendices A & B). Each individual interview, which took place at their school, took approximately 30 minutes, yet the discussion before and after the interview was extensive. The burden of the everyday experiences of what is taking place for students and their families in their schools was evident, and the frustration felt at not having the resources with which to alleviate some of these issues was clear. However, what was acutely apparent to me was the willingness of each of the staff members interviewed to try to bring about positive change in the lives of those students who were struggling.

I am grateful that these professionals who undertake extremely difficult and time-consuming jobs took the time from their schedules to be involved with this project. Apart from each simply being obliging, I came away from each meeting with the sense that this project was as important to them as it is to me.

Interview with external field educator

All five social work students had the same external field educator. I met with the field educator at Edith Cowan University, South West campus. An information letter was provided to the external field educator, and signed consent obtained (refer Appendices A & B). The off-site educator's extensive career as a social worker, her experience as a school social worker and her practice wisdom was evident throughout the interview. This brought a depth to the discussion due to her understanding of the complexities of working within the school environment, in a profession that is not seen as standard in Western Australia's public primary schools.

Focus groups with students

Due to the difficulty of arranging a mutually suitable time for the majority of the student group, the decision was made to cancel the focus group with students. Whilst the possibility for the student social workers to offer alternative perspectives and deeper examination of their experiences through the group interview was no longer available, it was agreed with my supervisors that the data already collected was sufficient from which to draw findings.

Focus group with school staff

Three school principals and a deputy principal were present for the focus group. One deputy was on long service leave and out of the country so did not participate in the focus group. What struck me initially was the camaraderie and collegiality between the school staff from the three different schools in attendance. As the discussion proceeded it was

evident that each garners a significant respect from the others and that there was a level of support that is often only seen when there is a deep understanding of shared situations and experiences. Extensive discussion took place before and after the recorded focus group discussion about Education Department policy and the parameters this imposes upon situations that don't necessarily fit the standard model. I came away from this group with a much deeper understanding of the complexities and intricacies that the executive staff need to deal with on a day-to-day basis.

The sites

Throughout this study, reference is made to the primary schools which were the sites for the case study research. Whilst it is important that identifying information not be provided, it is also relevant that some context is given to these sites.

Student enrolment at the three sites ranged from approximately 600 to 800 students. The schools' average net recurrent income per student was just below \$11,000 per annum. Ratings for two of the schools on the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage were just below the average whilst one was minimally above. The percentage of students in the highest quadrant of this index was well below the national average in all three schools. Student attendance was similar at approximately 93%, although those students attending 90% or more of the time ranged from approximately 75% to 85% (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016a).

The demographic and geographic location of each school was comparable, with the average age of residents approximately 33 years compared to the national average of 37.3 years. The average house price in the catchment areas of the schools was below the national average and below the average of the state's capital, Perth, whilst the average household size was slightly higher than that of the state of Western Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). In 2015, the percentage of individuals with a Bachelor degree nationally was around 25% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015) yet it

was less than half of this in the locations of each of the schools (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

Analysis and interpretation

Hermeneutic analysis

Hermeneutics is a theory of interpretation and understanding of text (Prasad, 2002). Smith (cited in Willis, 2007) refers to validation, critical and philosophical hermeneutics, whilst Prasad (2002) discusses classical, philosophical and critical hermeneutics. It is the method of philosophical hermeneutics in its broad sense, based on the work of Heidegger and developed further by Gadamer, which was followed in this study. A hermeneutic inquiry utilises a dialogical process whereby the researcher interacts with the text using a process referred to as the hermeneutic circle. It is incumbent upon the researcher to acknowledge existing pre-judgements, referred to by Gadamer as prejudices, and to be open to having these challenged by such interaction (Crotty, 1998; Schmidt, 2006; Willis, 2007). Initial interpretations, those that have been born from the immediacy of the interaction of researcher and text are not necessarily forgotten, but as stated by Gadamer “all that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or text” (cited in Ezzy, 2002, p. 27).

Ezzy (2002) contends that the researcher needs to be humble, to be prepared to accept that initial interpretations need to be revisited so that a broader, fuller interpretation and erudite understanding can be developed. It is asserted by Kvale (1983) that when the principles of hermeneutic enquiry are followed, this method provides for a rigorous and deep examination of the text, the context in which the author, or interviewee, is situated and the “tradition of understanding [s]he lives in.” (p. 187). It is within the broader scope of the social and political period in which the text was created and through awareness and understanding of the context of the time that interpretation of the text can take place (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012; Prasad, 2002; Willis, 2007). In so doing, there is a

“fusion of hermeneutic horizons” (Prasad, 2002), being the culmination of the possibility of understanding by the researcher and the possibilities of interpretation of the text. In this research project, the interpretation has been undertaken within a human rights framework and analysis of the current political environment.

Qualitative thematic analysis

Thematic analysis in its simplest form is examining text for patterns and concepts. Critiques of this method argue that to break down the narrative or the responses in the interviews to singular, coded particles may result in the loss of context and meaning. Conversely, it may be claimed from a positivist perspective that the method of analysis lacks prescription and is open to contamination by the researcher (Lapadat, 2010). When explaining qualitative analysis, Babbie claims that “understanding must precede practice” (2009, p. 403); therefore what follows is a description of the process and its purpose for such a study. By providing, and subsequently undertaking a detailed formula, together with carrying out the hermeneutic cycle as described above, the study was executed in such a manner that the raw data collected was given a voice and its meaning explored.

The practice of thematic analysis can be broken into three separate processes, these being observing, encoding and interpreting (Boyatzis, 1998). Observing relates to identifying a statement or a word that is worthy of further consideration, that offers insight or may provide some kind of meaning to that being studied. A preliminary data analysis can be undertaken from this first observation; an initial exploration of the text to uncover what is important, what issues are emerging and what may require clarification (Grbich, 2007). Encoding is providing those points of consideration with a code so that they can easily and more readily be placed in categories (Babbie, 2009). The categories may be pre-determined, but in this study a method of open-coding was employed whereby the text was examined so that concepts could be drawn from it (Sarantakos, 2005).

Interpretation of the data was continually taking place as I made decisions about what was important or redundant to the piece of research. Thomas (2013) refers to the iterative or recursive plan whereby each step informs the next. Whilst Thomas relates this to the research as a whole, it is particularly relevant when open-coding as the process involves returning to the starting point to review the data in light of what has already been identified. Ezzy (2002, p. 90) describes this process as often being “confusing, frustrating and somewhat chaotic.” Once the coding process has been completed, themes or chunks of information are apparent which now begin to tell the story which was embedded in the data. Relationships between these themes can provide insight to the complexity of that being studied, yet these themes may not have been evident unless an analytical examination took place (Gibson & Brown, 2009; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012).

The process of analysis

Once the data had been collected and transcribed, I went through a process of reading the text format of the data and identifying recurring words, statements and subjects. This was repeated a number of times because I wanted to ensure I was capturing the essence of what was said, and not merely seeing what I wanted to see. It was important to me that I repeated this process so that I could immerse myself, as much as possible, in the context. To amplify this experience, I listened to the audio recordings with and without the transcripts so that I could hear any subtle nuances in language or perhaps hesitation in responses, thus providing a further analysis in order to identify patterns. By undertaking this method, I was able to employ the hermeneutic cycle, questioning my interpretation and examining any biased layering I was placing over the data. Further, I gave consideration to the perspective of each of the participants as each brought their own story and experiences to that of the field placement. With this task complete, I typed each of the words or statements I had drawn from the data as having meaning into a separate document, then collated these into major or overriding concepts (refer appendices F, G & H) and distilled further until I had the dominant themes extracted from the data.

Conclusion

This chapter commenced with a personal reflection on the process of data collection and then moved to the mechanics of what actually took place. I have learned that it is imperative to have a well detailed and researched plan for a research study, and then be prepared to change and adapt as necessary. General demographic information has also been given to provide background for the sites of the schools included in this case study, which together with the geographic and economic data provided in chapter one offer an insight to the context as a whole. Further, this chapter has provided the scholarly approach to hermeneutic and thematic analysis, followed by details of how those processes were undertaken in order to allow the rich data to tell a story of the experiences of the participants. It has provided details of how the academic requirements for these types of analysis were actioned so that the themes identified were as true as possible to the participants' voices. The following chapter is evidence of this, as the findings from such an analytic process are offered.

Chapter 6: Findings

Introduction

Having discussed the process of data collection and data analysis in the previous chapter, I now move to the results of these activities. The findings provided below are detailed within the overall themes that were evident through the analysis. I have provided a large amount of direct quotes from the participants as each identifies aspects from their own experience. In other areas, it is the repetition of the comments made that highlight the similarity of experience.

Findings

This study was undertaken to explore whether there is a role for social workers in regional primary schools in the South West of Western Australia in relation to identifying and addressing social barriers to education. School principals and deputy school principals (acting as on-site field educators), social work students and the off-site field educator were interviewed; all having participated in the school social work field education placement program at Edith Cowan University. All participants have been provided with a pseudonym and any identifying markers of the school have been removed. Further, any reference to the situation of specific adults or children has either been removed or slightly altered so that the narrative can be conveyed, but identification masked. Similarly, identifying information has been redacted or altered slightly where it was felt that identification of a participant, event or particular situation was low, but still possible.

The participants have been represented in this document as follows:

- Edith Cowan University social work students: Student A, B, C, D & E
- Principals and on-site field educators: School staff 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5
- External field educator providing supervision for the students: External field educator

In chapter four, I stated that I had used the intrinsic case study methodology. By employing this methodology for this research the similarity between sites could be examined as well as their uniqueness, although not necessarily to the same level that a multi-case study would require (Stake, 1995). The findings indicate that the similarity between sites was high and the uniqueness of each was not evident in the data collected. It is not to say that there were not differences or unique experiences, however these were not apparent in this study and therefore the findings have been amalgamated as this will also help preserve the anonymity of each school.

A total of six themes were identified:

Theme	Description
School – home connection	The relationship between the school, the students’ home and the broader community
External barriers to learning	The nature and complexity of issues that students’ face outside of school
Capacity at the school level	The political, economic and professional context of the school
Mono-disciplinarity within schools	Reframing the school environment so the focus is not on the teaching profession
Needs for learning	The fundamentals of what children need in order to be able to have the opportunity to learn
School social work	Where does a school social worker fit in the education system and what would they do?

Table 1. Identified themes and definitions

It is acknowledged that perhaps the unspoken can provide insight to matters and concepts that may be of value for further research, for example lack of discussion related

to the hegemonic societal structures, multi-culturalism, etc.; however by listening to what was said in relation to the questions that were asked, I have privileged the voices of the participants.

Each of the interview schedules (refer appendices C, D & E for examples) were designed to allow the participants to divulge as much, or as little information as they felt was relevant and were comfortable to provide. This allowed for a narrative to be developed, thus providing context at the time of interpretation and analysis. The interview schedule was slightly different for the student social workers, the school staff and the external field educator; however, each followed a similar structure as referred to in chapter five, being semi-structured, respondent interviews that would allow for a narrative to emerge (Tracy, 2013). As a result, each theme was not necessarily drawn from a specific or individual question, but from the discussion as a whole.

School - home connection

Life for an Australian youth is viewed as a continuum, it begins with early years at home with a primary caregiver and perhaps time spent in day care; at the age of four or five, formal education is commenced; and when a child has completed year six at approximately twelve years of age, they progress to secondary school for another six years of formal education before undertaking further studies or full time employment. Yet, as discussed earlier, for some there are barriers to this seamless continuum that result in limited options for the individual's future.

As I undertook the data collection I was aware of a recurring theme, a comment being made by students and staff alike, in various forms but with very similar meaning. Whilst the analysis of the data revealed a number of elements for coding, the prominent theme that emerged was that a substantial void between children and their access to education was at best, being overlooked, and at worst, ignored. This was the tenuous linkage between the school and home.

It appeared that there was a gap in the current system, a breach in support to our most vulnerable students and this was occurring in a time and place (primary education) where contact between schools and the child and family was at its highest, and arguably at its most useful. This was summarised clearly by one staff participant who stated:

I see education and public education as our great opportunity to improve our society and I believe that primary, a focus on primary education gives us a much better chance to address societal ills before they become un-addressable and unfortunately, I think a lot of our policy making at the moment is more about retribution than about prevention. (School staff 3)

It was evident from the participants' responses that the link between school and home was in many cases tenuous and yet it was simultaneously recognised that it was here that the most work both needed to be done and was not being done. It was identified that there was a gap that needed to be bridged as there was currently very little connection until a time of crisis.

... I think that's the disconnect at the moment, [needing to be] working with the parent body, not so much the student body (School staff 3).

The school staff focus group participants discussed that in the past schools had access to social workers, but that this had changed many years ago. A student also noted that:

[The] combination of having someone that could go from the home and the school and back and forth has been lost. (Student D)

The importance of having someone undertake the task of school-home connection became apparent as school staff deliberated over the consequences.

Each day that goes on the more issues we have with our, our parents and society and the less we can influence outside the schools' sphere. And our, our psychologists are there to assess the kids, psychometrically but there's

this, this vacuum between the school and the home especially when the home's dysfunctional. And yet, the trouble is that vacuum is either endpoint where we call in CPFS or the police. There's nothing in between. (School staff 4)

... there is a role there for a qualified person who doesn't have to do a WISC test but can still make some good professional decisions. (School staff 1)

All participants made mention of the support that many families required and were initially uncertain or reluctant to speculate as to why parents didn't access relevant services. Nonetheless, they did surmise possible reasons and these were embarrassment, lack of transport, disinterest or in many cases, simply not knowing that support and assistance was available.

Some families don't know how to get out of this spiral downwards because, they just don't know. (School staff 4)

A lot of our caravan ... you know your caravan kids, those families ... they're paying huge money to live in a caravan but they don't know any better because they don't know who to contact. (School staff 4).

Whilst school staff could recommend a family member access the services of a local agency, they (school staff) were not in a position to follow this up. It was thought that social workers could liaise between the school, the home and the services in the community thereby providing support for the parent, the child and reducing the burden on school staff.

I think the capacity for the social worker to work with the parents in a greater role than what we do as educators, because as educators our role is really working with the child. We need someone to have that link, and we – I encourage my staff to have links to the home environment. What we need is someone to have the capacity to go around and have a cup of tea and

talk to that parent and provide additional resources that my staff can't do.
So I see a huge role there for the social worker. (School staff 3)

School – home – agency connection

There was acknowledgement of the services available in the community; however, ideals of 'whole community', 'school as part of a hub', 'agencies linking seamlessly', 'reduction of silos' were raised, indicating that whilst the services may be there, there were difficulties with access. This has been included as a sub-theme as initially, there needs to be a school – home connection so that the families can then be linked with agencies.

We already have the links, they're here but it's messy and you have to find them whereas if it was easier and all together like a village ... where the school's part of a bigger group of people that look after the interest of the student, the child, the person, because they're not students, they're people.
(School staff 5)

We would like to see the allied services linked more closely into each other not us being the centre, but everyone working together and I think building partnerships with the community nurse, with the social workers, with psychologists, with the paediatricians, with all the people that have got key interests in the health and wellbeing, and I'm not talking physical health, I'm talking mental health of our kids and family, and children services come into that as well because in the past a lot of that has been a very adversarial approach with schools, it's them and us. (School staff 5)

... all those resources that are spread out through the southwest that don't talk to each other, if you had those in schools it would make a hell of a difference. (School staff 4)

... let's have services for kids in places where there are some. (School staff 1)

Having a co-ordinator facilitate access to the services, whether on the school site or within the broader community was recognised as a possible solution to the disparity currently experienced.

What we would like ... is all of those services under an umbrella of somebody coordinating it [...] so that all the departments link more seamlessly than they do now; they link but it's not seamless ... (School staff 5).

External barriers to learning

As with many public schools, each of the schools that participated in this study had a diverse student population; the nature and complexity of issues that children were facing in the three schools were extensive. Some of these issues were seen to stem from a lack of stability in either the home or school environment.

The school has 30% of students born overseas, a significant contingent from New Zealand, and 25% of the school is FIFO. (School staff 1)

... we have 30% transiency, so when you look at numbers of kids in and out, 30% of our school looks different at the end of each year. (School staff 1)

... we have 62 kids on court orders, 13 wards of the state. (School staff 4)

... and the 16 year old is looking after a 4 year old and an 8 year old on 300 bucks a week. (School Staff 4)

Employment of parents in the mining industry has added a layer of complexity to the school environment, particularly with the state of Western Australia currently experiencing a downturn after a mining boom. School staff discussed the change they had noticed in the local areas where their schools were situated, some of which could be attributed to the change in focus of the mining companies in the north.

... we have a lot of fly in fly out miners, we have lots of transiency in the school because [of] the mining sector ... our parents tend to move quite a bit. (School staff 4)

... we've got the transiency issue and you've also got the attitude of a significant number of FIFO and mining work here, where there was a period of high disposable income but low value for education. So if it means they don't have to go to school that day "that's fine, I didn't go to school and I'm on big money" is an attitude, a cultural attitude that has come through. So when you add those factors in, particularly that low value for education, it affects kids engaging in it. (School staff 1)

... we see a great deal of transiency occurring and it tends to be the kids who are most transient who come with the biggest issues because there's no stability and no continuity in what's occurring in their life whether it be at home or be at school. (School staff 1)

Problems that are in existence in society at large are observed within the greater school community. Some of the school staff mentioned that the school was a microcosm, with issues in the school environment being a precursor to events in society as a whole; an example being a reduction in payment of voluntary school fees being a precursor to an economic downturn. In such circumstances, the child will often bear the greatest impact.

... in no particular order, we've got a huge meth problem in our society and that effects a number of our mums ... We have families that have limited wealth, living in less than desirable accommodation, some are in the caravan park etc. We have a lot of single parents and there's always angst between that, we have a lot of court orders which means that the two parents can't agree ... We also have families that are going through the poverty cycle in a second or third generation; single mum with nine kids under the age of 17. (School staff 4)

... there's a lot of depression and suicide, especially here in the South West at the moment. So they're real things and, and how the parent feel affects how the children feel. (School staff 4)

... we have many children in the school at the moment with special needs, we have a lot of dysfunctional families, we have a lot of children that are in desperate need of support through lack of care at home, be it food, clothing, emotional stuff (School staff 5)

... there is probably a significant proportion of kids that can't [learn] because of lack of food, lack of clothes, lack of equipment, lack of love, lack of sleep and we've got the generational poverty ... families here that have been on welfare for generations; they don't value education because they can't see that it got them anywhere. (School staff 5)

... mum has got massive social issues, mental health issues. (School staff 5)

... life at home is a chaotic mess. (School staff 5)

...they've been through domestic violence situations or really nasty separations where perhaps the parents hadn't been thinking of the children. (School staff 2)

... the appearance of trauma is very strong, there's a lot of fight or flight within the classrooms or within the playground ... the children are in quite heightened states (School staff 2)

... we're becoming a school with a student body with increasing numbers of social issues. (School staff 3)

We're seeing growing numbers of autistic children or children on the autism spectrum. We are seeing increasing numbers of children with anxiety

disorders, we're seeing increasing numbers of children who are oppositional, we are seeing increasing numbers of children who lack the resilience or the self-belief to actually do their best. Now some of these are genetic, a lot of them are environmental. (School staff 3)

Participants made the link between environmental elements in a child's life and their ability to engage fully and positively with learning and life in general.

Our major issue was compliant disengaged and compliant disengaged are the ones that sit there and nod and go 'yeah', but they've got their heads somewhere else and don't engage in the learning. (School staff 1)

If we get kids that come to school that have gone to bed at 1 o'clock in the morning, that have had a sugary diet the day before, that have been up all night watching television, that haven't been outside for a run around, we know we're going to have a lack of engagement in assigned tasks, we're going to have oppositional behaviour and we're going to have lots of mental health issues with that child. (School staff 3)

So from a whole of education perspective if we can address the environmental stuff at a younger age we can actually get greater surety that children will get through these difficulties and not fall through the cracks. (School staff 3)

Capacity at the school level

It may not be surprising that in an environment of cost cutting and budget constraints, school staff felt limited in what they could achieve due to either a real or perceived lack of resources. It was stated that the schools function with a risk management model, that instead of being proactive, they were having to be reactive and crises focused.

I think resources are a big issue for us and have been for the last five years. Diminishing resources versus increasing need for resources for kids. (School staff 4)

So the priority changes on a daily basis which means that sometimes the best laid plans that we're going to intervene with little Johnny, who's number 632 on the list, we might not get to little Johnny for 18 months. Now is that fair on little Johnny? No, but the reality is that there's 631 kids more at risk in front of little Johnny. So it really becomes that risk management, how do we manage ... if we have more resourcing you could actually target some of these kids much sooner down the process. (School staff 3)

... it takes an investment of time and it's also, it's a priority, you have to prioritise. (School staff 4)

... schools run a risk management model and on any given day, the time and resourcing is given to the most at risk child that day. (School staff 3)

Mono-disciplinarity within schools

Observations from the social work student participants of the research provided an insight into the mono-disciplinary context of a school, regarded through history as predominantly being the domain of professionals with teaching qualifications. It is acknowledged that this is the experience of the social work students only and teaching staff did not have the opportunity to respond.

In response to the question 'Was there any objection or any sense that people perhaps objected to having a student social worker in the school?', one student social worker said:

It wasn't openly objected but [...] you could tell some teachers didn't understand the value of multi-disciplines working in an education environment and I think that goes back to a lack of understanding of what we could do. (Student D)

The student school social workers identified the differences in professional perspectives and in some cases found there was conflict as opposed to negotiation through shared goals.

... disciplinary processes, that was the biggest one where there was resistance(Student D)

'Yeah, we want to teach them independency', then when we go 'well, this is a good opportunity for you to teach them independency' they go, 'Oh no, we can't do that'. (Student C).

... I think realising how much, how different it is, the view of teachers of what kids are meant to do and how they're meant to behave and all those rules(Student C)

Locating the person in their environment and taking a broader perspective when examining an individual's behaviour is a fundamental concept for social workers (Germain & Gitterman, 2008). The student school social workers noticed that this was not necessarily a view employed by others.

... kind of get blurred when you've got a classroom of 30 and you're the only teacher in there ... so it is good to have that link between the two professions to understand that there's a whole big picture to the child's education, not just what happens in that classroom. (Student A)

I think the perspective that social workers bring, I don't think it's that common, the sociological perspective is not that common. (Student E)

... teachers having more of an appreciation of how the outside impacts a child's ability to learn [is necessary]. (Student D)

There was an appreciation for the skills and knowledge that teaching staff possess and an acknowledgement by the social work students that they were the novices in a school setting, albeit with their own skills and knowledge to offer.

...be humble, you can show what you know but value what they know because you don't know what you don't know. (Student E)

The perspective that schools are the domain of teaching staff was apparent in the discussion with school staff; this evidenced through a general acceptance of the status quo and view that other staff and professions were in a supporting role. However, one student noted:

... the fear and anxiety about having an outsider that's not an educationalist in the school went very quickly ... (Student C)

A multi-disciplinary approach could provide differing perspectives so that innovative programs and resolutions may be developed. Further, it could allow those with the qualifications and skills in specific areas to deal with situations as they arise.

Everyone has a role ... sometimes if there's grief you need the chaplain ... but if there's domestic violence or if there's court orders etc it might not be the chaplain it might be the social worker that needs to link and if the child has got some sort of, we think they might need some testing for some sort of disability or learning difficulty, you need the psych. (School staff 4)

... it definitely needs a whole mixture of different professions. I think having just teachers, or even just all social workers – it can kind of have some blind spots ... (Student A)

... because of the experiences that parents have had at school, school is intimidating, very intimidating – we're actually an authority figure, whether we like it or not. So the social worker can be the person that goes "well I'm not on anyone's side, I'm just here to help". (School staff 4)

... the teachers and the school leadership are primarily focused on educational outcomes and the social work services can intervene to help bring about that in a more sort of ...holistic context. (External field educator)

It was acknowledged by participants that teaching staff are not qualified for the multitude of social and emotional challenges faced by some of the school students. Nor is it the domain of teaching staff to be working with individuals and families when their duties are to teach all the students in their class.

...we're not trained to deal with meth, we're not trained to deal with domestic violence, we're not trained to deal with court orders. (School staff 4)

Part of my job is a psychologist and a counsellor. I'm not trained (School staff 5)

I think social workers can bring an expertise to the school community that teachers and the other educational professionals don't have the expertise to undertake, nor do they have the necessary time to ... develop the interventions that are required (External field educator).

I think it's really important that social workers can come in with a different framework and a different mindset to help the child reach the goals that the teacher's trying to get. (Student A)

There was recognition by school staff and student social workers alike that the workload of teaching staff is high and the demand to teach a very packed curriculum left little time for social and emotional wellbeing.

... when 50% of your time is maths and English and it's in an Act of Parliament it doesn't leave a lot of time for the rest because that, that's our job at the end of the day. (School Staff 4)

They don't necessarily have the opportunity during the school education day to fit all of that in, because they're trying to teach children to read and write. (School staff 1)

...parent communication was getting lost because teachers really don't have time to look at every child, like it would be nice for them to do, because when you've got - well all these classes had 30 to 35 kids in, and one teacher, and no EAs [education assistant] in a lot of them. (Student A)

At each of the participant school sites, a multi-disciplinary team entailed more than teaching staff and student school social workers with both school psychologists and chaplains employed on a part time basis.

... she came to us for support and it was [...] real, [it] created a situation where we could all grow from each other and that's not what I expected from a chaplain. (Student E)

School psychologist is trained to, and is licensed by law to deliver assessment that can be used to identify conditions within the child ... Chaplain is certainly someone with an appetite to help ... The level of skill that they bring to deal with difficult situations by and large is quite limited. A social worker should be someone who is qualified, got a four year degree, has an enormous bank of knowledge and can act at a professional level working with children and the family and I think the importance with the social worker is the family. (School staff 3)

The variety and level of skill and knowledge that each individual brings to the school contributes to a more holistic and 'wrap-a-round' type of support system. Many participants identified both positive and negative aspects of the current student support model of psychologist and chaplain, with the role of each being quite different, and different again to social work.

A school psych would work with kids individually and what they can help them [with] and how they can change their behaviour there at school but they don't look into families and their situation as much as we do, I think. (Student C)

... [social workers] to actually implement some primary prevention programs, because ... the psych seemed to be only dealing with the high-end cases ... that seemed to be the role (Student E)

... social workers fit neatly, neatly in the middle there [between school psychologist role and chaplain role]. (Student E)

The role of chaplain in the school was understood to be useful, however there were concerns raised about the level of qualifications and the religious component to their appointment.

... certainly the ones I've had, and we've turned over a couple, haven't, do not have the skills needed to work outside of the school environment. So I would not be comfortable in them doing home visits. (school staff 3)

... some of these kids need, rather than a test, interpersonal, connection between home and school ... where the chaplain who is ... lovely people but I think they've done a Cert III. (School staff 4)

Further, there were questions as to why support staff had a religious element to their employment.

... it's mixing secular education with religion which I didn't think our government was meant to be doing. (Student B)

... and there's a religious background to it. (School staff 4)

So it's built on the premise that Christians or whatever are good people ... because that's the policy motive around chaplaincy, that Australia is built on Christian values. (School staff 1)

The workload of the school psychologist was mentioned by all school staff participants, with the recognition that there was limited time available to work with those children and families who were not in a state of acute need.

... so psych in schools in a reality has become a constraint by administrivia, that's work ... they don't have the time. (School staff 1)

The issue with our psych [...] is our psych cannot get out of the office ...
(School staff 4)

Needs for learning

School staff spoke with passion and confidence about their role as educators; there was awareness of the challenges that many children and their families are dealing with and a sense of frustration at not being able to intervene in a preventative capacity, if at all.

We work really hard with them to give them a break because sometimes life doesn't give them a break. (School staff 4)

Happy kids learn, simple as that. (School staff 1)

So if your question is can they [learn], the answer is yes. Do they is another question but we have to sit here in the confidence that every kid that comes through our door, whether it's for a week or ten years will gain from being in the sort of school that we provide. (School staff 1)

There was clear recognition of the difficulty children may have in learning due to the social and emotional challenges they face.

If we don't get the social side of child's psyche sorted out we're actually not going to help them with their learning, because it's going to be preventing their learning if they've got a trauma brain working. Learning is not going to get in anyway. (School staff 2)

... if children aren't ready to learn ... they're not going to learn. So the happier, the safer a child feels, the more listened to, the more valued, the better they're going to learn. You can't teach a child anything if they're not comfortable, feeling safe and valued and that's critical (School staff 5)

If you've got children that are emotionally unsettled or socially they're having issues, then they're not in a good place to be able to do the best that they can academically(Student B)

When discussing what was required to learn, one school principal stated "... basically sleep, a good diet, plenty of water, not too much exposure to screen stuff and conversation". (School staff 3) This indicates that the barriers to learning may not always lay with the child, but with the child's environment.

School social work

Role of a social worker

This theme included many sub themes. It is also closely linked to the discussion in the themes above, but for reasons that will become apparent, I have created distinctions between the themes. So far the focus has been on what is not available, whilst this theme is centred on what could be possible with social workers in schools.

Early intervention

School staff spoke about the very early years for children and families prior to formal schooling; that working with these families in a constructive and supportive manner can identify and prevent issues that will impact on a child in later years.

Early intervention. It's a no brainer. (School staff 3)

I'd be targeting the zero to eight age group ... with an early intervention modelling in mind, particularly to support young mums. (School staff 3)

So you're looking at schools, innovative schools looking at what we can do zero to four. We're starting to look at, we're not funded for any of this. (School staff 1)

The capacity to change behaviours before they become engrained. (School staff 1)

There was repeated discussion about schools being reactive by necessity, as opposed to proactive and thus being in a position to minimise barriers to children's ability to learn. This resulted in a crisis management function.

Because a lot of our kids come to school and have poor speech because parents don't talk anymore, they put electronic devices [on instead]. (School staff 4)

... if we got in early we could stop the crisis happening(School staff 5)

...before it gets to crisis which is what is traditionally happening [...] is we don't intervene until it's a crisis and if we get in earlier which we see, the teachers see, this child's struggling, why? Who can we get to help which is something that doesn't happen enough. (School staff 5)

A school social worker was seen as being a component in providing preventative support to both the student and the parents.

What it's done [student school social worker program] is given us an indication into what can be achieved involving a social worker at a younger age in a child's development and supporting the family to get in place some of the key elements, the key bricks that will enable a child to succeed
(School staff 3)

I'd like to go with a qualified social worker working within the education sector and these people being common in schools and common in primary schools, not just in secondary schools because I think, unfortunately there's a belief that problems occur when kids are 13, 14, 15, 16 with engagement and drugs. Well that's rubbish. If we can do the work in earlier years, the reliance upon restorative resources in later years will be reduced. (School staff 3)

The positive outcomes that are achieved in the Family and Parent Centres that are co-located on site in some schools were mentioned as this gave the school staff the opportunity to interact with parents and children.

... and we can get to the [different] groups through the playgroups next door.
(School staff 1)

Student participants were also cognisant of the benefits of early intervention and saw the school environment as a site for this to take place.

... that was the first entry point they've ever discussed issues with anybody, whether it's mental health issues, domestic violence issues, or anything like that. So it's the first point of access. (Student D)

... it provides an opportunity for families to access a safe and secure support network and early intervention as well, which is huge. (Student D)

It's really important because at the school it's the earliest intervention possible ... so I think it's very important to not dismiss that because it's such

an important time in a child's life to be at school and learning ... not dismiss things because ... they're just being naughty or things like that. (Student A)

A lot of the students I saw, it was the first time they've ever seeked [sic] out any sort of assistance for issues. (Student D)

... prevent some barriers that could be upcoming in upper school, or even later in life [...] and get in there and really assist them and their families at the earliest point (Student A)

Building relationships

The term 'relationship' was used by all participants; this related to a social worker forming relationships with students, families, parents, caregivers, teaching and school leadership staff, other school support staff, agency and government department staff and with the broader community. This, together with trust, was seen as an integral element of a school social work role.

... you need to have somebody that's consistent, somebody that knows the clientele and somebody that's taken the time to build relationships. (School staff 5)

Social work, in my perception of it, is about understanding people and building relationships. (School staff 5)

... that is their [school social worker's] first fundamental role, is to build that rapport and gain that professional respect. (External field educator)

...building their [student social worker's] relationships with the staff and the students ... that was key because that gives you integrity and then that trust comes with that. (School staff 4)

Develop your relationships with everybody – that includes the cleaners and the admin staff and the teachers and the teacher’s assistants – and as well with the students ... engage with families and parents before and after school. (Student B)

School staff and student social workers alike acknowledged that building relationships with parents and students had the potential to open the means to communication, which in turn allowed support to take place.

... if the child trusts the social worker, the parent will trust the social worker more because a lot of our parents [...] when they have trouble are very wary of telling you everything because they don’t want to lose their kids. (School staff 4)

... have a chat to the kids, because they’ll come to you. If you’re friendly and if you approach them, they will approach you if something happens. (Student A)

When each of the social work student participants were asked ‘What advice would you give to the next student school social worker?’ there was a similarity in the responses provided; they were mindful that they were building knowledge of the role of school social worker within the school community and related this to advocacy of the profession and of themselves as professionals.

... do whatever it takes to show that you have something to contribute because you have to build that, you have to build that faith that they [teaching staff] have in you up because you won’t get much from them until [...] they know that you know what you’re talking about. (Student E)

... developing relationships with those teachers and just explaining a little bit about what social work looks, could look like in a school. (Student B)

Parents and Community

Participants saw school social work as working and integrating at multiple levels, both within the school and external to it, developing the links between the school and broader community thus creating a more holistic environment. This is related to the school – home connection discussed above, but in this sub-theme, participants were placing the social worker in the gap and identifying what may be possible.

... a broader level, so [a] more systems ... perspective in regards to working with families and [...] developing connections between other agencies in the area and working on a different system, so your macro, your micro and all the levels. (Student B)

... I want to actually support kids and families at the beginning of their school experience so that we can make sure that any issues that are occurring in the home that traditionally will impact upon the learning of children ... will be addressed in concert with the school. Not by the school, but in concert. (School staff 3)

...within our local community we're seeing significantly increased and greater need and growing need and what that does then, it puts greater pressure on the home and the home becomes the vulnerable part. But the person who is impacted the most is the child and that's where the role of social worker [comes in] to actually link community support to vulnerable home [which] is going to have a beneficial effect on the child. (School staff 3)

... social workers can actually engage the home and services outside of the school a lot more freely than we can. (School staff 4)

The connection between parents and the school was identified as a focus for a school social worker. Participants spoke of it not being the role of teaching and administration

staff, and therefore it is currently an area that is being overlooked by the Education Department and other services.

... Social workers in general can [...] they can be more of a conduit between the school and the home. A lot of our department staff whether its teachers or psychologists or chaplains, the work tends to be [...] inside the boundaries of the school. (School staff 4)

We have lots of troubled kids who need additional support to, not only at school but linking between school and home. (School staff 1)

Social worker to support the parents to get their feet on the ground and then to support the parents to have the connection to the teacher to talk about the education of their student. (School staff 3)

Further, it was appreciated that a school social worker could work on a broader level, advocating and developing programs that generated involvement and support on a greater scale than an individual focus alone. Some participants discussed the broader scope that a social worker can offer, utilising social work skills to place the person in the environment and view the bigger picture, not focus solely on education.

So social workers in schools have a wide, [they] have scope to provide a wide range of interventions and supports to a school community. (External field educator)

... teachers were able to see the capacity for that person [student social worker] to provide some support at an individual child level but I think the growing area that they saw was the capacity for the social worker to do things on a large picture scale. (School staff 3)

... more support for parents [...] afterschool programs in the morning, so that it supports parents that have to work and just, it makes it a more of a community minded place for the children to be. (Student B)

Participants also identified that social workers in schools can be facilitators, brokering arrangements to bring support agencies in to the school when required or providing ease of access for the parents to utilise these resources.

... some of the work that was done [by the student school social worker] [was] with our parent body in providing support and guidance in them accessing additional resources and support for issues going on in their home lives. (School staff 3)

... we were able to use her [student school social worker] as a resource for the vast bulk of our parents in extending their parenting skills, in growing their engagement with other agencies. (School staff 3)

... that's the other thing we haven't talked about is the resources outside to be accessed. We just don't have time. (School staff 4)

And that's the role of the social worker to actually link that person to the community supports that are available that we're oblivious to. (School staff 3)

Clarification of the role of school social worker

Prior to the social work student placement period each school principal held their own understanding of what a school social worker could do, but necessarily limited their expectations for the social work students they had on-site. The students also had a broad overview of the role but, without having qualified social workers within the school site to supervise and mentor them, they found the role complex and difficult to fulfil in a short time period in the position of student. In a more general sense, all held similar perceptions of the school social work remit, however the data reveals some participants' lack of clarity regarding the social work role.

Whilst the school staff believed the profession of social work was well understood by staff in their respective schools, students had a different experience and found they needed to advocate for the profession, explaining what it is a social worker can do, and what they don't do, and the skills and knowledge this is based on. Many students commented that teaching staff were not aware that to become a social worker a tertiary qualification had to be achieved and that this was a four year degree.

...they weren't aware of what we did, what the scope of social work was.
(Student D)

... it was a lot of explaining that our role was beyond child protection.
(Student D)

I don't think they know [...] what we do really. (Student C)

It wasn't understood very well ... they thought I was similar to a chaplain in what I could kind of do [...] didn't have any understanding that it was a four year degree, and that you go to uni(Student A)

They [teaching staff] didn't respect our knowledge because they didn't know our knowledge, they didn't know our skills. (Student E)

... that we do have [...] some knowledge and insight on how we can help and better that child's experience in schooling. (Student A)

... bringing social work into schools because it was clearly an unknown, an unknown aspect in schools and we had a lot of people asking what social workers do. (Student E)

Through advocating for the profession, most students felt that the role was better understood and that the benefits were evident.

I had at least [...] four teachers, five teachers emailing me or ringing me every three days saying, this has just happened; not quite sure how to deal

with it; what would you recommend? Or this has just happened. Is there something, maybe that you can think of that can help this child with this problem? (Student A)

... once we talked to them [teaching staff] and we connected with their ideas and we reframed things in the way social workers look at things and approach things, they could start to see that we could bring something and then they started to try to utilise us (Student E)

What school social workers can do

Those who undertook a social work role within the school environment and who participated in this research were students of a Bachelor of Social Work, which therefore limited the scope and extent to which they could fully carry out the duties of a fully qualified social worker. In saying that, the breadth of what can be carried out was evident, as was the knowledge and skills that are acquired throughout the degree.

... we did see a significant statistical increase in children enjoying [participating in activities] after the program [was first introduced]. (Student E)

... a greater capacity to deliver primary ... intervention because we have the training (Student E)

... in a school setting, systems approaches is incredibly important. (Student D)

... when they were doing their research, they related it back to models and theories of social work ... there's a deeper process and meaning to it. (School staff 4)

There was a couple of [school] students who had significant traumas in their lives and we talked about how that shakes their worldview and their current experiences, their behaviours, their actions, their ability to connect with others, and I know, particularly for one teacher, I think that really [...] changed their perceptions of the student as this student was seen as just a troublemaker and she was labelled in a really negative way (Student D)

The student social workers respected the role of the teaching staff and saw the combination of education and social work perspectives as enriching the learning environment for the children.

I guess because they're teachers, obviously, but they were looking at what kind of educational needs they had and trying to meet them, whereas I kind of went in there with an underlying thing of how, why are those needs not getting met. (Student A)

We always looked at the broader rather than just focusing on the student, which I think goes back to that bio-psycho-social stuff. (Student D)

Social emotional learning is part of the education curriculum, but I found that [...] a lot of the time it was touched on quite briefly ... I did an assessment of the specific needs of each year group at the school and developed social and emotional learning lessons (Student B)

Further, the student social workers felt that they were able to both negotiate and facilitate communication between parents, school students and teaching staff.

... someone to advocate for a different side of the [school] student's needs. (Student D)

... more interaction with the parents [...] because the teachers are there for the kids, and I kind of helped at, I guess you'd call it with the barrier, try and

divide that ... and be kind of the voice of the parents and the kid
(Student A)

... could be much more effective in actually providing the therapeutic counselling that [school] students might need, assisting families and supporting families and parents. (Student B)

... looking at it a bit more holistically [...] rather than the education system and what they need to achieve (Student A)

The presence of the student social workers reduced the work load on other members of staff, and allowed for some programs and plans to be carried out in a more effective manner. The student social workers were able to use their skills and knowledge in a variety of ways that reduced the burden on other school staff.

... looked at the attendance rate and who was constantly not attending [...] trying to find out why and going a little bit deeper [...] to see why they weren't coming to school. (Student A)

... didn't have a particular focus on fixing something [...], it was about them being proactive, doing their research, seeing a control group that needed support and then having a long term plan. For us if there's a problem we have to fix it straightaway [...] they were able to build and I think that was the difference. (School staff 4)

Support for School Social Work

Without exception, all participants clearly identified that there was a role for a school social worker in their respective schools, as well as more generally, and that this position was needed.

... I've seen it, there's room for social work in school. (School staff 2)

Oh absolutely, absolutely. (School staff 4)

I think there's a growing need ... Massively growing need. (School staff 3)

I want a full time social worker. If the system says you're only entitled to two days a week, I'll take two days a week. I'm going to be pragmatic. (School staff 3)

They're [student school social workers] actually doing very structured, very limited intervention strategies but it's better than what we had previously, which was jack. (School staff 3)

Further, when the school staff participants were asked 'In your opinion, would an outreach social worker who visits the school, say once a week have the same/better/worse outcome than a school (on site) social worker?', the response was overwhelmingly negative, except it was agreed that due to resourcing issues, this would be better than nothing at all. However, it was believed that a visiting social worker would not be in the position to build the trust and relationships required with parents and the school community as a whole.

[It would] be impossible for them to have the same influence as [an] onsite social worker. They simply wouldn't have the time unless they had a team that was left at the school to do the role. (School staff 2)

And there's not that relationship building. That's really important especially in the social work role [...] that relationship building is absolutely key. (School staff 4)

All participants were in agreement that social workers are required in schools for the myriad of social, physical and environmental reasons discussed and to assist in addressing the gap in the school-home connection that currently exists so as to enable children to be in a position to be open to learning.

You wouldn't need a social worker if it wasn't broke. (School staff 4)

... our job is the kids, not the parents [...]. We do as much as we can but there's a hierarchy and we're to look after the kids, that's what we're paid to do. The social worker would fit in there beautifully, absolutely beautifully [...], you just need to look at the crime statistics, the drug statistics, the stats of how many kids are wards of the state, the stats of how much domestic violence, the stats of how many custody cases we have. And something will tell you, that will tell that there's, there's a need. (School staff 4)

... [social work is] a positive thing for our schools and in primary schools we really need them. We really, really need them. (School staff 4)

I can think of numerous families that I would like this person [social worker] to be able to go and knock on the door and have a cup of tea and have a little chat and provide them with the avenues to access support to make their job easier and better at home which in turn will make the parenting of their children better. (School staff 3)

Conclusion

Chapter six has provided the results from the culmination of the thematic analysis. It has presented six main themes, these being: school-home connection; environmental barriers to learning; capacity at the school level, mono-disciplinarity within schools; needs for learning, and; school social work.

Quotations elicited from the interviews with participants have been provided to support the identification of these themes. The next chapter will draw on the findings of the research, utilising the foundation of human rights, and weave this through the literature providing an evidence based discussion pertaining to each theme and the overall findings.

Chapter 7: Discussion

The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows (Ausubel, 1968, p. vi)

Introduction

Upon undertaking this research I anticipated certain elements or concepts may be identified, such as the need for a qualified social worker in schools to be available to counsel students experiencing challenging life events, or perhaps an accredited mental health social worker to work together with staff and students as required. I thought it probable that those students whose home environment made it difficult for them to learn would be recognised as needing support. What has surprised me is the strength of the finding that it is the link to the home environment that has been identified as being the most needed and that it is here that the social worker is required.

The findings from the analysis of the data were presented in chapter six, with this being organised into a number of key themes. These themes will now be discussed, linking findings from this study with previous research and literature pertaining to primary education and human rights.

Discussion

The whimsical notion that young school children enter the school grounds, skipping through the gates with a belly full of wholesome food, feeling safe and secure in their familial relationships and the safety of their environment, ready to soak up the interesting and engaging instruction that is on offer is, for a great number of children, just that – whimsical. The findings of this research strengthen what is already known, that is some children and their families are dealing with a multitude of problems that often impact every aspect of their lives. Whether it be poverty, alcohol or drug misuse, homelessness or domestic violence, just to name a few, the impact on a child's ability to learn is immense

and whilst school staff talk about and employ strategies of code-switching, so that the student can adjust language, demeanour and cognitive processes between home and school (Giles, 2016), it could be argued that this simply is not enough. Whilst it is important that a child feel safe and comfortable at school, this is not always sufficient to negate the impacts of a stressful environment away from school. Whilst Ausubel (1968), in the above quote, was referring more to academia, if a child's current knowledge is derived from trauma, instability or disadvantage, then it is conceivable that this is where the learning, and changes, need to commence.

In schools in the South West of Western Australia, and in all probability, Australia-wide, it is expected that children will undertake the activities set by the teacher each day in order to learn and progress in an incremental fashion through the stages of curriculum. Consideration is given to those who have diagnosed learning, physical or developmental disabilities, with a focus on inclusivity, but there is little in the way of formalised, structured interventions for those children whose learning disability is not as overt or of a diagnosable nature. That is, the learning disability brought about by disadvantage and instability in the home environment and other external barriers to learning.

The following discussion will interweave the findings of this research with literature discussed previously pertaining to education and human rights. The chapter will conclude by providing an argument for a reconsideration of the current primary school education model in Western Australia.

School – home connection

Civil society is fragile, and it needs to be extended. (Hall cited in Nixon, 2008, p. 118)

The data from the research highlights the disjuncture between family and school, between the school community and the broader community. Bridges between the school and an

individual child's caregiver only exist in certain circumstances and often, it is where the most support is required that the bridge is non-existent. One school staff member stated "We have lots of troubled kids who need additional support to, not only at school but linking between school and home" (School Staff 1). The school environment provides a ready and accessible link to these families which does not necessarily exist elsewhere, yet this link is overlooked or ignored until a reactionary response is required, with another staff member contending that "schools run a risk management model and on any given day, the time and resourcing is given to the most at risk child that day" (School staff 3). School staff and student social workers were aware of certain situations where they felt proactive action could be taken which would enhance the educational opportunities of a child, yet they were restricted in what they could actually do. This brings into stark focus the gap that exists in the support being offered to families and the access the families, and schools have to community services, thus there is a known impact on the child's opportunity to access education.

There was a sense of frustration emanating from the school staff as they could so clearly identify and articulate where the gaps in support were and what needed to be done in order for children to be able to fully access education. However, due to the machinery of an education department that is maintaining the traditionalist stance on education, government policies and resourcing shortages, they are unable to implement strategies to minimise or prevent these barriers. This is despite a clear statement within the *Australian Education Act, 2013* (p. 2) which asserts:

Strong partnerships across the broader community are necessary to support all school students, including partnerships between teachers, parents, carers and families, not-for-profit and community organisations, and employers.

School staff recognise their position as part of a whole, part of a community and that they need that community to be functioning in order for the children who attend the school to be given every opportunity to function to an optimal level. Further, the lack of a cohesive

partnership(s) with agencies and other government departments limits opportunities for all stakeholders to work together to enhance the opportunities of the child and family. Both state and commonwealth governments, as discussed in chapter three, use the rhetoric that increased parental involvement in schooling is advantageous for children's education; however, their policies focus on those parents who already have a higher level of engagement with their children's schooling and school community. Under the *Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes* plan, a software application (an 'app') was developed and made available to parents so that they could become involved and be provided with tips on how to strengthen their child's learning (Australian Government, 2016b). Whilst this may be beneficial to those who are involved with their child's education, it does nothing to engage those who, for various reasons, are disengaged and is effectively providing another resource to those who are less in need.

External barriers to learning

As discussed in chapter two, the barriers to education are frequently external to the classroom or school environment and external to the individual themselves. Research has suggested that there is a correlation between an individual's educational achievements and their socio-economic environment, with studies identifying that social disadvantage can negatively impact a child's behaviour (Webb & Vulliamy, 2002) which in turn may limit their ability to pay attention and learn. This was evident in one school who had gathered data and found their "major issue was compliant disengaged and compliant disengaged are the ones that sit there and nod and go 'yeah', but they've got their heads somewhere else and don't engage in the learning" (School staff 1). The impact on the ability of a child to learn when in a state of trauma or stress, when feeling unsafe or insecure is immense, and yet it would seem there is very little done to alleviate this known and obvious barrier to accessing education. All participants recognised that many challenges to a child accessing education were borne from elements external to the school, and as such felt constrained in what they could do about this. Back in 1995, Smith and Noble (cited in Webb & Vulliamy, 2002, p. 169) alleged that the link between

low socio-economic status and poor educational outcomes had been “almost a taboo subject in public policy debate in recent years.” Whilst this issue may no longer be considered taboo, I would argue that it is not considered a priority, otherwise policies and concrete actions would have been taken to improve the opportunities of those school students caught in the cycle of poverty and disadvantage.

Participants in my study referred to the high percentage of transiency that was experienced within their school populations; data that is not recognised in the official school figures due to the manner in which they are calculated. However, if the school staff are identifying this as an issue, and are aware of the impact on some of their students, then it needs to be addressed. In the study carried out by Israel and Beaulieu (2004), it was found that those students who had never relocated, or had moved home only a minimal number of times were more likely to remain in school. Conversely, research has shown a correlation between student transiency and poor academic performance (Scanlon & Devine, 2001; Mueller & Tighe, 2007). These statistics have been replicated in the Australian Child Wellbeing Project (2016), the authors of which also state that the likelihood of absence from school is increased in secondary years for those coming from low SES environments (Redmond et al., 2016). Therefore, I would argue that addressing these issues in the primary years would result in long term benefits to the individual, the family and society as a whole.

Relationships and building of relationships were recognised as being of utmost importance and it was here that all participants identified social work as playing a valuable role. This is not to say that others working within the school environment do not and could not nurture these same relationships; however, there was a sense that this was a specific skill of the social work profession, and that long term partnerships with children and families based on mutual respect and trust would allow the social worker to mediate between the school and family, whilst advocating for what is best for the child educationally and emotionally. In so doing, this could further build on the social capital and the links between the school and the family or child’s home environment.

Capacity at the school level

One member of the school staff being interviewed stated “part of my job is social work and I’m not trained” (School staff 5). This resonates with the results of a study carried out by Webb and Vulliamy (2002, p. 175) in the United Kingdom where 90% of those teaching staff surveyed agreed that “when parents come into school to see teachers, they frequently confide their own personal problems” and a high percentage spent a number of hours per week on what was deemed ‘social work’. Further, approximately two thirds of those who participated in the UK study maintained that the social work component of their role was too demanding and as School staff 5 stated, they were not adequately trained for such a role.

During the interview process for this study, select school staff participants mentioned that the school ensures there is operational training available when it is required. An example provided was that some staff had completed the Bridges out of Poverty training so they were better equipped to deal with those students from impoverished backgrounds. Whilst it could be argued that some training is better than none, a two day course (Investing in our Youth, 2016) cannot provide the same level of skills and knowledge as a four year tertiary qualification.

Schools are having to cater for a more diverse student population with, many argue, insufficient funds to manage (Cranston, Mulford, Keating & Reid, 2010) and in a time when the models of funding for schools in Australia generate uncertainty amongst those trying to juggle the finances (Caldwell & Spinks, 2013). Caldwell and Spinks (2013) state that funding of schools has increased approximately 300% over the last nearly 40 years. This then raises a number of questions, Is the claim of lack of funding erroneous? Are the funds expended inefficiently? Do the funds actually reach the schools? And does a 300% increase take into account the general increases in cost of living over that time and specifically, the increase in the number of disparate issues that schools now need to manage? Whilst the funding is not the focus of this study, the capacity of the school to

deal with these issues is, and the inclusion of a social worker to be able to manage and coordinate those issues outside the realm of the teaching profession could increase the efficiency of the school staff, as well as provide the required support to students and their families.

Mono-disciplinarity within school

Along with teaching staff, schools in Western Australia currently have both school psychologists and chaplains, often working across different sites. In addition to this, some schools may have nurses, occupational therapists, speech therapists and other allied health professionals providing outreach services on an ad hoc or set number of days per week basis. This multi-disciplinary environment within schools can provide a more holistic support base for both students and their families. As Hartnell explained:

... a team comprising different professionals with differing expectations, priorities, methods, and roles, although sometimes challenging because of these very differences, can lead to enhanced outcomes (2010, p. 189).

However, the traditional view of a school being the domain of teaching staff still remains. There is a sense that other professions on the school grounds are there by invitation, that they are somehow an addition to the foundation (Barrett, 2014). I would argue that the site for education should be multi-disciplinary and only by doing this are children being offered the opportunity to grow in every aspect of their being, as referred to in Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the child which states that education should be directed to “the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential” (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016).

Student school social work participants became aware of the different perspectives that a social worker could bring to the school and classroom environment. As mentioned in chapter two, half of teachers surveyed in a recent United Kingdom survey did not believe that there was a relationship between behavioural issues exhibited by school students

and anxiety or low engagement with learning. Conversely, a social worker employing ecological and systems theory would assess the situation by exploring the environment of the child, not focusing on the child solely, and examine the interconnectedness of “the child, the family and the environment” (Horner & Krawczyk, 2006, p. 43). Having a theoretical knowledge base that is distinct, yet complementary to educational theory can provide an alternative evaluation which leads to a more diverse understanding for all parties. This theoretical knowledge is also distinct to that of psychology and theology, which are currently the dominant support structures in Western Australian schools.

State and territory education departments across Australia utilise different service providers to employ, engage and supervise the chaplains that are working in schools. In Western Australia, that contract is held by YouthCARE, a Christian not-for-profit agency. The minimum requirements for becoming a chaplain in Western Australia include:

- “Minimum of Certificate IV in Youth Work or Pastoral Care or an equal or higher qualification in a relevant field that includes CHCCCS016 Respond to client needs & CHCMH001 Work with people with mental health issues
- Demonstrated capacity to sensitively relate the Christian faith in a secular context
- Demonstrated active engagement in the life of a Christian Church and denomination that affirms the triune Godhead of Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and is a member or associate Church of YouthCARE
- All YouthCARE chaplains are required to regularly attend a recognised Christian Church community and actively engage in their Christian spiritual development” (YouthCARE, 2015).

Under the National School Chaplaincy Programme, the minimum requirements are the same across Australia as those listed above for Western Australia (ACCESS Ministries,

2016). ACCESS ministries provide chaplaincy services in Victoria (ACCESS Ministries, 2016; Wright, 2009) and have developed the below table to promote the role of chaplains in schools (ACCESS Ministries, 2010, p. 5).

Chaplain	Counsellor	Nurse	Social Worker	Psychologist
Building relationships and being present in the school community	Counselling students	Health promotion and education	Counselling	Psychological assessment and diagnosis
Pastorally caring for all members of the school community	Assisting parents to make decisions about their child's education	Individual student health counselling and assessment	Development of programs, procedures, and policy to support students and the school community	Consultative and advisory service for staff
Implementation of preventative and proactive programs	Assessing student's learning and behaviour	School community development activities	Supporting designated students and families	Planning, implementing and evaluating services for the educational, social and emotional development of students
Promoting thinking about spiritual well-being	Assisting schools in matters of student disability	Resource and referral service to assist healthy life style choices for students	Often providing support to a large number of schools within a network	Supporting a designated client base
Referral to and connection with other government and community services	Liaising with other agencies about student well-being			Often providing support to a large number of schools within a network
Connection with church and community groups				

Table 2. Role of Chaplain, adapted from ACCESS Ministries, 2010, p. 5

Whilst it is noted that this table was devised based on the Victorian education system, it could be argued that it is biased toward chaplaincy, with social workers being in a position, and having the skills and tertiary qualifications to undertake the roles that I have highlighted in yellow. The only task that a social worker cannot undertake is that which is specific to religion. This has been included not to critique the chaplaincy program, but to highlight the breadth of tasks that can be carried out by a social worker. In addition, there is no suggestion that there is no place for chaplains within the school community, with many of the participants of the study noting that whilst social workers can focus on the broader community, chaplains can dedicate their time to aspects related more closely to the student's everyday issues. I have not highlighted the statement that both social workers and psychologists provide services across a number of schools as this is true for all the roles listed.

School psychologists were first employed in Australian schools in South Australia in 1924, and the following year in Western Australia (Anderson, Klassen & Georgiou, 2007), although has been disputed with Faulkner (2007) claiming the first school psychologist was in Tasmania in 1923. Research has found that psychologists in North America focus more on assessment than their counterparts in Western Australia who, it is claimed focus more on consultation (Anderson, Klassen & Georgiou, 2007; Klassen, Neufeld & Munro, 2005). However the findings from this study would contradict this, with both staff and student participants suggesting assessment and administration monopolise the time of the school psychologist, resulting in extensive waitlists for those children referred for assessment and/or consultation. Regardless as to whether the school psychologist prioritises time on assessment or consultation, the focus is on those children with perceived or diagnosable learning disabilities (Klassen, Neufeld & Munro, 2005). A survey in 2003 found that of the four identified least liked aspects of their work for school psychologists in Australia, three were supported by the comments made by participants in this study, these being: administrative burden and paperwork; overwhelming work load or case load, and; limited time for prevention and interventions (Jimmerson et al., 2006).

Needs for learning

Australia is one of a number of western nations that finds itself slipping down the rankings of international education tables (discussed further below) (Caldwell & Spinks, 2013), despite national testing, such as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) being a focal point in most classrooms during certain terms of the school calendar. Whilst teaching staff provide a concentrated effort for their students to perform at their best level during these tests, Cranston, Mulford, Keating and Reid (2010) and Sahlberg (2012) provide commentary that the priority given to testing and league tables diverts the focus away from the wellbeing of the child.

School staff participants were unequivocal in their agreement that for children to learn they needed to feel happy, safe and valued, yet the anecdotal evidence from these same participants, as well as the social work student participants was that there are a number of school students who do not come to school with this state of mind due to their home environment. This is then compounded by the pressure to perform in the relevant testing, only to have the poor outcomes as mentioned above. As the focus for teaching staff is to teach (Sahlberg, 2012), I would argue that reducing the external barriers to learning could result in better test outcomes, therefore providing a better outcome for all stakeholders, most importantly the child (Christenson, 2004; Horner & Krawczyk, 2006; Mo & Singh, 2008).

In research previously mentioned, Webb and Vulliamy (2002) found that 79% of respondents agreed that primary schools were an ideal location from which to provide support services and it is here that social workers could engage with students and their families to work collaboratively to ameliorate those external barriers currently in existence.

School social work

Gaps, such as those between school and home or school and other stakeholders, which were identified in this research could be related back to a lack of social capital. Field (2008, p. 1) provides a succinct definition of social capital when he suggests “Its central thesis can be summed up in two words: relationships matter.” [I]t is the relationships between individuals, groups, organisations and community that create a network of social engagement, providing a wealth of resources and support for each of the individuals within that network (Butler & Muir, 2016). Participants acknowledged that this was currently not the case, that there was a lack of these relationships and as such the system that should be in place to support children, was disjointed and ineffective.

Whilst it is acknowledged that current school staff create and build relationships, they are not in a position to create the networks that result in a multi-layered, integrated system. Further, skills and knowledge of community development theory are not included in a tertiary teaching qualification, but they are in a social work degree, placing social workers in a better position to help create and build these social relations. At both the state and federal levels of government, parental and community engagement in education has been called for, but it has been left to the parents and community to instigate this (Australian Government, 2016b; Department of Education, 2016c). Velkou and Bottrell (2011, p. 231) claim that “fear, isolation, violence and poverty” can result in many individuals not willing, or being able, to engage with the school community, and yet it is often these families and their children who are in the most need, and those with whom the school needs to be making connections.

Hardy and Grootenboer (2016) claim that the bureaucratic, and data would suggest ‘siloes’, nature of departments of education has resulted in schools not placing community engagement as a high enough priority. Green (2015) argues that many school principals understand community engagement to be limited to school based events, such as ‘school open night’ and parent/teacher meetings. Theories of community development

expand this concept beyond mere engagement and observe the existing power structures and systemic mechanisms within a community so as to build on identified strengths and broaden the power base (Minkler, 2012). By doing so, interaction between the school and community is increased and those individuals brokering these relationships may begin to build bridges with those who are not willing or able to engage.

By increasing community engagement and participation, and building social capital, the silo structure of services may be reduced with a more united and cohesive model of support created. Further, by acknowledging that the site for education is located within the community, a context is provided, allowing for a richer acknowledgement of “what the learner already knows” (Ausubel, 1968, p. vi). As such, the education of the child is enhanced whilst promoting a more holistic learning environment. Lingard, Nixon and Ranson (2008, p. 26) assert that “mediating learning and living requires a school to create and constitute a wider learning community of mutual recognition that embraces services, parents, and their communities.” The development of social capital, and particularly linking social capital between schools, communities and families increases educational opportunities and decreases non-attendance and school drop-out rates (Israel & Beaulieu, 2004).

School social work is an integrated and essential part of many education systems around the world and is increasingly so (see chapter 3), yet in Western Australia the social work profession is not employed in the same manner in the public education realm. Whilst social workers are employed within the private school system, anecdotal evidence from the few social workers employed in recent times by the public system has, from the perspective of the social worker, not always been a constructive process (C.Green, personal communication, December 5, 2016). This has been due to the lack of clarity about the role, little recognition from school executives about what it is a social worker can, and equally importantly, cannot do, and the provision of the necessary resources in order to carry out the role effectively. This view is consistent with the results of this research, which as discussed in the previous chapter, found that initially there was some

disparity between the school staff and the student social worker in understanding the role of a school social worker.

Despite this, school staff interviewed for this study acknowledged that there is a need for school social workers and that ideally, they need to be based at the school so that the necessary and important responsibility of building relationships and trust with school students, staff, families and the community can take place and continue in a sustainable fashion. Evidence from this study underlines that clarity and boundaries of the role need to be negotiated, but this does not detract from the overwhelming need for a qualified professional to assume the position that is currently absent from our schools. McKinnon, Kearns and Crockett (2004, p. 242) emphasise:

The fundamental nature of education in the promotion of wellbeing, and the many factors that work against the successful uptake of schooling, indicate that social workers should have a role in redressing imbalances in the education system and between schools and families in the wider community.

School staff participants reiterated that their primary function was teaching, and that whilst time prevented them from extending too far beyond this, they were also not qualified to provide the assistance and support that is required. Moreover, those currently available on the school site were not in a position to undertake this role; psychologists work more closely with the individual and this is mostly for assessment purposes, whilst chaplains are not necessarily qualified nor is it in the ambit of their role. Perhaps tellingly, despite school staff identifying the need for social workers and the findings of this study indicating the complementary perspective, skills and knowledge that social workers can bring to an education setting, the Western Australian Education Department continues to employ only qualified teachers as Program Coordinators of Student Services in secondary schools (Refer Appendices I & J).

A human right to education

The above themes can be divided into those which facilitate and those which act as barriers to the accessibility of primary education (refer figure 2). With the existence of these barriers, and the lack of these facilitators, it could be argued that children's human right to education is not being met in the South West of Western Australia. This raises important implications when considering access to education within a human rights framework.

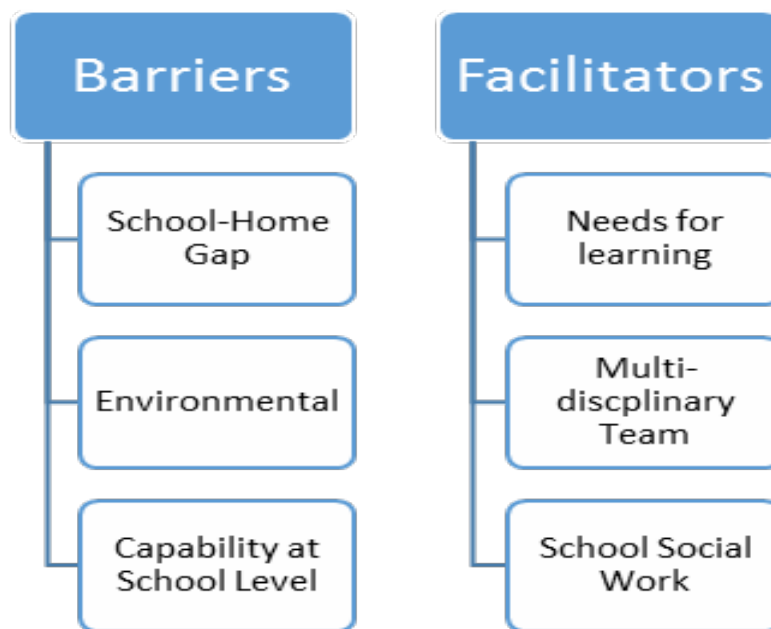


Figure 2. Model of Barriers and Facilitators to Education

Despite statements in the United Nation's declarations, frameworks and goals discussed in chapter 2 which refer to children who are socially disadvantaged, the focus appears to be on those, who all things being equal, would succeed in a conventional classroom; the emphasis is on the quality of the teaching and the welcoming of diversity within the educational setting. This ignores the barriers that are being faced by children who despite a good quality of teaching and the welcoming of diversity, may be unable to benefit from the learning available due to what is taking place in their home life and therefore are not

free to access learning. This could be referred to as social-environmental disability, but it would seem, is currently not viewed within that paradigm. Internet searches for the term return results such as: the social model of disability; disability in general; social barriers experienced for those with a disability; and environmental barriers experienced by those with a disability. As mentioned in chapter 1, a search for the term 'social disability' provides results that appear to relate to the disadvantage that some with a physical disability encounter on a social level or the social construction of disability. As such, the term 'external barriers' has been used throughout this thesis to indicate conditions external to the child which may impact upon their learning.

Whilst enrolment in school is one indication of possible education, it does not necessarily tell the whole story, as discussed in relation to Sub-Saharan Africa in chapter two. Whilst it is understandable that organisations such as the United Nations focus on those who cannot access a school, what about those who have access, but are unable to engage with the education on offer? The United Nations and others (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011; Gordon, 2013) when making reference to universal primary education make mention of disability, but social-environmental disability is, for the most part, ignored. Research carried out by Graham and Spandagou found that:

Principals in more diverse schools talked about inclusive education to include cultural, social, economic and ethnic differences. Principals in schools with limited diversity talked about inclusive education as something restricted to children with a disability or special educational needs (2010, p. 224).

In that same study, it was found that schools in New South Wales managed the ideal of inclusive education differently depending on how the concept was understood by school staff, most often the principal. Those in low SES areas did have a broader perspective on the parameters of inclusivity due to the diversity of the students enrolled. However, this was not always the case, with many school principals identifying an individual deficit, a

diagnosable disability, as one that is attached to funding and therefore is to be acknowledged and included in reporting (Graham & Spandagou, 2010).

Conversely, Gordon (2013) argues that inclusive education is not a human right at all; that the provision of education is different to it being of an inclusive nature. Whilst Gordon accepts that there is a legal human right currently, due to the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, he raises questions as to whether it is a moral human right, which therefore calls in to question the foundations of the legal human right. The purpose of this thesis is not to debate the human right of inclusive education, however in including this argument it brings to the fore that the issue of external barriers to education is not about 'inclusive education', it is simply about the human right **to** education.

As mentioned previously, Australia is being surpassed in international education tables (Caldwell & Spinks, 2013). On the 29th November 2016, results from the 2015 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) were released. This round of testing is carried out every four years to provide a comparative study of year four and year eight students in participating countries, which in 2015 included 580,000 students representing 57 countries and 7 benchmarking entities (regional jurisdictions within countries such as states or provinces) (IEA, 2016). These results indicated that except for mathematics in year four, there has been no increase in overall performance since the TIMSS testing began in 1995 (Thomson, Wernert, O'Grady & Rodrigues, 2016).

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) assesses 15-year-olds in the areas of mathematics, science and reading, in relation to applying their knowledge and skills in situations akin to real life. In 2015 there were 540,000 students from 72 participating countries taking part with the results released in December of 2016 (OECD, 2016). The results indicate a decline in Australian students' ability in the areas of science and mathematics, in an applied manner, but not in reading literacy. Furthermore, the number of high achieving students declined and the number of low performing students increased (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016b). Recent

results from the 2016 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) showed that student outcomes in the core curriculum areas of literacy (writing, spelling, grammar, punctuation and reading) and numeracy, had either marginally increased, marginally decreased or stagnated. These tests, introduced nationally in 2008, are carried out annually in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 (National Assessment Program, 2016).

Following the release of these international and national results, there has been call for changes to be made to the education system in this country. The governing Liberal-National Party Coalition have linked funding to student outcomes, with the Minister for Education, Simon Birmingham stating the “2016 NAPLAN National Report confirmed the preliminary results from August that highlighted despite significant funding growth in federal funding for schools, improvements in student outcomes have remained flat” (Birmingham, 2016, para, 2). When interviewed, Birmingham commented that parental engagement in schooling is important to a child’s educational outcome and that reading to a child each night would improve a child’s vocabulary, whilst usage of the *Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes* plan software application referred to earlier would have a positive impact on students’ educational achievements (SBS, 2016). These statements highlight that an assumption is made that parents value education and that they are in a position to support their child through the schooling system.

I would argue that whilst discussion and debate on funding, teacher quality, availability of resources, infrastructure, the curriculum and leadership is important, this is only one part of a bigger picture. What is being forgotten is that group who, in any other sense, would be considered the client. The discourse centres on the input for improved teaching, and it would seem little consideration is actually afforded to ensuring that those who are being taught, are in a position to learn.

Research for this thesis suggests that that the current system is denying these children their human right to an education and as such, it would appear that the state of Western Australia is not upholding the rights enshrined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration

of Human Rights (UDHR) which states that education is a right for all and that it should be free in the elementary, or primary years; in the ICESCR, Article 13 which asserts “that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society”; nor is it upholding Article 29 of the CRC which states that education should be directed to “the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential” (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016).

Conclusion

The findings from this study have provided a breadth of themes which have been discussed in this chapter. Whilst privileging the voices of the participants in Chapter 7, in the current chapter I have linked this to relevant literature to inform the reader that these issues either do not exist in isolation within the South West of Western Australia, or have been identified and remedied by others elsewhere. Whilst each theme provides insight in to the complexities and challenges experienced by the broader school community, understanding these in their entirety through the framework developed (see figure 2) suggests an overarching view which can inform some ways forward. The following chapter provides a summary of the research and findings. In doing so, particular aspects are placed in the foreground, with recommendations made so that the barriers currently being experienced by a number of children can be addressed.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

“... where the traditional idea of an experimenter manipulating the experimental system gave way to an alternative view.” (Gross, 2009)

Introduction

I sit here thinking how odd it is to have in this chapter the term ‘conclusion’ above, and directly below it the word ‘introduction’. But then I recognise this is an analogy for the education system in this state, where education is the conclusion and children the introduction. The conclusion is put before the introduction in that there is the infrastructure, the classroom, teaching staff, resources, funding, testing – and constant debate about all of these and their impact on academic achievement. What is overlooked is the introduction; the children who enter these classrooms. Many do not have the capacity to learn, not because of a lack of intelligence or desire, but due to external environmental barriers and yet only those with the diagnosable and recognisable ‘dis’ abilities will be assessed and supported. The children with external barriers to their opportunities to learn are not assessed and supported in the same way. The support that can be provided to their families and the social capital that can be built through networks and application of general social work and community development theory could also form part of their introduction.

Multiple sources state that higher levels of education result in individuals experiencing better outcomes in health, employment and life opportunities overall; in effect education is a multiplier of many other human rights (Sidoti, 2002; UNESCO, 1999). Therefore to knowingly perpetuate barriers to education when possible solutions are available is to wilfully deny some children their future potential. In discussing the bureaucratic pursuit of international rankings, Graham and Spandagou (2010, p. 233) claim that “the enrolment of and adjustments for students with additional support needs and/or challenging behaviour appear viewed as an imposition, rather than a global human right.”

This thesis has drawn on the findings of the research carried out by the author together with literature that is currently available in this area. In so doing, an argument for a reconsideration of the current primary school education model has been proposed. Furthermore, it has been argued that to continue with the current model would constitute a violation of children's human right to education.

In this chapter I provide details on the contribution of this research and suggest areas for further research. I discuss the future for school social work and provide recommendations based on the findings from my study. A concluding summary is offered, revisiting and responding to the research question.

Contribution

The study contributes to the field of social work first and foremost by upholding the ethics of the profession and seeking systemic change where injustices are evident. The bureaucratic model of the education system requires alternative perspectives and this study has contributed in a small way to this. Whilst social work is available in some schools in Western Australia as an outreach model, the impact that an on-site school social worker can have is evident from the research undertaken. Social workers can work on multiple levels, employing theoretical knowledge and skills to work with individuals, families and the broader community.

Future research

Being both a qualified teacher and social worker I find it difficult to comprehend how the provision of equitable access to education is not a priority for any government within the western world. The findings of this research indicate that there is great deal more that can be done, but for various reasons it is not. With this in mind, I would suggest the following research projects be undertaken:

- A further examination of social capital emanating from primary school sites within Western Australia and its impact on the educational outcomes of students at those sites. The tenuous linkages that exist between all stakeholders (school and home, school and other stakeholders) in this state's education system have become apparent through this study.
- Evaluation of the outcomes of having a qualified school social worker based within a Western Australian primary school. An action research study could be undertaken in partnership with a school and the state education department.
- Evaluation of the School Social Work Field Education program that is currently undertaken at Edith Cowan University, South West campus.
- Evaluation of the Western Australian Department of Education's strategic plan titled, *High Performance – High Care: Strategic Plan for WA Public Schools 2016-2019*. As discussed in chapter three, there are numerous reforms detailed in the aforementioned strategic plan, but there does not appear to be an instrument for evaluation of these reforms.
- Research to identify the users of the Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes plan software application. If evidence shows this is only being used by parent(s) who were already engaged with their children's education, then questions would be raised as to its efficacy.

The future for school social work in the South West of WA

The focus in the area of education is currently on quality of teaching staff, funding and Australia's ranking in international education tables. It would seem that there is an assumption that all those who attend school will benefit from an improvement in these focus areas, however this is not the case. If the systemic issues that have been highlighted in this study are not addressed, there will continue to be children who leave primary school with, at best, a sub-standard education. Whilst commonwealth and state governments continue to function within a neo-liberalist ideology of economic rationalism

and responsibility being firmly thrust on the individual, schools will continue to have students who are disengaged and therefore disruptive, disobedient and struggling to learn.

There is currently little evidence that the Education Department in Western Australia has any plans to employ school social workers on-site in primary schools. There have been rare occasions of schools employing social workers; unfortunately this has been amidst a lack of clarity as to what a social worker can and cannot do, resulting in unrealistic or distorted expectations by all parties (C.Green, personal communication, December 5, 2016). The AASW (WA) School Social Work Practice Group, which was discussed in chapter three continues to promote and advocate for the profession and to improve the understanding of this specialist field of practice. In so doing it is hoped that the Education Department and, more broadly the state government will acknowledge that public primary schools are not only an appropriate site for social work practice, but an essential one.

Based on the research undertaken for this thesis, I wish to make the following recommendations:

Recommendations

- 1) Social work educators across Australia continue to develop school social work opportunities through the field education program;
- 2) The AASW explore opportunities for further research and advocacy in the field of school social work, particularly in those states where school social work has not been well developed;
- 3) Consideration be given by state governments to re-evaluating and reconfiguring the site for education, and to the possibility of developing a fully multi-disciplinary school model, with teaching staff undertaking only one part of a greater whole in the process of ensuring all students are educated;
- 4) That the siloing of services be reduced so that a more holistic, wrap-around service can be provided to children and their families/caregivers; and

- 5) That a job description for school social work in Western Australia be developed with the input of social workers with knowledge of the school social work role.

In summary

The question that this piece of research sought to answer was:

Is there a role for social workers in regional primary schools in the South West of Western Australia in relation to identifying and addressing external barriers to education?

The findings indicate that not only is there a role for social workers in regional primary schools in the South West of Western Australia, but that if children are to be afforded the best opportunity to learn, then it is critical that school social workers are included as part of a multi-disciplinary team who, together with teaching staff, psychologists and other professionals are charged with the responsibility to ensure each and every child has access to an education.

School social work is not the panacea to all of society's ills, nor the silver bullet for increased rankings on international scorecards. What school social workers can do is work with families and caregivers to encourage their access to support and services within the community and in so doing help improve the educational outcomes of those children who struggle to focus on school work due to their social and familial environment. Evidence suggests that increasing social capital can improve educational outcomes, which in turn may increase human capital and each individual's ability to participate fully in society. Social workers can work with individuals, families and communities providing theoretically based interventions and evidence-based practice to support children's full participation in education.

Whilst it is acknowledged that children in Australia are privileged to have access to primary education, and that in comparison to some other countries the education on offer is comprehensive, some children are not being afforded access to the education that is available. This then raises important questions to be considered as part of any plan to improve the educational outcomes for all Australian children. Is the responsibility to uphold the human right to education limited to provision only, or does it encompass an obligation to ensure that all children have access, mentally, physically and emotionally to that which is on offer? If children are enrolled in school, but not learning, can a country such as Australia claim that Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) are being observed? If the answer to that question is no, then it would seem that some children's human right to education in the South West of Western Australia is not being upheld.

The findings from this study suggest that there is a role for social workers in regional primary schools in the South West of Western Australia and furthermore, that role could extend to upholding the human right to education for those children who experience external barriers to education. As long as the political institutions and those in control of our education system continue to hold inward and possibly protectionist frameworks when thinking of schools, some children may be denied the opportunity to learn.

Chapter 9: Postscript – reflections on process

The process of undertaking a Masters Research study has involved a great deal of learning along the way; learning in a way that was unexpected and at times, initially unwelcome.

I anticipated learning about the area of research (school social work), I considered I had a base knowledge of the research process and would undoubtedly learn more as I progressed, but I had envisaged this being in a rational, contained manner, for example, carry out this step and that logically leads you to do the next step. I suppose I had the belief that there was a manual somewhere and it described and defined each phase in minute detail. I couldn't find that manual.

What I wasn't expecting was the open ended nature of this process; that there are some loose rules and considerations, but the rest is up to the researcher. It appeared to me that I was reading, and reading, and then reading more, but not really getting the answers I was seeking. It was only when my supervisors, independent of each other said, 'yeah, that is what it's like' that I was able to let go of the search for the right way and start finding my way. However, in saying that, I was continually drawn to not wanting to do it wrong, to sourcing this elusive manual that would step me through the process. And so, the cycle would begin again of me procrastinating because I didn't have the answer or the instructions on what to do next, until I hit my head too many times against the wall and was able to ask for help.

Not surprisingly, each time I did, I received a wealth of knowledge, experience, and support and was again given the freedom to explore. I'm a social worker; I will critically reflect on my behaviour and what this says about me. But not today, as I'm busy writing about what it is I have learned of a more academic nature through this process. However,

this sits in my conscience rising to the fore at certain inopportune moments to inform me that I'm no good at this research malarkey.

As I was sitting with the data that I collected, I felt that I knew what was there, what findings were evident, but I wasn't sure how I got from A to Z. How do I explain in such a massive amount of words, that I interviewed some people and they told me there were gaps in our support of children that was impacting on their education? I seemed to stare blankly at the transcripts for far too long and when this got too much, I did the dishes, or the laundry, or made a cup of coffee. But it didn't help. So again I was faced with talking to my supervisor and saying, perhaps admitting is more aptly descriptive, that I didn't know what I was doing. As always, it was explained to me in the most rudimentary manner that I walked away thinking, 'well that's not too hard'; only to sit down again and feel that I was somehow constrained. It seemed to take me a long time to actually nut things out. This intrigues me as I am not usually like this, yet I have been confronted with it throughout this entire period since enrolling in the Masters. Is it linked to confidence, I wonder?

But then, I read a quote that made me feel less isolated and I had a giggle and felt a sense of relief wash over me. At the beginning of Saldana's text on coding, there is a quote. In part it states: "There, facing you, is all the material you have diligently collected. An empty feeling comes over you as you ask, 'Now what do I do?'" (Bogdan & Biklen cited in Saldana, 2009). Oh what a relief to read that quote; to know that I am not alone, that this is what others, others who even author their own books, have felt. And so, I was again inspired for the learning journey to continue and to perhaps stop critiquing my own actions, or inactions and understand that this is all part of the experience.

So with that, I commenced the data analysis in earnest. I read the transcripts and wrote down my interpretation of what was the key point. I finished the eleven transcripts and seemed to be heading back to the procrastination quagmire, when someone explained to me how they had undertaken data analysis. This sounded so in depth and detailed that I then became anxious that I was never going to have the time to do such a lengthy practice.

But, I started. So I listened to the recordings of the interviews and again read the transcripts and analysed on a deeper level, then I listened to the audio again without the written word in front of me. I typed out the interpretations and created little cards so that I could place them into themes. I thought I had so much further to go, until once again, I spoke with my supervisor. I had referred to my 'horrid Masters' and thankfully my supervisor translated this into 'I'm not going too well here, but I won't be asking for help' and had a chat with me.

I explained that I felt like I was repeating the activity using different methods and yet the findings were clear. There is little nuance in what was said and the findings are quite stark. Because of this I was also concerned that I was interpreting in such a way that supported my bias, so I was wanting to undertake the analysis with a rigour that would uncover any pre-conceptions. I have done that. I have questioned my findings and I have looked for alternative interpretations. And in fact, this is the hermeneutic circle of analysing data as a whole, as separate parts and then as separate parts as in relation to the whole (Kvale, 1983). It was then my supervisor said, you've done enough, now write.

Undertaking the analysis has also highlighted the importance of the development of questions and I have noted that some of those I employed have not necessarily related to the research question. I found that with the school staff some of the questions and therefore the answers have pertained to the social work field education program at Edith Cowan University and, in particular, to the relationship between ECU, the school and the future of student school social work placements. The response has been positive, but not in the sense that it could inform this study. That is not to say that the data I collected has not been useful, far from it, but perhaps some of the questions I asked were redundant. In hindsight, I would have asked questions relating to community engagement and development, but perhaps this is a future project.

By progressing through the stages to date I am reminded of the philosophy of keeping something simple and doing it well. I wonder if I was far too ambitious at the start and

tried to combine all the levels of interest I have on this topic. I have learnt another lesson – to practice what I preach. That is, be clear on what it is I want to do, develop a simple but robust way to achieve this, then set about doing it.

The preceding passage of reflection details the confusion that was initially encountered from having so much information and initially not knowing how to manage it, despite having the academic description of hermeneutics and qualitative thematic analysis provided. The large step from academic knowledge to practice was evident here and as stated above, provided for more learning on my behalf. However, once the analysis was finalised (or finalised in the sense that I stopped) and I was able to start writing about my findings, I felt more comfortable. This feeling continued to increase in intensity as I became more and more emerged in the project as a whole; it was no longer merely an element, a stage, but a culmination of the research. Perhaps there was a sense that this was real, it was no longer simply an academic endeavour.

The latter stage of undertaking this Masters research has been a rollercoaster of emotion. I have found myself getting very frustrated and angry, but not because of the research or the work I was undertaking. I became frustrated because there are many children who are being excluded from an education through no doing of their own; that these children are being relegated to a difficult life journey because the system cannot, or does not meet their needs, needs which in the scheme of things are not excessive. Again, this has been a learning point for me. Tempering my emotions as I attempt to mount an argument and provide evidence has not come easily.

Then, the feeling of elation as I submitted my first complete draft; it was a wonderful sensation, one that lasted a few days. My supervisor, being as always efficient and constructive, provided me with excellent feedback which resulted in my revisiting many areas of the thesis. I expected this, and was prepared, or so I thought. After an initial burst of energetic editing and additions, I seemed to fall in a heap. Suddenly I felt like I was back in that quagmire, trying desperately to drag my body to the finish line. Just as

suddenly, that feeling left and I again became energised, determined to turn out a decent piece of work. I felt I was close.

But then, I submitted the second and what I thought final draft. I knew there would be feedback, I knew there would still be work to do and again I thought I had prepared myself. I hadn't. I wonder if you can when this is something you have not experienced before. I felt dejected, but got on with the job. Until, a few nights ago I became very despondent and from somewhere came the belief that I was nowhere near finished, that I was deluding myself. Tears of frustration began and yet I had the presence of mind to finish a few more passages and perhaps send an email to my supervisor. Again, the following day I sat with each of my supervisors independently and was assured that I was there, I was at the polishing stage. I was also reassured that my emotional upheaval was quite normal.

In providing this postscript I am aware I am exhibiting my vulnerabilities for all to see; however, it was someone else's vulnerability in Saldana's (2009) text which provided me with confidence to continue. The elusive manual was never uncovered; I no longer believe it exists, so as of now I will stop looking.

The emotional roller-coaster is now on an upwards trajectory.

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Legislation

- Australian Education Act, 2013* (No. 67, 2013)
Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1900
Public Education Act 1899 (63 Vict. No. 3)

Appendices

- A. An example: Consent letter (for school principals)
- B. An example: Consent letter (for social work students)
- C. Interview schedule for school staff
- D. Interview schedule for social work students
- E. Interview schedule for school staff focus group
- F. List of concepts
- G. Image – data analysis
- H. Image – data analysis
- I. DET Job vacancy #1
- J. DET Job vacancy #2

A. An example: Consent letter (for school principals)

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

SOCIAL WORKERS IN SCHOOLS

I am a student in the Masters of Social Science at Edith Cowan University, undertaking research into school social workers in primary schools in regional Western Australia.

This research is valuable for a number of reasons, these being: there is limited research undertaken into school social work in Australia, and even less so in Western Australia; public primary schools are not currently a mainstream site of social work practice; is a logical response to the social and political climate, which is one of conflict and uncertainty building social and human capital in the school environment; and finally, education in childhood is a human right and if there are barriers to this, then it is incumbent on a society such as ours to mitigate the effects of these barriers.

You recently hosted a social work student on placement at your primary school and I am eager to speak with you, or a nominee, to hear about this experience. I also wish to speak to the on-site supervisor for the student/s, who is a member of your staff. I will do this by way of a one-to-one interview and a focus group held with the external field educator and the on-site field educators and principals (or nominee) from the three schools involved in this trial. As such, I seek consent for you/nominee and the relevant staff member who supervised the student/s to participate.

Project description: This study will explore the experiences of five Edith Cowan University social work students who undertook a field placement in a government primary school, the on-site field educator and the principal or nominee from the three host primary schools, together with the external field educator who was contracted by Edith Cowan University to provide supervision to the students. It is envisaged that this rich data will depict the roles undertaken by the student and illuminate possible links between social work and human rights within the primary school setting.

Procedure: Participation in this study will entail the following –

- A one-on-one interview between yourself and the researcher. Approximate time 1 hour.
- Attendance at a focus group. Approximate time 1.5 hours.

Interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded for later transcription and will be used solely for research purposes. Interviews will be conducted at a time and place convenient for you. Focus groups will be held at a mutually agreed location, which is likely to be the ECU South West campus. The principals of each of the participating schools (3), the on-site supervisor from each of the participating schools and the external field placement educator will be invited to attend this focus group.

Risks and discomforts: It is envisaged that both risk and discomfort will be minimal.

Benefits: There will be no personal benefit to participating in this research, other than the opportunity to reflect on the experience and advance knowledge in this area.

Withdrawal: Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Should you wish not to participate, no questions will be asked and no consequences will be incurred. Furthermore, should you wish to withdraw at any point, you are welcome to do so. You have the right to decline to answer any question(s).

Confidentiality: All data collected will remain private and be stored in a key locked cabinet or via electronic means with password access. All names will be altered with each participant being assigned a pseudonym. In telling me about your experiences, you may make reference to specific children's stories. Please note that if individual students are discussed, it should be in the broadest possible terms, the names of students or their families should not be used, and there should be no discussion of personal home situations. If participants were to divulge individual information about students or their parents which they have been privy to in their employment or work at a school site, they could potentially be breaking the *School Education Act* (1999). Information about individual children cannot be included in my thesis other than in a de-identified format. Every effort will be made to remove any information which could identify individual schools, individual staff, and individual children. Whilst Individual primary schools will not be named or identified, and that while the names of people who participate in the study will not be used, their roles in the program will be identified. Based on this, people familiar with the program may know who the research publications are referring to. .

Results: Once completed, a summary of the thesis will be available on request.

Questions: Should you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact myself or the research supervisors via the contact methods listed below.

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If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact:

Research Ethics Officer
Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
JOONDALUP WA 6027
Phone: (08) 6304 2170
Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

The project has been approved by the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.
If you wish to take part in this research please sign the consent form below and return to me.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
Regards,

Karen McDavitt

Consent by principal for principal or nominee to participate

Name:

I give consent for my school to participate in the project as described in the information letter.
I would like to participate in the School Social Work research project. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and have clarified any queries I may have. I am aware that my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw my consent at any time.

I can be contacted on:

Phone:.....

Email:.....

Signed:..... Date:.....

Signed by principal only if nominee elected:

Name:

I would like the abovenamed to participate in the School Social Work research project. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and have clarified any queries I may have. I am aware that the participation is voluntary and I can withdraw my consent for the abovenamed to participate at any time.

I give consent for my school to participate in the project as described in the information letter.

I can be contacted on:

Phone:.....

Email:.....

Signed:..... Date:.....

Consent for staff member (on-site supervisor) to participate

Name:

I approve of the abovenamed staff member participating in the School Social Work research project. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and have clarified any queries I may have. I am aware that participation is voluntary and I can withdraw my consent for this staff member's participation at any time.

I give consent for my school to participate in the project as described in the information letter.

I can be contacted on:

Phone:.....

Email:.....

Signed:..... Date:.....

B. An example: Consent letter (for social work students)

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

SOCIAL WORKERS IN SCHOOLS – SUPPORTING CHILDREN’S HUMAN RIGHT TO PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH WEST OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

I am a student in the Masters of Social Science at Edith Cowan University, undertaking research into school social workers in primary schools in regional Western Australia.

This research is valuable for a number of reasons, these being: there is limited research undertaken into school social work in Australia, and even less so in Western Australia; public primary schools are not currently a mainstream site of social work practice; is a logical response to the social and political climate, which is one of conflict and uncertainty building social and human capital in the school environment; and finally, education in childhood is a human right and if there are barriers to this, then it is incumbent on a society such as ours to mitigate the effects of these barriers.

As you were recently on placement in a primary school in the Greater Bunbury Region, I am eager to speak with you to hear about your experiences. I wish to stress that as you are a current student at Edith Cowan University and as I am a current staff member, should you choose to proceed or not, this will in no way have any bearing on your progress as a student.

Project description: This study will explore the experiences of five Edith Cowan University social work students who undertook a field placement in a government primary school, the on-site field educator and the principal or nominee from the three host primary schools, together with the off-site field educator who was contracted by Edith Cowan University to provide supervision to the students. It is envisaged that this rich data will depict the roles undertaken by the student and illuminate possible links between social work and human rights within the primary school setting.

Procedure: Participation in this study will entail the following –

- A one-on-one interview between yourself and the researcher. Approximate time 1 hour.
- Attendance at a focus group. Approximate time 1.5 hours.

Interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded for later transcription and will be used solely for research purposes. Interviews will be conducted at a time and place convenient for you. Focus groups will be held at the ECU South West campus.

Risks and discomforts: It is envisaged that both risk and discomfort will be minimal.

Benefits: There will be no personal benefit to participating in this research, other than the opportunity to reflect on the experience and advance knowledge in this area.

Withdrawal: Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Should you wish not to participate, no questions will be asked and no consequences will be incurred. Furthermore, should you wish to withdraw at any point, you are welcome to do so. You have the right to decline to answer any question(s).

Confidentiality: All data that is collected will remain private and confidential. Pseudonyms will be used within the thesis so that no identifying links can be made. However, as you were one of only five students on placement within a primary school, unsubstantiated links may be made. In telling me about your experiences, you may make reference to specific children's stories. Information about individual children cannot be included in my thesis other than in a de-identified format. Every effort will therefore be made to remove any information which could identify individual schools, individual staff, or individual children.

Results: Once completed, a summary of the thesis will be available on request.

Questions: Should you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact myself or the research supervisors via the contact methods listed below.

Karen McDavitt
Edith Cowan University
585 Robertson Drive
BUNBURY WA 6230
08 9780 7821
k.mcdavitt@ecu.edu.au

Prof Kathy Boxall
Edith Cowan University
585 Robertson Drive
BUNBURY WA 6230
08 9780 7777
k.boxall@ecu.edu.au

Dr Marilyn Palmer
Edith Cowan University
585 Robertson Drive
BUNBURY WA 6230
08 9780 7777
m.palmer@ecu.edu.au

If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact:

Research Ethics Officer
Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
JOONDALUP WA 6027
Phone: (08) 6304 2170
Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

The project has been approved by the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

If you wish to take part in this research please sign the consent form below and return to me.
Thank you for your time and consideration.
Regards,

Karen McDavitt

Consent to participate

Name:

I would like to participate in the School Social Work research project. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and have clarified any queries I may have. I am aware that my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw my consent at any time.

I can be contacted on:

Phone:.....

Email:.....

Signed:..... Date:.....

C. Interview schedule for school staff

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – SCHOOL STAFF

Thank you for your time today. I have a number of questions to ask and want you to feel comfortable to answer them in any way you choose, and if you don't wish to answer a particular question, just let me know.

Please don't limit your answer because of time as it is important that I gather as much information as possible and your input is incredibly valuable. We have an hour so that should be plenty.

Informed consent – provide document and have participant sign.

PLEASE NOTE: All data collected will remain private and be stored in a key locked cabinet or via electronic means with password access. All names will be altered with each participant being assigned a pseudonym. In telling me about your experiences, you may make reference to specific children's stories. Please note that if individual students are discussed, it should be in the broadest possible terms, the names of students or their families should not be used, and there should be no discussion of personal home situations. If participants were to divulge individual information about students or their parents which they have been privy to in their employment or work at a school site, they could potentially be breaking the *School Education Act* (1999). Information about individual children cannot be included in my thesis other than in a de-identified format. Every effort will be made to remove any information which could identify individual schools, individual staff, and individual children.

(Write down observations of environment as this is being read through and signed).

Interview questions

Introductory – Building rapport and setting the scene

- Please describe the school in which you work.

Narrative, drawing out the experience of the participant

- How did you feel the role or function of a student social worker was understood in the school overall?
- What were the similarities and difference between the roles of student social worker and the roles of other school or contract staff?

- Was there any objection or any sense that people perhaps objected to having a student social worker in the school? If yes, can you provide more detail?

Typology question

- If you had to list the three most important elements or tasks the student social worker did, what would they be?

Questions of greater specificity (Galletta, 2013) - Thinking about the research question and development of theory. Generative questions (Tracy, 2013)

- In your experience, do children present at school in a frame of mind ready for learning?
- If not, in your experience what are some of the reasons that children may not be ready to learn?
- If yes, what are some of the factors, in your experience, that need to be in place so that children are in the right frame of mind to learn?
- Have there been any changes within the school environment due to having a student social worker on site? If yes, what were they?
- In your view, are there any links between the roles of a student social worker and the facilitation of education of a child/children?
- Conversely, are there any aspects of the role of student/school social worker which you think hinder the education of a child/children?
- In your experience, are teaching staff adequately trained to deal with the issues you've mentioned that may present barriers to children's learning?

Hypothetical question

- If you could imagine an ideal support system for primary school children which had everything possible in place to support their learning, what do you think it would look like?

Revisiting the narrative and making connections to theory - Linking it all together – allowing opportunity to reflect back on earlier part of interview and draw on that for these questions.

- Do you believe there is a place for social workers in government primary schools in regional Western Australia? Can you explain?

Finish with ...

- What advice would you give to another on-site field educator/principal who hosts a student social worker?
- Was there anything I didn't ask that you think I should have asked?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you again for your time today, I really appreciate it. I want to reassure you that all the data collected will remain confidential.

D. Interview schedule for social work students

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE - STUDENTS

Thank you for your time today. I have a number of questions to ask and want you to feel comfortable to answer them in any way you choose, and if you don't wish to answer a particular question, just let me know.

Please don't limit your answer because of time as it is important that I gather as much information as possible and your input is incredibly valuable. We have an hour so that should be plenty.

Informed consent – provide document and have participant sign.

PLEASE NOTE: All data collected will remain private and be stored in a key locked cabinet or via electronic means with password access. All names will be altered with each participant being assigned a pseudonym. In telling me about your experiences, you may make reference to specific children's stories. Please note that if individual students are discussed, it should be in the broadest possible terms, the names of students or their families should not be used, and there should be no discussion of personal home situations. If participants were to divulge individual information about students or their parents which they have been privy to in their employment or work at a school site, they could potentially be breaking the *School Education Act* (1999). Information about individual children cannot be included in my thesis other than in a de-identified format. Every effort will be made to remove any information which could identify individual schools, individual staff, and individual children.

(Write down observations as this is being read through and signed).

Interview questions

Introductory – Building rapport and setting the scene (this question is not suitable for external field educator)

- Please describe the school in which you undertook your field education placement?

Narrative, drawing out the experience of the participant

- How did you feel the role or function of a student social worker was understood in the school overall?
- What did you do that was different to what other staff at the school were doing?

- Was there any objection or any sense that people perhaps objected to having a student social worker in the school? If yes, can you provide more detail?

Typology question

- If you had to list the three most important elements or tasks you undertook, what would they be?

Questions of greater specificity (Galletta, 2013) - Thinking about the research question and development of theory. Generative questions (Tracy, 2013)

- Do you believe there were changes within the school environment due to having a student social worker on site? If yes, what were they?
- In your view are there any links between the roles of a student social worker and the facilitation of education of a child/children?
- Conversely, are there any aspects of the role of student/school social worker which you think hinder the education of a child/children?

Hypothetical question

- If you could imagine an ideal support system for primary school children which had everything possible in place to support their learning, what do you think it would look like?

Revisiting the narrative and making connections to theory - Linking it all together – allowing opportunity to reflect back on earlier part of interview and draw on that for these questions.

- Do you believe there is a place for social workers in government primary schools in regional Western Australia? Can you explain?

Finish with ...

- What advice would you give to the next student school social worker?
- Was there anything I didn't ask that you think I should have asked?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you again for your time today, I really appreciate it. I want to reassure you that all the data collected will remain confidential.

E. Interview schedule for school staff focus group

Focus Group questions – School staff and off-site supervisor

Thank you for your time today.

I have some questions but no doubt there'll also be some discussion, so I may steer things back to the central issue if we're going off on a tangent.

Informed consent – provide document and have participant sign.

PLEASE NOTE: All data collected will remain private and be stored in a key locked cabinet or via electronic means with password access. All names will be altered with each participant being assigned a pseudonym. In telling me about your experiences, you may make reference to specific children's stories. Please note that if individual students are discussed, it should be in the broadest possible terms, the names of students or their families should not be used, and there should be no discussion of personal home situations. If participants were to divulge individual information about students or their parents which they have been privy to in their employment or work at a school site, they could potentially be breaking the *School Education Act* (1999). Information about individual children cannot be included in my thesis other than in a de-identified format. Every effort will be made to remove any information which could identify individual schools, individual staff, and individual children.

(Write down observations of environment as this is being read through and signed).

- What was your understanding of the role of a social worker prior to the placement?
 - Did that change at all throughout the placement? If so, in what way?
- In a general sense, was the experience of having a student social worker at your school a positive or negative one?
 - In what way, why?
- If there were benefits to having a social worker on site, what were they?
- Conversely, if there were negatives to having a social worker on site, what were they?
- In your opinion, what is the difference between a school psychologist, a chaplain and a social worker?

- In your opinion, would an outreach social worker who visits the school, say once a week have the same/better/worse outcome than a school (on site) social worker?
- In your experience, are all children able to benefit from the education on offer in a primary school?
 - Why/why not?
 - If not, do you believe a social worker could have a role in improving this?
 - How?
 - If not, do you believe another member of staff or another professional would be better suited to this task?
 - How/why?
- Do you believe it is important for someone to have tertiary qualifications when undertaking a role such as that of social worker in a primary school?
 - Why/why not?

F. List of concepts

Once the data had been collected and transcribed, I went through a process of reading the text format of the data and identifying recurring words, statements and subjects. With this task complete, I typed each of the words or statements I had drawn from the data as having meaning into a separate document, then collated these into major or overriding concepts.

Support For School Social Work

- “So I think the capacity for the Social Worker to work with the parents in a greater role than what we do as educators because as educators our role is really working with the child. We need someone to have that link, and we – I encourage staff to have links to the home environment. What we need is someone to have the capacity to go around and have a cup of tea and talk to that parent and provide additional resources that my staff can’t do. So I see a huge role there for the Social Worker”
- Advocate for role of Social Worker.
- “Do you believe there is a place for Social Workers in government primary schools in regional Western Australia- Yes!”
- Families voluntarily seek out a Social Worker for support
- “There’s room for social work in schools” “Absolutely, absolutely” “I think there is a growing need” “massively growing need”
- “There’s a need”
- Different levels of knowledge that Social Work can bring to a school
- Increased chaplains hours after SSW
- SSW became part of school
- Space for SW – chaplain undertrained and psych focussed on high needs
- Wanted social work to engage with parents
- “I think social workers need to be based in schools”
- School would like to have a social worker
- Outsource psych/chaplain, in house social work
- Education needs a multi-disciplinary approach “it can kind of have some blind spots”
- Teachers saw that social workers can engage at a broader level
- For some parents schools are intimidating, social workers are not the school
- Social work can work with parent body

- Teacher's take an educational perspective (you must learn), social workers take a different perspective (why aren't you learning).
- SSW identified needs
- Once teaching staff aware, they utilise social worker
- Autonomy of SSW resulted in good outcomes
- Preference for on-site social worker
- SSW had an individual impact with students
- SSW enhanced what was at school
- "it shows us that there's other people outside of the Department who can be a valuable part of our, our process in schools"
- School would like to have a social worker
- I want a full time social worker but will take what I can get
- "There is a role there for a qualified person who doesn't have to do a WISC test but can still make some good professional decisions"
- Instead of work in mental health, drug and alcohol etc, work in early intervention in a school
- Ed staff have no time or knowledge to access services – social work knows.
- Qualifications are critical
- Can hold a social worker accountable
- Conflict on values between social worker and school could hinder students
- "You wouldn't need a social worker if it wasn't broke"
- "are coping a lot better than they ever would have done if they had not had that support"
- "This is for the betterment of kids, schools and the profession (of education)"
- "for schools and in primary schools we really need them. We really, really need them"
- Funding from dept for school social workers
- Every school should access to a Social Worker

Needed to learn

- Motivation to learn
- Kids need to feel safe, valued, comfortable, nourished
- Stability, consistency, genuineness in relationship between kids and teachers
- One stop shop
- Positive outlook – belief kids will learn and grow at school
- Kids need to feel valued
- Children need to know that we care
- Kids need to have self-esteem developed

- “We work really hard with them to give them a break because sometimes life doesn’t give them a break, you don’t choose the family that you’re born into”
- “If we don’t get social side of child’s psyche sorted out we’re actually not going to help them with their learning, because it’s going to be preventing their learning if they’ve got a trauma brain working, learning’s not going to get in anyway”
- School enjoyment – being connected
- Mindfulness – for children
- Whole support (everyone can support if everyone brought together)
- “Happy kids learn, simple as that”
- Different learning – communication, school, emotional
- Holistic education
- Children’s independence
- Safe & secure support network
- Viewed education in cultural context – what others don’t have (and we have education in Australia)
- Take right to education for granted in Australia

Capability of School

- Organisational issues
- With a busy curriculum, teachers can’t do it
- Chaotic nature of student services unit
- Education professionals don’t have the expertise in the area (that social workers do)
- 50% is maths and English
- Teachers are not adequately trained to deal with all the complexities in the way social workers are
- You have to prioritise and sometimes some kids are not the priority, but should be
- Class sizes
- Loss of creativity and expertise by not being able to use level 3 teachers
- Independent school
- Part of deputies job is social work – and not trained
- Teachers have no time to develop interventions
- Prioritising those at risk means some kids miss out
- Teachers not adequately trained to deal with home life of students
- Crisis management model
- Crisis response
- Bridges into poverty training

- Teacher – purely educational point of view, as that's their job
- Teaching staff overworked
- School psych gives trauma training each year
- Curriculum crowded to educate on social issues – where does it fit?
- Teachers not trained to do it
- Addressed in concert with school, not by the school
- Schools can refer families to agencies but it doesn't mean they attend
- Teacher can't change it (the home environment)
- Teachers can't undertake connection to home
- Only pointy end are dealt with due to time and crisis situations
- “we're not trained to deal with meth, we're not trained to deal with domestic violence, we're not trained to deal with court orders”
- Ed dept is a complex system, different to other systems, depts., etc
- Kids need stability at school (same staff/faces)
- “each day that goes on the more issues we have with our, our parents and society and the less we can influence outside the school's sphere”
- What you develop in one school will be different in another
- Need to be proactive – what we have is reactive
- Schools are needing to be innovative, creative in order to get what's needed
- Noticed importance of supervision to social work – Ed staff could learn from this
- Loss of level 3time has had a massive impact
- Schools has program to code switch in the morning
- “Our basic function in the school is teaching and learning”
- Time and resources given to most needy child on any particular day
- Lack of resources for teachers
- Teachers role to educate
- Teachers protective of class and space
- Lack of resources for teachers – don't have time to see this stuff
- Teacher workload high
- Funding – lack of
- Teaching staff thought social work similar to chaplain
- Organisational issues
- Look beyond school
- Teachers duty of care
- Lack of school staff
- Teaching staff did not realise professional undertaking (4 years study, degree etc)
- To get resources – a lot of hard work, innovative means, thinking outside box
- Class too large to deal with in depth examination issues

- Teachers think they can do it all (in a Positive)
- Proactive school in a lot of areas
- 2nd hand uniforms
- Teachers are busy trying to teach children to read and write
- Teachers & school leadership focus on ed outcomes
- Teachers don't have time
- Focus on curriculum by teachers
- Teaching staff busy
- Teachers – “didn't understand the values of multi-disciplines working in an education environment”
- Proactive school in a lot of areas
- School staff have operational knowledge
- Teachers – experiential knowledge but not adequately trained
- Focus on curriculum by teachers
- Teacher's role to educate
- Class too large to deal with in depth examination of issues
- Teaching staff busy
- Teachers don't have time

Multi Dis Team

- Psychologist does one on one work
- Recent history has had schools with psychs instead of social workers
- Chaplain – shared knowledge
- Psych can't get out of office
- Social work training (more than chaplain, different to teacher)
- Psych – did not engage
- Chaplains can bring an element SW can't (religion and belief in afterlife)
- Chaplain not equipped to deal with mental health and other issues
- Limitations of chaplain
- Difference in perspective relating to disciplinary process
- Psych for “pointy end” students (tertiary?)
- Defining roles between chaplain, psych and social work
- Different theoretical knowledge from multi-dis team
- Knowledge of social worker, chaplain, psychologist
- Different perspectives between teachers and social workers
- Sharing of knowledge
- Multi-discipline – working together with teachers work
- Became part of social support team

- Working as part of student services team
- Liaised with chaplain
- Teacher perspective different to social work perspective
- SW needs to be part of the team – all on same page
- All work as a team, wrap around
- Social workers become part of the student support team
- They all form a team to help our kids
- Social worker compliments ed/student support team
- Policy motive – “that’s the policy motive around chaplaincy, that Australia is built on Christian values”
- “Some of these kids need, rather than a test, interpersonal, connection between home and school”
- Religion shapes chaplain
- “So it’s built on the premise that Christians or whatever are good people”
- Testing
- Process of psych in school constrained by “administrivia”
- Psych – admin load is excessive
- Notices difference in PD – social work do PD, chaplains and psychs don’t
- Everyone has a role in this complex environment (meaning psychs, chaplain, social worker)
- Chaplains – mixing secular with religion
- Chaplain not equipped to deal with mental health and other issues
- “It’s difficult to talk to your psych or chaplain about your meth mum’s or your meth dads because unless there’s a referral for the kid...”
- Chaplain role is limited
- Psychs do testing and pointy end
- Limitations of a chaplain
- Defining roles between chaplain, psych and social work
- Chaplain’s don’t necessarily have currency skills
- Some not willing to see chaplain due to religion
- Social worker – 4 year degree, professional knowledge
- Chaplains – skill to deal with difficult situations is limited
- Psych – deliver assessment. Licenced within a school setting to do assessments
- Chaplains don’t have skill to do this like a social worker can

Role of Social Worker

What Social Workers Can Do

- Macro issues

- Primary health model
- Primary interventions
- Holistic programs in place
- "...but also how social workers can interact with students, not in an emergency context but in a sustainable context."
- Resiliency for students
- SW primary and secondary interventions
- Project was researched, has process, resources, outcomes
- Knowledge of social worker (theory)
- Different learning – communication, social, emotional
- Social workers can identify emerging issues
- Support teachers – different perspective on child
- Programs
- Agency referral
- Partnership – social worker and teaching staff
- Foster resiliency skills for students
- Identify gap or need and develop expertise
- School, community and broader
- Student to student friendships and relationships
- Advocate for family
- Support teachers – encouragement
- Systems
- Agency liaison
- Food bank
- Families/students have access to services through social worker
- Agency referral for long term support
- Social workers can carry out whole year and whole school programs
- Mental health supports for children and families
- Resilience
- Social work knowledge
- Theoretical, evidence based practice
- SW can bring an element no one else can
- Underlying issues
- Social and emotional wellbeing (focus on for social worker)
- Individual needs and intervention
- Resiliency programs
- Social and emotional wellbeing
- Bio-psycho – social model
- Theory

- Systems
- Assessment of specific needs for each year group
- Long term plans, not reactive
- SW share case management
- Social work can assist with ed outcomes in a holistic way
- Aid with transitions – life, school, etc
- Prevent barriers to schooling
- Educational milestones not being met -what is broader picture
- Prevent barriers to schooling
- Patterns in student behaviour
- Knowledge for program development
- Advocate for student from a different perspective
- Models and theories of social work utilised
- Social workers can implement programs that complement the curriculum
- Social and emotional wellbeing
- Broader look at behaviour – why, not just naughty
- Observation to identify small, rectifiable issues/behaviours
- Teaching resiliency
- Social and emotional wellbeing paramount
- “The capacity to change behaviours before they become ingrained”
- Needs assessment
- SSW provided strategies for coping to students

Clarification of the role of SW

- Social workers assertive of practice in schools
- Uncertainty around social work profession
- Teaching staff did not realise professional undertaking (4 years study, degree, etc)
- Autonomy often due to school not knowing role of school social worker
- Social work role
- Advocate profession
- Therapeutic counselling required
- Unclear on social work role
- Define role
- Uncertainty of social work role
- Social work role being clearly defined
- Initially, limited idea of social work
- Teachers not sure of the role
- Social work role uncertainty

- Advocate for SW role
- Social workers need to be assertive of the value of our practice in a school setting
- Advocate for role of social work
- Confusion between chaplain and social work role
- Uncertainty around social work profession
- Advocate for role of social worker
- Initially, limited idea of social work
- Advocate
- Advocate profession
- Advocate for social work as a profession
- Demonstrate role of social worker (by doing it)
- Advocate for role of social work
- Advocate or define SW role
- Social work role being clearly defined
- Uncertainty around social work role
- Define social work role
- SW deal with some kids finding it tough with lots going on (at school and with other students)
- Where does social work fit?
- Advocate for place for social work
- Social work role not understood
- Role of SW is beyond child protection
- Social workers assertive of practice in schools
- Social workers can take groups of children
- Autonomy in social work role
- Uncertainty around social work role
- Advocate for social work as a profession
- Social work role
- Advocate for role of social worker
- Student social work role uncertainty
- Work with family, individual, phone calls, supports, counselling, programs, social skills, social interaction, transition, self-esteem, body confidence

Class and Schools

- Teachers thought they were being critiqued
- Teachers were able to engage SW to work with individuals
- Programs must be specific school appropriate
- Support teachers – strategies to deal with challenges

- Recognised in school community for different perspective
- Those staff who understood role, utilised it
- Teaching staff thought social work similar to chaplain
- Utilisation of social work was at individual class level (ie: depends on teacher)
- Staff became more clear of school social work role
- The fear of staff to SSW went very quickly
- Teachers utilised social work role once aware of benefits
- S & EWB Lesson planning and delivery
- Provision of education in Multi-disciplinary terms – social workers can do this
- Social workers need to understand school context
- Interventions to address challenges (with children)
- Sociological perspective not common in schools
- Difference in perspective relating to disciplinary process
- Build relationship with teachers
- Liaise with teaching staff
- “An outsider that’s not an educationalist”
- Curriculum – S&EWB
- Value what teachers know
- Staff unsure as to why SSW there initially
- Critique of teacher (teachers may have thought this)
- Staff became more clear of school social work role
- Social workers can engage multi-faceted and multi organisations
- “Well I’m not on anyone’s side I’m here to help”
- Social workers need to know what the school protocol is and not overstep bounds of reality
- History of SW chequered over past 30 years
- Social workers linked parents to agencies

Building Relationships

- Relationship building with kids
- Build relationships with teachers
- Parent, child, social worker – trust and relationship
- “Building relationships, building relationships, building relationships” (SW role)
- Social workers – build networks within school community
- Relationships with staff and students
- Relationship building with kids
- Spend time with kids, build relationships and identify needs
- Relationships with everyone (cleaner, teachers, admin, principal, students, parents)

- Network – build relationships
- Relationship building is absolute key
- Need relationship – outreach will work if same person
- Relationships
- Building relationships
- SW relationships with staff
- Ongoing social work builds relationships
- Build professional relationships

Community

- Broader perspective
- Families/students have access to services through social worker
- Broader
- Social worker can see bigger picture than just education
- Home
- Holistic – child centred, but broader environment
- First entry point for support/assistance
- Whole support (everyone can support if everyone brought together)
- Person – in – environment
- Holistic
- Person in environment
- SW can engage outside school
- Social worker can see bigger picture than just education
- Community
- Families
- Link between home and school
- Counselling, support – school community
- First time/early intervention
- Broader – children, families, etc

Issues Evident

- Social & emotional wellbeing
- Homelessness, financial issues – but school can't assist with these things so who does?
- Need more accommodation for non-standard
- Parental support should be part of education
- 62 kids on court orders, 13 wards of the state

- Growing number of children from dysfunctional environment”
- “And the 16 year old is looking after a 4 year old and an 8 year old on 300 bucks a week where the social worker can impact that situation because they would have place they could go to”
- Social issues
- Conflicting messages to kids
- S&EWB
- 30% transiency
- Rules
- Students can’t reach potential if they have issues
- Connection with others
- Socially isolated children
- Kids panicked as forms not signed etc because parents not engaged
- No parent engagement
- Parents are abusing drugs
- Skipped breakfast
- Rules/Independence
- Children’s decision making
- Home environment has huge impact
- Kids who go to Day Care, school then day care – need to have someone touch base every day and just check in
- Suicide, depression, mental health
- “schools are they, they are very much what, mirror what society is going through, the good, the bad and the ugly”
- The way parent feels impacts the way child feels
- Unemployment
- Below standard housing
- Meth/drug use by parents
- Kids who are transient have more issues
- Diminishing resources vs increasing need for resources
- Single parents – court orders
- Poverty/intergenerational poverty
- 25% of school population not ready to learn due to home life
- Students can’t reach potential if they have issues
- Funding – lack of
- Social and emotional wellbeing paramount
- Transiency stats used by depot not correct (hide the reality)
- Increase in transiency
- Transient population

- Mental health issues
- Children not being given autonomy
- Contradicting messages being given to children
- Single mum with 8 kids under 15
- Teachers undermine children's decision making
- Too many "rules" – undermines children
- Teachers dominate children
- Resources go to secondary because kids are behaviourally challenging – it's not proactive
- Lots of troubled kids
- Lack of resources
- Conflict between government departments
- Transient population
- Labelling of students/families
- Many students with special needs
- View that teachers are too focussed on negative, obeying rules
- 17 diagnosed autistic, 2 pending
- Low standards in households
- "That will impact on any child's learning. It will impact on behaviour, it will impact upon attitude, it will impact upon their capacity to engage"
- "drug abuse or alcohol abuse or domestic violence or mental illness or whatever"
- Parent body need support and guidance
- Changing home life due to FIFO has an impact on child
- 25% FIFO
- Domestic violence
- High percentage of rentals, transiency
- Lack of resources
- Parents over compensating
- Some parents have a low value for education
- FIFO
- The number of schools attended limits the ability to be educated
- Grief and loss
- If a child is not ready to learn (too much going on) they won't
- Schools now more complex; clientele is more complex
- Fight or flight – heightened state
- Trauma
- Need to switch off from home – what went on before school and what might go on after school
- Increasing need

- Social issues
- Mental health issues
- Intervention early in primary, not when it is too late
- Increasing complexity of issues
- Issues link back to home environment
- Children need to play, be active, good diet, sleep, conversation – many are not getting this
- A lot of this is environmental
- Growing number of students on the autism spectrum, with anxiety, oppositional behaviour, lack resilience, lack belief
- “I see education and public education as our great opportunity to improve our society and I believe that primary, a focus on primary education gives us a much better chance to address societal ills before they become un-addressable and unfortunately I think a lot of our policy making at the moment is more about retribution than about prevention”
- “which could be whether they had breakfast or whether they’ve had a fight or something’s going on or whatever”
- School can give stability to a kids life
- Silos – government deps
- Mining changes impacts the make-up of the school
- Transitions, puberty, anti-bullying – SW programs
- Family issues
- Many students from dysfunctional families
- 0-4 engagement with kids and parents (preventative)
- Many children needing support
- Many families don’t value education
- “desperate need of support through lack of care at home, be it food, clothing, emotional stuff”
- Parents with mental health issues
- Intergenerational poverty
- “any issues that’s impacting upon the student’s learning environment”
- Trauma or distress in family
- “Life at home is a chaotic mess”
- “the number of students we’ve got here that are dysfunctional has grown significantly”
- Relationships and trust need to be built with parents and it needs to be ongoing
- ¼ of every class is compliant disengaged
- Change (in school)
- Link has been lost since losing social workers so many years ago
- Lack of extended family

- Isolating young mums, mums feeling pressured
- Lots of fly in/fly out
- High percentage of compliant disengaged
- Increasing social issues
- Students need to code switch from home to school
- Direct reflection of society
- Different phases in school community depending on employment, waves of employment brings different cultures
- High transiency – statistics do not reflect this
- Whatever is impacting the home will impact the child
- “socially isolated” – children
- Lack of resources to target kids sooner
- Domestic violence intervention this morning!
- “a mum, 8 kids under 14, no licence, no car”
- Resourcing issues
- “within our local community we’re seeing significantly increased and greater need and growing need”
- School is a microcosm of the community and provides early indicators as to what is going to happen in economy/society
- Nasty separations

Gaps

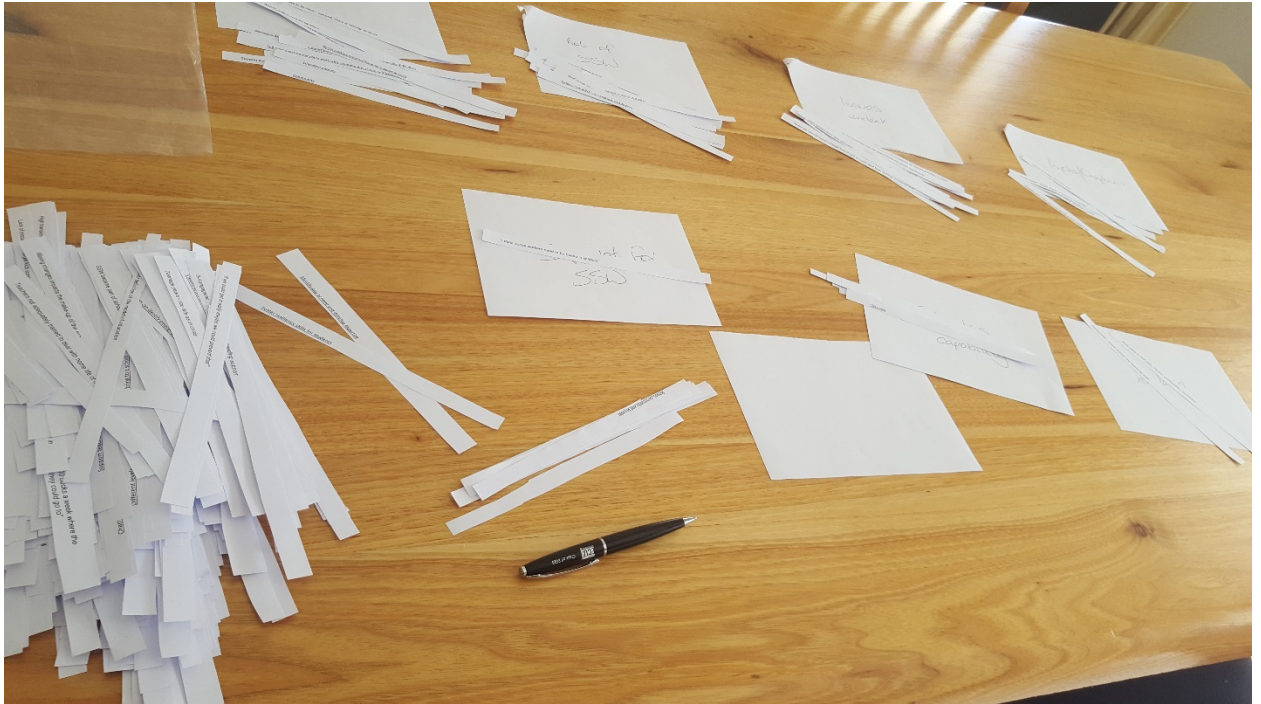
- Early interventions
- Need support – links to school and home
- Family
- Teenage years – to late as in crisis
- Early intervention
- “If we could get in early maybe we could prevent that”
- Wrap around services
- Support kids and families at beginning of school experience
- Integration at all levels of community
- Parental support should be part of education
- Prevention
- “let’s have services for kids in places where there are some”
- Community based
- Support parents and families who are experiencing difficulties
- Our job is kids not parents
- Wrap around support services

- School as part of a hub
- Support for teachers
- SW would fill this
- Educating parents
- Allied services and school all talking and linking seamlessly
- Working with families and school community
- Link all the members of community – systems
- Needs to be a community effort
- Full time social worker could work with – community, school and school leadership
- Families
- Need to link to community
- Supporting parents
- Need a broader definition of the model of education
- Proactive
- Someone for parents to talk to
- Early intervention
- Community
- Currently services don't talk to each other
- Vulnerable families targeted from within the school site
- Social workers can deal with home and services outside of school
- 0-4 engagement and parenting centre
- Early intervention
- All services linked with someone co-ordinating (SW, psych, OT, Speech Therapist, mentors)
- Community
- Support for parents
- Parents/families
- Parents
- Community/group
- Someone needs to take the role on, fill the gap
- Look beyond school
- Links to community
- Family
- Before and after school programs to support parents
- Connections with other agencies
- Innovative schools are looking at 0-4 years- but are not funded for this

- “...Social worker to support the parents to get their feet on the ground and then to support the parents to have the connection to the teacher to talk about the education of their student”
- 0-4 age group
- More services arranged from the school site
- “So from a whole of education perspective if we can address the environmental stuff at a younger age we can actually get greater surety that children will get through these difficulties and not fall through the cracks”
- Most vulnerable don’t have support but are connected to the school
- Need to work with families
- Parents
- Allied health/wrap around services
- Preventative instead of current crisis model
- A visiting social work can’t build trust
- Supporting parents will make parenting of child better
- Family
- “this vacuum between the school and home especially when the home’s dysfunctional”
- Early intervention
- Community with schools as part of that (not centre)
- Need early intervention
- A student social worker better than no social worker
- Support for young mums
- 0-8 age group
- Early intervention
- Cost effectiveness – prevention
- Link between parents and school (Gap)
- Parent support
- Conduit between school and home
- A gap that needs to be filled – currently there is nothing, or crisis
- Create a village to support children and families
- Family
- Whole community perspective
- Integration at all levels of community
- Family
- Connections with agencies
- Agency referral for long term support
- Broader
- Families

- Early intervention
- There is a disconnect between parents and school at the moment
- Advocate for family
- Early identification of issues
- Families
- Early intervention
- Social workers bring professional support services

G. Image – data analysis



H. Image – data analysis



I. DET Job vacancy #1

11/25/2016

Department of Education - Program Coordinator - Student Services

Department of Education

Southwest Education Region

Harvey Senior High School

Program Coordinator - Student Services

00024141

Level 3, \$111,830 - \$122,741 per annum (SEA GA 2014)



Advertised Vacancy Number: SS/SA443011

This is a twelve (12) month fixed term, full-time position commencing Term 1, 2017 with possible extension (12 months) and/or permanency

Program Coordinator - Student Services

We are seeking a passionate, innovative and empathetic Program Coordinator - Student Services who likes children! The successful applicant will have high levels of interpersonal skills with students, staff, parents and the local community. They will work collaboratively with other members of the Student Services Team to provide an environment that nurtures the emotional, physical, social and academic wellbeing of all students.

We are a small and personal senior high school in the idyllic yet bustling country setting of Harvey – less than 90 minutes from Perth and at the gateway to the stunning southwest.

As an Independent Public School in 2017, we are on a mission to become the clear school of choice for our large intake area. The surest way for us to accelerate that journey is to ensure that only the very best, most positively and actively involved teachers join our existing team.

We require an outstanding and suitably experienced individual to take on and succeed in the role of Program Coordinator – Student Services and for the right person to join our team, we are offering far more than 'just another coordinator job'.

We are offering...

- The rare and rewarding opportunity to be instrumental in the design and implementation of our Student Services Program. This could well be a career defining role.
- The autonomy and freedom you'll need to deliver such a program that needs to be tailored to the needs of our students.
- The support of dedicated and committed Year Coordinators, Nurse, Chaplain and Psychologist
- A busy and vibrant workplace filled with passionate people.

<https://search.jobs.wa.gov.au/print.php?advertID=195977>

1/3

- A new and democratic leadership culture that has the right blend of engagement and consultation combined with clarity and consistency around policy and other non-negotiables.
- Regular and well-structured team meetings keeping you 'in the loop' and giving you a voice within a safe environment
- Ongoing and structured opportunities for you to present and implement approved ideas that improve your work practices, our work environment and our student outcomes
- An evolving culture of continuous review and improvement
- And we suspect that you would like to enjoy and be fulfilled by what you do... At least we hope so – because we insist on it!

Applicants who are highly organised, resilient and decisive are sought, with a passion for results that thoroughly enjoy working with children. You will also possess the skills and abilities of compassion, care, versatility and consideration required to work in a collaborative environment.

The Program Coordinator for Student Services will contribute to the development of the Student Services Operational Plan and School Business Plan and will have budgetary responsibilities. The ability to develop, implement and review effective documented plans, that are tailored to individual student needs with ongoing monitoring and management, are highly regarded as well as the importance of building quality relationships within the community.

The successful applicant will also be responsible for counselling students and liaising with parents/caregivers in relation to attendance issues and coordinating interagency support in collaboration with the Student Services team. They will also ensure consistency in the implementation and maintenance of the Behaviour Management procedures within the respective Year Groups.

Harvey SHS truly embraces the student centred schooling approach and anticipates all applicants to join them in continuing this attitude. Continuous improvement and a commitment to building great work environments and a healthy culture are anticipated from applicants who have a high level of reliability and care for the students and staff as a whole. If you are interested in joining our close knit team of friendly, honest and caring staff then please apply by selected the Apply Now button at the bottom of this advertisement.

This selection process will initially be used to fill the above vacancy. Applicants assessed as suitable during this selection process may be appointed to other similar vacancies that occur throughout our school for up to 12 months following this initial appointment. This includes circumstances where this position becomes subsequently vacant should the successful applicant decline or vacate the advertised position.

To be suitable for this role, you will need to demonstrate the following work related requirements:

- Capacity to provide effective leadership in a diverse range of educational settings;
- High level of interpersonal and public relations skills that demonstrate the ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships to achieve planned outcomes;
- Professional knowledge and the ability to apply this knowledge to ensure a high level of educational outcomes for all students (e.g. Aboriginal students, students from diverse ethnic backgrounds and students with special needs);
- Capacity to manage physical and financial resources.

Applications will be assessed against the work related requirements of the position. The business needs of the school may also be considered. It is therefore recommended that you consider all information contained in the advertisement and any other related information before applying for the vacancy.

Further information about Harvey Senior High School can be found by [Schools Online](#)

For further job related information:

Please contact Di Clayton, Principal, by telephoning (08) 9729 1303 or emailing michelle.dowsen@education.wa.edu.au

Application Instructions

All applications are submitted online. Select "Apply for Job", at either the top or bottom of this screen and follow the instructions on your screen.

You are required to attach a personal resume and covering letter outlining your skills and experiences in relation to the position. It is recommended you have these documents completed and ready to attach before selecting "Apply for Job".

You are asked to complete an online application form and attach your documentation, please allow enough time to complete this process as applications cannot be accepted after the closing date and time.

After you have submitted your application online, you will receive an email confirming lodgement. If you do not receive a confirmation email, please telephone (08) 9264 4127.

J. DET Job vacancy #2

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Department of Education

Independent Public School - Southwest Education Region

Newton Moore Senior High School

Program Coordinator - Student Services

00018389

Level 3, \$111,830 - \$122,741 per annum (SEA GA 2014)



Advertised Vacancy Number: IPS/SA467912

This is a six (6) month fixed term, full-time position commencing Term 1, 2017 with possible extension

Newton Moore Senior High School (SHS) is seeking to appoint a Student Services Manager with outstanding case management, conflict resolution and positive behaviour management skills to join our senior leadership team.

As Manager Student Services you will have a focus on the development of a safe, positive and caring learning environment that will improve student outcomes. The successful applicant will have a capacity to develop, implement and evaluate policies, plans and programs relevant to the functions of the Student Services area.

You will display a sound understanding of the case management of educationally at-risk students that includes knowledge of effective intervention, monitoring and reporting strategies. There is an associated responsibility to manage administrative and operational systems in the relevant area of responsibility, in order to ensure the effective operation of the department, within the school in accordance with Departmental policy and guidelines.

Using effective change strategies, the successful applicant will lead the school community to accept and develop opportunities for improved service in the area of Student Services and Pastoral Care. In this key school leadership position, the successful applicant will also demonstrate strong communication, interpersonal and organisational skills and have an ability to build strong school and community links with parents and external agencies and to work collaboratively as part of the Student Services team at Newton Moore SHS. They will be innovative and have a strong knowledge and experience in the delivery of successful pastoral care programs and case management strategies.

Newton Moore SHS is an Independent Public School (IPS) located in Bunbury a coastal city 175kms south of Perth. We have a strong commitment to offering innovative and best practice educational programs. The school delivers two DEO Approved Specialist Academic Programs: Science Horizons and Engineering Specialist.

Newton Moore SHS also provides enrichment through the following programs: Moore Academy of Sport and Health (MASH), Follow the Dream, Clontarf Football Academy, Girls Academy and CALM Cadets. Newton Moore SHS also coordinates the Indonesian Language Hub for the Bunbury District.

Our school has a strong focus on delivering quality teaching and learning using varied teaching practices and effective use of technologies. Newton Moore SHS values building strong relationships with our students and their families and work in a collaborative environment.

This selection process will initially be used to fill the above vacancy. Applicants assessed as suitable during this selection process may be appointed to other similar vacancies that occur throughout our school for up to 12 months following this initial appointment. This includes circumstances where this position becomes subsequently vacant should the successful applicant decline or vacate the advertised position.

To be suitable for this role, you will need to demonstrate the following work related requirements:

- Capacity to provide effective leadership in a diverse range of educational settings;
- High level of interpersonal and public relations skills that demonstrate the ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships to achieve planned outcomes;
- Professional knowledge and the ability to apply this knowledge to ensure a high level of educational outcomes for all students (e.g. Aboriginal students, students from diverse ethnic backgrounds and students with special needs).
- Capacity to manage physical and financial resources.

View Advert

Applications will be assessed against the work related requirements of the position. The business needs of the school may also be considered. It is therefore recommended that you consider all information contained in the advertisement and any other related information before applying for the vacancy.

The Department is an equal opportunity employer and encourages people with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and persons from culturally diverse backgrounds to apply.

Further information about Newton Moore Senior High School can be found by visiting www.newtonmoreshs.wa.edu.au (<http://www.newtonmoreshs.wa.edu.au/>) or [Schools Online](http://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolsonline/home.do) (<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolsonline/home.do>)

Additional information about Independent Public Schools is also available [here](https://www.education.wa.edu.au/web/our-schools/independent-public-schools) (<https://www.education.wa.edu.au/web/our-schools/independent-public-schools>)

For further job related information:

Please contact Pippa Herbert by telephoning (08) 9722 2427 or emailing Pippa.Herbert@education.wa.edu.au (<mailto:Pippa.Herbert@education.wa.edu.au>)

Application Instructions

All applications are submitted online. Select "Apply for Job", at either the top or bottom of this screen and follow the instructions on your screen.

You are required to attach a personal resume and covering letter outlining your skills and experiences in relation to the position. It is recommended you have these documents completed and ready to attach before selecting "Apply for Job".

You are asked to complete an online application form and attach your documentation, please allow enough time to complete this process as applications cannot be accepted after the closing date and time.

After you have submitted your application online, you will receive an email confirming lodgement. If you do not receive a confirmation email, please telephone (08) 9264 4127.

If you are having difficulty submitting your online application, please telephone (08) 9264 8666 for assistance.

ELIGIBILITY

Employees will be required to:

- Provide evidence of eligibility to work in Australia for the term of the vacancy
- hold a recognised qualification in teaching and be currently registered or eligible for registration to teach in Western Australia;
- obtain a current Department of Education Criminal Record Clearance prior to commencement of employment; and
- obtain or hold a current Working with Children Check.

TRAINING

Employees will be required to:

- complete the Department's induction program within three months of commencement;
- complete any training specific to this role required by Departmental policy; and
- complete the Department's training in Accountability and Ethical Decision-Making within six months of appointment.

The Department applies a four (4) day breach period to this selection process.

Applications must be submitted before 4.30pm (WST) on Friday, 9 December 2016

APPLICATIONS MUST BE SUBMITTED ONLINE

PROFORMA, FAXED, HAND DELIVERED, POSTED, EMAILED AND LATE APPLICATIONS ARE NOT ACCEPTED.

ATTACHMENTS: - [applicant resource - how to write a cv and covering letter oct13.pdf \(/files/vacancies/467912/12992931.pdf\)](#)
- [applicant resource - information for applicants dec14.pdf \(/files/vacancies/467912/12992932.pdf\)](#)
- [endorsement - jrf - generic - program coordinator - nion and senior high schools - may 2015.pdf \(/files/vacancies/467912/13012376.pdf\)](#)

You can view and print these PDF attachments by downloading [Adobe Reader](http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html) (<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>).

WORK TYPE: Fixed Term - Full Time

FTE: 1.0

LOCATION: South Bunbury

CLOSING DATE: 2016-12-09 4:30 PM
(YYYY-MM-DD)