

Faculty of Humanities

**Discretion and control at the front line: rationalities of practice
in child and youth services**

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Hall' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Date: 11 May 2011.

Abstract

Focusing on child and youth services in Victoria this research is a theoretical conceptualisation of the governance of front line work. The research addresses the question of how multiple rationalities of practice are experienced by front line workers. In exploring the contemporary context for practice, the research provides an analysis of the history and development of non-government organisations and human service professions and their roles in delivering publicly funded welfare services.

The discursive practices associated with the concepts of managerialism and contractualism are explored in terms of how front line work is configured and controlled. The research combines a critical examination of two modalities of surveillance and control of front line work (the Registration Standards for Community Service Organisations and the *Looking After Children* Framework). These case examples are positioned as exemplars of modalities of surveillance and control that represent contemporary administrative and managerial logics. I offer a detailed analysis of the interplay between these instruments and particular logics of social work practice.

The concepts of governmentality (Foucault, 1991) and habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) are developed to articulate a more embodied understanding of human service practice where interpretation is positioned at the centre of action. Using material collected from interviews with front line staff, the concept of habitus is further expanded to articulate an understanding of practice that explores how multiple rationalities are configured and enacted. The analysis positions the embodied histories of individual front line workers as the key influence in the construction of practice.

This analysis addresses a significant gap in the understandings of work in the human services and contributes a new and critical understanding of the instruments of control and discretionary practice in the human services. The research concludes with a consideration of pathways to enact a practice that critically engages with contemporary modalities of governance.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Social workers found that the conditions of their work made it impossible for them to do what they imagined they had been educated to do...everyone mentioned the size of their caseloads, the shortage of certain vital provisions and the antagonism between social work and other professional or paraprofessional groups in the welfare field. (Pearson, 1975, p. 24)

The focus of this research is the practice of front line human service workers. Control and constraint are continuing themes in the practice of human services. As the above quote illustrates constraint, competition and competing rationalities are, and have been, inseparable from the terrain of the work. My study explores how the practice of human service workers can be conceptualised to address what, at first glance, presents as a simple question 'what informs the practice of human service workers?'. The research is framed by an understanding that relationships and intersections are at the heart of practice at the front line, in the interactions between worker/s and their external world. This examination addresses the question of how competing rationalities of practice are experienced by front line workers. I explore how the administrative, managerial, professional and moral imperatives of the work are interpreted and lived out in practice. This work is a study of the theoretical understanding of practice within a restructured and restructuring context.

This research responds to the question by addressing the complex relationship between the narratives of practice and the experiences of control and autonomy in work. The context for the delivery of human services lies at the intersections of public policy and private practice. This study recognises that interpretation should be positioned at the centre of the examination of how practice is enacted. The analysis moves towards an understanding of practice that acknowledges the key role that the perception of the social world plays in the conduct of activity.

The site of my exploration is the human services sector and specifically people employed at the front line in the child and family services organisations. The key shared characteristic of each agency worker interviewed was that they worked directly (face to face) with children and young people in state care. This research resides significantly in the theoretical realm as it seeks to develop a new understanding of practice. The empirical work that was conducted as a component of this project (interviews with front line staff working in children and youth services) has been used to animate the key theoretical concepts that will be outlined in the early chapters of this thesis.

The evolution of the research project

As with many research projects, the completion of this thesis can be best described in the manner of a journey. It was a journey that commenced with the confidence and purpose of the best planned expedition but one that underwent a profound change of direction the further I proceeded. Changes of direction in the focus came about as the key assumptions of the research project were interrogated and found wanting. I commenced this project in 2001. As an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant project, this research already had a clear topic (and question), 'Professional discretion in children and family services: the impact of the Contract State'. It was a project deeply rooted in modernist assumptions regarding the place and stature of professional knowledge and clinical practice, and characterised by essential certainties of the experience of structural change and organisational restructuring for practitioners. For a variety of reasons outlined below these assumptions and certainties (and with them the central question) were disrupted and altered as the project progressed.

From Observer to Participant

The focus also underwent a change as I moved from an external observer and researcher of the human services practice context to an active participant as I

commenced working with a non-government child and family welfare organisation (MacKillop Family Services) in 2004. In a trajectory not without its ironies (and duplicities), I commenced in a position titled 'Practice Development'. For reasons that will become apparent in the chapters to follow, the practice development activities associated with the role were subsumed over time by activities directed towards external compliance and accreditation. This research and the arguments set forth should not then simply be read as an act of resistance (or compliance!); it seeks to distil what I have read, heard, seen and experienced. In actuality it represents much of what I have learned through these years. The issues of discretion and control of professional knowledge and practice wisdom become less discrete and more interwoven in the field of practice. It is a context where the politics of practice defy simple conceptualisations of power and control.

Setting the scene: the context of practice

This thesis begins with a consideration of the conditions of front line human service practice, informed by the concept of the 'field' (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The human service sector is presented as a social space with its particular values and regulative principles and also as an arena of conflict and competition (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Elements of this conceptual framework are used as I examine the key characteristics of the external conditions of human service practice. While this study includes a detailed use of Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus (see Chapters Four and Six) in the analysis of the dispositions of human service workers, I do not employ his concepts of field and capital (and the relationship with habitus) to the same degree. My intention in the use of the term 'field' (in Chapters Two and Three) in my analysis is to highlight the range of dominant, subjugated and sometimes competing discourses in the external realm of practice. While a more detailed analysis of the intersections and interplay of field, capital *and* habitus in my site of study may have yielded an interesting analysis it was beyond the scope of the research project.

The original research proposal was deeply rooted in the emerging narratives of public administration restructuring that characterised the 1980s and 1990s literature, comprising an account of increasing compartmentalisation, control and constraint of transparency and surveillance. While these narratives may not be as salient in the contemporary literature, the themes of fragmentation, restructuring, change and control still characterise this service environment. It is an environment where the dominant feature has become the 'purchaser / provider' models of relationship between government and service agencies, and the avoidance or management of risk is a key policy and procedural paradigm. In addition, the original research focus was based on a clear assumption of the role and practice of human service professionals in the human services. The project was imbued with an understanding that the application of professional knowledge provided the antidote to a service context that was dominated by administrative and or resource rationalities. In the pages to come I seek to interrogate and confirm, disrupt or realign these narratives.

Child and Youth Services: the private practice of public policy

While I do not propose that other areas of human service (and other) practice represent areas of moral exceptionalism, I argue that the area of out of home care, which comprises the focus of this research, is often characterised as the example *par excellence* of the State involvement in the private lives of its citizens. It is an area of public administration with an explicit moral dimension. It represents a public expression of centralised moral authority. It is an intervention into the private lives of children and parents that applies the public narratives of 'good' and 'bad' parenting, of care, abuse and neglect or trauma and attachment. Through an exploration of the narratives of human services workers I argue that this sector represents a fertile environment for workers to enact their own personal moral frameworks in their interpretation of day to day practice. It is an exploration of a centralised moral paradigm that represents a rich context for the idiosyncratic interpretations of what is good and bad, normal and abnormal.

By way of illustration and as an introduction to this terrain, I begin with a brief anecdote to highlight the key issues to be navigated in the coming chapters. A story illuminating the key issues of power and control in human services, it also encapsulates some of the problems of contemporary analyses of human services restructuring. In January 2002 a flurry of media attention focused on the activities of a child and youth welfare service in Melbourne. Victoria's largest independent child and family welfare service Berry Street Victoria was embroiled in a controversy surrounding the practice of 'chroming'¹ by young people in residential care. In response to heightened levels of solvent abuse by some of the children in their residential care the agency had developed a policy of allowing supervised chroming. This internal policy was developed as part of a broader harm reduction approach and represented a practice consistent with the well developed research literature on harm minimisation (Hamilton & Rumbold, 2004; Ritter & Cameron, 2006). Harm minimisation has been a guiding principle of the Australian National Drug Strategy since 1985 (for example see Blewett, 1987). It is an approach that highlights a holistic response to drug use that minimises the harms associated with drug use. This approach contrasts with strategies that focus on prohibition or treatment (Australian Drug Foundation, 2003). In relation to the Berry Street policy approach:

The policy encourages children to steer clear of substance abuse. But in extreme circumstances, where a child cannot be dissuaded from chroming or sniffing substances, it encourages them to do so under supervision so medical help can be sought if necessary. (Costa, 2002, p. 1)

While developed as a last resort to work with children and young people who were engaged in high levels of chroming, the practice hit the newspaper headlines following the release of a report from the Parliamentary Drug and Crime Prevention Committee² (2002). The Committee noted that while contentious, the majority of submissions to the enquiry were supportive or understanding of the policy adopted by Berry Street.

¹ 'Chroming' refers to the practice of inhaling solvents (for example, paint vapours).

² The Parliamentary Drug and Crime Prevention Committee is a Committee of the Victorian Parliament with the role "to inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on any proposal, matter or thing concerned with the illicit use of drugs" (2002, p. iv)

The Opposition (Liberal) leader Denis Napthine in the Victorian Parliament decried what he referred to as 'sniffing rooms' (Australian Associated Press, 2002, p. 1) and the editorial of Melbourne's leading tabloid, *The Herald Sun*, called for the Minister for Community Services to be sacked (Mendes, 2002). The response from the agency was swift. Faced with the possibility of losing funding from the Department of Human Services (DHS) the Chief Executive Officer of Berry Street, Sandy de Wolf announced that the practice of supervised chroming would cease (Costa, 2002).

Such an example seems to present compelling evidence of the ability of funding agencies, in this case the DHS, to dictate the practices of community welfare organisations. Regardless of the logic and evidence applied to support the practice of supervised chroming the funding body, as holder of the purse strings, was able to cut the Gordian knot of the policy rationale to stop the practice. In turn this would support the argument that welfare work is becoming increasingly constricted (Hough & Briskman, 2003; Laragy, 1996) by the dual pressures of an overtly conservative politics and a contractualist service framework that heavily weighs in favour of the government. As Bessant (2003) suggests with this episode, "all the necessary ingredients, were there for a great story... disillusionment, lost children in peril, champions, bad characters, the authority of the sovereign state and deception" (p. 11).

To what extent is this constriction characteristic of the work of front line welfare workers in these agencies? In drawing general conclusions from such examples as Berry Street we only gather a blinkered view of the work carried out. This example is forceful but also exotic, it is not the stuff of day to day practice but it does send a clear message about the relationship between government and funded agencies. In its relevance to practice at the front line I am reminded of Kaplan's (cited in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 30) anecdote concerning the drunkard who has lost his keys and persists in searching for them under the lamppost as that is where the light is best. Narratives of public policy, organisational and structural reform in the

human services are certainly illuminated but their manifestation in the day to day practice of front line workers is less so. With Lipsky (1980), I share the view that the work of front line staff is often far from clear cut, with options and choices multitudinous and the results uncertain. As such, to infer that front line workers are merely enactors of policy is to ignore this complexity. It denies the 'lived in', messy and contingent nature of the welfare practice and the mix of banality and repetition that also accompanies much of the work. In fact such an analysis tends to remove the worker from the sphere of welfare work almost entirely. The Berry Street example reinforces that while administrative and resource paradigms represent an influential rationality for public policy, a moral panic still has the capacity to sweep all before it in generating an expression of centralised authority (Bessant, 2003; Rayner, 2002).

The question of discretion

In negotiating the themes of control and constraint in the conduct of human services practice I have focused on the issue of discretion. This concept is more than a residue of the original research question. The original framing of discretion suggested a practice space carved out in a service context dominated by administrative and resource rationalities. This research seeks to reposition discretion and to reflect the varied experiences of discretion at the front line. I acknowledge that discretion or the capacity to enact a practice that is free of the constraints of rationalities of control is not without its problems. For example, I suggest that the capacity to deploy discretion is not an activity welcomed by some front line workers. For some an absence of discretion is far from problematic. I seek to focus on the pragmatics of discretion. I configure discretion as both a calculated activity and as a residual space in circumstances of crises and disruption, an unreflective space at the juncture of field and practice. In addition, drawing on the concept of 'governmentality' (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982; Foucault 1979; 1991; Rose, O'Malley & Valverde, 2006) I make problematic the assumption underlying the

concept of discretion. I explore the possibility of framing discretion as a disciplined activity, as a governance of practice through freedom (Rose, 1990; 1999).

The external context

Literature of control and rule bound practice

Returning to the analysis of the field of practice, the first part of this thesis begins with a focus on the practice context of human services sector and the key rationalities for practice at the front line. The account of the development and reform of community organisations is an important one for this research. It locates the unique development of a non-government service delivery sector within the wider narratives of public sector administration and restructuring. In doing so, I provide a cautionary note to the adoption of easy generalisation and application of accounts of change developed in other jurisdictions to define the analysis of government / non-government relationships in Victoria. Similarly, this perspective makes problematic the focus on professions in the discussion of front line practice. It emphasises the decentralised and disparate service context of human services, in particular the area of child and family services. This milieu has further exacerbated the diffusion of professional demarcation in practice. These changes have produced a context that renders professional boundaries and professional turf a quite soluble commodity.

Within this context, the restructuring of human services practice and delivery have been reordered based on the strategies and processes most often associated with the terms 'managerialism' and 'contractualism'. My deployment of these terms is not an exercise in reification. This work does not suggest that in and of itself either term represents a real or compelling force for change. I use the terms to describe a range of emergent organisational and practice orthodoxies that have been implemented in the sphere of public and not for profit administration. I then move from the more structural shifts in the dynamics of organisational relationships to a

discussion of the techniques of surveillance and control of front line practice. Using the case examples from the Victorian context (the implementation of the Registration Standards for Community Organisations and the application of the *Looking After Children* framework and associated records) as examples, I animate the techniques or mechanisms of control directed at front line workers and their organisations. I analyse these as instruments that frame a particular kind of practice. It is a frame that represents an amalgam of the modalities of control and risk management with the formal knowledge that is in the ascendant in their particular field (that is, developmental theory and attachment theory in child and family services).

As originally planned, this research was to focus exclusively on social workers employed in the children and youth services sector. To continue on this path would have been counterproductive and ignore the context of the research project. Instead, I use the term human service workers to describe front line staff. In doing so I acknowledge it is not a term without its imperfections. It is not my intention to signify a unifying experience of practising in this area. My intention is quite the reverse. I have used this term to define people working directly with children and young people in out of home care. This represents a range of occupational types, although primarily case workers and residential workers.

While this study has not concentrated solely on the experiences of qualified social workers, social work literature remains central to this research project. The key themes explored in this study, particularly in relation to the constitution of human service worker practices, are a shared terrain with social work. Also, as mentioned previously, although the experience of human service organisational restructuring in Victoria shares certain commonalities with the experience in other states and internationally, there are important differences in the history, composition and intra/extra-governmental relationships within the human service sector. Again, this

does not necessarily foreclose on a consideration of work carried out in other settings but doing so requires care.

A theory of practice

In addition to the analysis of the structural conditions of practice, I employ Bourdieu's (1990) concept of 'habitus' to explore front line practice. I examine practice as the manifestation of the relationship between the habitus and the interpretation of the social world. I argue for an approach that transcends the debates regarding the binary of structure and agency (of free will and determinism) to articulate a conceptualisation of practice that acknowledges the structuring capabilities of the social world on individuals as they in turn interpret, order and structure the social world. That is, an internal world that structures and is structured by the social world.

I explore some key assumptions regarding practice and interrogate the discussion of determinants of practice and focus on the under-acknowledged role of the lived experience of front line workers as a significant mediator of their practice. This is a realm of informing practice beyond the paradigms associated with professional training, organisational culture or rules and regulations.

This thesis advances the further argument that a missing component of existing framing of practice is the lack of attention paid to the worker as existing outside their place of work. Such an analysis tends to present practice as disembodied. The focus of this research develops an understanding of practice as more than simply determined by rule following, (the ever nebulous) 'organisational culture' or formal training. It is an understanding that recognises multiple subjectivities. I outline how the lived history of workers should be regarded as a key attribute in the interpretation of the social world and in turn interpreting and informing their responses in the workplace. I develop a conceptualisation of practice characterised

by seemingly opposing yet interrelated elements of fluidity and certainty. The analysis presented in this research provides an important counter to contemporary framing of policy implementation and decision-making in human service practice.

The person in the practice

This work draws on Foucault's concept of 'governmentality' (see for example Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982; Foucault, 1991; Rose et al., 2006) to analyse how the acquiescence to control can be experienced as an expression of autonomy. I use interviews with front line staff to animate the conceptualisations of habitus and field to explore the question of discretion. In particular, I explore the narratives deployed by human services workers and the role they play in framing the key actors (for example children and young people and their families) and actions within their place of work.

Of course, this leaves the researcher with the difficulty of how best to explore welfare work. With Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) I share the view that the research methods employed should flow from the site of examination rather than be imposed on the site of study. The central purpose of this study is to shed light on the practice of human service welfare workers. Such a study can only flow from the experiences of the workers themselves. The space these workers occupy is the site of practice. Their experience is an embodied one. It is not my intention to devote time, energy and rigour to filling the void of the hypothetical. My aim is to move to an understanding of what happens and seek the explanation as to 'why'. As an outsider entering the terrain of child and welfare work it is not easy to characterise the conditions of the work and the key features and influences on the day to day practice of workers. Yet in order to understand the multiple subjectivities, this characterisation must be undertaken.

Practice and the interpretive frame

The black letter law, the Departmental and organisational policy guidelines, the physical location and even the children and young people that are placed with these services are all quite tangible. What is less clear is how the individual worker, working within a team, unit or otherwise, interprets and responds to the myriad of situations and circumstances that are part of this work. From the banalities of routine paper and practice tools through to the extreme situations of physical and emotional confrontation, rarely is the space given to understanding the worker as 'actor'. There is certainly evidence of a strong push towards codifying and compartmentalising human service practice but what we do not know is the extent to which these tools are applied, adapted, ignored or refashioned by those at the front line. And even less is known about the question of why.

In the spirit of venturing down this path I have employed an approach that works towards this goal. I outline an account of practice that highlights the interpretive frame as an exercise of individual agency while positioning the interpretive frame as constituted by the experience of the social world. In developing this account, I acknowledge the varied experience of power and control in the governance of front line practice. For example, the ordering of compliance activities may be experienced as assisting with sense making in the workplace or alternatively as an expression of rationality that is counter to the logic/s of the front line setting.

With Howe (1991) I share the view regarding the value of analyses of human service work as "state based" and "organisationally tethered" (p. 204). Yet this type of analysis can too often present an etching devoid of personality and possibility. In turn van Krieken (1991) argues that it is important not to lose sight of the changes to the conditions of welfare and the history and development of services for children, young people and their families. As has been illustrated earlier, changes in the development of the welfare states, specifically in relation to child welfare, have been associated with both cost (domination) and benefits (liberation). We need not

to forget that many services, from pensions to publicly-funded health services, simply did not exist in the not too distant past. For example, early in my research a colleague suggested to me that twenty years ago social workers in child and youth services had a great deal of discretion. They could remove a child from their family or not. The decision was theirs. Today, while often tightly constrained, there are other options open to workers in this field. Furthermore, while discretion and individual autonomy may have been eroded this is not necessarily all bad news. The history of child and youth services provides a telling reminder as to the dangers of too much discretion, low levels of transparency and little accountability (for examples of the lack of accountabilities see Community Affairs Reference Committee, 2004; 2005).

Sense making and the experience of change in practice

This research sets out to refocus on a discussion of the possibilities inherent in welfare work and recover the location of the workers within the narratives of control and compliance. Of course, there are some stark absences in this research approach. What of those in middle and senior management positions or more crucially those on the receiving end of human service practice? How can we begin to investigate human service practice without recourse to these groups, especially the latter? Surely the goal of the research should be some form of road map towards what constitutes good practice. The response to these and associated questions is an important one and sets the political orientation for this research.

My purpose in conducting this research is not to provide a grand narrative to account for recent changes in the delivery of human services. As has been outlined previously grand narratives of the ilk of managerialism (or its more expansive sibling 'economic rationalism'), or the professionalisation project, simply do not provide the analytical, let alone explanatory, wherewithal to account for the contingent, personal, interpretational and emotional aspects of the work of front line

practitioners. My central focus can be pared back to asking the simple question of 'how do you make sense of what you do?' Of course the problem with simple questions is they rarely prompt simple answers. To the researcher they can seem messy, illogical, elusive or contradictory. It remains a conundrum for so long as we continue to see reason and logic as existing outside the field of human experience and conceive of a practice as disembodied. Returning to the 'absences' in this research approach, in the manner that I quiz interviewees for a rationale behind their actions it seemed only just that I should do so for this project. Where some may see silence and marginalisation I argue for recognition of the key domain of welfare workers. Such an approach may indeed lead to the objectification of service users but it is equally possible that the objectification of children and young people in care is a key element of day to day welfare practice. What I seek to do is shed some light on one aspect of this arena and be part of the dialogue that follows.

The final section of my work focuses on how front line practice can be reconsidered within this contemporary environment. I explore the possibilities and the potential for greater critical engagement with the external condition of practice, through initiatives that link the advancement of collective identities and sense making to practice development. The final chapter also configures the elements of a practice that enables the capacity to deploy discretion at the front line in an environment of escalating and intrusive modes of surveillance.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis sets out to examine the relationship between the external conditions of practice and the internal dispositions of workers. Chapter One outlines the central question to be explored in the research study and introduces the primary areas of examination. Chapters Two and Three focus on the context for practice in the human services and chart key practice rationalities. Chapter Two provides a detailed analysis of the development and role of the community sector in the

provision of welfare services in Victoria, Australia particularly in the area of out of home care. The chapter identifies three waves of inter-related contemporary restructuring (practices associated with the rationalities of managerialism, contractualism and audit) and concludes with a case study of the Registration Standards for Community Service Organisations as an exemplar of a modality of front-line practice control. Chapter Three sets out an account of the development of human service professions, such as social work and youth work, and explores their influence and authority (or lack thereof) in the community sector setting. I explore how the development of human professions, the fragmented context of human services delivery organisations (and the lack of associated professional jurisdictional boundaries in for example social work and youth work), coupled with the absence of clear professional methodologies, has made discussions of professional discretion in this context problematic. The concept of discretion is analysed in the context of emerging techniques to control front line practice. The *Looking After Children* framework is analysed as a technology of control that representative of an administrative logic of human service practice. Chapter Four provides a theoretical analysis of practice. Drawing on the work of both Foucault and his concept of governmentality (1991) and advancing Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1990), an account of practice in the human services is developed to explore the relationship between actors and the social world. Chapter Five outlines the methodology employed for this research and sets out the details of the empirical work completed for this study and the approach to the (narrative) analysis of the material collected in interviews with front line workers. The following two Chapters (Six and Seven) centre on the analysis of interviews conducted with front-line workers employed in the out of home care sector. Chapter Six provides an analysis of the interview data and practice identities to develop an understanding of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) of front line workers employed in the out of home care sector. Chapter Seven provides a further examination of the narratives of front line workers to explore the issues of governance, interpretation and language and the practice of power and control in work in the human services. The experience of navigating competing or dominant rationalities of practice is explored. The concluding Chapter (Eight) develops a new understanding of human service practice

and the experience of control through the repositioning of the dispositions of workers and the interpretations of control as central to the understanding of discretion. The Chapter sets out the key limitations of this research and, also, outlines a range of initiatives to proactively respond to measures aimed at codifying, compartmentalising or otherwise constraining front line practice. Nussbaum's (1999; 2000) capabilities approach is highlighted as a critical antidote to techniques of control that seek to marginalise vulnerable populations such as children and young people in care.

Chapter 2 – The context of human services practice: the development and governance of the community sector in Victoria

What social workers think and do can be understood in relation to the intellectual, ideological, and material surrounds in which they find themselves...I remain impressed with analyses which reveal social work to be largely a state-sponsored agency-based and organisationally-tethered activity. It is not wise to tackle an examination of social work without taking note of this formidable context. (Howe, 1991, p. 204)

A common feature of non-government welfare agencies was their haphazard, serendipitous and even opportunistic development, often based around the passions of key leaders. This is hardly particular to Australia, but when combined with federalism and with religious rivalry it exacerbated the fragmentation of the sector. (Murphy, 2006, p. 44.10)

Introduction

The focus of this research is the practice of front line welfare workers, an analysis that cannot proceed without paying attention to the context of practice. As suggested by Howe (1991) above, the practice of front line workers cannot be separated from the context within which workers operate in the human services. For Howe, the rationalities of practice are strongly aligned with material conditions. While Howe focuses on social work it is reasonable to assume that his analysis could be expanded to workers in the human service sector more generally. In the sections to follow I place the context for human service practice within a historical frame and highlight the critical aspects in the development of this sector and its relationship to the contemporary structure and practice. In particular, I outline the evolution of a diverse and distinct Victorian non-government human service sector involved in welfare service provision. I then move to an analysis of the colonising effects on this sector of emerging rationalities of organisational practice (managerialism) and the repositioning of the relationship with the government sector through the use of techniques of contract (contractualism). While Howe

rightly focuses on the institutional context my analysis extends to a wider conceptualisation of the human service 'field'. A field that acknowledges the alignment and competition of imperatives expressed in the front line of practice (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and extends beyond a consideration of practice or activity as "state-sponsored, agency-based and organisationally-tethered" (Howe, 1991, p. 204).

The field of human service practice

In this chapter I seek to explore the context of publicly funded welfare services in Victoria. My aim here is to invest the environment of human service practice with the competing politics and tensions of a social sphere experiencing constant change and to locate human service workers and their practice within a 'field'. My intention is to articulate the 'field' of practice. Following Bourdieu (2005; see Thompson, 2008) I locate the subject within a specific historical, local/national/international space and relational context and (also) question the assumptions of how the conditions of this social space of practice have been articulated. It is a field that can be understood as simultaneously a space for both contest and conflict and also a space of the expression of objective forces of discipline and power (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In elaborating on the concept of field, Bourdieu articulates:

a network, or configuration of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agent or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.) (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 97).

In exploring this concept, Thompson (2008) describes particular sites of analysis that "have their own rules, histories, star players, legends and lore" (p. 69). For Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) a field is characterised by the constant

struggle of actors and institutions "according to the regularities and the rules constitutive of this space of play" (p. 102).

In their study of homelessness services in New York City, Emirbayer and Williams (2005) use Bourdieu's concept of field to analyse the "field of shelters, and ... the field of field of homeless clients" (p. 689 – 690). The authors use this concept to identify the elements of the dominant and dominated positions in the hierarchy of homelessness shelters and of service users accessing these shelters. In their analysis of shelters, the authors move beyond a hierarchical model of legitimacy based on factors such as public or private ownership, service specialisation or formalised classifications of target populations. The analysis centres on dominant agencies as representative one of two kinds of legitimacy within the field – authenticity or control of clients. With authenticity they suggest that agencies actively seen as 'the real deal' practicing with the most challenging client were afforded a dominant position within the hierarchy of shelters. Also, shelters that exercised high levels of control over services users were afforded a privileged position over agencies that were seen as more chaotic. With this analysis, there is a greater emphasis on the conditions within which practice occurs. For Emirbayer and Williams, Bourdieu's analytical concepts offer the potential to provide considerable insight for human service workers:

As social workers intervene in private homes, prisons, work settings, and the broader community, a relational and field-analytic perspective can help them better to understand the external forces assigning, as it were, to their particular case some of its pertinent properties. (p. 718)

While not employing Bourdieu's concept of field to the same degree, the analysis set out below charts the key conditions of the context for human service practice and the prominence, privileging or otherwise of practice and reform agendas.

Reform and restructuring in the human services

In casting the global narratives associated with the terms 'managerialism and 'contractualism', this work seeks to animate those terms and how they are

experienced (or not) and interpreted by human service workers in their day to day practice.

I begin with an analysis of the history and role of community organisation in Victoria before turning to focus on the narratives of contemporary human service reform. I have characterised the period of reform as the three waves of contemporary human service restructuring: the emergence of the manager, the rise of the contract and the proliferation of techniques of surveillance and control. In the section to follow I seek to outline the key characteristics of these narratives of change and, in particular, outline the techniques associated with managerialism and contractualism as manifestations of public choice theory (Mendes, 2008; see also Held, 1996; O'Brien & Penna, 1998). I deploy this method of analysis in the knowledge that the reforms as outlined were interconnected and their implementation did not necessarily follow the trajectory or chronology that the use of the term 'waves' suggests. My aim in structuring the analysis in this manner is to emphasise the constancy of change in this milieu.

Both the size and diversity of the non-government service sector in Victoria represents a critical feature that is not accounted for in much of the literature. Unlike other jurisdictions, rather than 'contracting out' government services to the non-government sector, community organisations have historically played a very significant role in the delivery of services. In the Victorian experience the contemporary reforms can be seen more as a reordering of the relationship between government and non-government rather than a redevelopment of the underlying architecture of design and delivery of human services. This has profound implications for the analysis of restructuring and control in its context. The role and diversity of community organisations in Victoria represents fertile ground for the reordering of the relationship between the government and the non-government sector.

Some authors (see for example, Alford & O'Neill, 1994; Egan & Hoatson, 1999; Ernst, Glanville & Murfitt, 1998) have argued the adverse consequences of the

outsourcing of government service delivery functions, in particular associated with the Victorian Kennett Government (1992-1999). Such an analysis under represents the significant legacy and ongoing contribution of, the community service sector has played in delivering welfare services in Victoria.

The organisation and development of welfare services in Victoria remains crucial to understanding the impact of contemporary reforms. While the Victorian context shares many of the characteristics of Western welfare states in both the design and delivery of welfare services, the history and role of the non-government sector in delivering publicly funded services cast these reforms in a different light. It is a setting that represents an organisational and sectoral plurality. The sector comprises a diversity of organisational types working within the field of government funded services (Stronger Community Organisations Project (SCOP), 2007). In the section to follow I interrogate the manner in which the contemporary experience of reform has been characterised and highlight the limitations of much of the analysis. In doing so, I question the transplanting of much of the international analysis of human services restructuring to the Victorian experience. Such an approach fails to adequately acknowledge the unique features of the mixed economy of welfare service delivery in Victoria.

This section explores how the development of the human service practice has been continuously reconfigured as particular orthodoxies have gained legitimisation before moving on to a discussion of the habitus of human service in later chapters. The chapter examines the development of the non-government community services and the emergence of key organising rationalities (of managerialism, contractualism and audit. This analysis is informed by Bourdieu's concept of 'field' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) to explore the changing organisation and practice of child welfare to highlight competing configurations of power and ideology have evolved in this setting.

Community services sector in Victoria

Far from operating at the margins of welfare service delivery the non-government sector has played a key role in the provision of welfare services and in the implementation of government policy (Lyons, 2001; Productivity Commission, 2010). In tracing early developments in public policy, Lyons (2001) argues that while State governments played an active role in certain areas of social welfare, such as the provision of education “in other areas of social policy, governments were reluctant to intervene. Rather than directly providing for the sick and the poor they encouraged leading colonists and their wives to form and support non-profit organisations to provide services” (p. 99-100).

Despite the ongoing association of the human service professionals, and in particular the social workers, with government services, there is a long and rich history of welfare services being delivered by the non-government sector in Victoria (Blacher, 1997; Community Services Victoria, 1992; SCOP, 2007; Victorian State Services Authority, 2007). In the section to follow I move to an analysis of the non-government sector’s role in providing services, with particular reference to the move from input based funding to the more tightly controlled output based funding models. In addition, it will focus on the non-government sector’s complicated role as an arbiter in the statutory environment of child and youth services.

The relationship between the government and the non-government sector represents a critical part of this study. My reasons for following this path are perhaps best explained in the Community Services Victoria (CSV) report *Welfare as an Industry: a study of community services in Victoria* (1992). Apart from providing a valuable snapshot of the state of non-government services prior to the election of the reformist Kennett government in 1992, the report reflects on the development of non-government services in Victoria. In recognising the legacy of the past the reports states:

The industry we look at today is very different from that which existed a hundred years or even ten years ago. But it clearly shows its roots in the past – in terms of services provided,

institutions which house these services and organisations which tend to dominate the contemporary scene (CSV, 1992, p. 1).

Many of the taken-for-granted areas of government welfare functions are relatively recent phenomenon. For example, the responsibility for the investigation of child abuse was not absorbed into direct State control until 1985 previously residing with a non-government organisation, the Children's Protection Society (Markiewicz, 1996b). Despite the pivotal role of non-government agencies in providing welfare services, relatively little work has been undertaken to assess the sector. As Lyons (1993) points out "it is not possible to obtain a detailed and reliable picture of the size, disposition and economic contribution of third sector organisations" (p. 27). More recently, there has been a more concerted effort on behalf of both state and federal governments to map the composition and contribution of the non-government sector (Industry Commission, 1995; Productivity Commission, 2010; SCOP, 2007). This work suggests that while the precise dimensions of the sector are far from clear, non-government organisations are significant social actors in the human service field.

Historical antecedents

Of relevance to this study is the relationship between the State, as providing a legislative framework for the practice of welfare service delivery, and the non-government organisations that played the key role in delivering these services. Of course, these community agencies did not operate in a vacuum. Their work was carried out in a highly political context, combining a complicated series of organisational, legal and ethical factors. In elaborating on the Victorian example Hiskey (1980; see also SCOP, 2007) points out that, "there has...historically been a strong emphasis on subsidization of the voluntary sector in the child welfare field" (p. 6). The developments in colonial Victoria set the scene for a long and enduring relationship to follow. Kennedy (1985) examines this relationship in its infancy and credits Victorian Governor La Trobe with "set[ting] the precedent of government subsidy" (p. 33) to prominent charitable organisations. As illustrated in the CSV report *Welfare as an Industry* (1992), by the 1880's Victoria's seventy-six leading

charitable organisations derived two-thirds of their income from the State. Interestingly, this proportion of government funding for community organisations was similar to that which was estimated in Victoria in 1990 (CSV, 1992; see also SCOP, 2007; Victorian State Services Authority, 2007). The trend towards the government removing itself from direct welfare service provision is also evident during the colonial period. Kennedy (1985) points out that during this period municipal authorities, such as the Town Council of Hotham, comprising the inner suburbs of northern and western Melbourne, 'outsourced' their own relief work to the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society for a nominal fee. This emphasis on subsidy rather than service delivery is representative of a particular logic regarding the place of government in the field of child welfare. This move led to a further legitimisation of non-government organisations in welfare policy in Victoria.

The non-government sector was a significant actor in the human service field. For Murphy (2006) this represented a 'mixed economy' of welfare with government and non-government agencies involved in the provision of welfare services:

Australia developed systems of non-government welfare that were piecemeal and unsystematic, with the churches subsidised to deliver services but left to go their own way, and with significant fragmentation due to colonial and state divergence, idiosyncratic development and sectarian rivalry. In combination, all these factors signal a distinctive trajectory to the mixed economy of welfare. (p. 44.12-44.13)

Murphy (2006) suggests that rather than subsume the charitable sector, the post war expansion of the welfare state proceeded in tandem with this sector.

Community services organisations in Victoria comprised a range of faith based and non-faith based organisations, with sectarian rivalries further contributing to the fragmentation of the sector as parallel organisations were developed by Catholic and Protestant Churches (Lyons, 2001; Murphy, 2006). In relation to the out of home care sector that is the focus of this study, as of April 2010, there were a total of thirty-seven community service agencies registered to deliver out of home care services in Victoria (DHS, 2009a).

The colonial government in Victoria actively legislated to address the issue of child neglect, although some authors suggest that the legislation was aimed more at regulating the lives of children than protection *per se* (Jaggs, 1986; Swain, 1998). Early legislation was particularly notable as it assigned increased statutory authority to non-government agencies. As Tierney (1963) points out, as early as 1890 the introduction of the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act gave “greater statutory recognition to private persons and institutions desirous of taking charge of neglected children” (p. 21). More specifically, the Act extended the authority of voluntary organisations by granting the “power to permit approved private persons to take over the legal guardianship...and also to trace out and remove children that may be living in bad houses” (Jaggs, 1986, p. 57).

With regard to the private organisations that were mandated to ‘rescue’ children, by 1897 thirteen such institutions were granted such powers (Jaggs, 1986). This was a somewhat unique development in the formation of policies to manage ‘neglected’ children in Australia. This contrasts with, for example, Tasmania where the colonial government took on full responsibility for the administration of children's homes and orphanages (Murphy, 2006). Despite the distinctiveness of this development in Victoria, Jaggs (1986) suggests that this aspect of the Act generated little debate or controversy, instead debate focused on the restrictions to be imposed on street trading by children. Again in contrast with the Victorian experience, other states such as New South Wales and South Australia legislated for the formation of statutory bodies to investigate instances of abuse or neglect (Swain, 2000). The granting of these new powers to private individuals and non-government organisations was not accompanied by a substantial increase in the numbers of children ‘apprehended’ as the vast majority of children placed in care were voluntary admissions (Jaggs, 1986).

The trend of delivering welfare services in partnership with government is particularly evident in Victoria (CSV, 1992; Hoatson, Dixon & Sloman, 1996; Saunders, 1994; Tierney, 1963). The role of non-government organisations acting as ‘subsidiaries’ of government to deliver welfare services is reflected in funding

arrangements which see the largest twenty non-government organisations receiving an average of sixty per cent of their funding from government sources (Blacher, 1997). In relation to child and youth welfare services, unlike other states, such as New South Wales and South Australia, governments in Victoria have a long history of subsidising the community service organisations to provide welfare services such as out of home care (see Hiskey 1980; Markiewicz, 1996b; Murphy, 2006; Tierney, 1963) and granting statutory powers to non-government organisation in areas such as the investigation of child abuse and neglect (see Jaggs 1986; Swain 2000). Moreover, others (Millis, 1996; SCOP, 2007) have suggested that Victoria can be considered Australia's 'home' of philanthropic and related not for profit activity. This reflects a reputation that can be traced back to the State being the first to offer tax incentives for people leaving money to establish a charitable foundation (SCOP, 2007). In 1996, the Australian Association of Philanthropy estimated that eighty-five per cent of Australian trusts were located in Victoria with many restricting their funding activities to that State (Millis, 1996).

The state government of Victoria continues to be a significant funder of services delivered by community service organisations, particularly in the areas of health and welfare. The Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) funds the greatest number of not for profits organisations (Victorian State Services Authority, 2007) and is also one of two government Departments (Department of Planning and Community Development being the other) to grant the largest amount of funding to the not for profit sector. The Department of Human Services has the largest number of service agreements with the not for profit sector of all government Departments (SCOP, 2007; Victorian State Services Authority, 2007).

The model represented by the mixed economy of welfare suggests a legitimisation of the role and place of the non-government sector. Within the field, this history suggests a degree of power and authority over the practice of child welfare. The notion of 'subsidy' suggests a limited intervention by government in the practice of welfare within these organisations. The organising methodologies of practice did not emanate through the relationship with government. The governance of

practice, or 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), within the field were organised towards the rationalities of a multitude of faith-based and non-faith-based non-government organisations rather than a singular dominant entity such as government..

The sections to follow outline how the reform and restructuring associated with the concepts of managerialism and contractualism reorganised both the structure of community organisations and the services provided and also reshaped their relationships with government agencies. These rationalities legitimised and de-legitimised particular ways of working and reconfigured the governance of practice.

The first wave of contemporary reform in human services:

'Managerialism'

I now move to an analysis of the concepts of techniques and practice associated with the term 'managerialism'. In deploying this term, my aim is to animate a collection of techniques and practices of public administration. I do not engage in a process of reification; these concepts are tools of description rather than concrete forces of change. From a critical perspective, I acknowledge that in and of itself this concept does not correspond to anything that is tangible (or real). What the term requires is a reliance on human actors to make these concepts 'real'. In drawing on Bourdieu's (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), concept of 'field', this analysis recognises that it is the politicians, bureaucrats, managers and social workers and so on, that are relied upon to legitimise and put into practice these ideas.

As set out in the Introduction, the focus of this research has evolved from the question of how human service workers have responded to contemporary reforms in the human services sector. The reforms characterised by changes to established organisational structures and approaches to policy processes described here come broadly under the term 'managerialism'. Numerous authors have mapped the application of managerialist reforms on the human service sector (see Alford & O'Neill, 1994; Considine, 1988; Lyons 1998). Since the early 1980s, Australia's

public, and much of the not for profit, sector policy making and program delivery have been reshaped by the application of ideas of 'managerialism' (Meagher, 2000; Muetzelfeldt, 1992; Tilbury 2006). The reform of Australia's patterns of governance restructuring and the organisation of human service delivery have altered the conditions and practice of publicly funded welfare (Alford & O'Neill 1994; Baldwin 2004; Harris 2003; Tilbury 2006).

Beginning with the concept of 'managerialism', put simply the term as applied to human services is used to describe an array of reforms and restructuring techniques with the general aim of aligning practices more closely with corporate modes of organisation (Harris, 2003; Meagher, 2000; Muetzelfeldt, 1992). Central to the restructuring that has occurred in human services since the 1980s has been the reform of organisational structures and policy processes both within and outside publicly funded welfare services. Applied to public welfare, the concept of 'managerialism' is typically used as a banner term for a wide range of organisational reforms, public policy priority changes and the restructuring of the relationships between agents of public service delivery and their 'clients'. For Meagher (2000) "...the language and practice of the Australian public policy have become increasingly organised around the assumption that economic development in the form of more competitive and dynamic markets will achieve all national economic and social aims" (p. 74). These reforms were aimed at improving the efficiency of private, government and non-government organisations (Alford & O'Neill, 1994; Considine, 1988; 2000; Lyons, 1998).

The key characteristics of managerialist reforms can be distilled into four basic threads; work is to be determined by clear objectives denoted by managers, role specialisation, hierarchical line management with some devolution of decision-making to managers down the line of control (Baldwin, 2004), and higher levels of technical control (Harris,2003). A range of modalities in the human service setting are evident in techniques such as the introduction of service agreements that establish formulas for funding, performance targets and clearly delineated service

components. For Mautner (2005) the discourse of managerialism involves community organisations becoming and talking more like a business. It involves the adoption of the organisational practices of strategic planning, performance measurement, customer orientation, marketing, risk management and quality assurance (see also Dixon, Kouzmin & Korac-Kakabadse, 1998).

For Tilbury (2006) the managerialist way of doing things has become a new orthodoxy in welfare practice. Such characteristics sit in sharp contrast to the values of transformation and distributive justice associated with liberal, rights based or critical social work. Such a movement suggests an undervaluing of those factors or issues that defy quantification. As O'Connor, Warburton and Smyth (2001) argue:

Social work and the human services are currently undergoing fundamental and rapid change. The mission, focus, structure, funding, organisation and governance of social welfare and community services are being reshaped by these changes. The existence of a welfare state that provides even the minimum level of support for all citizens is under question. (p. 1)

Such critiques paint a rather foreboding and imposing picture of the environment which human service workers occupy in the field of practice as the logic of managerialism gained particular currency or capital.

The 'Economic Rationalism' thesis

Applied to public administration, the concept of 'economic rationalism' is typically used to describe the motivation for a wide range of organisational reforms, public policy priority changes and the restructuring of the relationships between agents of public service delivery and their 'clients'. In Australia it is most associated with Michael Pusey's (1991) analysis of the process of public administration reform in Federal government agencies, *Economic Rationalism in Canberra: a nation state changes its mind*. Similar accounts of public sector restructuring can be found in the discussions of managerialism or the reforms associated with 'Thatcherism' in the United Kingdom or 'Reaganism' in the United States (see Kettl, 1998; Pollitt, 1993;

Self, 1993). In Pusey's (1991) analysis of the Australian experience, economic rationalism accounts for a quantum shift as the state, and associated political practices, align more closely with market, and market-like, modes of organisation (Meagher, 2000; Muetzelfeldt, 1992; Pusey, 1991).

Central to the restructuring that has occurred since the 1980s has been the reform of organisational structures and policy processes both within and outside traditionally defined sections of public administration. These reforms emphasised a set of rationalities that gave primacy to the aim of improving the efficiency of private, government and non-government organisations (Alford & O'Neill, 1994; Considine, 1988; Lyons, 1998). The 1990s saw the emergence of a 'second wave' of public sector reforms delivered through the increased use of contracts to regulate the direct service functions of non-government organisations. This process has been characterised as 'contractualism' (Alford & O'Neill, 1994; Lyons, 1998; Ramia & Carney, 2001; Yeatman, 1997). This process of restructuring has not occurred in an ideological or political vacuum.

The second wave of reform and the use of contracts: Contractualism

The second wave of human service reform was characterised by a move away from a subsidising relationship with non-government agencies towards the increasing use of contracts to regulate the delivery of human services. It describes a regulatory paradigm focusing on the clear delineation of roles within the human service sector and the further realignment of the relationship between government and the not for profit sector. While the managerialist project was founded on the twin pursuits of efficiency and effectiveness, with the enactment of the contractualist paradigm we can discern a deployment of the discourse to formalise and separate the relationship between the funding and the delivery of welfare services. This is a relationship that framed government agencies as purchasers of services and community service (and other) organisations as providers. It is also a relationship that framed government agencies as a client of service providers and provides a

clear linkage with the approach espoused in public choice theory (Harris, 2003; O'Brien & Penna, 1998).

Contractualism as a manifestation of Public Choice Theory

Public choice theories are one of the contemporary manifestations of that tradition of classical liberalism which has emphasised reducing the impact of the state (government) on 'individual freedoms' (Held, 1996). Such ideas are well represented by the advocates of public sector restructuring. In their influential book *Reinventing Government*, David Osborne and Ted Gaebler (1992) famously defined their preferred model of governments 'steering not rowing'. The authors are quite explicit in relating how 'self-interest' can cloud the policy process. Their view of public administration is perhaps best exemplified by the following:

Government and business are fundamentally different institutions. Business leaders are driven by the profit motive; government leaders are driven by the desire to get reelected. Businesses get most of their money from their customers; governments get most of their money from taxpayers. Businesses are usually driven by competition; governments usually use monopolies. Differences such as these create fundamentally different incentives in the public sector. For example, in government the ultimate test for managers is not whether they produce a product or profit – it is whether they please the elected politicians. Because politicians tend to be driven by interest groups, public managers – unlike their private counterparts – must factor interest groups into every equation. (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992, p. 20)

This account of the motivation of public officials points to an obvious argument towards the need for robust regulatory frameworks to constrain the excesses of policy actors (Mendes, 2008). To this end, the primary mechanisms to achieve improved public administration are the economically 'rational' tools of contracts and competition. In relation to the provision of welfare services, the aim of contractualism is to set an agreed regulatory framework whereby none of the allegedly 'self-interested' parties (government departments, service providers or service users) can coopt, or control, the entire process of welfare provision. It aims

to ensure that interest groups do not capture the Welfare State (Mendes, 2008). This purchaser / provider contractual model seeks to formally separate personal gain from rational policy making and service delivery (Hancock, 1999). Government bodies take the sole responsibility for the formulation of appropriate policy while contracting out the specific service delivery functions to non-government agencies. Furthermore, O'Neill & McGuire (1999) argue:

The purpose of moving towards a more contractual relationship is to increase the capacity of the purchaser or funder to specify what is being purchased, monitor the delivery of purchased services and apply sanction, if necessary, to service providers. Only in this way, proponents of contracts argue, will the efficiency and effectiveness, or 'value for money', of services be improved. (pp. 15-16)

Public choice theorists argue that such a regulatory framework avoids the pitfalls of allowing the policy formulation process to be 'captured' by the interests of either the professionals working within the field or the service users themselves (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992).

In short, the reforms associated with the rise in the use of contracts, were aimed at furthering the efficiencies of government and generating greater control and certainty over service delivery functions (Lyons, 1998). The 1990s saw the expansion of this wave of public sector reform through the increased use of contracts to regulate and dictate the service delivery functions of non-government organisations. The approach was also referred to as 'new managerialism', 'new public management' or 'contractualism'. The theoretical foundations of contractualism, with the assumption of the individual as primarily guided by the 'rational' choice of self interest, are founded in public choice (or agency) theory (Alford & O'Neill, 1994; Hancock, 1999; Yeatman, 1998). Regulation on the exchange of goods and services comes through the use of contracts, in which individuals 'freely' enter into formal relationships thereby limiting the constraints on individual liberty (Yeatman, 1997). As Yeatman (1997) states, "contract...is associated with individual freedom from social restrictions, with individual choice, and relationships which are based in the freely given agreement of individuals" (p.

39). As such, she implies that proponents of this perspective believe that contracts can and should be used to regulate everything from the exchange of labour and the purchase of goods, through to the delivery of welfare services.

The aim of the contractualist reform was to formally separate the policy formulation process from the program management and service delivery functions. An added element of the public choice agenda is to drive the greater efficiency of services through the introduction of competitive markets into the welfare sector. The argument in favour of this can be summarised in the following. As government bodies formulate contracts for the delivery of specific services, these contracts are then put out to tender, thereby creating competition among potential service providers. The contracting out of service delivery functions aims to increase competition between service providers, through the creation of quasi-markets, and in the process, create greater efficiency gains and improve quality of service to consumers (Flynn, 1999; McDonald, 1999). Applying these reforms to the welfare sector had the dual effect of providing government agencies with greater control over the delivery of services while devolving accountability for day to day management of service delivery to the service providers.

Restructuring and reform in Victoria

The contractualist framework presupposes a new relationship between government and non-government agencies delivering government funded human services. In the Australian State of Victoria, the introduction of contractualism has meant that through the 1990s the non-government sector played a key role in the provision of welfare services and in the implementation of government social policy (CSV, 1992). For example, a study undertaken by the Victorian Department of Community Services during 1989-90 estimated that the community services sector was responsible for employing approximately seventy five per cent of paid staff in the welfare sector (CSV, 1992). For public choice advocates, given that the sector was both well established and heavily reliant on government funding, this suggests a

context ripe for the introduction of a more rigorous regulatory framework. In health and welfare services, the move from historical or submission-based funding agreements towards output based funding in the form of service agreements commenced in Victoria in the late 1980s under the Cain Labor government. This process was introduced in the form of Funding and Service Agreements (Australian Council of Social Services, 1997; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs, 1998; O'Neill & McGuire, 1998). One view as to the intentions of this new regime came from the then-Director General of Community Services Victoria, John Patterson in the twilight of the Kirner Labor government:

From July 1992, the traditional hodge-podge of funding arrangements, which have differed from program to program, and even from organisation to organisation within a program, will be replaced with formal Funding and Service Agreements. These will formalise the reciprocal obligations of CSV and each funding body. They will, as far as possible, be denominated in units of service, rather than in broad qualitative terms. The central objective is to move as far as possible towards a contractual relationship between provider and recipient of government grants. (CSV, 1992, p. xix)

The accelerating reform agenda: the election of the Kennett Coalition Government

The pace of public sector reform and the move towards a quasi-market approach to welfare service delivery field gathered significant momentum following the election of the conservative Kennett Coalition government in 1992, leading some observers to refer to Victoria as becoming 'the Contract State' (Alford & O'Neill, 1994). In addressing the Victorian Parliament in November 1992 on the need for reform in the public service, Premier Jeff Kennett (1992) stated:

Reduction in department numbers will not cure all the current ills of public management. It is important that public sector agencies adopt proper corporate planning and clear corporate objectives. The means by which this will be achieved is by freeing up public sector employment by allowing the chief executive of each agency to manage his or her organisation as if it were a business. Victoria is a State that needs to get back to business and through significant and far - reaching reforms the government means to ensure that businesslike practices and methods will be the norm across the public sector. (p. 354)

With this paradigm there was also a clear imperative towards a more corporate approach to manage the relationship between government agencies and non-government service providers.

The enthusiasm with which service tendering has been engaged within sections of the bureaucracy is perhaps best summed up by Bruce Williamson, Assistant Director, Project and Outsourcing Development, Department of Treasury and Finance in Victoria, when addressing a conference in 1996:

Out-sourcing forms part of the overall strategy for service delivery. It enables a focus on the strategic core and value added business. It leads to benefit (sic) which could be significant. Out-sourcing requires a business approach and it requires very different thinking. (p. 22)

Replacing bureaucratic models of public administration with contracting regimes, it was argued would better serve 'the public interest' by ensuring greater efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of welfare services (see Blacher, 1997; James 1992; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Such reforms have indeed changed the field of welfare service delivery in Victoria.

One of the leading proponents of the Victorian state governments' reform agenda within the Department of Human Services' bureaucracy during the 1990s was (then) Director of Youth and Family Services, Yehudi Blacher. Blacher (1997) provided a spirited defence of the proposed introduction of competitive tendering into the area of youth and family services:

It is an unfortunate aspect of the so-called debate about the virtues or otherwise of CT [competitive tendering], that it is increasingly being undertaken against the background of a view (more as a tenet of faith than a conclusion based on clear evidence) that somehow the 'human services' are different and therefore should be exempt from any competitive tendering process...human services are different but only to the extent that every sector is different from the other. This suggests that what is important is to develop strategies for the efficient and effective delivery of these services not that somehow they should be exempted from a process which done properly can deliver those objectives. (p. 40)

Such an analysis presupposes that welfare services can be managed and delivered in a manner wholly consistent with any form of output-based service organisation. It is a rationality that suggests what is needed are clearly identifiable objectives rather than posturing about diverse service requirements. As such, service quality or performance can be gauged through the attainment of specified objectives.

While the new regulatory framework based on contractual relationships was to become the new orthodoxy, questions remain as to how well the best interests of both those who access welfare and the wider community are served by this arrangement. In relation to the child and family welfare sector, criticisms have been raised that this administration presided over a significant change in the configuration of services, with a significant shift from prevention and support services toward the statutory investigation child protection services (Mendes, 2001a). In the following section I address the legitimacy of these reforms, with particular reference to the adequacy of current arrangements in fulfilling the 'duty of care' for those children and young people relying on welfare services. Applying the analytical frame of field, I highlight the tensions and conflicts as these rationalities were applied in the human service field.

The paradox of regimes of regulation

Current approaches to welfare service delivery associated with the managerialist and contractualist imperatives emphasise standardisation of services in response to the needs of service users in an attempt to bring certainty to an environment often characterised by ambiguity and instability (Brannon, 1985; Parton, 1998).

The contractual arrangements in the welfare sector dictate that governments exert control over how, when and where services are delivered through specifying or

constructing the desired outputs of a particular service. In relation to the accountability mechanisms required of non-government agencies delivering welfare services, Seddon (1998) notes the paradoxical nature of current manifestations of contracting out, "...in the name of de-regulation and market solutions it is necessary to introduce a quite elaborate regulatory regime to ensure that citizens have an adequate means of redress" (p. 94). Taking this point further, the then-Commissioner for Community Services in New South Wales, Robert Fitzgerald (2001) notes the increasingly onerous and opaque regulatory burden facing contracted agencies:

At the present time, it is important to understand that there is not only overt or black letter regulation [i.e. compulsory standards, accreditation], but increasingly what we can call contractual regulation, which is much less transparent but just as prescriptive...Often in community welfare, particularly with the increased contracting out of services, all that has happened is that the regulation has grown markedly, not through legislation but rather through contracts. Contractual regulation now governs much of the delivery of services in the community service system. If legislated regulations were further decreased, they would quickly re-emerge in funding contracts but without the transparency or review processes provided through black letter regulation. (p. 7)

I shall return to the issue of the compliance burden on community agencies in more detail later in this chapter with an examination of the Registration Standards for Community Service Organisations.

The evidence suggests that this is a burden that continues to be a feature of the sector. In a recent investigation into the not for profit sector, the Productivity Commission (2010) made particular mention of the regulatory environment not serving the interests of the sector, noting that the complex compliance regimes in place for many organisations do not serve the sector well. Others have questioned the extent to which contractual agreements establish partnerships of the quality required between government and funded agencies. For Brown and Ryan (2003):

The evidence also indicates that the success of relationships between government and community organizations is determined by the common values, attitudes and approaches of

departmental officers and service delivery staff. Frameworks, policies and service agreements are important symbols of intention, but they are unable to define the whole relationship between government and community organizations. (p. 3)

The authors suggest that a reliance on contracts to mediate this relationship, constrains or compartmentalises the interaction required for a productive relationship.

Public oversight and the opacity of contracts

The Auditor-General of Victoria (1999) raised concerns regarding the proper oversight of arrangements put in place in contractual agreements between government agencies and community organisations, stating that:

There appears to be a widely held belief, particularly prevalent among senior bureaucrats, that financial arrangements with the private sector should be shielded from parliamentary and taxpayer gaze. Unless Parliament is provided with appropriate information, its capacity to exercise its constitutional right to monitor the operations of the Executive will be restricted, and accountability and good governance in Victoria may be irreparably harmed. (p. vii)

It is difficult to rationalise how such constraints on access to information could benefit the public interest. Such criticisms have been well rehearsed in much of the research and commentary on contracting out (see for example Hughes & O'Neill, 2001; Johnson, 2001; Zifcak, 2001).

The positioning of service users and duty of care in the contractual regime

One of the issues that has received relatively little attention in discussion of contracts in the regulation of the delivery of human service is the effect on those who use, or rely, on those services. Proponents of the contractual model argue that a renewed focus of service outputs places the interests of services users 'centre stage' (Department of Health and Community Services, 1996). Paradoxically, the assertion that non-government service delivery organisations are best placed to meet the needs of service users as they provide more flexibility in responding to

local/community issues may be more problematic once they are subject to critical scrutiny. Contractual arrangements may well focus the business of service delivery by stipulating agreed service outputs. The contractual relationship between government and service agencies obviously stipulates roles and responsibilities within that relationship. While the legal status of such service agreements is currently unclear (Yeatman, 1998), the use of a contract centres on the relationship between the service agency and the government, as no such formal agreement exists with service users themselves. In a sense the existence of a contract between these parties privileges this relationship over the relationship with the service users. The government agency is configured as the client rather than the actual service user. The focus on the relationship between government and service agencies arguably marginalises the service user, given that the focus is the provision of quality (standardised) units of services as opposed to a more comprehensive assessment of individual needs. It may well be that public choice theorists imagine that service users will define their own needs and choose the services from the range available.

While much of the evidence about the effects for service users arising out of the increased use of contracts remains equivocal (see House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs, 1998), there is evidence to suggest that these relationships have muddied the waters in relations to the 'duty of care' of the public sector institutions.

Ombudsman Victoria Report 2000

A report published by Ombudsman Victoria (2000) raised serious concerns regarding the contracting out of residential care services for children and young people by the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS). More specifically, the Ombudsman (2000) noted: "I have been particularly concerned with the adequacy of care being provided to those children and young people who are residing within the placement and support system" (p. 24). The report outlines the findings of an investigation of the poor quality of care of five children from one

family, subject to Custody to the Secretary Orders and placed in the care of the DHS. Under the Victoria legislation, the *Children and Young Person's Act 1989* (later superseded by the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*), the Secretary of the Department of Human Services is ultimately accountable for the care of children and young people placed in out of home care. The children were placed in a Family Group Home under the auspices of an Approved Community Service (ACS) agency. The agency that provided the service did so under a contract entered into with the DHS. In his review of the case the Ombudsman was highly critical of the Department's failure to meet its statutory responsibilities to the children. This, he noted, arose out of the mishandling of the children's placement and the subsequent lack of Departmental supervision and intervention. In relation to the contractual arrangement between the DHS and the ACS the Ombudsman (2000) argued that:

With the exception of the funding arrangements being negotiated between the parties, bearing in mind that the Secretary of DHS was the custodial parent of the children by order of the Children's Court, I was unable to find any evidence of DHS having entered into a specific contract with ACS prescribing the necessary standards of care to be met, or requiring that there be specific reports and monitoring of the placement by DHS, exception auditing and other quality assurance provisions to ensure that specific standards would be achieved and maintained. It was evident that the arrangements meant that the Secretary, the court appointed custodial parent, merely relied on oral advice from the ACS and undocumented information provided at annual and unscheduled Case Plan meetings to ensure that the children were safe and being cared for to acceptable standards. (p. 28)

More pointedly, the Ombudsman observed in relation to the Department of Human Services' duty of care to children under its protection, "if you want to contract out services, it is not good enough to contract out and forget about it" (cited in Rollins, 2000, p. 1). While the care of children subject to Custody of the Secretary Orders forms part of the Department's 'core business', this case suggests the inadequacies of the current system of out-sourcing.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee 2001

Further inquiries have provided additional evidence of a distinct failure of the current service delivery frameworks to provide a system of care appropriate to

children in the care of the state. In relation to the inappropriate placement of children in care, the Chief Executive of Kildonen Family Services (Davies, 2000, as cited in Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, 2000) provided a blunt assessment of the situation:

Do we have kids coming in with no substance abuse problem and leaving with a drug problem? Yes. Do we have girls coming in who are not sexually active and leaving a year later working on the streets? Yes. You have to say that is systemic abuse, something is clearly not working. (p. 92)

There is also evidence to suggest that attempts to 'improve' the capacity of residential services for young people have resulted in diminished service standards. The peak body for child and family welfare organisations, the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria, argued that:

...part of the problem is that the economics have become the key driver in the way the system operates. In order to get flexibility and a range of individualised options for kids there has to be a gap between system capacity and system demand. Over recent years that gap has been screwed down so tightly that often kids are ending up in inappropriate placement – the system simply does not have the capacity to provide the flexibility for that option to be available for them at the time they need the system. (Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, 2000, p. 92)

Service agencies such as MacKillop Family Services, Anglicare and Kildonen Family Services have expressed grave concerns regarding the ongoing viability of residential care services as the costs associated with such services far exceeded the funding provided by the state government (Davies, 2001). Similar problems are evident in the area of foster care. Victoria's largest foster care provider, Anglicare, released data showing that a total of 656 children were turned away by the agency due to the inability to recruit foster parents (Saltau, 2001). Such cases highlight the inadequacies inherent in current systems designed to provide care for vulnerable children and young people. They suggest that while young people are placed in the care of the state in order to protect them from abuse, questions remain as to the adequacy of subsequent administration of guardianship responsibilities.

From outputs to service quality

A key legitimating argument offered for contracting of welfare services has been the issue of improved service quality and the argument that services can be delivered both more efficiently and effectively. One of the central criticisms of the earlier submission based funding arrangements was that the lack of a coherent focus on service outputs led to a situation where the cost of delivering similar services fluctuated greatly between different agencies. For example, the Youth and Family Services Division within the Victorian Department of Human Services found that the providers of family support services in one Victorian region “receive notional unit-client allocations ranging from \$263 to \$823” (cited in Carter, 2000, p. 23). Examples like these were used to argue the case for efficiencies via contracting-out. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs (1998) for example, pointed to the benefits of a funding model that placed a greater emphasis on specified outcomes “...contracting out can improve the quality of service delivery because it enables a better understanding of quality requirements through improved specification of responsibilities and required outcomes” (p. xiii). While presenting the possible benefits, the Committee (1998) also acknowledged the lack of reliable evidence to support the claim that contracting out inevitably leads to cost savings:

...there are no detailed empirical studies which have specifically looked at the cost impacts of contracting out of welfare services in Australia. Many studies claiming significant savings without loss of quality have been criticised for not taking into account a number of key variables, such as the costs of redundancies and the cost of the tendering process. (pp. xiii-xiv)

In relation to welfare services many commentators have drawn attention to the problematics associated with measuring the quality of human services (see for example, Harris, 2003; McDonald, 2006). Though McGuire (1997) assumes that it may be possible to measure quality his remarks suggest why this may be problematic “service quality and effectiveness are more difficult to evaluate than efficiency. Not only are quality standards harder to agree on and evaluate, but the

link between client satisfaction, service quality and performance is more complex for public services” (p. 117).

I now turn to what I characterise as the third wave of human sector reform, and emergence of techniques associated with risk management and quality assurance and improvement in the human services.

The third wave of reform: the rationality of the market and the modality audit

While the reduction of service quality to more quantitative and economically tactile forms of output based performance monitoring has increased dramatically in recent times, these changes have not occurred without criticism (see Jones, 1999, McGuire, 1997; Pollitt, 1993; Self, 1993). As McGuire (1997) suggests “needs assessment and accountability for public services are political because the allocation of scarce public resources is contested...often there is not consensus about outcomes” (pp. 117-118). Through setting the parameters by which services will be evaluated, “the role accorded to citizens in the process is mainly one of feeding back, via questionnaires and other market research, their (dis)satisfaction levels with what managements have designed and delivered” (Pollitt, 1993, p. 187).

Power (1999) argues that this development represents a narrowing of the focus of knowledge development within organisations and he suggests:

The audit society is a society that endangers itself because it invests too heavily in shallow rituals of verification at the expense of other forms of organizational intelligence. In providing a lens for regulatory thought and action audit threatens to become a form of learned ignorance. (p. 123)

The effectiveness of services is governed by systems of audit, performance monitoring and other ‘technologies of trust’ (Porter, 1995; Power, 1999), rather than the less concrete, more immeasurable, forms of service outcomes. Such measures of service performance and effectiveness have the obvious potential to relegate the interests of service users to accommodate service standardisation.

One worrying trend is the suggestion that the attainment of quality outcomes is somehow impossible in the absence of such monitoring systems that give primacy to economic considerations. The problem associated with many current forms of performance monitoring is explained by Zifcak (2001): “the disciplinary shift from social to economic science that has been involved has dictated a movement away from evaluation towards measurement” (p. 95). Similarly, in their research in Sweden and England, Berg, Barry and Chandler (2008) note that under the condition of contractualism, “social work middle managers are becoming more generalist than specialist in performing their daily work activities, increasingly separated as they are from work with clients, their managerial positions more budget-led rather than needs-led” (p. 125).

Further, Porter (1995) points out that, “the quantitative technologies used to investigate social and economic life work best if the world they aim to describe can be remade in their image” (p. 43). Such a movement suggests an undervaluing of those factors or issues that defy quantification. Indeed, such a devaluing or mistrust of that which cannot be quantified is present in the research work of Llewellyn (1998) in the discussion of costing and caring in the field of social work:

...the values of accountability and responsibility can still sit in stark contrast to the inherent indecision and ambiguity of social work practice. Where ‘real’ social work (the professional counselling task) has to defend itself against the encroachment of managerialism it can find itself exposed as lacking in substance and as being devoid of objectives. (p. 38)

The devaluing of work not associated with clear and measurable outputs is further illustrated by one regional manager participating in the research conducted by Llewellyn (1998):

They [social workers] say to me that there’s no time to do ‘real social work’ but when I ask what that is they find it difficult to answer. I suspect that often it was having a cup of tea with the client to no particular end. (p. 38)

Criticism is evident as to the adequacy of current performance indicators in human services, particularly in relation to reliability of forms of data collected in providing a credible or accurate representation of desirable service outcomes.

The recurring problem of data management and out of home care

Again returning to the Department of Human Services in Victoria, the Auditor-General in his 1996 Report *Protecting Victoria's Children* was critical of the information management system employed by the DHS to monitor the performance of those agencies delivering placement and support services:

Presently, KIDS [Key Information Data System] is running on software that is inadequate, obsolete and does not provide the quality of information necessary to identify the extent of system inadequacies that planning processes need to be directed to. Reports are generated on an ad-hoc or as needed basis. Central management receive reports that measure agency performance against agreed quantitative performance criteria, such as average occupancy per agency, length of stay of completed and incomplete placements, average occupancy per component of care, and number of clients per type (e.g. respite, emergency, reception etc). While these measures give the overall indication of where clients are placed within the system on a given date, they fail to measure the quality of care that each child has received.
(p. 161)

The (then) Secretary of DHS responded to the Auditor-General's criticism by pointing out that a new information management system, Funded Agency Client Transaction System (FACTS), was to be introduced in 1996 to overcome these problems (Auditor-General of Victoria, 1996). In spite of this, the adequacy of the new system in providing appropriate information regarding out of home services has again been questioned. The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (2000) found that "FACTS does not maintain data on unsuitable placements due to lack of capacity in placement facilities" (p. 90). In addition, "the Committee was surprised to learn that the Department does not gather consolidated data on multiple placements and placement breakdown" (Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, 2000, p. 90). These examples serve to illustrate the significant 'gaps' in information regarding the adequacy of services to young people. Such concerns regarding the

system of child protection and out of home care continue to dog the Department of Human services with these gaps continuing to plague the data systems employed by the DHS. A more recent review of the Child Protection system (Ombudsman Victoria, 2009) was sharply critical of the data system implemented to replace FACTS, the Client Relationship Information System (CRIS). The Ombudsman (2009) noted that:

The evidence provided by senior departmental staff is that the introduction of CRIS has not only failed to provide the child protection system with a more effective tool than its predecessor, it has also impaired the department's efficiency without providing adequate functionality. Many examples have been provided to my investigators of delays in processing reports arising from the introduction of CRIS...[t]hese issues with CRIS have been compounded by inadequate planning and post implementation support. (p. 39)

As contracts with service agencies are constructed around these kinds of concepts of service quality, the development of relevant and useful indicators matters deeply. Opportunities exist for the development of more sophisticated sets of performance indicators that better reconcile with the interests of service users. Such initiatives need to give primacy to the interests of the service user rather than factors whose elaboration contributes little to our understanding of what is actually occurring within service agencies.

From contract to partnership?

With the elections of the Labor Government in Victoria in 1999 strategies were adopted to realign the relationship between government and the community sector. The stated intent of this initiative was to move beyond the purchaser/provider model to a relationship characterised by partnership. As evidence of this new direction in the relationship, the Department of Human Services developed the *Partnering Agreement* (2002) with non-government organisations in the areas of health, housing and community services. The agreement has been viewed as a representation of a reconciliation strategy with the community sector (Productivity Commission, 2010). This framing of this instrument

suggests an acknowledgement or response to the adversarial relationships associated with the prior contractualist practices.

The rise of risk culture and techniques of control and compliance

I now move to a consideration of how techniques associated with risk and more particularly 'risk management' have permeated the human services. Within the human service field (and elsewhere) this rationality of practice achieved increasing legitimisation. For Kemshall (2006; see also Kemshall 2010) the evidence of the proliferation of risk in the practice of human services can be found in the assessments and monitoring tools that increasingly populate the landscape of human services practice. The case example in this section (the Registration Standards for Community Organisations) is analysed and positioned as evidence of both the emergence of techniques informed by conceptualisations of risk and also to highlight the interdependencies and intersections with the rationalities and techniques outlined in the section on managerialism and contractualism.

The practice of risk and risk management has been deployed as a modality of governance to the terrain of human services. McDonald (2006) applies the term "the renaissance of risk" (p. 72) to describe two interdependent conceptualisations of risk; as a technique to assist in the deployment of scarce resources or to manage 'overloaded systems' and, secondly, a moral discourse ascribing new (neoliberal identities) to particular people. Taylor and White (2006) highlight a welfare practice of assessment and decision making that is rapidly and increasingly colonised by narrow interpretations of reason and progress. This is a move that is based on an 'unrealistic' framing of human service practice representing a form of governmentality, of organisation and technique, that has usurped "traditional practices of value and relationship building" (Webb, 2006, p. 47). It is an approach that configures the conditions of welfare as amenable to technical and / or rational responses (solutions). As argued by Green (2007), the management of risk

increasingly occupies a position of preeminence in the administration of practice in health and welfare services.

Green (2007) provides a succinct summary charting three explanations for the rise of risk culture. He highlights the 'risk society' explanation of Giddens and Beck as a byproduct of the confluence of "globalisation...rapid social, economic and environmental change...and the unintended consequences of progress" (p. 397-98). Green describes a response that sought to eliminate or at the least put strict parameters around the issues of insecurity and uncertainty. Moving to the second thesis of the regulation of risk, Green discusses the analysis based on the work of Foucault and the concept of 'governmentality' (I shall return to this concept in more detail in Chapter Four). Here there is a discernable focus on the shaping of conduct through what Garland (2001, cited in Green, 2007) describes as "a modality that involves the enlistment of others, the shaping of incentives and the creation of new cooperative forms of cooperative action" (p. 399). Finally, Green (2007) draws on the work of Power (2004a, see also Power 2004b) and others to highlight that the focus on risk is derived from a pronounced regard for the overt regulation by "government business and the professions to eliminate accidents and errors" (Green 2007, p. 400). The increased use of practice instruments and the systems of surveillance and audit are seen as in the ascendant, an approach to practice that equates visibility or surveillance with good practice.

For human service professions the focus on risk has been associated with rigorous and complex techniques that can be loosely said to attempt to make front line practice more 'transparent' and accountable. For Green (2007) such technologies are representative of a context where empirical evidence has increasingly come to supplant subjective and individualised judgments. He articulates a practice environment where the enactment of discretion occupies a space that is becoming more and more restricted.

For Kemshall (2010), while the risk rationalities are pervasive there is “no inexorable logic of risk” (p. 11). Kemshall points to a tension between normative rationalities of policy and the situated logics of users and workers, highlighting the environment of child protection as a sector where this tension is particularly pronounced. The organising paradigm of risk represents a regime of certainty, a rationality for human service practice that seeks to mitigate against the unknown and gives primacy to stability over contingency. For White, Hall and Peckover (2009), the technologies of risk have created a 'descriptive tyranny' in practice that is inherent in the demand for prescriptive codifying in tools of risk rationality such as the Common Assessment Tool implemented in England. These are tools that have no place for the narratives and justifications that workers often feel are necessary to employ.

As highlighted by Green (2007) there is an alignment between regimes associated with risk management and quality assurance and auditing. In the section to follow I analyse a case example as exemplifying the contemporary technologies of risk and surveillance. The case example is highlighted as emblematic of the increasing legitimacy of these technologies applied to human service practice. To the critical eye, there is certainly an alignment between particular human service disciplines and the project and practice of managerialism (see for example the analyses of Baldwin, 2000; Carey, 2007; Searing, 2003). Rather than representing an oppositional discourse to the modalities of measurement inherent in the managerialist discourse, human service disciplines with an emphasis on instrumental knowledge and activity and behaviour categorisation share a certain compatibility. As Epstein (1999) notes, “social work has been instrumental in turning therapy into social policy” (p. 11). Similarly, Kingfisher (1998) notes that a feature of human service work is the characteristic to “construct clients from otherwise significantly more complicated human beings” (p. 132). There are examples of a number of developments from within the human service field that have been (at least in part) influenced by the discourse of managerialism.

Compliance and assessment in the human services – quality standards and compliance and the framing of front line practice: Case example

The following case example, the Registration Standards for Community Service Organisations, is examined as illustrative of a modality of control. The Registration Standards are an instrument that is wholly consistent with the managerial and contractual imperatives and representative of the rationalities outlined in the earlier section of this chapter. It is a technology that seeks to make the practice of human service work more transparent and, in essence, more 'manageable' and represents an exemplar of the characteristics and strategies of the 'three waves' of public sector and human service reform.

Beyond the sector and organisational restructuring and consistent with the technologies of the 'third wave' of human service restructuring, recent years have seen the evolution and expansion of performance standards applied to community service organisations. The basic premise of these compliance regimes is to ensure service providers conform to, or meet, a set of basic standards. For some, such models of accreditation were seen as a useful antidote or improvement of techniques associated with the rigidity and specificity of contractual techniques of governing service delivery (that is, the focus on outputs and performance monitoring) (see for example Muetzelfeldt, 2000). Such standards have evolved to the point where they represent a rigorous form of governance and surveillance by funding bodies of front line workers and the community service organisations they are employed in.

In Victoria, a range of regimes of standards and accreditation frameworks are presently applied to community service organisations by State and Federal government agencies (for example, in the areas of aged care, health, disability, housing, family and community services, homelessness and community care). Each

set of standards shares a focus on organisational processes, for example, the requirement for certain models of strategic and business planning, processes associated with recruitment and screening and the maintenance of risk management methodologies for the organisation. In addition, many of the regimes specify particular models of practice with service users, for example, models of planning, the frequency of particular tasks or interventions and the maintenance of systems of complaints and feedback. Each regime is supplemented with formal systems of internal and external review or audit to monitor levels of compliance with results made available to the relevant government department.

One of the key difficulties for human service workers is the evidentiary requirements associated with demonstrating compliance with such regimes of standards. I now move to a consideration of the regime of accreditation standards introduced into the Victorian out of home care and family services sectors and explore how these Standards frame both organisational activity and, more specifically, the front line practice of those working with children and young people residing in out of home care.

The Registration Standards for Community Service Organisations in Victoria

In 2007 the Registration Standards for Community Service Organisations were introduced in Victoria. The Standards apply to all agencies funded to provide out of home care and family support services in Victoria. There are eight Standards representing different dimensions of organisational practice that can broadly be defined as governance; organisational processes; human resources, service environment and infrastructure; case practice; building family capability; service responsiveness; and service integration. Each Standard has a series of sub-Standards for example; Standard 5.4a (within the Standards focusing on case management) states “The CSO [community service organisation] adopts a partnership approach when working with children, youth and their families which is responsive to the children’s age, gender, culture, communication needs and developmental stage and works to understand their needs and views in the context

of the family, community and culture” (DHS, 2008b, p. 72). While the Standards tend to be verbose, phrased more as principles than discrete and measurable standards, the regime is accompanied with an Evidence Guide that specifies in great detail the precise compliance requirements for front line work.

Community service organisations are required to conduct an annual self-assessment against each of these Standards, providing four different ‘types’ of evidence to demonstrate compliance for each sub-Standard. The four evidence types are Approach (for example documented policy, procedures or guidelines), Understanding (evidence of staff understanding of policy, procedure or guidelines), Action/Implementation (evidence of policy ‘in action’ for example, in the service user files), and Feedback (evidence of systems to gather ‘stakeholder’ feedback on the policy, procedure or guidelines). This methodology has been adopted to represent a circular and abstracted logic of organisational practice improvement. That is, policy and guidelines are developed, strategies are undertaken to implement the policy or guideline, a process is in place to monitor the application of the policy or guideline in practice and finally feedback and evaluation methods are undertaken to review the conduct and efficacy of the policy or guideline. It is in the production of evidence for Action/Implementation that has direct implications for front line workers.

This system of standards and assessment is not amenable to a more qualitative consideration of practice and outcomes. By design or default it encourages a process of evidence gathering in relation to human service practice that is forensic rather than fulsome, an approach consistent with what Parton (2003) describes as “attempts to rationalise and scientise” (p. 2) human service practice. While it is the organisation that is assessed, the Standards configure work with clients in a particular way that directly influences practice. The work that counts in the Registration Standards is the work that is visible to the auditing eye; the evidence of practice at a particular point in time. For front-line workers the requirements of these regimes are representative of a ‘command and control’ approach to the practice of human services (see Chapman, 2004; Munro, 2010) that places an

emphasis on the prescription and scrutiny of all level of practice. It is an approach to the surveillance and control of organisations that has direct implications for the practice of front line workers. Front line workers are the major producers of the evidence of compliance with practice standards. It is the records (artefacts) of their work with clients, the *Looking After Children* documents, the records of their meetings with children and young people, records of attendance at meetings, the conduct of supervision (although not the content) that is assessed, coupled with the compliance with explicit timelines that control front line practice.

Based on the enabling legislation, the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, organisations found to be non-compliant with the Standards can ultimately be subject to interventions such as the appointment of administrators or deregistration and the loss of government funding. The Standards represent the further evolution of the concepts of managerialism and contractualism with the emphasis on the governance of internal processes. The Standards move a step beyond managerial or contractual modes of governance in that there is a higher degree of intervention not simply in the specifications of service delivery but also in the internal governance and practice processes of the organisation. Compliance with the *Looking After Children* framework (to be discussed in Chapter Three) is a key source of evidence for the practice related standards in the Registration Standards.

Criticisms of the Impact of the Registration Standards

While the Registrations Standards have only recently been implemented there is a small and emerging literature on the impact of their introduction. Murphy (2009) completed a project investigating the implications of the introduction of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (including the Registration Standards for Community Service Organisations) focusing on the issues of governance and autonomy in community organisations. For the participants in Murphy's (2009) study "[t]here was a consistent assessment that the prescriptive nature of the Registration Standards and the intrinsic linking of standards to quality were flawed"

(p. 18). Moreover, the interviewees were critical of the structure of the compliance regime as too focused on compliance rather than service improvement and having a negative effect on practice:

...there was an overall assessment, amongst research participants, that the compliance regime, as it is structured, has blurred the nature of practice. If service delivery is conceptualised as a continuum in which mandatory (and necessary) standards are at one end (Point A) and quality enhancement through specialisation is at the other (Point B), the burden of compliance has meant that [Community Service Organisations] are struggling to move beyond Point A. (Murphy, 2009, p. 19)

The regulatory regime and the detrimental impact on practice was also noted by Ombudsman Victoria (2010). In a report into the placement system supporting children and young people in out of home care, the Ombudsman noted the evidence from witnesses was that the burdens associated with the administration of compliance with Registration Standards had not been appropriately funded. One witness noted:

...compliance was placing too much administrative burden on organisations and what it ended up resulting in is people meeting compliance as opposed to people being able to focus on doing work in the best interests of children. They tended just to have to make sure the boxes were ticked as opposed to being able to have deeper discussions around its relevance. (Ombudsman Victoria, 2010, p. 54)

Evidence such as this suggests that the regimes create the conditions for an emaciated practice as the tasks of demonstrating good practice or generating the artefacts of practice (evidence) becomes more of a feature of day to day work. For the human services worker, it is not sufficient to do something...there must be evidence of the doing.

This type of compliance regime has direct and profound implications for human service workers. It brings to another level the issues of compliance, control and risk management and configures narrow parameters for markers of what constitutes evidence of 'good practice'. For example, gauging the existence of plans, maintaining a record of the number of contacts with service users and so on, is privileged over the more qualitative aspects of the service user experience.

Audit and the realignment of trust

On the question of human service work, the applications of systems of audit have altered the configuration of how good practice is to be constituted. These systems represent approaches to practice in the human services that represent the ascendancy of administrative rationalities over substantive justice goals (Jones, 1993 cited in Power, 1999; see also Ife, 2001). For Power (1999) the emergence of techniques of measurement and audit represent realignment of faith or trust in the rationalities of good practice. Power (1999) questions the view that technologies of measurement represent a more accurate representation of the social world of organisational practice, concluding that:

it is clear that trust can never be eradicated in social arrangements. The audit society is not simply a distrusting society; rather, it reflects a tendency not to trust trust. This means a systematic tendency towards uncritical trust in the efficacy of audit processes, a trust which results in the absence of evaluation of audit process itself. (pp. 136-137)

Power (1999) suggests that trust in systems of audit has displaced confidence in the judgement and discretion of professionals and the predominance of quantification over intuition. It is the issue of professional practice within the human services that I focus on in Chapter Three.

Conclusion

In this section I have sketched the landscape of human service practice in Victoria and outlined the key features of the architecture of the 'field'. I have outlined how the structure and development of the community sector in Victoria, and the colonising effects of regimes of restructuring have altered the politics of front line practice. Focusing on the practice of front line workers, and in particular the deployment of discretion in practice, the regimes of surveillance and control represent a considerable problem. I have outlined a field populated by a disparate and diverse range of community organisations. The unifying discourses and administrative and managerial rationalities aimed at governing organisational

functioning and front line practice gained legitimacy and fundamentally reconfigured practice. Within this field, practice that was fluid or opaque became subordinate or dominated by work that was contained, certain and visible. The implementation of these regimes suggests a climate in which discretionary practice is frozen out, a context where the art and techniques of governing at a distance (Rose & Miller, 1992) have profoundly altered the capacity of workers to practice in a manner that mediates the subtleties of both the needs of services users and the context in which they practice.

In the chapter to follow I move to a discussion of human services workers and the characterisation of the professions of child and family services. In questioning the roles of professions, such as social work, within the conditions of contemporary restructuring Noordegraaf (2007) suggests “the fact that identities are hard to find explains the rather easy longing for businesslike, measurable performance in newly developing professions in public domains” (p. 780).

I will explore how the narratives of the development and experience of human professions (and in particular social work) have marked practice at the front line. I situate these narratives in the context of how professions have engaged in their role within community organisations and their role and response in the techniques of practice governance.

Chapter 3 – Professional identities and demarcation at the front line: professional rationalities of practice

Wherever there is social work, the social worker is always tied to a source of authority. I think that this is an absolute rule. That is clearly the situation in prisons and also in industry. Social workers don't actually possess authority. They have some freedom of action but no real authority. (Thibaud cited in Foucault et al., 1999, p. 91)

If we can think of practice as an art, the relevance of the arts and humanities is that much more apparent. Social work practice is often referred to as both an art and a science. But regardless of where science fits into the scheme of the profession, art is what we do, what we use interpretively, imaginatively, and creatively – that is, if the practitioner is not numbed by a preoccupation with the mechanics of theory, method and technique. (Goldstein, 1992, p. 51)

Rules, relevance and boundaries: the human service professions and welfare work

Following on from the previous chapter which charted the evolution and restructuring of human service organisations and the distribution of power as new technologies of (risk management and systems of audit) practice gained a dominant position, this chapter articulates how the development of the human service professions, specifically social work and youth work, can be understood in the human service field. As the account of the organisation of human services in the previous section suggests, the child and youth services sector does not possess a singular or strong institutional presence. It is a context that does little to facilitate a unified and organised professional presence. As I shall outline this milieu, coupled with the ongoing problematics associated with debates regarding the recourse of, for example social work, to professional status, has undermined attempts to establish or enact clear professional boundaries or demarcations in this context.

This section explores the extent to which rationalities of professional practice have gained legitimacy or otherwise in work at the front line.

I then move to an analysis of how human service professions are positioned within this environment. Just as the structure of the non-government sector in Victoria has impacted on the experience of restructuring it has also had a role in the fragmentation of the orthodoxies associated with professional boundaries in the human services. The proliferation of organisational boundaries has disrupted the already somewhat muted influence of these professions in the creating of a discrete space within front line practice. While this tends to suggest a diminution of the influence of the methodologies of social work in human service practice, I outline linkages or commonalities between certain techniques of controlling front line practice and rational instrumental streams within social work knowledge. This section explores how the voices of human service professionals are to be heard and enacted through informing the practice frameworks and tools.

Focusing on the issue of practice in the human services requires an analysis of the composition of the workforce and the development of human services professions and their role in shaping the terrain of front line practice. The application of professional knowledge is an exercise of power not based on technical rationalities of resource rationing or actuarial techniques of risk management but instead the exercise of clinical or other (in Goldstein's (1992) example, social work) knowledge. In the quote highlighted above, Goldstein (1992) suggests a practice beyond the reductionist conceptualisation of work as rule-following behaviour or the mannered application of a technique.

The phrase 'professional discretion' as applied to human service workers comes with considerable conceptual baggage. What do we mean by 'profession'? Is it appropriate to apply this term to human service workers? Is it simply the skills that are learned through training in, and performance of, specific work? Does

membership of a professional group actually constrict the application of discretion? How does this notion sit with the values associated with the disciplines in this field? These are difficult questions. Debates regarding the nature of social work professionalism have raged since the 1960s (for examples see Etzioni, 1969; Ferguson, 2003; Garrett, 2003; Hugman, 1991; McDonald & Jones, 2000; Parton 2003; Rose, 1990). To date the responses to these questions remain contested and unresolved. While the connection has rarely been made, these contests are strikingly similar to those taking place in the field of anthropology where methodological questions are similarly debated and ideas of meaning and interpretation have been interrogated (see Ortner, 1984).

This chapter concludes with an analysis of the *Looking After Children* framework, as an instrument that represents rationalities consistent with both the project of ordering the population of children and young people in out of home care and as a means of surveillance of the work of front line workers. The case management tools that comprise the framework serve the interests of technical or bureaucratic rationalities by deploying modalities of work that are consistent with a discourse of social work. In the field of practice the tools are exemplary of the currency of rationalities consistent with an administrative logic. These tools sit neatly within the discourse of evidence based practice. This discourse is becoming more prevalent in the language, policy and practice of human service work (Jordan, 2000; McDonald, 2006).

Human service professions and the community sector

A key aspect of this research is to examine how to conceptualise the human service professions today in the field of practice in light of its history and development, and how has the changing organisation of the human service sector impacted upon the work carried out. The term 'human service workers' is a deliberate one. As outlined, while this study initially sought to study the work of social workers, the definition of what we term 'social worker' and 'social work' remains problematic.

Despite the prevalence of Schools of Social Work in Australia, the diverse characteristics of the work carried out and the increase in other areas of formal training, in areas such as youth work and welfare studies, has muddied the waters of the formal qualifications required in particular work or sector. Within the competing logics of practice in the human service field the authority of the social work is muted. For these reason this study has applied the term 'human service workers' or 'human service professionals' to accommodate the lack of clear lines of demarcation between those performing tasks associated with welfare service delivery. In mapping this change this study will focus on the emergence of human service professions and chart the key areas of development.

Much of the literature regarding the development of human service professions shares a basic assumption about the location of human service workers delivering welfare services. That is, the development of human service professions can be gauged by examining the degree to which graduates were employed in the public sector bureaucracy (Chenoweth & McAuliffe, 2005; Hough, 1994; Laragy, 1996; Lawrence, 1965; Markiewicz, 1996a). Lawrence (1965) seeks to equate the development and success of the Australian social work profession by illustrating the increasing numbers of social workers employed within the bureaucracy and mapping the rise in numbers of social workers in upper levels of the welfare bureaucracy. While these developments are significant, such work ignores the practices and input of those human service professionals employed outside the government sector.

The presence of social workers and other human service professionals in the non-government sector is largely ignored. Writing in 1979, Scott was one of the first researchers to acknowledge this significant gap in the understanding of the development of social work in Australia. Scott (1979) noted:

there is extensive work on the history, growth and current practice of the Commonwealth, State and municipal organisations, but the fourth arm of administration, the voluntary

sector has been neglected by social and political scientists...Even less is known about the influence that professional social workers have exerted on voluntary agencies. (p. 39)

For Scott, the experience of work in the non-government sector had not entered the discourse of social work. Social work had not defined, nor been defined by, its presence in this field. This early analysis continues to have relevance. Since this work was published, the question of the role and influence of professionals within this sector has not been well developed in the literature.

In the discussion of the influence of professionals and professional knowledge this distinction is important, as the non-government sector increasingly becomes the major employer of human service professionals (Hawkins et al., 2000; MacDonald, 1999). Despite the literature that equates the emergence of human service professions, such as social work, to its increased presence within the State bureaucracy, the evidence suggests that the majority of human service professionals in Victoria are not employed by government agencies. For example, research conducted by Community Services Victoria (CSV) illustrates that the non-government sector employed approximately three times the number of social and welfare professionals as the relevant state government department (CSV, 1992). This is supported by further research conducted in 1995-96 in Victoria, which indicated the majority of university graduates employed as 'social workers' were employed outside the government sector (Hawkins et al., 2000). More recent data appears to confirm this trend continues, with data from the 2006 census suggesting the just under sixty per cent of social workers were employed in the non-government sector (DHS, 2008c).

This data provides compelling evidence when considering the experience of social workers employed in this context. Just as an analysis of organisational restructuring of human services outlined in Chapter Two paid specific attention to the role of community service organisations in the provision of welfare services, this chapter examines the role and position of human service workers employed in this field. In

turn I also focus on how the location and composition of the human service workforce has undermined the structure and influence of professional boundaries. A unifying logic of human service professions has not been able to exert a dominant presence in the field of practice. This analysis links to the empirical work completed for this research, discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, based on interviews conducted with human service workers employed in the community service organisations to further explore the influence of professional rationalities on front line practice.

The professionalisation discourse in out of home care

In a series of reviews of out of home care in Victoria it was becoming commonplace to include among the recommendations a renewed focus on professional education and training as a means of improving the quality of care for children and young people (for examples see Carter, 2000; DHS, 2001a; 2001b; Morton, Clark & Pead, 1999; see also Loch, Bristow & Newbold, 2008). In a dominant narrative of the field, the skills and capacity of the workforce in out of home care was framed as lacking the requisite knowledge and expertise for working with children and young people placed in the care system. More recently, Victorian state government initiatives have focused on employing 'expert practitioners' to provide intensive in home care for children engaged with the child protection system (DHS, 2009b).

This discourse is part of a long history in the welfare field of calls to 'professionalise' welfare work and by doing so to fulfil the dual aims of legitimising the role of welfare workers and to bring a degree of exactitude, certainty and rationality to human service interventions (Lawrence, 1965). The assertion regarding the value of trained human service workers, such as social workers or youth workers, appears straightforward and commonsense. As with many axiomatic claims it is in interrogating the assumptions where things start to get messy. What is professional practice? More specifically, how is professional education and training manifested

in practice? How is the question of discretion to be approached in this context or, to refer back to Goldstein (1992), what is the source of, and where is the place of, creativity and imagination? As has been discussed earlier, the arena of human service practice is contingent, uncertain and constantly shifting. It is not my intention to end the debates regarding the role of professions in the human services; rather it is to provide a brief account of the development of the professions to contextualise the discussion of front line practice in the human services.

This chapter explores the relevance of training and education (professional or otherwise) as a component of both the structural conditions of welfare (the field) and the possible orientating dispositions (*habitus*) of individual workers. This section relies heavily on the literature from the field of social work. This is not to suggest the dominance of social work knowledge in the welfare field. The lessons drawn from social work research, in terms of the influence of professional knowledge on practice, and, more specifically, practitioners' understanding of how their work is enacted, is more developed in this field. My approach seeks to transcend the debates regarding the merits or otherwise surrounding the professionalisation of social work and other human service semi-professions. I do not wish to engage in a diatribe against the usefulness of training and education. I believe training and education, professional or otherwise is an important starting point in discussing the practice of workers. My point is simply that we need not begin *and* end there. The section to follow examines the extent to which human service professions, professional training and professional identities have been legitimatised or de-legitimised in this field of practice. With Chapter Four I proceed to further the analysis of how practice is constituted.

Social work and human services

The Australian Association of Social Workers *Code of Ethics* (2002) states “Social work operates at the interface between people and their environments. Social

workers are qualified professionals who practice their profession in a broad range of government and non-government settings” (p. 1). The meaning behind the phrase “qualified professionals who practice their profession” is of particular relevance to this study. The initial concern of this study was to investigate worker autonomy in the current organisational and policy context and the ability of workers to apply the skills, knowledge and values that they have developed through the course of their training in, and performance of, human service work. A number of authors have already made contributions towards charting the development of these professions, particularly in relation to the development of social work (Bush, 1999; Gleeson, 2008; Lawrence, 1965; Markiewicz, 1996a; 1996b; Swain, 1980) and youth work (Bessant, 1997; Irving, Maunders & Sherington, 1995). With regard to social work, some researchers (for example Lawrence, 1965; Swain, 1980) provide a linear account of the development of social work as emerging in colonial times through the institutionalisation of the ‘friendly visiting’ work of the Melbourne Ladies’ Benevolent Society (Swain, 1980) and the follow-up care provided by hospital almoners (Lawrence, 1965; O’Brien & Turner, 1979). Others have pointed to a distinctly more disjointed narrative of social work (Gleeson, 2008; Mendes, 2005). Mendes (2005) suggests a profession with major gaps in its “knowledge of social work practice, education, activism and professional organisation” (p. 121). He points to a social work with a range of professional and political identities.

McDonald (2006) has suggested that the development of social work (as with other professions) is a modernist project rooted in assumptions regarding the welfare state and the development of a singular identity of practice and the pursuit of a clear place within the architecture of welfare. These are assumptions that have experienced significant disruptions undermining the certainties associated with the practice methodology and the institutional context of social work. In the following section I analyse the key developments in the project for recognition of the social work and youth work professions and detail the debates that have accompanied this project.

The development of social work in Australia

Published in 1965 John Lawrence's *Professional Social Work in Australia* set about outlining the development of social work as a profession. His account remains influential as it was the first detailed attempt to bring together a defining narrative of the professionalisation project in social work (Swain, 2008). While not without significant flaws, this narrative sets the scene for future analyses of social work in Australia and provides the foundations for many of the key assumptions attached to the location, methodology and influence the profession.

Lawrence (1965) asserts that the development of the social work profession in the 1920s resulted from an environment characterised by "...urbanism, industrialization, social and economic change, a large social service expansion, particularly in the government sector, overseas example, and the stimulation provided by qualified social workers themselves" (p. ix).

The influence of social workers' striving towards recognised expertise is supported by Bush (1999), who argues that in the period from 1920-39 a younger generation of social workers sought to distance themselves from the established models of social work. That is:

natural qualities of sympathy, tact and generosity on their own were not enough. Maturity, wisdom and experience were less highly valued. In their place, more valued were objectivity, youth and an awareness of up to date, technological theories in hygiene, nutrition and mental health and how to most effectively apply these to individual circumstances. (Bush, 1999, p. 272)

With its emphasis on the maintenance of 'expert' knowledge and the formulation of 'scientific' systems of practice, this work is open to considerable criticism. This is a view supported by van Krieken (1991) who argues that the period 1923-1940 was characterised by a shift to become more scientific, systematic and efficient. In this analysis, legitimacy and the power to exert control in this area (field) of practice resided in the capacity of the profession to articulate a unified and codified practice.

Saleeby (1990) describes a less methodical social work as a profession with the four cornerstones of indignation, inquiry, compassion and care.

Depending on one's point of view Lawrence's (1965) book demonstrates either a rustic charm with little relevance to today's diverse human service environment, a stinging indictment of the invisibility of issues of power and domination that have been directed towards the discipline since its early development in the more radical analyses or a response situated somewhere in between. As a basis for examining the development of social work Lawrence's work provides an interesting but somewhat dated analysis. In later years a number of authors have sought to challenge or re-examine his work (Kennedy, 1985; 1989). One of the weaknesses of Lawrence's study was the absence of a discussion regarding the key institutional players in the development of the profession. For example, the centrality of the voluntary sector to the project of professionalisation is largely ignored as are the underlying assumptions that informed the model of casework practice.

Social casework as the primary practice method

The early training methods in social work centred on 'social casework' forms of practice (Lawrence, 1965; O'Brien & Turner, 1979). That is, practice with a "concentration upon the units [individuals and families] of social breakdown" (Lawrence, 1965, p. viii). This form of practice derived from early understandings of sociology and psychology, providing the epistemological base for social work that heavily influenced education programs until the 1970s (Cornwell, 1976; Crisp, 2000; Lawrence 1976; Parker, 1979). This casework model was a form of social work that Garton (1990) suggests was heavily influenced by the English model of practice with an emphasis on social aspects of poverty rather than the American model that was influenced by psychological approaches. The emphasis on social casework was mirrored in employment outcomes for social workers. Using survey results from a study conducted by the Australian Association of Social Workers in 1968, Lawrence (1976) points out that the vast majority of social workers were employed in positions where social casework was the primary function. For Lawrence, the

maintenance of this type of expert knowledge and practice was a key element in social work's claims towards professional status.

Social work as a profession

The development of a 'recognised' knowledge base is only one element in the path towards recognition of professional status (and legitimisations in the field of practice) and I shall return to this point shortly. Within the developing field of social work, the pursuit of professional status has similarly involved a discussion of core characteristics. Lawrence (1965) asserts that the following characteristics are to be found in the 'established professions': community recognition as a distinct occupational group with certain rights and duties; a general common purpose; shared intellectual techniques acquired only after prolonged training at a tertiary educational level; a fundamental knowledge, or theory, at the basis of the group's practice that is capable of being set forth systematically; conformity to certain standards of behaviour (code of ethics) and collective responsibility to use their knowledge for the benefit of the community. Lawrence (1965) argues that a set of preconditions need to be established to form the basis of a profession. He asserts that the professional group has specific rights and duties as set out in a code of ethics. Lawrence (1965) was convinced that, to varying degrees, the discipline of social work in Australia had succeeded in fulfilling the basic requirements in these key areas, through the development of state and national professional associations and the accreditation requirements attached to training institutions. For Lawrence (1965) social work had become a powerful orienting discipline in the field of practice in human services. Whether through the induction of trained social workers populating the sector to a particular way of working, or the capacity to deploy recognised approaches to social work, his analysis suggests a significant authority in determining 'how work should be done' in this setting.

In a similar although more detailed analysis of the characteristics of professions more broadly, Larson (1977) lists the following common elements or traits as combining to form a profession (or 'professional phenomenon'): professional

association; cognitive base; institutionalised training; licensing; work autonomy; colleague control; and a code of ethics. In relation to social work in Australia, serious doubts remain as to the extent to which the profession has fulfilled these criteria. As shall be outlined, there is no agreement as to the cognitive base with debate continuing as to the foundations of social work knowledge. Also, the goal of work autonomy and collegial control remains beyond the grasp of social work in many institutional settings. Social work while bound to institutional and organisational settings has increasingly struggled to define a distinct, discrete or privileged place within these settings.

In his analysis of the practices of power in the caring professions (nursing, social work and remedial therapies), Hugman (1991) turns his attention to the claims of professional status and professional knowledge. With Lawrence, Hugman (1991) identifies the methodology of casework practice as the main and most prestigious form of social work; the practice that defines the profession. While noting the success of social work (or more specifically social workers), in colonising the academic posts within social work, Hugman raises a series of questions in relation to the claims of social work to professional status. He notes that the claims to a knowledge base for social work are inextricably linked to the acceptance of certain of the social sciences. In addition Hugman (1991) notes that “social work was an emerging profession bringing together strands from other practices which made no claims to professionalism” (p. 89), a characteristic that has further blurred the claims to a professional stature.

Training and education for social workers

Lawrence (1965) argued that the key to the development of the profession was the introduction of training to the work of ‘social provision’. He asserted that the formalisation of training for social workers was required as:

it was claimed that mistakes in relief-giving arose mainly from a lack of thorough investigation of the circumstances of the applicants. Investigation, or study as some preferred to call it, was a necessary prerequisite for assisting people, whether with material or other help. Indiscriminate giving was likely to be harmful to applicants as well as a waste

of funds. The untrained worker tended to become immersed in 'doing' and 'giving' instead of finding out the facts of the case, particularly how the client saw his [sic] own problem. Helping people help themselves was too little the aim and still less the achievement of untrained social workers. If agencies now needed to pay their social workers, to be worthy of their hire they should be trained. (Lawrence, 1965, p. 31)

Formal training in social work was initially provided through hospitals and the state based training boards (Lawrence, 1965). During the 1940s the work of social work training was taken over by a small number of universities (in Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney) although Lawrence (1965) notes that in the initial stages this did not involve a substantive change to the content and length of the course. In his later account of the development of social work in Australia, Lawrence (1976) charts the development of social work training and education and the steady and significant expansion in the number of universities offering social work undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications. This expansion has continued subsequent to Lawrence's analysis. From the early modest presence in universities, social work programs grew steadily. In 1980 there were approximately twenty undergraduate programs with this number growing to twenty-six by 2009 (Healy & Lonne, 2010, p. 11).

Criticism of early analyses of social work

With his book *Charity Warfare: the Charity Organisation Society in Colonial Melbourne*, Kennedy (1985) provides one of the more radical criticisms of Lawrence's views on the development of the social work profession through his study of the practices of the Charity Organisation Society in the late nineteenth century. In a lively critique of the prevailing interpretations of social work history, Kennedy (1985) argues that:

Historians working within the profession like to interpose wave after wave of 'changing attitudes' and 'reform' between the 1890's and the 1920's. Then in the 1920's they arrange for the infant profession to arise out of the sea, fresh from nowhere, in a blaze of glory...The origins of Australian social work as a profession, meaning the beginning of its existence in reference to the principles and concepts, and the social conditions which gave rise to them,

and the social practices which derived from them, belong to the later nineteenth century and...to the first decade of the Charity Organisation Movement in Victoria. (p. 198)

Kennedy (1985) argues that contemporary models of casework are to a large degree informed by the punitive and radical approaches of the Charity Organisation Society. He firmly frames this role as one of policing and subduing disadvantaged populations. His work suggests a *de facto* application of the Poor Laws in Australia. This work certainly enlivened the debate around the development of the social work profession. Clearly, the interpretations of the development of the profession of social work differ dramatically, whether it is the 'moral missionaries' as portrayed by authors such as Swain (1980) or Bush (1999) or the conservative class warriors as defined by Kennedy (1985; see also Musgrove, 2003; Peel, 2005).

For Mendes (2007) the debate regarding a focus on the structural versus individual causes of social problems can be traced to the genesis of social work and early debates between Mary Richmond and Jane Addams. Such interpretations illustrate the contested nature of much of what is put forward and serves to illustrate that the understandings of past events are not as straight forward as sometimes assumed. To a certain extent, these debates remain at the periphery of this research and are only emphasised to highlight the degree to which these philosophical debates or fissures have acted as a barrier towards the modernist and unifying narrative of the project of professionalisation in social work. Of interest to this project is the development of technologies within the profession to adapt to the practice of 'social provision' and the degree to which these methods gained currency in the work of welfare service delivery.

The expansion of social work and human services

The period following World War II was characterised by a substantial increase in the provision of welfare services by governments (Bryson, 1994; Jones, 1990). As Bryson (1994) states, this period was marked by "...a gradually expanding welfare state with increasing social rights and the progressive extension of state-provided

services” (p. 292). Indeed, following the early periods of development, the social work profession appears to have flourished from the 1950s to the 1980s (McDonald & Jones, 2000). During the 1950s the demand for qualified social workers exceeded the supply (Markiewicz, 1996a). A substantial increase was recorded in the number of social workers employed in the state and federal bureaucracy in both caseworker positions and prominent administrative posts during this time (Lawrence, 1976; Markiewicz, 1996a). This trend did not equate to the establishment of clear professional authority or practice boundaries in these fields. As McDonald and Jones (2000) point out, despite the proliferation of trained social workers:

Social work’s success in meeting this demand was uneven, with significant variations in different organisations, sectors, fields and States. Success depended on ensuring a reliable supply of qualified workers and on convincing managers across a range of fields and organisations that employing social workers with professional accreditation represented a more efficient and effective means of staffing their services than employing other occupational groups. (p. 5)

The authors argue that the social work profession’s ability to capitalise on the growth in the human service sector was hindered in part by the “rapid growth in other forms of social welfare education and training” (McDonald & Jones, 2000, p. 5). Indeed, running parallel to the project of professionalisation in social work was the emergence of other welfare professions in sectors such as child and youth services, such as youth work.

Social work identity and unity of practice

The project of professionalisation was a quest for the legitimisation of the practice of social workers, a process to nurture the development and provide space for the expression of ‘expert’ knowledge. Accompanying the pursuit of professionalisation questions remain as to the place and direction of social work. As Gross (2007) suggests that, “all professions require a sense of history so that they can anchor their roots” (p. 150). It is clear that the history of social work in Australia is, at best, partial with significant gaps and omissions in the understanding of its development

(Mendes, 2005). We can trace some of the ambiguity of the current role in tracing back the meaning of 'profession'. As Freidson (1986) illustrates, the term is grounded in the Latin 'profess'. Such a conceptualisation obviously prizes a unified form of shared knowledge, a singular cognitive base. This pursuit remains one which the profession of social work has found elusive or unwanted. Simply put, 'what does social work declare?' The answer presupposes the discussion of its professional standing and either reverts to a degree of generalised abstraction that becomes meaningless or a cacophony of anthems (and connections to a range of social sciences) that serves to undermine the narrative of the professionalisation project.

Social Work: conflicting identities

Within the field of social work philosophical debate regarding the foundations of practice continues without clear resolution. For Reamer (1993) there lies a tension within social work between proponents of a practice that is informed by rational instrumental knowledge and those supporting a practice framed as a more creative, artistic endeavour. At a macro level, Reamer acknowledges a further binary in identifying the potential fissures of approaches within the profession focusing on transformation and structural change with those focusing on the individualised clinical skills associated with counselling and psychotherapy. While the language may have altered this debate has been a feature of social work literature over many years.

Reamer (1993) suggests that social work occupies the intersections between "intellectual, scientifically based rigour and value based commitment to human rights and justice" (p. 194). Irrespective of the validity of Goldstein's (1992) argument (cited at the opening of this chapter) regarding the positioning of social work practice as an art we can discern that this locates a practice that is antagonistic towards the structures of professional demarcation and control. Writing from within the radical tradition, Pearson (1975) identified four discernible

and opposing streams of social work; the conservative, the liberal or reformist, the Christian/humanist tradition and the radical. Not unexpectedly, Pearson suggests a social work that is rich in a moral and political discourse. His outline of the traditions of social work presupposes a conflict in the foundational understandings of practice. For Reamer (1993) the resolution to such tensions lies in an ambitious return to “the ideas that helped inaugurate social work and give it shape and meaning” (p. 196). He suggests a greater focus on the place of both scientific knowledge, the canons of logic and aesthetics of practice as a means of unifying the profession while acknowledging that key philosophical questions may remain 'forever blurred'.

Professional currency in social work

Social work and social workers can be seen as occupying but not defining the human service sector (field). Based on an analysis of the historical literature in Australia, Mendes (2005) suggests there remains a lack of a unifying narrative or discourse to inform the ongoing development of the profession. In an earlier work Mendes (2001b) argues that the positioning of the profession has been unduly influenced by media attacks on social workers. For Mendes (2001b) the tabloid positioning of social workers as “bumbling and incompetent” (p. 30) or as zealous child removers, had not been countered effectively by professional associations. His analysis suggests a profession that is not only hindered by a lack of internal unity but also one that is actively undermined by conservative interests in the media.

As outlined by Thibaud (cited in Foucault et al., 1999) at the opening of this chapter, social workers have a certain degree of autonomy in their work but the 'profession' does not afford authority by virtue of their membership of this group alone. Similarly, McDonald (2003) argues that while the occupational grouping of social work has grown over recent decades, “it continues to have a marginal role in the Australian welfare state” (p. 127). The assertion that social work does not have a clearly defined place within the human service sector and struggles to maintain professional demarcation is echoed by Martin (1990) who highlights that relatively

few employing organisations require specific accreditation to professional associations, such as the Australian Association of Social Workers. A more striking suggestion although somewhat axiomatic in the context outlined above is provided by Powell (2001) who argues the fragmentation of the social work discipline positions the profession as “a prime candidate for professional abolition” (p. 23).

For others, there remains significant potential to enact a discretionary practice which is informed by a professional identity in social work. In her research focusing on meaning and identity construction with child protection workers in Victoria, D'Cruz (2004) presents a more hopeful analysis on the possibilities for a professional identity and practice and the application of a model of professional discretion (see also Fook, Ryan & Hawkins, 2000). D'Cruz highlights the potentialities of a reflexive and critical practice as a way of overcoming the simple binary (and unhelpful) oppositions that are in evidence in the practice of child protection workers. This analysis is directed at social work as a profession within the child protection sector and is based on her emphasis on social work methodologies such as critical reflection as the primary pathways to re-enacting discretion in the child protection settings. As a consequence her work suffers from the assumption that social work occupies or is capable of occupying the position as the dominant and consistent professional orthodoxy within this field. There is limited evidence to suggest this is the case and further evidence to suggest that this sector also reflects the malleable lines of professional boundaries that have been highlighted above in the non-government setting.

As an element of the human service field, social work continues to exercise an uneven level of influence on how work is done. Through the analysis of the development of social work, this section has highlighted the limitations to the legitimacy and authority of the profession. Within the field of practice, social work lacks the clarity of a unified epistemological base to guide a disciplined practice.

Contemporary practice and the maintenance of professional boundaries

The conceptualisation of professional boundaries as becoming increasingly blurred is supported by Noordegraaf (2007) and his framing of 'hybrid professions' under the competing conditions of, for example ambiguity and the rationalities of managerialism. For Noordegraaf the contemporary context ('domain') has become increasingly complex and fluid, thereby undermining or overtaking the turf of 'pure' professionals. Noordegraaf (2007) suggests a fusion of professional models to adapt to the conditions of ambiguity that define the contemporary context:

This is highly relevant in ambiguous domains, in which expertise can no longer be isolated from other experts, decision makers or clients. It is highly relevant in the face of rising demands and declining capacities. It is highly relevant in mixed occupations that bring together (contradictory) types of control, such as managerial professionals and professional public managers. Hybridized images of professionalism do not emphasize only occupational control (pure professionalism) or organizational control (situated professionalism) but reflexive control (i.e., reflexive searches for a professional use of professionalism) to establish meaningful connections between clients, work, and organized action. (p. 780)

Noordegraaf (2007) suggests this model of professionalism represents not only a path forward to accommodate the changing context of practice but also a way of creating a “new sense of belonging” (p. 780) for professions struggling for a clear identity. For Noordegraaf (2007) conceptualisation of professionalism bound to simple knowledge or organisational based demarcations are increasingly redundant:

Cases, clients, costs, and capacities interact in multifaceted ways. New ways of ordering and controlling collective conduct are sought—or more specifically, new ways of linking street-level work, organized action, and outside worlds. Working floors are linked to collective action, and managerial work is linked to new demands. These linkages are neither fixed, as they used to be, nor loose; they call for subtle and selective standards. These linkages, moreover, are also used to legitimate work. Because legitimate linkages can never be definitive, present-day professionalism goes hand in hand with patterns of fragmented association. (p.781)

With this analysis, Noordegraaf provides a pathway to move beyond ossified characterisations of profession within the conditions of contemporary practice. For

Noordegraaf the key to social work gaining a more dominant or privileged space within the field of welfare work lay in engaging rather than resisting new rationalities of practice. The approach suggests a focus more on expertise within specific locales rather than the more abstracted or generic framing of professional or clinical knowledge.

Youth work in out of home care

The anecdotal evidence suggests that human service workers with a youth qualification also represent a significant proportion of the out of home care sector. While there is approximate data on the size and composition of the health and welfare sector (for example Healy & Lonne, 2010; Productivity Commission, 2010), data as to the education and training background of those employed in out of home care as a subset of this sector is not available. Many of the elements of my arguments deployed in relation to the diffusion of social work identify and influence in the human service sector are equally relevant, even more so, when describing the location and influence of youth work and youth workers in the field of out of home care.

The development and proliferation of youth work education and training options

While the origins of social work can be traced back to the early twentieth century and beyond, the emergence of youth work is a more recent development. Youth work as an organised activity emerged from the National Fitness Movement, an initiative aimed at providing sporting and recreational activities for children (Irving et al., 1995). The formalisation and expansion of youth work training commenced in the 1960s (Bessant, 1997; Irving et al., 1995; Maunders, 1999). In Victoria, youth work education programs were initially provided in the non-government sector by organisations such as the YMCA. During the 1960s, universities became involved in providing formal training, with the Victorian Social Welfare Department also establishing its own training course (Irving et al., 1995). More recently, the field of youth work has been subject to a degree of fragmentation, with the proliferation of

a range of qualifying education and training options at both a university and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) College level. As Corney, Broadbent and Darmanin (2009) note of the multiple youth work training options, “in the community services sector, there are approximately fifty qualifications, from work experience and entry level to advanced practice qualifications” (p. 41). The authors' go on to argue that the non-degree courses in youth work are becoming a substitute for an undergraduate degree and, thereby, undermining the integrity, identity and industrial influence of youth work.

The development of the youth work profession shares much with the project of professionalisation undertaken within social work. Further evidence suggests that, similar to social work, a diverse range of rationalities are evident under the banner of 'youth work'. For example, in his content analysis of the journal *Youth Studies Australia*, Hemmings (2008) highlights:

despite the relatively large percentage of articles underpinned by a conceptual or theoretical framework, there was no evidence of an increased use of such a framework over the [10 year] review period ...no one theory was dominant across the time frame of the review. (p. 12).

Debates regarding the professional identity of youth work continue (Bessant, 2004; Sercombe, 2004). Unlike social work, youth work does not have a clearly articulated code of ethics (Corney et al., 2009) and authors such as Sercombe (2004) and Bessant (2004) suggest significant divisions within the field on the questions as to the desirability of pursuing a project of professionalisation. These factors, coupled with a context that is organisationally diverse, signify a challenge to the maintenance of discretionary spaces based on the authority or hegemony of professional membership and knowledges based on social work or youth work training and accreditation. In considering the positioning of youth work and youth workers in the field of out of home care these factors, as with social work, have contributed to the undermining of the influence in gaining a more dominant

position. While some influence is evident in the spaces for practice, youth work has not established a defined space for discretionary practice.

Education and training characteristics of the human service workforce

In their recent analysis of the social work and human service workforce, Healy and Lonne (2010) highlight an organisational context that is representative of a growing and diverse range of training and qualification backgrounds. The data presented by Healy and Lonne does not provide details as to specific subsets, such as out of home care, within the human service field. The analysis provides a useful picture of how the training background of the wider workforce has changed in recent years with the development of new qualifications, particularly programs developed within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector such as Certificate III and IV and other social and behaviour science programs. Healy and Lonne (2010) also estimate that approximately twenty per cent of the direct care workforce in the human services does not have at least a certificate level qualification (p. 57). For the authors this diverse configuration of the workforce has had the adverse consequence of diluting the high-level practice skills and values of staff. Healy and Lonne (2010) sound warning on the possible dangers of the mix and rigor of training and qualifications in the sector:

the workforce needs have been met by graduates from an increasing range of qualifications, most of which have curriculum that has not been consistent or developed with close industry support or cognizant with theory and research on social welfare practice. (p. 57)

This contributes to a landscape for human service practice representing a multiplicity of practice and training approaches. While each of these disciplines, to varying degrees, can lay claim to specialist or expert knowledge or knowledges, it is apparent that within the human service sector the demarcation lines between different professions in this field are less than clear. This reinforces the need to broaden the field of enquiry when attempting to focus on models of discretion in specific disciplines of human service workers.

Practice discretion

The framing of the discretionary practice of front line human service workers

While often not directly stated, many of the narratives constructed around the impact of recent reforms suggest that, prior to the emergence of the techniques associated with managerialism and contractualism and other modalities of control, the work completed was relatively unproblematic. This implies that constraint and contradiction or a clash of ethics is a new feature of human service practice.

Obviously this is not the case. This type of analysis can too often present an etching devoid of personality and possibility. Indeed, many of the developments that have come under fire in recent years were the direct result of trying to address the problems evident under previous regimes or models of practice. As selected authors (see for example, Harris 2003; Ife, 1999; McDonald, 2006; Powell, 2001) suggest, social work in a 'cold climate' is nothing new.

In this section I examine how the response to control and regulation of front line work has been conceptualised. As I have illustrated, human service work and human service workers have always practiced within an institutional context. While my analysis highlights the often dispersed characteristics of this setting within community agencies, these activities none the less have been performed within an institutional or sector context. It is a context increasingly guided by a mix of black letter law, regulation and other compliance related activities.

I do not suggest that child and family services have moved away from a focus on the overt control of front line practice. Frontline workers working with children and young people involved with the statutory child protection system know full well that the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of practice are often explicit, immovable and far reaching (D'Cruz, 2004; Munro, 2010). In this section I develop a discussion of how front line practice is to be understood within this terrain. The positioning of social workers within a practice sphere of competing organisational and ethical accountabilities is

not a new feature of human service work (Harris, 2003; Pearson, 1975). It is not a dilemma that has been created with the emergence of the techniques of managerialism (contractualism and so on). Conflict (for example, competition for resources, between ideologies, organisations and so on) is a defining characteristic of the spaces of social workers and other human service workers occupy. The field of human service practice has always been a site of considerable conflict with the imperatives to ration resources and discipline the conduct of particular populations competing with professional, organisational and other ways of working. As an institutional activity, the capacity to negotiate and mediate the organisation (and organising) demands of the welfare sector is a key and valuable attribute for human services workers. The section to follow examines how the issue of practice discretion is framed within the human service field.

Discretion as front line policy production

It is in the nature of what we call human services that the unique aspects of people and their situations will be apprehended by public service workers and translated into courses of action responsive to each case within (more or less broad) limits imposed by their agencies. They will not, in fact, dispose of every case in unique fashion. (Lipsky, 1980, p. 161)

In his influential account of the work of front line practitioners (street level bureaucrats), Lipsky (1980) suggests that a central feature of their work is the production of policy (see also Evans & Harris, 2004; Kingfisher, 1998). He suggests a role with the fundamental virtue of discretionary practice to negotiate competing rationalities. This is a role that requires decision making capacity based not on the abstractions of formal policy or bureaucratic procedure but instead on the basis of the individual needs and circumstances of services users. For Lipsky, due to the pressures and uncertainties of their work environment, practitioners were constantly producing policy and enacting a practice that mediated the harsher demands of public or organisational policy. While highlighting the positive use of discretion in the interests of services users, Lipsky is careful to acknowledge that the conditions can be used by practitioners in a way that is counterproductive to the interests of service users and/or fraudulent. He frames street level bureaucrats as

“agents of control” (Lipsky, 1980, p. 11), as actors required to bring order or regulation to situations of conflict. In considering human services as a field of practice, Lipsky’s analysis suggests that while the unifying and codifying methodologies of bureaucracy were dominant, this domination was far from absolute.

Constraints on discretionary practice

In the concluding sections of his work, Lipsky (1980) turns his attention to what he frames as the 'assault' on human services. While his analysis predates the language of 'managerialism', the responses and techniques to the fiscal tightening of welfare policy and the greater reliance of forms of accountability sit comfortably within this discourse. Lipsky correctly points out the ‘cause and effect’ abstractions associated with his conceptualisation of bureaucracy, which share many of the characteristics of managerialist techniques of governance, are rarely clear cut for the practitioner dealing with real people and their lives. He provides four conditions or prerequisites in the project to increase the levels of accountability of front line workers; the establishment of clear and graded priorities; the development and maintenance of performance management processes; benchmarking and comparability of worker performance; and the establishment of incentives and sanctions to discipline workers. The discussion of the *Looking After Children* framework at the conclusion of this chapter represents a modality that encompasses these conditions.

In relation to the influence of professions such as social work in front line practice, Lipsky (1980) suggested that this status inoculated practitioners from the more reified excesses of bureaucratisation. This allowed members of these professions, through their deployment of professional knowledge, to practice in the interests of service users rather than according to the rationalities imposed by the bureaucracy. For Lipsky the profession occupied a dominant position in the field of practice. While Lipsky's analysis of discretion as a fundamental aspect of the application of

public policy and the delivery of public services retains much of its relevance and applicability in the contemporary analysis, its significance is qualified. In relation to the field that is the subject of this study, his analysis of the status and influence of human service professions and professionals, as argued in the preceding pages, remains problematic in the out of home care sector in Victoria. In turn, while his analysis does acknowledge the emphasis on performance measurement and monitoring, it (understandably) does not anticipate the degree to which the modalities of control and the instruments of surveillance would evolve over time. The development and implementation of instruments of surveillance and control have further opened up street level work to the gaze of governance.

In a more contemporary analysis of discretion focusing on the site of social work in the United Kingdom, Harris (2003) argues that the spaces for the application of discretion were severely eroded with the reforms to welfare (and other) practice associated with Conservative governments. For Harris, the positioning of social work as a dominant actor in the sphere of practice has been eroded as this restructuring and reform progressed. He points to a range of structural (for example, the introduction of a funding and services model characterised by the purchaser/provider split) and procedural (for example regulatory responses to welfare system failures) reforms as altering the architecture of practice (see also McDonald, 1999). This analysis of a discretionary practice that is increasingly constrained and marginalised represents a strong theme in the literature of human service practice. In this Australian context the assertion of greater control over practice is shared by Hough and Briskman (2003) who argue that the transplanting of corporate planning techniques into the welfare field has coincided with a decline in the professional power and autonomy of a range of professions (including social work, in relation to youth work see also Bessant, 1997). The accompanying focus on time-limited contracts and task-based or procedural interventions has resulted in a deprofessionalising of welfare practice (Dominelli, 1996). Through his examination of the practice of child protection workers in the United Kingdom practice, Spratt (2000; 2001) suggests that despite a professed move in the language of policy and

organisational intent towards a more child welfare orientation, a narrow conceptualisation of decision making based on managing risk remained a pervasive influence on practice. Based on their interviews with child protection workers and a review of case files in Victoria, Stanley and Goddard (2002) suggest an alternative framing of front line practice. The authors describe a practice that is inextricably linked to the trauma and abuse suffered by the children and young people who are the subjects of investigation. Their work describes a practice environment that is infused with high levels of violence; violence against children and young people and also against the workers themselves. Stanley and Goddard assert that it is violence or the threat of violence that drives a high degree of decision-making and practice for front line workers.

The systematic changes brought about through the prevalence of rationalities of risk have also altered the practice of welfare (Kemshall, 2002). Kemshall suggests a practice that has moved away from individualised assessment and the expression of (professional or otherwise) judgement towards a practice defined by 'matching' eligibility and outcome. In a later work, Kemshall (2010) opens the possibilities for discretionary practice in this context, highlighting the resilience of individual value frames and ideological beliefs in the interpretation and application of the technologies of risk.

In their study of 'governance at ground level', Considine and Lewis (1999) suggest that attempts at greater control of front line activity through the increasing clarification of regulatory arrangements do not necessarily translate into a homogenising of the practice of actors although they cited evidence from some workers to suggest that the dominant narratives of practice are internalised. The authors speculate that such regulation can only seek to constrain or place parameters around choices rather than prescribe specific direction. Similarly, in their research with social workers employed by the Australian social security agency Centrelink, McDonald and Chenoweth (2009) point to a decline in professional

autonomy brought about by the conditions of New Public Management. This change represents a shift in the value sphere associated with their work and the emergence of theories and technologies of ordering practice. In acknowledging this environment of increasing restriction of areas of practice, McDonald and Chenoweth suggest that new spaces for the expression of agency (application of discretion) are opening up to resist or engage the prevailing paradigm.

Front line practice and the coproduction of policy

In an analysis with similarities to Lipsky's, Kingfisher (1998) provides an examination of the coproduction of policy by front line workers. Rather than focusing on the front line workers as mediating the interests of service users Kingfisher, turns her attention to the role of contemporary discourse and shared organisational narratives in the coproduction of policy. In this analysis, sense making is conceptualised as a collective activity. With her research with welfare workers in the United States, Kingfisher paid particular attention to how front line workers collectively produced policy within an agency. She monitored the conversations between workers to explore how they framed particular service recipients, often with harmful consequences for their service users. Kingfisher (1998) highlights incidents of the workers "referring to their clients in a pejorative tone of voice, sometimes resembling that of a stern parent speaking to a recalcitrant child" (p. 129) or frequent talk of service users as "liars" or "lazy". In turn, Kingfisher notes how such representation would feed into how the workers would apply their own discretion. For example, workers would ensure that the requests from perceived "liars", "pests" or "child abusers" would go to "the bottom of the pile" (Kingfisher, 1998, p. 130). For Kingfisher (1998) such interactions represent the prevailing ideology in action:

'The ideology 'personal responsibility'...along with its attendant characterisations concerning laziness vs hard work, honesty vs dishonesty and morality vs immorality, provides a resource that workers draw on in their concerted efforts to make sense of and construct clients and policy...such ideologies are not determinant, but rather are accomplished and reproduced (or not) by people in interaction. (p. 130)

Here we can see the powerful effect of attaching particular meanings to contingent situations. Kingfisher describes a practice that, while informed by the specifics of agency policy, is applied in a manner that is reliant on the interpretation of the practitioner. It is an interpretation that can alternatively undermine, negate or reinforce the influence of specific policy intentions.

Control and technologies of front line practice at the front line

One factor that appears to receive scant attention in the literature on the elements that constitute a profession is the ability to influence or inform social policy. It is in this area that human service professions, such as social work, have had some success. The strength of the social work profession does not seem to reside in practitioner/group autonomy or unified practice methodology but in the influence from some quarters on the language and techniques evident in the development of administrative modalities of practice. I use the example of the *Looking After Children* framework to explore this issue in more detail.

The *Looking After Children* Framework: Case example

The *Looking After Children* Framework⁴ is exemplary of a technology that can be interpreted as the modality to discipline the actions of both the subject and the actor (that is the case managers and the service user / young person) by providing a tightened frame for human service and organisational practice through prescribing both categories of service users and articulating or mandating responses. In the section that follows I highlight how the *Looking After Children* 'records' both frame correct behaviour for the subject of the records and also represent a guiding compass to shape the conduct of the workers applying the records in practice. The *Looking After Children* framework was developed in the United Kingdom as a

⁴ For a more detailed history of the development of the *Looking After Children* in the United Kingdom, Australia and elsewhere see for example Kufeldt, Simard & Vachon, 2000; Parker, Ward, Jackson, Aldgate & Wedge, 1991; Wise, 2003a; 2003b.

response to the very poor outcomes for young people in out of home care. The framework is used as a case management tool for young people placed in the care and protection of the State. It is a framework that is informed by a developmental discourse of children and young people and particular ideas of the role and functions of 'the good parent'. The framework is structured around seven 'life domains' that inform a series of related tools and processes. The life domains are health, education, identity, family and social relationships, social presentation, emotional and behavioural development and self care skills. From a critical perspective, it is an approach that can be situated as one of the "technologies of intervention ... [with the emphasis on] observation, measurement, assessment and administration" (Foucault 1984, cited in Epstein, 1999, p. 90). This is a technique applied to a population that seeks to "discipline, regulate, administer and arrange" (Epstein 1999, p. 14; see also Garrett, 1999a; 1999b; 2002). The *Looking After Children* framework can be examined as a technology to govern *both* children and young people in care and the workers that are positioned with the responsibility of applying the records.

Beyond the United Kingdom, the framework and tools have been applied in a number of countries including Canada and Australia. Much like the Westminster system of government, the *Looking After Children* framework has been adapted and applied in different ways in the jurisdictions that have adopted it. For Nygren, Hyvonen and Khoo (2009) the framework represents a 'travelling idea', a policy initiative that is a:

concrete and detailed approach exemplifying how reforms are spread internationally...Countries introduce reforms through imitation, but reform implementation depends on contextual factors such as differing constitutional arrangements, administrative systems, reform traditions and cultures, and such factors account for the motives, opportunities and consequences of reforms. (p. 494)

In Victoria, the application of the *Looking After Children* framework has been mandatory for all children and young people entering the out of home care system since 2002 (DHS, 2008d). All agencies providing out of home care are required to

implement the framework. As set out below, the *Looking After Children* framework is applied in Victoria using a series of documents to be completed by human service workers in consultation with children, young people in the out of home care system and their families. Each record is to be completed within specific timelines.

As a system of case management, the *Looking After Children* framework revolves around the completion of four separate practice tools (or 'records'); the Essential Information Record (EIR), the Care and Placement Plan (C&PP), the Review of the Care and Placement Plan (RC&PP) and the Assessment and Action Record (A&AR). The information recorded in each tool is structured around the seven 'life domains'. The *Looking After Children* framework specifies timeframes within which each record is to be completed. The EIR is completed at the time of referral and updated regularly (at least every six months), the C&PP is to be completed within fourteen days of a child or young person entering a out of home care placement, the process of filling out the A&AR begins immediately following the first C&PP and is completed over the following six weeks, and the RC&PP follows the completion of the A&AR and informs the development of a new C&PP. The *Looking After Children* records are lengthy documents⁵, for example the C&PP is approximately 24 pages long and the A&AR can run to in excess of 62 pages for a young person aged 15 or over. The thread of individual accountability runs heavily through these documents. All needs that are identified have a corresponding section outlining how it will be responded to, who is the person responsible and a specified completion date.

While there is a clear administrative logic to the approach, timelines and the linkages between the records, as the above description highlights the *Looking After Children* documents represent a detailed and highly structured practice tool for social workers. The records are consistent with what Webb (2006) frames as a 'technology of care', an instrument concerned with "the governance of uncertainty" (pp. 141-142). The framework takes the qualitative concept of 'care' and seeks to

⁵ With the exception of the Assessment and Action Record, these documents are now completed electronically in Victoria. The page numbers of the previous hard copies are listed to convey a sense of the breadth of the information contained in the tools and the work involved for social workers.

break it into component parts, making it more measurable. It contains a high level of prescription both in term of the content of the tools and the timelines within which they are to be completed. For Chambon (1999) instruments of this type present a reconfiguration of the work of practice with service users:

The structure of a timetable imposes a pace on the activity and a degree of effort on the part of participants; it also differentiates between one activity and the next. In social work we can think of the rationing of time and the pace of appointments, or the planning of client activities, as constitutive processes. (p. 63)

Given the widespread application of the framework, the critical response to the *Looking After Children* framework and the records has been relatively muted. The debate has been characterised as one between “relatively uncritical advocacy of LAC or its wholesale critique” (Yeatman & Penglase 2004, p. 233). Garrett (1999a; 1999b; 2002; 2003) has provided a spirited critique of the key assumptions underlying the system. He (1999a) highlights the problematic position of the *Looking After Children* system and its use both as a tool for research and as a practice tool for social workers. For Garrett, the *Looking After Children* framework is attempting to be a servant of two masters, each with priorities that to a certain extent sit in opposition to one another as an instrument to gather evidence as opposed to a guide for good practice. Such a tension leads to the argument that the application of the tools involves pressuring workers to devote a disproportionate amount of their work towards recording information contained in *Looking After Children* tools rather than spending time with their clients (Munro, 2001).

Garrett (2002) also notes the silence of the tools on the issue of class and power, factors that appear to be a more salient characteristic requiring redress for the population of children and young people entering out of home care systems. In a similar vein, Yeatman and Penglase (2004) raise questions as to the efficacy of individualised planning approaches such as *Looking After Children* in providing service user centred responses beyond narrow service delivery contexts. Perhaps

more tellingly, Garrett (1999a) argues that *Looking After Children* documents, particularly the Assessment and Action Record, are rooted in assumptions that are potentially oppressive and contain powerful subtexts about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. For example, Garrett (1999a) highlights the tools “unquestioning bias towards adult authority figures (teachers and managers)...[that] are rooted in normative assumptions and social conformist imperatives” (p. 301).

Such normative assumptions can be found in the Social Presentation section of the Assessment and Action Record for young people aged 15 and over “Do you know how to adjust your behaviour and conversation to different situations (for example at work, TAFE, or school, with friends, teachers or managers, at home or with people you don’t know very well)?”

Also, to the question of a young person’s behaviour the Assessment and Action record states, “Objective 1: The young person’s appearance is acceptable to young people and adults” and respondents are asked to provide a response along a continuum from “acceptable to young people and adults” to “not acceptable to either”.

The *Looking After Children* tools themselves are somewhat resilient to change. In keeping with the discourse of the market, the *Looking After Children* tools associated with the framework are licensed. The tools' licensing obligations can prove to be a disincentive to the easy adaptation of the tools. In Australia, the University of New South Wales and Barnardos Australia hold the *Looking After Children* International License. The use of the tools and any changes that an organisation or agency would like to make to the tools will attract a fee.

Rationalities of practice: the link between human service professions and administrative logic

Far from representing a pure expression of administrative or managerial logic, the *Looking After Children* records are also informed by a methodology consistent with

particular streams of social work. The 'profession' of social work is complicit in the development of these tools (Garrett, 2003), although it is a social work that is more representative of the rational instrumental knowledge (Reamer, 1993) or 'objective research' academy based knowledge (Garrett, 2003) than streams of social work that emphasise social action and transformation. For example, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, a behaviour screening tool developed in the field of child psychology (Goodman, 1997) which is becoming more widely used in the child and youth services sector, is incorporated into the key assessment record within the framework. With the emphasis on data recording and the generation of evidence, the tools are consistent with the discourse of evidence based practice that has gained currency in the human services and sections of the field of social work (McDonald, 2006; Webb, 2006). The records represent a rich source of evidence, not just of the configuration of the needs of children and young people but also of the practice of front line workers. The strong current of accountability ensures that they not only represent a technique of knowing and ordering children and young people, they also represent a technology of knowing and ordering front line workers.

Garrett (2003) suggests that while widely used, the views of supporters of the framework have remained relatively unchallenged in the social work literature. Interestingly, for a practice tool based on outcomes, the records themselves have remained untouched by a rigorous evaluation process. For Garrett, the *Looking After Children* framework represents a subjugation of the interests of children and young people in care to the dominant managerial interests of containment and demand management. He points to the dangers of the records as an expression of power being configured as devoid of politics through deploying the modalities of objective science. Furthermore, while the *Looking After Children* framework incorporates an explicit focus on 'family involvement', the parameters placed on this involvement and the intricacies of the records themselves can render the process opaque or alienating for families. Despite an emerging literature that has critically engaged the framework in the United Kingdom, this has been largely

absent from the Australian social work (and other) literature (for exceptions see Halfpenny, 2009; Yeatman & Penglase, 2004).

From the point of view of the front line worker, the *Looking After Children* Framework and associated tools can be seen as representative of a wider trend that is positioning work with children and young people in out of home care as an increasingly technical task. In relation to front line practice, Garrett (2003) argues that the *Looking After Children* system is a “reinvigorated form of Taylorism” (p. 48), a process whereby the complex and ambiguous work with children and young people is reified into a series of discrete, measurable and observable tasks. The tools and records represent technologies of governance for the population of children and young people in care (I shall return to the issue of governmentality in Chapter Four), a method of knowing and organising this cohort of young people, embedded with discourse(s) regarding the categorisation of normal and abnormal conduct. The records are not only applied to shape the behaviour and conduct of the target population but also that of the workers applying them. The size, detail and timelines of the documents ensure that they are a dominant entity in the interaction between front line case managers and residential workers and requiring of an architecture of process to support the completion of the records. While the records are a periodic and ongoing surveillance device for young people the completion of the records is also subject to a monitoring regime. Every six months, data on the completion rates of the records within individual community agencies is gathered, aggregated and published by the Department of Human Services (for example 2007a; 2007b; 2008a). This six monthly data has been collected since 2005.

Remembering the pre-Looking After Children context

While Garrett (2003) deploys a forceful argument, the *Looking After Children* system cannot simply be framed as an expression of pure managerial control as it is informed in part by techniques developed within the human service professions. This is consistent with the governmentality thesis that places emphasis on

governing practice through deploying expert knowledge. Moreover, while briefly outlining the context within which the *Looking After Children* Framework was initially developed, Garrett's account does not adequately acknowledge the systemic failure of the pre-*Looking After Children* system to care for children removed from their families. This context parallels the Victorian experience with consistently poor outcomes for children and young people in out of home care being a feature of the system (DHS, 2001a, 2001b; Wise, 2003b; Community Affairs References Committee, 2004; 2005). It was a context characterised by a lack of accountability and attention to the voice and needs of children and young people in care. Young people were too often slipping through the cracks of the system. In this context the *Looking After Children* or similar framework can provide greater rigour to the process of managing care. However, at this time there is a lack of reliable data to support any claims that the application of this system contributes to better life outcomes for children in care in Victoria.

Looking After Children: the mandatory use of the records?

The *Looking After Children* framework presents front line workers with a practice and surveillance tool of considerable rigour, a technocratic instrument with little space for discretionary practice. Despite this there is evidence of a disjuncture between the theory and application of the tools. The data gathered by the DHS (2008a) highlight rates of compliance that do not reflect the prominence of the tools. For example, in the *Looking After Children* Monitoring Report for the period October 2007 to March 2008 notes:

The most frequently used LAC record was the Essential Information Record (EIR); it was used for approximately 70% of all children and young people in full time care. This was followed by the Care and Placement Plan (C&PP) with approximately 65% usage, the first review of the Care and Placement Plan (C&PP Review) with approximately 50% usage and finally the first Assessment and Action Record (A&AR) which was used for about 30% of all children and young people in full-time residential care and approximately 45% of all children and young people in full-time home based care. (DHS, 2008a, p. 3)

The report also highlights significant regional variation in the completion of the records (DHS, 2008a) and this pattern is repeated in monitoring reports for other

time periods (DHS, 2007a; 2007b). In the recent report into the out of home care placement system, Ombudsman Victoria (2010) also highlighted the "significant non-compliance with the minimum registration standards required of community service organisations in relation to *Looking After Children* processes" (p. 55).

Moreover, a project in Victoria to aggregate data from the Assessment and Action Records (DHS, 2008d), noted that significant sections (for example information relating to 'Education' of children and young people) were not recorded. The data suggests there has not been a passive or ordered acceptance of the records in front line practice. The emphasis on making practice more discrete and observable, as a means of furthering rates of compliance, has not been reflected in the monitoring data.

As with many other areas of the out of home care sector, the monitoring regime attached to the *Looking After Children* framework continues to evolve. As the above data suggests, the 'mandatory' use of the records may not as yet be reflected in rates of completion but changes have been made to improve rates of compliance. The Registration Standards include a focus on the completion of *Looking After Children* records. This linkage emphasises the interconnectedness of the regimes and layers of governance in the out of home care sector. The inclusion in the Standards provides the DHS with an instrument of significant control over community service organisations and front line workers.

Conclusion

The analysis of the role and status of human service professions within the child and family service sector presents as a conundrum. Applying the concept of 'field' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) to the analysis of the community sector highlights a context where the discourses of social work or other human service professions have not achieved high level of ideological legitimacy or dominance. While the evidence suggests that this sector, including the child and youth service sector continues to be the employer to the majority of social workers, the influence of

professions and professional rationalities within this context is far from clear. The absence of a clear and unifying practice methodology, coupled with a lack of lines of professional demarcation in the sector, combine to cloud and diffuse the development and maintenance of a professional 'turf' or authority in the field. These features, coupled with the characteristics of the sector outlined in Chapter Two of a diverse, dispersed and localised architecture of organisations, further diminish the institutional presence of human service professions at the front line. The multiplicity of non-government organisations that are the primary service providers has further undermined the possibilities for the clear boundaries that are an essential organising feature of the professional project. While other human service professions such as teaching and nursing have benefited from a stronger and more singular institutional base, this has not been the case for social workers and youth workers in the child and family service sector, to the detriment of their professional (and industrial) standing. While social workers and youth workers populate this sector, they do not define it. This feature, coupled with the development of a large albeit fragmented (non-government) child and family services sector, positioned the professional demarcation of social work as particularly vulnerable to more procedural techniques of welfare service delivery that characterised the restructuring of human services.

While the professions may be a muted presence from within the sector, the influence of social work knowledge/s remains discernible in front line practice. As illustrated in the analysis of the *Looking After Children* framework, I have outlined how the development of case management frameworks and tools have been informed by certain ways of social working and evidence based approaches to practice, making a strong contribution to the governance of the activity of front line workers. These instruments are strongly informed by particular types of work with individuals. The framing of children and young people and their subsequent needs (and risks) has been presented as a mode of governance.

I have outlined a context where these modalities of control are increasingly accompanied by multiple regimes of surveillance and techniques of governance that have sought to transform, through discourses deploying the language of transparency and accountability, the realm of front line practice from a 'private' sphere of practice to a more public exchange. It is an exchange increasingly based on the framing and categorisation of populations of services users according to particular ways of 'knowing' their characteristics and needs. The net result of this ontological approach is to expand the conceptualisation of governance of service user populations and also practitioners. This explanation has led to a way of understanding the motivation for practice not based on a simple political economy of 'doing what you are told' but instead incorporating a more nuanced approach to practice based on 'doing what is understood to be right'.

It is not my intention to frame the elements outlined in Chapters Two and Three as representing the totality of external exercises of power in the practice of front line workers. I argue that these characteristics and instruments (such as the Registration Standards and the *Looking After Children* framework) of the out of home care sector are the salient features of a practice context rich in modalities of control and unifying discourses of practice tempered with an institutional and professional diffusion. It is within this space that I now turn to an examination of how the act of practice is interpreted.

I have outlined a field that is representative of both unifying and disassembling narratives. I have articulated a work environment that is diverse and disparate and rich in the expressions of power. It is a context where the techniques of risk management and practice surveillance have become increasingly prominent. Far from being externally imposed rationalities on the human services context I have sought to highlight the alignment of the certain forms of clinical knowledge that have informed the development of increasingly sophisticated modalities to shape front line conduct.

In the section to follow I examine more closely the issue of practice; of practice as representing the site of the relationship between the internal and external worlds. Having provided an account of the key features of the external world I move to a discussion of how the experience of that world shapes practice and how the experience of the internal world in turn shapes the interpretation of the external world.

Chapter 4 – Theories of practice: reflex, rationality or feel for the game?

People also produce representations of the social world, including representations of themselves and their productive activities – people never simply act, their representations of their actions and domains of actions are an inherent part of action, action is reflexive. (Fairclough, 2000, p. 170)

Having taken the time to focus on the ideas informing practices associated with managerialism and contractualism, the development of human service professions and work, I now turn to the question of what this means in terms of the work front line practitioners carry out. The question that precedes the analysis of ‘how are we to understand these practices’ is, of course, how do front line workers themselves understand the work that they do? How is practice configured within this milieu of diverse rationalities of discipline and control? What are some useful conceptual tools to bring to an analysis of practice? To a large extent the influence of each of the factors I have outlined so far depends on how practice is conceptualised.

The point I make is that the practice of front line workers is not a simple matter of stimulus and response nor is it a matter of front line practitioners acting with unbounded freedom in contravention of agency or funding body policy or a mixture of the two. The actuality would seem to be a great deal more complex and shifting.

Implicit in much of the discussion regarding the increases in the instances of prescriptive practice, as the techniques of managerialism are implemented, is an assumption regarding the absence of human agency among front line workers. That is, the dual suppositions that rules or policy provide a clear and accurate picture of subsequent action or that change can be uniformly affected through top

down management approaches. What is interesting to note are the instances where the policy implementation process has broken down or the application has been uneven, as highlighted in Chapter Three in the uneven implementation of the *Looking After Children* framework. This feeds into the large question of how are we to understand the act of practice by front line workers. In the human services assumptions of compliant and controlled practice ignore clear evidence of the uneven implementation and application of policy. Many have conceded the field too quickly in the analysis of contemporary practice.

'Restumping the house': moving beyond the theory versus practice debate

Debates surrounding the legitimacy of theory versus practice, or variations on that theme continue to be raised in the social work profession (see for example Chan & Chan, 2004; Osmond, 2005). It is difficult to explore this debate without slipping into caricature. The dispute seems to be between those who privilege practice wisdom or 'on the job' experience and those that support forms of practice that are empirically based and grounded in a form of scientific method. It is a contest between the idealism of 'the way things should be' and the pragmatism of accommodating 'the way things actually are'.

The terrain of this dispute centres primarily on the experience of graduating social workers entering the workplace (see for example Harré Hindmarsh, 1992). The 'problem' stems from the extent to which new graduate's expectations, goals and beliefs are undermined, inhibited or ignored in the day-to-day practice of the social worker. In a sense this is the battle for the hearts and minds of these new starters. For example, in a detailed study of the experiences of graduating social work students, Harré Hindmarsh (1992) outlined the oppositions experienced by new practitioners. Harré Hindmarsh (1992) uses the term "oppositional practice" (p. 245) to describe how social workers attempted to mediate, for example, the competing demands of their agencies and their own ideas of effective and

appropriate practice and their experience of “a gap between what they wanted to achieve and do and what they were able to achieve and do; moments when the conditions of their practice resisted their intentions” (p. 245). The central problem of this dispute runs very deep, it is blindness to individual agency. The valorising of the practice based approaches incorrectly presupposes that it is possible to have practice without meaning (an act without theory, an intervention without logic). This is a view that frames ‘commonsense’ as ahistorical. As was outlined in the previous chapter, explicit ‘theory’ can come in many guises through informing policy guidelines, practice instruments or simply providing a language to frame particular actions. Practice obviously stems from a view as to the way things are. Similarly, the theoreticians err in not accounting for the ‘lived in’ nature of the social world. The realm of practice is a world that constantly resists classification and codification.

Policy virga and practice resistance: the curious case of the inoculated front line worker

In the field of meteorology the term *virga* is used to describe rain that evaporates before it reaches the ground. As the drops of rain fall to earth the resistance of the air steadily diminishes the drops until they completely disappear. A steady rain in the upper reaches of the atmosphere is experienced as nothing more than persistent cloud cover on *terra firma*. This seems to be quite analogous to the problems associated with the implementation of policy and other mechanisms to police activity at the front line. How are these inconsistencies to be explained? The question remains as to why change can be effected in some instances but not in others, with certain rationalities of policy more evident in practice than others. Much of the literature regarding failures in the policy implementation process seems to convey the central problem as one of policy not being communicated well enough or simply misunderstood. A more likely assumption is that just as resistance to change can take many forms so too can the motivations for such action.

Differences in the application of rules or policy are complex issues. The following section sheds some light on this area of practice. It is a question that goes to the heart of how practice is understood and conceptualised; a question that goes beyond simple concepts such as practice discretion. As I have illustrated in the previous section, the professional discourse that threads through disciplines such as social work posits the worker as practicing a reasoned logic through the application of techniques informed by a theoretical framework or frameworks. As was argued in the previous section, the key assumptions of the professional project in youth work and social work have become increasingly more unstable as fissures in, or diffusion of, the practice methodologies have become more pronounced. What is clear from this section is that the professional project does not provide a strong thread with which to analyse the practice of front line human services workers.

The question of discretion: how will we know it?

The question of discretion is central to this research project. As I have outlined, the context of human service work is a complicated one. The history of the development of human service work, the human service sector, the changing relationship between funding bodies and service agencies and the modalities of regulation and prescription and professional (and other) training have all altered over time. How then are we to understand discretion? If the practice of human service workers is viewed as a constellation of activities, discretion can then be understood as the ability to work with a degree of autonomy *within certain parameters*. The easiest path would be to simply chart acts of resistance or rule breaking. Deeds defined as “industrial deviance” (Pearson, 1975, p. 27), “banditry” (Jordan, 1990, p. 67) or “subversion” (Evans & Harris, 2004, p. 888). These terms describe acts of resistance that stymie, inhibit or undermine the explicit policies of the day in the service of clients or the interests of the workers themselves. While such an investigation would have some merit, my own approach is somewhat broader. It is not simply to view the application of discretion as separate or distinct from practice. The act of discretion is an exercise of power, in the sense that the

actor “in the particular circumstances obtaining at a given moment, is able to successfully enrol and mobilise persons, procedures and artefacts in the pursuit of...[his/her]...goals” (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 183). Discretion is the extent to which workers are able to pursue what s/he believes is the appropriate path and to what extent it is a feature of their work.

This of course can be framed in another way. Discretion may flow from the worker’s literacy in the conditions of their work, of knowing the ropes so to speak. For the purpose of this study, one of the key aspects of discretion is that it is a deliberate or considered act. While uncertainty is a feature of both forms of discretion it is the deliberative qualities of the application of discretion that concerns this research. From this starting point discretionary activity encompasses a range of activities such as fudging the rules or using them to a particular end, practicing in the ‘blind spots’ of policy, re-authoring dominant orthodoxies or rationalities, strategies of enhancing autonomy, passive resistance to outside interference or surveillance and so on. As Wittgenstein (cited in Stern, 2003) suggests, “rules leave loopholes and practice has to speak for itself” (p. 189).

It would be a mistake to view the application of discretion as a fundamentally positive activity. Just as discretion can be utilised to enhance the experience of service users it can also detract from this experience. Human service workers can make bad decisions and the history of the human service sector is rich in stories of abuse and oppression (see for example Kingfisher, 1998; Margolin, 1997). Moreover good intentions are no guarantee of positive outcomes for those relying on community service organisations. This way of viewing discretion has an overt moral quality and raises the question as to what ends this autonomy is used. This leads to the issue of how the practice of human services workers is to be understood.

The starting point for this analysis of practice is to discuss the discipline of front line practice and the territory and analytical tools Bourdieu (1990) highlights, to begin to analyse what informs practice. The previous section contained material regarding the external or contextual drivers (influences) of practice. The prescriptive practice that is evident in deploying the *Looking After Children* framework or the evidentiary requirements associated with demonstrating compliance with external registration standards. The analysis of these systems suggests a simple cause/effect relationship between prescriptive policy and constrained practice. This simple structuralist explanation has the effect of reifying practice. It removes the actors from the scope of the examination. The aim of this chapter is to explore the territory between cause and effect to focus on the critical role of interpretation and perception in informing practice.

Governmentality: the shaping of conduct and technologies of the self

Governmentality, a particularly influential stream of analysis grounded in the work of Michel Foucault, has emerged in recent years to help provide an account for the rationalities of human action. Foucault (1991) defines the term governmentality as representing the following three characteristics:

[firstly] the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principle form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security...[secondly] the tendency which over a long period and throughout the West, has steadily led towards the pre-eminence over all other forms (sovereignty, discipline, etc) of this type of power which may be termed government, resulting, on the one hand, in the formation of a whole series of specific governmental apparatuses, and, on the other, in the development of a whole complex of *savoirs* [and thirdly]...the process, or rather the result of the process, through which the state of justice of the Middle Ages, transformed into the administrative state during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, gradually becoming 'governmentalized'. (pp. 102-103)

Foucault suggests a complicated array of discreet albeit inter-related systems and discourses with the aim of organising and governing populations. The term 'savoir' is deployed to describe the critical discourse within the discursive sphere that configures the field of possible intervention (Procacci, 1991).

Governmentality represents a form of analysis that allows a description of power as not solely residing within, and exercised by, the realm of the state. Rather, it describes power as dispersed throughout the social sphere but guided by particular rationalities of government. As described by Garland (2006):

From the sinning, confessing subject of the Christian faith, to the self interested, enterprising subject of liberalism, the subjects of government are to be conceived of as active in the process of their own government, rather than passive effects of powers over which they exert no control. (p. 359)

For Rose & Miller (1992) the governmentality analysis “sought to draw attention to a certain way of thinking and acting embodied in all those attempts to know and govern the wealth, health and happiness of populations” (p. 174). As has been argued in the previous chapters, the techniques and modalities of managerialism and contractualism can be viewed as techniques of governing at a distance (Muetzelfeldt, 2003). Forms of surveillance through audit procedures and mechanisms aimed at limiting the scope and breadth of activity are explicit techniques of managerialist practice.

As Rose & Miller (1992) argue the “problematics of government should be analysed in terms of their governmental technologies, the complex mundane programmes, calculations, techniques, apparatuses, documents and procedures through which authorities seek to embody and give effect to governmental control” (p. 171). Power and control is not expressed or maintained centrally, it is expressed through an array of technologies and strategies within a dense field of social relations (Rose et al., 2006).

Governmentality and the policing of populations

In charting the characteristics of the concept of governmentality, Rose et al., (2006) place a particular emphasis on the discipline of populations through knowing. They argue that "to govern...it was necessary to know that which was to be governed and to govern in the light of that knowledge" (p. 87). Rose et al. (2006) further contend that within this construct of the expression of power, professions such as social work represent a practice or agency of governance that are "mutually formative" (p. 88) with the technologies of government.

As a concept to describe the array of instruments, techniques and discourses that weave through the field of practice, the concept of governmentality has a particular resonance in child and family welfare. In his influential work *The Policing of the Family*, Jacques Donzelot (1979) charts the development of a range of public institutions and practices that developed to oversee and guide the private conduct of the family. A sometimes subtle, sometimes not, approach to harnessing the institution of the family towards the interests of the state. As is evident in the normative aspects of the *Looking After Children* framework discussed in Chapter Three, its role as an instrument of governance for both the child subject to the process and the person completing the form is apparent. It is an instrument that allows for the description and organisation (categorisation) of the population of children and young people in care and linking the knowing to control (Rose et al., 2006). The tools provide the lens through which the population is ordered (categorised) (see for example Garrett, 1999a; 1999b; 2003). Within this paradigm the tools perform a dual function of observing and controlling both the population of children and young people and the workers who apply the tools. In child and youth services, the manifestation of the technologies described is evident in an array of instruments for example in statutory case plans, the *Looking After Children* records, incident reports, the Best Interests Framework, court reports, communications books and case notes. The conduct of populations is not governed merely through the threat of overt sanction but rather through a complicated and

diverse range of techniques. It represents a form of social regulation that establishes acceptable forms of conduct and seeks to *internalise* the goals and priorities of government within the population (Rose & Miller, 1992). Based on this analysis, welfare workers can be framed as agents working in the interests of the state and enacting the processes of discipline (Foucault, 1977, cited in Parton, 1994).

Rose (1999) develops the concept of the governance of populations further in his analysis of freedom. He distinguishes between "freedom as a formula for resistance" with "freedom as a formula of power" (p. 65). In relation to the latter, Rose (1999) suggests a model of freedom as "instantiated by government" (p. 65), a regulation through the development and maintenance of an "ideal of freedom" (p. 67). He suggests that within a liberal democracy, government is realised through the establishment and maintenance of norms and ideals (virtues) in the social sphere.

Technologies of the self and the question of discretion

Another conceptualisation of internalisation relevant to this study of the practice of front line human service workers is Foucault's (1990) concept of technologies of the self. Rose et al., (2006) describe technologies of the self as the "ways in which human beings come to understand and act upon themselves within certain regimes of authority and knowledge, and by means of certain techniques directed to self improvement" (p. 90). The term describes the internalisation of dominant discourses and represents a means of self discipline or shaping personal conduct to better accommodate prevailing conditions in the social world. It is an exercise of power that is manifested in the controlling of the external world through the ordering of the internal.

In turning to the question of discretion, the concept of governmentality sits in obvious tension to a practice that is more calculating and a more overt exercise of power. A simple configuration of discretion suggests a knowing and rational subject at odds with the inculcated activity framed by the governmentality thesis. While acknowledging the location of resistance within this conceptualisation of the governance of conduct, the exercise and interpretation of individual agency remains problematic.

Criticism of the concept of governmentality

It is on the issue of the embodiment of power and control that McNay (1999) is critical of the conceptualisation of governmentality. McNay argues that the conceptualisation of control and resistance in Foucault's work represents an unresolved tension between determinism and voluntarism. Furthermore, McNay argues that Foucault's concept suggests a framing of the body as essentially passive, a vacant entity unto which power relations are inscribed. She identifies an account of power that does not place sufficient attention on individual agency. In addition, this account does not provide the nuanced conceptual wherewithal to explain how experiences of control can differ as can the manner of response or resistance. It leads to a description that represents a "failure to consider fully the recalcitrance of embodied existence to self" (McNay, 1999, p. 96). Van Krieken (1991) is similarly questioning of the analysis of the 'government' of populations, suggesting that despite the emphasis on the possibilities for resistance, a weakness remained in that the actor was configured as the object in the analysis of power. That is, the subject is configured as 'organised' rather than 'organising'. In relation to the development of child and family welfare, while not wholly discounting this analysis, van Krieken suggests the need for a more nuanced model of the account for the expression of power, an account that moved beyond a passive account of the governance of populations, to also incorporate more explicit and overt characterisation of the proactive expressions of power.

McNay (1999) positions the concepts of 'habitus' and 'field' as providing a stronger analytical frame to the discussion of the durability in the experience of power. In the positioning of the mutually constitutive relationship between the field and the habitus, McNay suggests that Bourdieu's conceptualisations possess a greater analytical strength that locates a more active subject. For McNay this allows for a more embodied or 'lived in' experience of power and a less unitary form of resistance. I shall return to these concepts later in this chapter. I now move to a consideration of approaches to social theory that focus on the prism of practice.

Practice theory

The analytical techniques developed in the anthropological field come to the fore when focusing on the issue of practice. A method of analysing behaviour loosely under the umbrella term 'the practice turn' has evolved through the work of influential theorists such as Bourdieu (1990; 1998), Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), Schatzki (1996) and Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina and von Savigny (2001). While certain key differences are evident in their work these authors (see Schatzki 1996; Stern, 2003) they share an approach to the analysis of the social world through the prism of social practices. As Schatzki et al. (2001), suggests, "practice approaches promulgate a distinct social ontology: the social is a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices centrally organized around shared practical understandings" (p. 3).

As I illustrate such analyses provide a useful corrective to those approaches that seek to codify and segment the source or foundation of human action. In particular these approaches provide the means of transcending the binaries of structure/agency, life experience/professional knowledge and power/resistance that come to the fore so often in discussions of decision making in human service work (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Taylor & White, 2001; 2006). This is not to foreclose on a discussion of logic; instead practice theory opens up a more

expansive conceptualisation of the constitution and application of logic. As Schatzki et al. (2001) summarise:

practice approaches...tend to reduce the scope and ordering power of reason...[t]hey do this by abandoning the traditional conception of reason as an innate mental faculty and reconceptualising it as a practice phenomenon: as (1) a way of being dependent upon thus varying among practices or (2) ways of operating within practices, e.g., rational procedures and argumentation. (p. 5)

Equally, this approach raises the problem of the means of investigating practice, for example Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) highlight the problems associated with examining motivation after the fact. This approach does not negate the influence of professional knowledge or training; rather it situates it in the context of a host of other influences and practice rationalities.

The work of meaning

The practice context of human service workers is loaded with possibilities for alternative interpretations. Front line work in the child and youth services sector represents a public intervention in the private space of the family. Trying to make sense of often complicated situations, on the basis of incomplete or uncertain information is a defining characteristic of the work. Just as interventions are implemented towards certain aims, the process of intervention relies on the sense the worker has made of the situation. There is a logic to the intervention based on how events, conversations or other material are interpreted and responded to. The social field “presents itself as a structure of probabilities – of rewards, gains, profits or sanctions - but always implies a measure of indeterminacy” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 89). In this sense practice cannot be separated from the ‘making of meaning’. As Kingfisher (1998) states “it is the business of welfare workers, as street level bureaucrats, to construct clients from otherwise significantly more complicated human beings” (p. 132). As practice is governed by interpretation, it is here we can see the usefulness of the constructivist approach (see for example Baldwin, 2000; Parton & O’Byrne, 2000).

Constructivist Approaches

In describing the contingent nature of the constructivist approach, Potter (1996) argues that:

the metaphor of construction works on two levels when applied to description. First is the idea that descriptions and accounts *construct the world*, or at least versions of the world. The second is the idea that these descriptions and accounts are *themselves* constructed. Construction here suggests the possibility of assembly, manufacture, the prospect of different structures as an end point, and the likelihood that different materials will be used in the fabrication. It emphasises that descriptions are human practices and that descriptions could be otherwise. (pp. 97-98)

Such a focus pays particular attention to human agency. If the role of the actor in social practices is to be adequately acknowledged attention must be paid to the pivotal role of interpretation. In the elaborate regulatory context of contemporary child and youth services, a key feature of the work is the ability to comprehend and apply a raft of policy and practice documentation. It is to the issue of 'sense-making' in the human services that I now turn.

Construction as interpretation

In elaborating on meaning construction in social work, Scott (1989) drawing on the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz, highlights the key role of interpretation in the formulation of social worker practices. Scott argues that this aspect of the practice of social workers has received scant attention in the literature within the profession. In this sense there are commonalities with Fairclough (2000) as Scott (1989) argues that social workers act on the basis of, "cognitive schemata developed through experience and the application of theory" (p. 49).

Scott (1989) further argues that the work of the social worker involves applying these schemata in continually constructing and evaluating working hypotheses. Scott opens the door to a discussion of social work practice that concedes that

professional training may not be the whole story of practice. It is a discussion that highlights the role of professional training *and* organisational culture in informing practice.

While Scott's (1989) work here identifies the doorway to a more fruitful discussion of practice, unfortunately she does not proceed through it. For example, Scott does not address other factors that may influence the 'interpretation' of events such as the life history of the social worker (for example the characteristics such as class, gender, age). While recognising the key role of reflexive actions or the influence of tacit knowledge, Scott does not conceive of these as influenced by factors outside the identity of the organisationally tethered and professionally trained social worker. I share with Scott the acknowledgment regarding the usefulness of applying the 'anthropological gaze' to the practice of human service workers by adopting an approach that looks beyond professional knowledge as the sole guide to practice. What is lacking in her analysis is a richer understanding of the individual's agency.

In their ethnographic study of child protection workers in the United Kingdom, Scourfield and Pithouse (2006) take the analysis of sense making in practice a step further. Their focus is on the relationship between the application of lay and professional knowledge. In their description of lay knowledge the author's suggest a conceptualisation consistent with practice wisdom as opposed to professional (or evidence based) knowledge. They highlight that these knowledges are deployed simultaneously in practice. While their focus is on the gendered assumptions of workers, Scourfield and Pithouse move beyond an analysis of sense making as solely organisationally configured. Instead, they point to a more individualised interpretative frame in practice, albeit one that is ultimately strongly aligned with shared organisational narratives of gender.

The finding of this work is also supported by Mayo, Hogget and Miller (2007). Based on a study of the work of public service officials working in the area of urban renewal, Mayo et al., acknowledge a 'solidaristic ethic' as an influential motivator in the workplace. An ethic based on a shared conceptualisation of justice and vulnerability. The author's argue for a conceptualisation of practice that incorporates a focus on the values and identity workers bring to their interpretation and experience of discursive practices and rationalities in the workplace.

Construction as an exercise of agency

A more thorough analysis of the application of discretion is provided by Mark Baldwin. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, Baldwin (2000) investigated the impact of discretion by social workers on the implementation of policy. Through employing a multi layered and elaborate research approach, Baldwin asserts that even in the most technocratic of work environments there is the potential for human agency to be asserted. As Baldwin (2000) states:

the possibilities for such agency were the same in all three organisations in which empirical work was carried out...it made little difference whether there was a well-organised rationalist managerial technology in place or not...Discretion will happen because human beings will create their own reality through relationships...discretion is essential as well as inevitable. (p. 173)

I now turn to the work of Bourdieu (1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and the concepts of habitus and field to assist in the exploration of practice. Bourdieu's work assists in navigating beyond the limitations posed by the governmentality approach to a more nuanced understanding of practice. It is an understanding that locates the actor and the context in an interdependent and mutually constitutive relationship allowing for multiple and shifting logics of practice

Bourdieu and the practice turn: the ‘political soup’ of habitus

One of the features of my work to date has been to offer reminders that many of the current debates surrounding welfare practice are not new. The ‘discovery’ of prescriptive practices, the scarcity of resources and the delivery of welfare services by the non-government sector are less revelatory than may be acknowledged in much of the literature. These have been features of welfare work for some time. With regard to the prescriptive practice, in 1965 Wilensky and Lebeaux were warning that “any worker that tries to be a good humanitarian and a good agency representative at the same time is in for a torment of conscience” (p. 321-322).

Similarly with my own application of Bourdieu’s (1990) notion of habitus some of the ideas, (*sans* the language and conceptual tools) have been raised before. For example, Pearson (1975) in examining the practices of resistance by social workers argued that:

if we are to understand the meaning of behaviour...we must attempt to understand the structure of the social worker’s experience of education and work, how he [sic] tries to connect up in *his* [original emphasis] life the demands of welfare theory and welfare practice... [a]nd that is...the necessary human and critical response to this subject: neither idle scholarship, nor witless law and order will help us understand this feature of disorganisation in the welfare state. (p. 32)

Moreover, with the description of the “political soup” (Pearson, 1975, p.37) Pearson (1975) comes close to a description (albeit *possibly* dated) of what may be called the habitus of the social worker:

When reaching for a formula to describe the motives which inform rebelliousness in social work, I have often found it useful to describe them as a ‘political soup’ – mixed out of Christianity, reformist socialism, snatches of Marx, visionary utopianism, nostalgic references to simple forms of pre-urban living, ‘commonsense’ reasoning, and a heart which beats in the right place most of the time. (p. 37)

At its most basic level Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus as applied to practice render as irrelevant the Sisyphean pursuit of the theory versus practice debates that have emerged in social work from time to time. Bourdieu cuts the Gordian knot of the assumptions lying beneath such an idea of practice. For Bourdieu there can be no practice without theory – no action without meaning. As Schatzki (1996) outlines, “[Bourdieu suggests that]...practices, conditions and dispositions are mutually calibrated. Left to their own devices, consequently, practices are self-propagating histories of activity” (p. 137). It is here that Bourdieu's concept of habitus is of use. Bourdieu (1990) describes the habitus as, “embodied history, internalised as a second nature and so forgotten as history – [the habitus] is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product” (p. 56). In this sense Bourdieu seeks to undercut the structure/agency dichotomy, arguing instead that each structures the other, with the relations between the two the dominant feature in the governance of practice or the embodied significance of experience (Houston, 2002; Marcoulatos, 2001).

As Bourdieu (1990) argues:

...[t]he habitus which at every moment, structures new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences, which are modified by the new experiences within the limits defined by their power of selection, brings about a unique integration, dominated by the earliest experiences...” (p. 60)

Rather than a prescriptive map of social practices, Bourdieu uses the idea habitus to demonstrate the ‘parameters of the possible’ with regard to human action. He outlines a theory of practice that accommodates both a context where practices are experienced uniformly and at the same time allowing for divergent practices:

This durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations is a practical sense which reactivates the sense objectified in institutions. Produced by the work of inculcation and appropriation that is needed in order for objective structures, the products of collective history, to be reproduced in the form of the durable, adjusted dispositions that are the condition of their functioning, the habitus, which is constituted in the course of an individual history, imposing its particular logic on incorporation, and through which agents

partake of the history objectified in history is what makes it possible to inhabit institutions, to appropriate them from the state of dead letters, reviving the sense deposited in them, but at the same time imposing revisions and transformations that reactivation entails.

(Bourdieu, 1990, p. 57)

While conveying a system of analysis that appears at first glance to be merely reconstituting a further binary (field and habitus), Bourdieu dismisses both the voluntarism and structural domination of previous analyses (Schirato, 1997). Within this definition of habitus as generative dispositions there is an incorporation of what others may refer to as 'tacit knowledge'. What Schirato (1997) describes as:

more than a familiarity with the rules and knowledges of a field...it also picks up on the presumption that any serious and effective knowledge of a field is predicated, first and foremost, on the contingent nature of the field and its capital. (p. 263)

In transcending the binary of structure and agency, these concepts share a similarity with Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984). Giddens (1984) also highlight the constant revision of social practices based on the actor's experience of the social world. While there are parallels with the concepts of field and habitus, Maton (2008) suggests Bourdieu's conceptualisations possess an analytical strength and integrity beyond that proposed by Giddens.

Habitus: exploring possibilities of action

Bourdieu (1990) moves beyond a simplistic formula that under Conditions X, Person Y will do Z. Rather, in privileging the relations between field and habitus, he is at pains to convey that under these conditions we cannot not with any certainty know how X will respond. X's experience of the world is mediated by their lived history to that point.

Perhaps a more concrete example centres on the issue of 'chroming' by young people 'in care'. As outlined in Chapter One in the example involving Berry Street, a more divisive issue among child and youth welfare workers would be difficult to

find. This issue provides a divide between those who argue for a 'harm minimisation' approach and those with a more prohibitionist outlook. Based on my own experience this is not a battle between 'green idealists' and 'world-wise' practitioners but one that cuts across experiential boundaries.

To some extent this conflict is intractable, with each camp able to deploy arguments and evidence that support their position. My point is a simple one, there is no one view of this issue among human service workers. The 'source' of their views runs much deeper than simple training or the time spent in the position. We cannot anticipate how a human service worker will respond by simply paying attention to their training or the position they occupy within a particular agency. Again I return to the usefulness of the concept of habitus.

The closest we can come to understanding social practices is to view the habitus as structuring the parameters of possible action. It is a concept that suggests a structuring of dispositions towards the social world as opposed to a more deterministic framing of action. Burkitt (2002) argues that together with influential sociologist and anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1935), Bourdieu conceived the habitus as being "not uniform and differs between societies and within society, by educational background, fashion, and social prestige" (p. 225). We can see here the possibilities for investigating the complicated issue of the application of discretion by human service workers.

In highlighting the efficacy and strength of the concept of habitus over the concept of governmentality McNay (1999) argues:

the idea of the corporeal, pre-reflexive foundation to agency establishes a second area of difference with Foucault's work in that it provides a corrective to the voluntarist emphasis that hampers the idea of practices of the self...Habitus suggests a layer of embodied experience that is not immediately amenable to self-fashioning. (p. 103)

There are discernable echoes of ideas of practice wisdom or tacit knowledge in the human services in this concept. It is an approach to practice that is both informed and constrained by our experience of welfare work. This sits comfortably with the ideas of practice wisdom. While the relations between field and habitus construct the parameters of the possible it does not insist on a deterministic mode of action. McNay (1999) correctly points out, Bourdieu insisted on an 'open' system of dispositions with a habitus that is constantly evolving and changing through our engagement with the social world and, in turn, leaves open the possibility of a more fluid experience of the structural conditions of that world. Habitus is a collection of dispositions through which the social world is interpreted and engaged leading to a practice that is (co)produced through the relationship with the field. This relationship informs a practice that is not determined according to defined rules but is continuously and variously negotiated based on personal circumstances (Maton, 2008).

'Feel for the game'

As we have seen, there is an inherent complexity in investigating or analysing practice. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) illustrate there are serious barriers to exploring the motivation of the actors. Are we able to procure the 'source' of practice in any reliable fashion? To what extent is the rationale provided by the actors 'reliable' and how are actors able to reflect on the structuring qualities of their own habitus? One of the problems identified by Bourdieu (1990) relates to what he refers to as the "feel for the game" (p. 66). His oft quoted example is that of the tennis player who is asked "how does she play a rally?" The action is more of a reflex with an instinctive quality, rather than a task that lends itself to easy description. There are parallels here to the work of human service workers in responding to the question of how to develop trust or rapport with service users. The response is often complex, it is not simply a matter of overt calculation and enacting agency policy or professional paradigms. Some within the field of social work have likened this quality of workers as more of an 'art' (Goldstein, 1992; Gray

& Webb, 2008). What is left is a practice that is an individualistic creative endeavour which defies a 'painting by numbers' form of both teaching and analysis.

Habitus and motivations

As the researcher I enter some murky terrain in trying to in any way map this action and dealing with the not uncommon response of 'I'm not really sure – I think I have always done it that way'. Here we have what Burkitt (2002) describes as:

the habitual aspects of the self which form the basis of our character but which can often become non-reflexive...the dispositions that lead to certain actions in particular contexts that we are aware of performing yet we don't know why we perform them. (p. 220)

For Gartman (2007; see also Garrett, 2007a; 2007b), the conceptualisation of formation of the habitus and the acquisition of dispositions shares, with elements of psychoanalytic theory, an emphasis on past, particularly childhood experience.

While advancing the argument that the habitus is subject to constant and ongoing revision, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) emphasise it is often through conflict or disruption where our habitus becomes 'objectified' that the habitus is subject to revision. This suggests an understanding of habitus as a series of 'techniques' (see Mauss, 1935, cited in Burkitt, 2002); techniques both of the body and a use of knowledge of the outside world. There is little doubt that the tasks associated with human service work are governed by techniques of the body. For example, the worker may adopt a particular posture or response when dealing with someone who is visibly upset. The act of listening to painful or extreme examples requires of the worker not just a passive 'ear' but an interaction that may consist of a range of physical cues. In considering how a worker practices 'empathy', it is more than simply listening. It must be given meaning. It can involve nodding, smiling, expressing sympathy or surprise. It is very much a physical act. Similarly, the projection of calm and control in situations of crisis involve a technique of the body and a buffering of reflexive or immediate reactions. Part of the 'art' of this

technique is masking that it is learned or simply a 'part of the job', a technology of the self (Rose et al., 2006). We can see here the emergence of a behaviour that becomes a reflex. If it is perceived as calculated or forced it is likely to lose its meaning and its affect.

The analytical possibilities of habitus

It is certainly surprising given the predominance of the language of 'practice' in the human services, particularly the profession of social work, that the methodologies of practice theory have not been more widely applied. While certain international theorists (Emirbayer & Williams, 2005; Garrett, 2007a; 2007b) have applied these ideas to human service practice, the human service literature in Australia literature has not engaged with these ideas in a meaningful way (for exception see D'Cruz, 2004). The more interesting analyses have come from other fields.

Jessica Chan (1997) has applied Bourdieu's ideas to explore policing culture in New South Wales. In particular, Chan explored the opportunities for, and barriers to, cultural change in the policing service. Chan's focus was on attempts within the New South Wales police service to improve relations with ethnic minority groups. This was an issue that gained sharp focus following the release of a documentary *Copping It Sweet*, a fly on the wall piece which captured overtly racist police practice toward Indigenous people living in the suburb of Redfern in Sydney. In turn, this program served as a damning evaluation of past attempts by the police service to address and improve relations with minorities. In applying Bourdieu's works, Chan's (1997) starting point for the analysis of police culture was:

Instead of explaining racist police practice in terms of the inculcation of racist values among police officers through a vaguely understood process of socialisation, we can view officers as active decision-makers who are nevertheless guided by the assumptions they learn and the possibilities they are aware of. Their acquiring of cultural knowledge creates schemas and categories which both help them to organise information and lead them to resist evidence to the contrary to these schemas. (p. 74-75)

In explaining the production of police practice Chan (1997) developed a tripartite model of the interactive influences on police actors. Chan identifies the structural conditions (Field), cultural knowledge (habitus) and police practice as mutually constitutive influences on the Actor (in this case the police officer). In locating and elaborating on the structural conditions of policing, Chan identifies an intricate edifice of the tangible conditions that comprise the arena of police practice; the political context, the social and economic situation of minorities, government policies, Reconciliation with Aboriginal people, discretionary powers of police and legal protection against police abuse.

With Bourdieu, Chan (1997) recognises that these factors alone cannot provide the analytical wherewithal to adequately account for the practice of policing. To this end Chan (1997) proceeds to sketch the four elements of the “habitus of policing” (p. 76); axiomatic knowledge, dictionary knowledge, directory knowledge and recipe knowledge. Axiomatic (commonsense) knowledge is defined under the banner of why things are done the way they are in an organisation. Chan highlights instances such as the influence of guiding or orientating metaphors such as waging ‘war on crime’ or the descriptions of the stuff of ‘real police work’ which prizes the extreme (and relatively infrequent) facets of the work such as, disarming a suspect, saving lives, preventing robberies over the more mundane aspects of the work. This of course bears a striking similarity to human service workers, a point I shall return to later.

In turn, dictionary knowledge (Chan, 1997) describes the performance of the routine categorising of often complex situations or contexts. She suggests a heuristic method of spotting what or who does/does not ‘fit’ in a given situation which can descend into (ethnic and other examples of) stereotyping. Directory knowledge is framed as an extension of dictionary knowledge in that it provides for the ‘when’ and ‘how’ to intervene. As Chan (1997) states, “having developed

indicators of normality and abnormality, roughness and respectability, police officers tend to target the unusual and the disreputable” (p. 78).

For Chan (1997) recipe knowledge describes the “what should or shouldn’t be done in specific circumstances” (p. 78), or knowledge of appropriate methods of routine police work. Drawing from other research, Chan describes this knowledge as that which allows the police officer to ‘stay out of trouble’ or ‘cover your ass’ which equates to an ambivalent attitude towards superiors stemming from a localised camaraderie. A related example Chan provides is that of the ‘code of silence’ which ensues following allegations of misconduct.

In mapping the influences of police practice, Chan (1997) is at pains to point out that such a conceptualisation of police practice is not simply an amalgam of these knowledges. She does not suggest a somewhat more sophisticated form of gratuitous structuralism. Rather she argues against a unidirectional or linear model of practice. Instead, she frames a practice that is configured through the interactions of the field and habitus into the melting pot of the Actor with practice the end product. She highlights an understanding of practice that is essentially relational, based not on its constituent parts but rather the relations between these. Just as the objective conditions of police work have a structuring quality on the habitus of police, the habitus of the police officer mediates the experience of these conditions.

What remains underdeveloped in this conceptualisation is a habitus that incorporates influences outside the realm of the police officer. The analysis is less expansive than may have been suggested by Bourdieu as it skirts around the formative influences outside that of the police officer (that is gender, age, class, background) that is, what Bourdieu (1977; 1990) refers to as an embodied history whereas Chan’s (1997) is struck with a blindness outside the identity of police

officer. A focus of the dominant notions of what a police officer is that it ignores those forms of resistance that have been evident such as, 'whistleblowers', or even sub-groups within the police, for example marching in the gay and lesbian Mardi Gras.

Insofar as Chan's (1997) conceptualisation of the habitus of policing represents an embodied history, it is a selective one. It is an analysis devoid of a narrative outside of the beat. For example, it is an embodiment of practice without a body outside of the workplace. The analysis shares with Scott (1989) a blindness to an approach to 'work' as formed beyond or before the organisation (work site). It is not unreasonable to assume that the actor's experience of policing would be mediated for example by, gender and ethnicity. As Bourdieu (1990) states, "...all the schemes of perception and appreciation in which a group deposits its fundamental structures, and the schemes of expression through which it provides them with the beginnings of objectification and therefore reinforcement, intervene between the individual and his/her body" (p.73). Ultimately, Chan (1997) does not adequately account for practice that is informed by embodied experience.

Critics of Bourdieu

Bourdieu's theory of practice and the conceptualisation of habitus is not without its critics. Mouzelis (1995) is critical of Bourdieu's thesis as he argues that it ignores or downplays the strategising of individuals. He suggests that in privileging the thesis of the spontaneity of practice via the relation between field and habitus, the conceptualisation does not sufficiently account for instances where an individual's behaviour is strategic in working towards other broader goals. Mouzelis (1995) argues that the framing and positioning of field, habitus and practice fails to give adequate weight to the "voluntaristic and interactive-situational dimension" (p. 111) of social activity.

A more sustained critique of Bourdieu's work has come from Jeffery Alexander (1995). Rather than the marginal critique mounted by Mouzelis (1995), Alexander questions some of the foundational assumptions in Bourdieu's work. In an attempt to revive or recover the value of the early social sciences from beneath the 'social top soil' of more recent, faddish works, Alexander deploys the dual criticism that the ideas of more recent social theorists such as Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1977; 1990) represents a form of sociological myopia and a fondness for neat explanations. It is for Bourdieu that Alexander (1995) reserves his most sustained criticism:

Neither Bourdieu nor many of his enthusiastic readers seem to understand what a multidimensional social theory actually requires; how individual action and its social environments can be interrelated without reduction; how ideal and material dimensions can be brought into play without sacrificing their autonomy and reducing one to the other; how macro can be linked to micro without committing the fallacy of assuming that the fit between them is entirely neat. (pp. 193-194)

Alexander (1995) is particularly scathing of Bourdieu's application of the concept of habitus as it relates/applies to the possibilities for reflexivity, rejecting the assumption that these two conceptualisations can coexist. He argues that the rigidity of the concept of habitus forecloses on the possibilities for reflection and transformation. It is an accusation that Bourdieu's analysis is unable to reconcile the contradictory positions of reduction and reflexivity. For Alexander this represents a failure of logic. In turning the analysis back on itself Alexander seeks to demonstrate how Bourdieu himself provides ample evidence of the paucity of the theory he seeks to promote. Moreover, Alexander disputes the claim that Bourdieu's work offers the possibility of reconfiguring agency beyond the analytic environment of hegemonic structuralism. In Bourdieu, rather, Alexander finds a slight variation on Frankfurt School critical theory, with the accompanying weakness associated with a diminution of the concept (and central significance) of cultural autonomy. More specifically, Alexander finds in Bourdieu's work insufficient acknowledgement of the capacity for individual agency. He suggests the analysis represents a reproduction, albeit slightly reconfigured, of class based

(or materialist) analyses of social action (a criticism shared by Houston in his later work, 2009, see below). It is a criticism of 'field' and 'habitus' not as independent concepts but simply reconstituted manifestations of economic determinism.

In his response to Alexander (1995), Gartman (2007) formulates a defence of Bourdieu's key concepts, particularly the concepts of habitus and field. While acknowledging the validity of Alexander's criticism of Bourdieu's framing of social change and the failure to sufficiently account for the possibility of fundamental structural change, he mounts a spirited defence of the concepts of field and habitus. For Gartman (2007), Alexander's analysis distorts or downplays the mediating and variable influence of the intersections or relationship of the concepts of habitus and field. Rather than a deterministic explanation of action as outlined by Alexander, Gartman seeks to reinforce or restate the emphasis Bourdieu places on the contingency of action.

Far from removing the individual from social action or positioning practice as merely a reflection of the material world, Gartman (2007) highlights Bourdieu's emphasis on the durability of the habitus as “the active presence of the whole past” (Bourdieu, 1990, cited in Gartman, 2007, p. 390; see also Houston 2002). Action is not simply framed as an unreflective space at the juncture with the field. Ultimately, in Bourdieu's framing of practice Gartman finds more space for conscious human practice than suggests by Alexander's critique.

While emphasising the shared dispositions of certain groups, Bourdieu (1990) and others (see for example Crossley, 2008; McNay, 1999) did not segment or order the habitus in the manner suggested by Alexander. As highlighted in the earlier chapters, work in the child and youth services sector has an explicit and implicit moral dimension. It is an intervention into the private lives of families. In Chapter

Seven, I present an analysis of interviews conducted with human service workers to begin to explore how experiences outside the work place shape practice. How the interpretations of, for example, good parenting and bad parenting, of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour of young people inform practice within the workplace.

Habitus and field and human services practice

To date the application of Bourdieu's work remains relatively underdeveloped in the field of human service work. In the field of social work, Garrett (2007a; 2007b; 2009a) and Houston (2002) have highlighted the usefulness of the concepts articulated by Bourdieu. Garrett (2007a; 2007b) provides a wide ranging analysis of Bourdieu's key ideas including habitus and field, suggesting an alignment between his key ideas and the field of social work. Unfortunately, his analysis of the application of Bourdieu's concept of field and habitus to the understanding of the practice of social work remains underdeveloped. Garrett (2007a) suggests the usefulness of deploying the concepts of field and habitus to an analysis of how social workers engage with assessment frameworks. These may include the *Framework of Assessment for Children in Need and their Families*. Garrett (2007a) proposes that Bourdieu's ideas can act as a critical antidote to the discourses that run through practice tools such as those in evidence in the *Looking After Children* framework (see Chapter Three). In relation to habitus, he sees a role for this concept in interrogating a social work academic's own embodied history as reflected in class based assumptions evident in their work.

For Houston (2002) the concepts of field, habitus and culture can be applied to develop a culturally (in the global sense) sensitive practice, a practice that is consistent with the professed ideals of "tackling oppression social exclusion and discrimination wherever it is located" (p. 156). In deploying the language of 'culturally sensitive' practice Houston adopts a more global and encompassing framing beyond the use of the term in relation to minority ethnic and cultural

communities or groups as it is often employed in social work. It signifies a framing of culture as far from benign. Instead it posits an entity of vested interests and exercises of power.

Applying Bourdieu's concepts, Houston (2002) suggests a four stage process of analysis to assist social workers: understanding the relationship between culture, power and reproduction; enhancing the reflexive capacity; being sensitive to service user's experiences of culture; and developing practical strategies for empowering the excluded. The first stage involves the development of an appreciation of the composition and interaction where each of the components of field, habitus and capital intersect. For Houston (2002), this represents an approach that acknowledges the "deep seated nature of cultural disadvantage" (p. 159). The second stage involves deploying a "critical introspection" (Houston, 2002, p. 159), a focus on interrogating taken for granted assumptions; making the common sense problematic. Houston (2002) argues this is an endeavour aimed at social workers who, "ought to reflect on how they can disidentify themselves from the welfare field and their own personal habitus to expose practices founded on symbolic violence" (p. 160).

The third stage centres on empathy and openness to the experience of others. While the first two stages ask the social worker to reflect primarily on their own experience and interaction with the social world, Houston (2002) outlines the importance of reflecting on the experience of those people that social workers work with and their experiences, assumptions and engagement with the social world.

The final stage of Houston's (2002) conceptual framework centres on awareness raising and empowering by "extend[ing] the possibilities for unfettered critical examination of habitus, field and capital to the client" (p. 162). He suggests an approach that represents a "challenge to the fatalistic ideas which assume that change is impossible" (Houston, 2002, p. 162).

While the use of Bourdieu's key theoretical concepts represents new territory for social work literature, Houston's framework is grounded in much of what has come before. The recourse to strategies of empathy, awareness and empowerment are recurring themes in social work literature. The essential weakness with Houston's (2002) analysis when applied to the Victorian context of child and youth services is that it lays claim to a 'professional habitus' of social workers. As I have argued in Chapter Three the assumptions attached to this framing of the organisation of social work are problematic. It assumes a unity of vision and purpose that does not reflect the actuality of social workers or other human service (para) profession in this context. His framework also presupposes a context for collective action that does not fully engage the contextual difficulties for such action (that is, a fragmented and disjointed services context) and it does not reconcile the tension between the recognition of individual experience and the call for collective action.

Interestingly, Houston's positioning of (and affection for) Bourdieu's ideas appear to have undergone a fundamental shift in more recent years as demonstrated in the pages of the *British Journal of Social Work*. In an article published in 2007 outlining the usefulness and application of Habermas' concept of 'communicative action', Hayes and Houston's (2007) link the usefulness of this concept in its application to family group conferencing. Garrett (2009a) provided a critique of 'communicative action' based on its supposed blindness to (or failure to engage with) the issue of power. In his piece Garrett (2009a) freely drew on Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus as a more useful analytical framing of power and practice.

In his response to Garrett (2009a) and drawing on the work of Di Maggio (1979), Callinicos (2005), Jenkins (1982) and others, Houston (2009) was sharply critical of Bourdieu's work in that, "it emasculates human subjectivity and, in doing so, unintentionally presents the 'subject' as a 'cultural dope'"(p. 9). In essence, he argues that Bourdieu's framing of practice does not adequately account for human agency.

In a criticism reminiscent of Mouzelis, (1995), Alexander (1995) and to a lesser extent Gartman (2007), Houston (2009) argues that the concepts of field, habitus and capital do not offer the analytical wherewithal to provide an adequate account of social change. He argues that these concepts are too deeply rooted in a determinist framing of material reproduction to provide the 'conceptual arsenal' to account for instances of individualised action outside the of the objectivist conditions of the social world. Put simply (and more colourfully), "it is doubtful that Einstein, Mozart or Sartre could have existed in a Bourdieusian world" (Houston, 2009, p. 10). For Houston this conceptual blind spot or weakness in Bourdieu's work ensures that his theory cannot inform an emancipatory project informed by a critical reflexivity. Houston (2009) has clearly moved on from (or recanted) his 2002 account of the usefulness of the application of the concepts and habitus, field and capital to an empowering project within social work.

In giving further oxygen to the debate on the strength or otherwise on the capacity of Bourdieu's 'conceptual arsenal', Garrett (2009b) again weighed in with a further response to Houston's (2009) contribution. While briefly restating his criticism of the Habermasian concept of communicative action, Garrett mounted a defence of the concept of habitus against the charge of representing the subject as 'cultural dope'. For Garrett (2009b) the habitus does not determine individual action, "it disposes or influences an individual to act in a particular way" (pp. 2-3). The concept is not simply a reconfiguration of a structuralist narrative of practice, it is a narrative that seeks to transcend the binary opposites of structure verses agency.

Conclusion

One of the key benefits of the concept of the habitus is that it provides a clear account of how we can begin to consider a practice that is influenced not merely by the conditions of the world of work. It brings an acknowledgement of the role of the embodied history of individuals (of personal values and experiences) in interpreting the work (and social world) and influencing practice.

In the Victorian context I have attempted to highlight the benefit of the concept of habitus and the problematics associated with a framing of workers that places too great an emphasis on the organisational, sectoral, professional or procedural influences on practice or a lack of attention paid to the intersections, contradictions and interpretations of these elements in practice.

In the preceding section I have sought to sketch out the architecture of a theory of practice to bring to the analysis of the activity of human service workers. In Chapters Two and Three of this thesis I have set about articulating the key elements of the field. In a similar vein to Chan (1997) in the section to follow I draw on material gathered from interviews with human service workers to animate what I frame as the habitus of human service workers. My focus here is on human services workers as actors (with agency) engaging in an environment characterised by both fragmentation, prescription and an overtly moral dimension to practice. I highlight the multiple narratives of practice and the way in which these narratives frame the key actors and external rationalities in this context. In addition, I seek to build on this frame to chart and analyse the experience of control and constraint in front line practice.

In linking back to the question of discretion in the above section I have charted both proponents and critics of the concept of habitus. My own interpretation of Bourdieu's concept of habitus is consistent with that of Garrett (2007a, 2007b, 2009a) and Maton (2008). I do not see in Bourdieu's work in this concept a framing of the individual as devoid of agency. In habitus I have a conceptual tool that engages with the possibility of discretion. Bourdieu (1990) is careful to put parameters around the possibilities for action. He suggests a practice that is not disconnected, sealed or dictated to from that in which it is immersed. Habitus is a concept that brings the analytical power to examine the parameters of the possible in human service work. In habitus we also have support for an understanding of discretionary practice that is problematic. The possibility for a fluid description of discretion that is individualised, shifting and open to multiple interpretations.

Chapter 5 – Data sources and examination: exploring the logics of practice

In the preceding chapters I have outlined the key conditions of the field of practice for front line workers in out of home care. These conditions represent an organisational and policy climate that is rich in discourses of behaviour and practice with modalities to shape and control practice. It is an environment for practice that is both complex and immediate. I have outlined some key examples of the technologies employed to organise practice. I now turn to focus on the experiences of workers in child and youth services. This chapter sets out the components of the empirical work completed for the project and the approach adopted to the analysis of the data collected. The approach employed in this study situates the narratives of front line workers at the centre to explore how ontological schema are applied in the configuration of practice.

In many ways the professions and other roles associated with welfare work are the problem in microcosm of contemporary debates in sociological theory. Debates surrounding the role of social workers, for example, oscillated between those exposing a profession complicit, and explicitly engaged, in social control (Illich, 1977) or from Foucault's perspective as a 'discipline' of discipline or an arm of surveillance (for examples see Chambon, Irving & Epstein, 1999; Garrett, 1999a, 1999b). These positions have been contrasted with the more sympathetic analyses which have advanced the project of transformation, or those that have promoted the possibilities of a discourse of 'empowerment' (see for example Ife, 2001; Pease, 2009). The authors promote a practice or project with an overt sense of the politics of work in the human services.

Of course my description above outlines a simplistic binary. Such descriptions are mere caricatures with these positions not providing the analytical wherewithal with which to examine the practices of front line welfare work.

Background

This leaves the researcher with the difficulty of how best to explore welfare work. With Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), I share the view that the research methods employed should flow from the site of examination rather than be imposed on the site of study. The central purpose of this study is to shed light on how the practice of human service welfare workers is configured. Such a study can only flow from the experiences of the workers themselves. The space these workers occupy is the site of practice. Their experience is an embodied one. In the interviews conducted with front line workers my aim was to understand what happens and seek the explanation as to why.

As an outsider (and also as an insider) entering the terrain of child and welfare work it is easy to characterise the conditions of that work, to engage in the work of mapping the characteristics that appear to be the key features and influences on the day to day practice of workers. As charted in the preceding chapters, the black letter law, the Departmental and organisational policy guidelines, the physical location and even the children and young people that are placed with these services are all quite tangible. What is less clear is how the individual worker, working within a team unit or otherwise, interprets and responds to the myriad of situations and circumstances that are presented as part of this work. From the banalities of routine paper work through to the extreme situations of physical and emotional confrontation, rarely is the space given to understanding the worker as an 'actor' in this context.

There is certainly evidence of a strong push towards codifying, compartmentalising and controlling human service practice but what is less well known is the extent to which these techniques are applied, adapted, ignored or refashioned by those at the front line. And even less is known about the question of why? In the spirit of venturing down this path I have employed a method aimed at working towards this goal.

The shadow side of discretion

Considering the question of discretion also raises the issue of the 'shadow side' of human service practice. In the manner of Jordan's (1990) conceptualisation of 'bandit practice' in social work, the spaces of discretion have also been the site of the abuse of (particularly young) service users. Rather than mediate the rougher edges of bureaucratic or managerialist technique and practice, this site has shrouded front line practice in a manner that lead to expressions of individual and/or professional practice that have facilitated the abuse of vulnerable service user populations. In child and youth services, recent inquiries into institutional care (Community Affairs Reference Committee, 2004; 2005) have highlighted the often systematic physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children and young people.

The analysis set out here avoids a romanticising of discretionary front line practice. Often the configurations of human services practice as an art do not adequately reflect the possibilities for an artful yet domineering or abusive practice. The research completed by Margolin (1997) and reports such as the Forgotten Australians (Community Affairs Reference Committee, 2004; 2005) provide ample evidence of the abusive consequences of both a bloodless proceduralism and a context ripe with discretionary spaces for unreflective practice. The evidence from these reports suggests that freeing front line workers from the modalities of managerialism and risk management would not of itself lead to better practice and serve the interests of service users. For example, protecting the rights and

promoting the wellbeing of children and young people in out of home care is not and should not be a discretionary activity. Baldwin (2000) suggests a dilemma attached to the question of discretion:

This is the perennial problem for agencies, striking the balance between prescription and discretion. How does management enable skilled workers to demonstrate good practice, whilst remaining within resource constraints? How do you define procedures which enhance rather than stifle creativity and imagination? (p. 58)

Navigating the narrative of increasing constraint in practice

As has been illustrated earlier, changes in the development of the welfare states, specifically in relation to child welfare, have been associated with both cost (domination) and benefits (liberation). As illustrated in Chapters Two and Three, while recent analysis of public administration and human services has focused on a restructuring of the sector based on a tightening of both systems governance and practice, this has developed concurrently with an expansion in social expenditure as a proportion of GDP (see Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007), the significant growth in the health and community sector workforce⁶ and the implementation of range of welfare interventions and service types. We should not forget that many services, from pensions to publicly funded health services, once did not exist. As Van Krieken (1991) usefully reminds us:

the greater regulation of personal and family life by welfare state bureaucrats and social workers went together with pensions and benefits which made it easier for families to survive temporary crises and escape the more immediate controlling effects of poverty itself. (p. 141)

In relation to the question of practice discretion, while there is evidence of a tightening of discretionary space in some areas, this has occurred in parallel with an introduction and implementation of a range of service and practice options which practitioners can utilise. For example, thirty years ago social workers in child and

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics data suggest that in the ten years to 2006, the health and community services workforce increased by 34.7 per cent (Healy and Lonne, 2010)

youth services had a great deal of discretion. The worker could remove a child from their family or not. In this decision the worker had a great deal of discretion. Today there are other options open to workers in this field.

While discretion and individual autonomy may have been eroded this is not necessarily simply a diminution of authority. The child and family services sector now comprises a vast architecture of forms of surveillance (for example mandatory reporting), triage (for example ChildFirst in Victoria), and other interventions and services (see for example, Bromfield & Higgins, 2005; DHS, 2007c; 2009b; see also Keleher & Reiger (2004) for a useful discussion of the development of maternal and child health centres in Victoria and the accompanying tensions of policy directions). In turn this suggests that an increasingly important prerequisite for creating and enacting discretionary practice is a sound knowledge of the landscape of practice – of 'knowing the ropes'. As set out in the previous chapter, this aligns with Chan's (1997) framing of the habitus of policing, in particular the mapping of recipe knowledge and of knowing what fits with what and the knowledge of routines.

Exploring sense making in practice

This research refocuses on some of the personality and the possibility inherent in welfare work. The preceding chapters on the field of the human service sector and the articulation of the concept of habitus animate a positioning of practice as both grounded and contingent. It opens up the analysis of the logics of practice. It presents a logic grounded in interpretations of the social (in this case human service) world and a particular framing of action (practice). This section sets out the interview design and interpretative scheme employed for the primary empirical work completed for this research. As highlighted in the Introduction, the interviews conducted for this research have been used to animate the key theoretical concepts that have been developed in the preceding chapter.

There are some stark absences in this research approach. What of those in middle and senior management positions or more crucially those on the receiving end of human service practice? How can an investigation of human service practice proceed without recourse to these groups? Surely this goal of this research should be some form of road map towards what constitutes good practice. The responses to these and associated questions are important as they set the political orientation for this research.

My purpose in conducting this research is not to provide a grand narrative to account for recent changes in the delivery of human services. As has been outlined previously, grand narratives of the ilk of managerialism and contractualism (or its more expansive sibling 'economic rationalism'), or the professionalisation project, simply do not provide the analytical or explanatory wherewithal to account for the contingent, the personal, the interpretational and the emotional aspects of the work of front line practitioners.

My central question can be pared back to simply asking 'how do you make sense of what you do?' The problem with simple questions is they rarely prompt simple answers. To the researcher they can seem messy, illogical, elusive or contradictory for so long as the analysis continues to position reason and logic as existing outside the forum of human experience – as disembodied.

Returning to the 'absences' in this research approach, in the manner that I quiz interviewees for a rationale behind their actions it seems only just that I should extend this questioning to this research project. Where some may see silence, marginalisation or uncritical compliance (a passive worker or totally governed subject), I argue for recognition of the key domain of welfare workers. Such an approach may indeed lead to the objectification of service users but it is equally possible (and as the following chapters chart a defining characteristic) that the

objectification of children and young people in care is a key element of day to day welfare practice. My analysis does not provide answers to the problems associated with contemporary welfare practice; rather it sheds light on the experience of governance and the practice of discretion at the front line.

Generalisation

As outlined in the Introduction, this study has not concentrated solely on the experiences of qualified social workers. The earlier chapters have deployed social work and other literature in the analysis of the constitution of front line practice and particularly the framing of contemporary reform in public administration and social services. Also, as mentioned previously the experience of human service organisational restructuring in Victoria, while sharing certain commonalities with the experience in other states and internationally, has important differences in the history, composition and intra/extra-governmental relationships within the human service sector. Again, this has not necessarily foreclosed on a consideration of work carried out in other settings but care has been taken in generalising out the experience of reform and restructuring in other jurisdictions.

The research approach

This research has employed a case study methodology to explore human service workers' responses to restructuring in the sector. Interviews were used to explore the practice of front line workers. The aim was to open up the field of practice and the associated decision making and to examine the narratives employed in the stories of practice. In the process this research illuminates how workers frame their experience of work and opens up to analysis the logic/s employed to articulate practice. The agencies participating in this study were drawn from metropolitan, regional and rural settings in Victoria. The original intent was to allow for the experience of human service workers in different environments (urban, regional and rural settings) to be examined. As the focus for this research altered the

contrast between the experiences of workers in these settings ceased to be a significant factor in the research.

Sample/participants

Participants in the interviews were drawn from five child and youth service agency settings. Each of these agencies was involved in the provision of out of home care. A total of eighteen front line workers were interviewed. Using purposive sampling techniques, participants were selected based on their ability to provide information (Padgett, 1998). This approach represents an effective method of selecting participants for in-depth inquiry based on their capacity to provide information rich case studies (Patton, 1990). This is consistent with Colaizzi (1978) who argues the importance of both, experience with the topic of inquiry and capacity to contribute as key criteria in the selection of participants. Contact was made with the Chief Executive Officers of each the participating agencies who were asked to nominate front line staff to participate in the interviews.

As presented in Chapter Three, the lines of demarcation or professional boundaries in non-government organisations are, at best, unclear. The shared characteristic of each of the interview participants was that they worked directly with children and young people in out of home care. The educational background of participants was varied and included; no formal training (Interviewee 10, 15, 16), social work graduates (Interviewees 3, 5, 6, and 8) , social work and psychology graduate (Interviewee 7), Certificate in Youth Work (Interviewee 4, 11 and 12), Certificate in Child and Family Welfare (Interviewee 13, 14), Diploma of Welfare (Interviewee 17), Associate Diploma of Welfare (Interviewee 18), Teaching (Interviewee 2), Diploma in Health Care (Interviewee 1) and Social Care (UK) (Interviewee 9).

Ethics Approval

This section provides an outline of the process involved in undertaking the interviews, the ethical issues to be addressed and the participants. Ethics approval for the interview section of this research project was obtained from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University's Faculty of the Constructed Environment Ethics Committee (a copy of the ethics approval is included as Appendix I). I commenced this study while enrolled at RMIT University. The empirical work for this study was completed prior to transferring my candidature to Curtin University of Technology in 2007. Each of the participants⁷ received a letter containing an outline of the research and a summary of the research questions. Participants were asked to sign a consent form to participate in the interview and agree to the taping of the interview. To ensure the anonymity of participants no names have been used; nor the places of employment identified. In Chapters Six and Seven, where I draw on the material from the interviews, I have allocated a number to the interview participant (for example Interview 1).

As outlined in the Introduction, the focus of this research project underwent a significant change from what was originally planned as I pursued a more theoretical methodology to address the question of practice and discretion at the front line. Exploring the question of discretion in front line practice required a more robust grounding in the theoretical concepts and language that could account for multiple interpretations of the social world. With the concepts of governmentality and habitus I 'discovered' the conceptual tools to navigate more ably the complexity of practice. The research moved from a focus on uncovering the shared truth of professional practice in out of home care to one of making sense of multiple and shifting discourses and perspectives.

⁷ While the ethics approval was sought to conduct a total of 20 interviews, only 18 were conducted for this research project

The initial plan for the empirical work for this research, as outlined in the ethics application, involved two stages of data collection. The data collected from the first round of interviews has been used to animate the key theoretical concepts that have been developed in Chapter Four.

Interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with a total of eighteen human service workers from these five agency settings. This technique was chosen as it allows for a detailed exploration of issues and accommodates a variety of responses to the subject (Alston & Bowles, 2003). As the initial focus of this research centred on the impact of human service restructuring I adopted an approach that would allow workers to elaborate on how they have experienced and negotiated these changes and moved towards a discussion of their understandings of their practice and the context within which they worked.

As Skinner (2002) argues in relation to people's experience of workplace restructuring, "the workplace is a social environment. Actions are fashioned according to prevailing norms, drawn from either public narratives, as a consequence of particular organisational cultures, or from workers own work identity" (p. 38). As such this study does not focus solely on specific responses to particular policy changes. To do so in isolation from other important considerations would encourage a selective and myopic picture of human service work.

In addition, a more nuanced approach is required to gauge workers' experience of change. The interviews were structured to draw out the key influences on practice and open up the issue of discretion for discussion. While not necessarily the original intention of the structure of the interviews, the format provided a useful platform to open up the narratives of practice. This approach encouraged workers

to articulate their interpretations of their practice, service users, organisational setting and the wider sector.

Narrative

To enact policy requires interpretation (Baldwin, 2000) and it is here that the interesting questions emerge. Narrative approaches offer a reasonable *modus operandi* to explore the meaning workers attach to their day to day practices. The construction of narrative (story telling) is an important characteristic of human service work as the workers deploy their own ontological schema to make sense of practice (White et al., 2009).

As Riessman (1993) suggests “narratives are laced with social discourses and power relations, which do not remain constant over time” (p. 65). This is not to ignore the influence of objective structures such as policy guidelines and organisational forms. The use of the term ‘objective’ structures is a deliberate one. In outlining the key conditions of the human service field in Chapters Two and Three, I have sought to chart the tangible, concrete aspects of the setting in child and youth services. As argued in the previous chapter, this analysis of human service practice in all its forms proceeds with the recognition that practice flows from the relationship between the reality of the setting and the individual habitus of the worker. I argue that the objective conditions of child and family services are experienced, interpreted and mediated through the habitus.

This framing of practice positions interpretation at the centre of the analysis. In this I draw on the reflection of Geertz (1975) that researchers cannot with any certainty see the world as others do, the best that can be hoped for is to move towards what s/he sees with. In this sense it is also necessary to look beyond the content of the interviews, towards the underlying assumptions and the taken for granted

interpretations that are implicit, in this form of analysis (Riesmann, 1993). For example, interviews were littered with talk such as 'risk', 'care' and 'resi-kids'. Each were subject to sometimes radically different meanings among interviewees.

The ground work

Establishing and maintaining trust with participants is an essential condition in research such as this (Glesne, 1999; Mason, 1996). In an effort to draw out specific case histories I would meet with participants prior to the interview. In addition to canvassing standard issues such as the processes to ensure confidentiality and so on, I would take the opportunity to work through a summary of the interview questions with each participant. The rationale informing this process was to allow participants time to reflect on the own practice in relation to the areas I was interested in exploring. It was a process to establish what Boud and Knights (1996) refer to as a "climate for reflection" (p. 29-30) to encourage "benign introspection" (Shaw & Gould, 2001, p. 101).

Such space for reflection was important given that this project was exploring both formal and informal influences on worker practices. In particular, the focus was on the role of cultural norms or situated 'commonsense' knowledge – what is usually described as 'tacit knowledge', 'practice wisdom' or 'the feel for the game' (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Scott, 1990; Shaw & Gould, 2001). This research explores what people had actually done as opposed to the more speculative approach suggested by posing the questions of 'what would you do if...?'. Floersch (2000) highlights the importance of oral narratives in exploring how practices are constituted as "one effect of ignoring the oral narrative is that the personal, the practical, and the situated have become invisible...research often reduces situated forms of knowledge to organisational structure, policy and disciplinary knowledge" (p. 185). Further, Floersch argues against the dichotomy of mechanistic workers as agents of their intuition versus practice wisdom (intuition) as superior to all other

forms of knowledge. As White (1981) reminds us narrative overcomes the problems associated with “translating *knowing* into *telling*” (p. 1).

Recognising agency

The approach adopted here presupposes that human service workers are not automatons mindlessly following the agency or funding body policy and directives. Rather it recognises workers as active agents making decisions that are constituted by an array of influences according to personal, professional and institutional concerns. In particular the responses to a given situation are overwhelmingly influenced by ‘ways of seeing’. A study that advances the claim that the work of human service workers is shaped predominately by the fiats of funding bodies or agency policy fails to pay attention to the actual experience of workers. In particular how workers deal with or experience change and how decisions are constituted. Moreover there is the trap of relying too much on the language of practice ‘after the fact’. With Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), I acknowledge that the language of practice possesses two benefits not present at the time of the act. The narratives of practice allow the space for both hindsight and calculative reason to be applied.

Paying attention to the ‘feel for the game’ in exploring the practice of human services workers matters deeply. As I have argued in Chapter Three, even within human service professions such as social work there is an absence of a clearly articulated and unambiguous ‘professional’ discourse or body of ‘expert’ knowledge. In responding to the debates regarding the continuing development of professional social work Gibelman (1999) argues that “its efforts in this regard have been hampered by the breadth of the profession, its relationship to the external socio-political and economic environment, and divisions within the profession itself” (p. 298). Such conditions suggest considerable scope for the application of tacit knowledge in this field. As Hudson (1997) illustrates:

Professionals, whether social workers, psychologists, or psychiatrists, are expected to have special expertise in forming judgments. Such expertise is partly the basis for their claim for professional status. In human service professions, such as social work, there are frequently no hard or fast rules for the situations which are encountered and the interventions engaged in always require decisions and choices. Judgment and decision-making rely to a large extent on the knowledge, ethics, values and skills of the profession. (p. 35)

As such this research was designed to explore how a variety of procedural, organisational, professional and personal rationalities are disseminated and to explore the logic of practice.

The structure of interviews

The questions in the initial round of interviews were exploratory in nature. In particular the questions were designed to allow workers to elaborate on how actions are 'fashioned'. The research design was such that participants were encouraged to relate examples of their own work practice to illustrate how values, professional knowledge and experience in the field were operationalised. There was a logic to the structure of the process of data collection. In a sense the interview questions were based on the assumption that the strong current of managerialist practice would run against or through the practice of individual workers. It was an assumption that I was about to enter an environment characterised by strong and salient pressure to conform to clear policy, agency or funding objectives.

Based on this assumption a series of propositions were set out to explore how individual workers reconciled these demands. For example, there was a key purpose of opening up for discussion the question of what, if any, personal values or professional values/knowledge informed the work. I then sought to explore if the stated values conflicted with managerial or other paradigms and associated practices. I was hopeful that the questions would ultimately lead to a discussion of strategies for best negotiating, or creatively engaging with contemporary regulatory

regimes. As I have outlined, the assumption this was based on was somewhat naively conceived. As with most abstract assumptions it failed to account for an actuality that is much more complex, with the drives and motives for practice much less clear cut.

An initial letter was provided to participants outlining the project (see Appendix I). The schedule (summary) of interview questions was provided to each participant prior to the interview. The summary was divided into seven sub-sections; Background Information; Practice Knowledge; Workplace Issues; Practice Dilemmas; Policy; Inter-agency Contact; and, The Future (see Appendix II). It should be noted that at this stage of the research project I was still working under the initial research title of 'Professional discretion in child and youth services: the impact of the Contract State'.

The interview questions focused on models of discretion and the relationship between the different aspects of decision-making. For example, participants were asked to describe which skills, values or (professional) knowledge they considered important in guiding their work. They were then asked to relate examples of how this knowledge was operationalised. Participants were also prompted to relate examples where they believed they were able to enact a considerable degree of discretion and also occasions when the reverse was the case. Specific attention was paid to the role of economic considerations as an organisational pressure. Related to this point was discussion of the reporting requirements, of both the agency and the funding body, associated with the work undertaken. In particular, what information was supplied, how workers perceived this information, and was it an accurate descriptor of the work completed? In exploring the question of support and accountability, participants were asked who they felt accountable to, for example, service users, colleagues, supervisors, agency or funding body, and did this change depend on circumstances and why?. In further exploring the constitution of practice, participants were then asked to relate an example where they

encountered uncertainty or a situation where their first thought was 'what do I do here?' Participants were then asked to elaborate on how they responded to this situation, if and where they sought guidance or support and how the issue was resolved.

The final sections of the interview concentrated on the workers' ability to engage in the formulation of policy and their experience of this process. In exploring the issues of knowledge sharing and collaboration in the sector and the extent to which formal or informal networks existed between agencies providing similar services, I asked what (if any) contact participants had with others in similar agencies. In attempting to reconcile the unique structure of the human service sector in Victoria and its possible influence on practice, participants were asked if working in a non-government agency was a positive aspect in their area of work.

Discretion versus prescription?

In his exploration of the application of discretion practice by care managers, Baldwin (2000) approached the issue of social worker discretion and the organisation and implementation of policy in the Community Care field in the United Kingdom. Key similarities are apparent in his methodology and that adopted for this project. With his research of discretion and the policy implementation process Baldwin highlights the complexity in the (sometimes competing) agendas associated with public policy orientation and the imperatives of managerial, professional, service user orientation and political discourses. In turn, he highlights that it is the practitioner (care manager) who is left to make sense of these often competing demands.

Baldwin (2000) constructed an elaborate (seven stage) research method involving two distinct stages of data collection. In the initial stage of interviews Baldwin's questions centred around the role of the care manager; influences on practice, the

knowledge, skills and values involved in assessment; the competing demands of procedure and practice, discretion versus prescription; individual care versus community care; resource constraints. While the institutional context differs from the Victorian context, Baldwin rightly extends his analysis beyond a focus on practice as a rule or resource bound activity and identifies the key array of influences on the work of care managers. In this regard, his research shares much with this study in the focus on interpretations as a central feature of the practice of human service workers.

In many ways the early stages of this research fell victim to the assumptions that I am now warning against. From the beginning of this research, including the formulation of the interview questions, I was working with the belief that the debates and facets of managerialism and the increasing prescription of welfare practice would indeed mirror the experience of the people I planned to interview. I am grateful to those that provided feedback on the questions for suggesting the inclusion of more open ended questions, which ensured that the questions did not compartmentalise or foreclose on the responses from participants. The framing of the questions in this way facilitated an examination of the narratives of practice deployed by participants, and interrelated with the habitus of human service workers.

In adopting this approach I was able to move beyond the (my) early assumption of a (relatively) uniform interpretation of the contemporary milieu of human service work (of control, constraint and negotiation) or the maintenance of a generic narrative of front line practice. As framed in the original research design the interviews were positioned as a 'fact finding' device. A method consistent with what White (1981) criticises as “an expedition that is prepared for what is to be found” (p. 48).

While not a deliberate application of grounded theory (Glaser, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967) at the outset, the direction of the research underwent a profound change based on the themes that emerged from the interviews. The themes led to a reconsideration of the key assumptions of the research project and a substantial change in the focus of the research question. This change occurred much in the manner outlined in the work of White et al. (2009). They argue that the capacity (even necessity) to outline a narrative or logic of practice is difficult to separate from simple action for front line workers. Moreover, in focusing on the question of discretion, the initial approach could not accommodate or reconcile the responses from participants. For example, responses regarding the lack of constraint on front line practice or the reconfiguring of (apparently) constrained or disciplined practice as 'discretionary'. This alteration in the definition of discretionary action allowed a more focused analysis on an idiosyncratic habitus of the human service worker. The language and contingency of workers' experience and actions were more helpfully explored through the concept of habitus.

Analysis of the interview material

All interviews were taped and transcribed to accommodate a detailed analysis of the language and descriptions workers deployed to explain their practice and the context for their work. The initial focus of the interviews was an analysis of the habitus of the human service worker. Interview content was grouped into themes to articulate the identities of human service work to explore how participants' 'ways of seeing the world' were configured in relation to their practice. The elements of participant identities and how workers framed themselves and their practice were explored to analyse a particular habitus. The expressed identities of participants are framed as constituted by the habitus. The 'stories' of their practice position, their experience of their work, of children and young people in care and their families and of their interaction with the Department of Human Services (DHS). In relation to the deployment of discretion, at a (seemingly) simple level of analysis, the participant's responses locate the sense of 'what is right and wrong' at the centre of

the analysis. For Somers and Gibson (1994), “narrativity demands that we discern the meaning of any single event only in temporal and spatial relationship to other events” (p. 59). The authors identify four features of narrativity: relationality of parts; causal emplotment; selective appropriation; and temporality, sequence and place. The features are framed as interconnected and mutually supporting.

The relationality of parts describes the ordering of the often complex conditions of the social world, and the tendency to make sense of actions through establishing relationships between components in the narrative (Somers & Gibson, 1994). With causal emplotment Somers and Gibson (1994) describe, the manner in which actions are inscribed with a logic to transform events into episodes, the manner in which events are storied:

without attention to emplotment, narrativity can be misperceived as a non-theoretical representation of events. Yet it is emplotment that permits us to distinguish between narrative on the one hand, and chronicles or annals (Hayden White, 1987), on the other. In fact, it is emplotment that allows us to construct a significant network or configuration of relationships. (p. 60)

In articulating selective appropriation, Somers and Gibson outline the manner in which the elements of an event are prioritised or ordered, with primacy given to certain conditions to assist in making sense of the event. Rationalities are configured to bring understanding to the action. For temporality, sequence and place, the author’s highlight how within the narrative events are interpreted based on their positioning within a particular time and sequence.

For Somers and Gibson (1994), “the chief characteristic of narrative is that it renders understanding only by connecting (however unstably) parts to a constructed configuration or a social network” (p. 59). An illustration of these features at work in a narrative of practice can be discerned in, for example, a worker's account of a young person absconding from a residential unit. The worker may inscribe the events leading up to the acts with a particular significance or logic -

a tense access visit or a conflict with a worker or another resident (relationality of parts, causal emplotment). It can be interpreted as a chronological progression of experiences, as a culmination of events, an escalation of behaviour (temporality, sequence and space) or even an unforeseen act defying an explanation (casual emplotment). The act of running away may be interpreted as 'letting off steam', an act of resistance or the confused actions of a traumatised mind (relationality of parts). In relation to this study, this configuration of narrative provides the tools to discern how the competing rationalities of practice are (or are not) woven into the accounts of practice.

This account of the construction and components of narratives is consistent with the analysis of human services practice in this thesis as it allows a move beyond the framing of practice as simply rule-following or responding to the simple exercise of power. It positions interpretation at the centre of practice and sense-making as a fundamental part of acting in the social world. Similarly, Ricoeur (1981) argues that the central aspect of narrative "does not simply consist in adding episodes to one another; it also constructs meaningful totalities out of scattered events" (pp. 278-279). This analysis of sense-making through story-telling links well with the concepts of field and habitus outlined in the preceding chapter in the emphasis on the fluidity of and relational characteristics of agents engaging with the social world. For example, in relation to practice in out of home care, this logic can be seen to inhabit the worker's language as the construction of young people's lives through a mix of anecdotes from other workers, case files and (in some cases) the methodology of risk or the pre-eminence and privileging of stories of crisis and response in the workplace. In particular, the stories of chaos and crisis in out of home care are representative of 'public narratives' (Somers & Gibson, 1994), a shared or institutional narrative that imbues practice logic beyond the relatively rare circumstances of the event itself.

Developing the narrative

In the analysis of the interviews with front line human service workers conducted for this research, I examine how workers bring together a diverse and often disparate range of experiences and rationalities of practice to configure the meaning of their work, the motivations of those they work with and other contextual influences on their work. Particular logics that were not necessarily representative of the formal rationalities of the practice sphere are explored through this analysis. As outlined in the introductory chapter, it is unsurprising in this sphere of work, of public intervention in private lives, that the framing of practice would be strongly influenced by the personal lives of workers. In this regard, the 'ontological' narrative situates knowing who we are as a precondition of knowing what to do (Somers & Gibson, 1994).

As is presented in Chapter Six, narratives were drawn together to animate a habitus of human service work that emphasised the lived history of workers, a history beyond the workplace, as a central organising concept to inform practice. In the interviews there is evidence of a lived history that informed the perceived needs and motivations of children and young people in care and ordered the external influences and constraints on practice. The stories of practice were inhabited by experiences outside the workplace.

Data Coding and Analysis

The method of analysis I have applied to the interviews involved drawing out some of the key themes. I have not used the data from the interviews as the foundation for my argument. Instead, I have examined and grouped interview material to animate the key theoretical concepts explored in Chapter Four.

The coding and analysis of the data was informed by the three phases of “open coding, axial coding and selective coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998 cited in Alston & Bowles, 2003, p. 211). Interview material was transcribed. The interviews were read and re-read to ensure familiarity with the content. Open coding was completed initially as data was sorted using ‘constructed codes’ informed by the broadly defined key concepts of ‘habitus’, ‘discretion’ and ‘control’. The narratives of work were assessed to identify particular dispositions. The second stage of axial coding involved interrogating the material in the broad categories to identify more specific themes. For example, material coded to habitus was further analysed and coded to identify discreet sub-dispositions representing particular configurations of worker habitus. Throughout this stage, as emerging interpretations were assessed, headings were merged or altered. Consistent with the concept of habitus, I stratified the evidence of extra-organisational influences on habitus formation that emerged in the narratives of practice. That is, analysis of the dispositions of front line workers towards their work informed by influences beyond the immediate sphere of work. An analysis of the narratives of the application of formal knowledge described by the interviewees in practice was also incorporated. Themes such as the framing or privileging of certain identities (for example, heroic identities) of practice were explored in the narratives, as was the manner in which they were used to imbue the totality of the work in out of home care, to construct a type of habitus. The final stage of coding involved selective coding and refining “core categories” (Alston & Bowles, 2003, p.215). Worker habitus formation outside the workplace emerged as a key organising concept in this stage of the analysis. At key stages of the coding of the data, I worked with my supervisor to further the integrity of the analysis regarding the connections between the interview material and the themes I advanced.

Chapter Six sets out the analysis of the interviews to support the key claims in my argument to demonstrate issues of interpretation and the deployment of self in navigating the multiple rationalities of practice at the front line. In Chapter Seven I draw out the themes of the practice and experiences of governance in out of home

care. In outlining the organisational and institutional influences on practice, I have grouped material based on the strong theme that emerged on the pre-eminence of the DHS in the narratives of practice. I locate the dominant (and sometimes shifting) role the Department plays in the narratives of front line workers.

Reflection

Throughout this work I have included reflections drawn from my experience working in this sector. Where I have cited specific examples, for example, the case example involving Berry Street cited in the Introduction, the case study analysis of the Registration Standards for Community Service Organisations (Chapter Two) and the *Looking After Children* framework (Chapter Three), I have relied solely on information in the public domain. With the Berry Street example I have drawn on newspaper and journal accounts of this episode. With the other two case studies, my analysis draws on public documents and reports readily available on the DHS website. On the limited occasions where I have included reflections from my location within the sector, I have done so in a manner that ensures no participants or organisations are identifiable.

This is not to say that I do not bring my experience of the workplace to this analysis. I lay no claim to providing an objective analysis of restructuring and the practice of discretion in front line practice. I am both a participant and an observer in the context I examine.

Chapter 6 – The habitus of human service work

One of the foundational assumptions that informed the development of this research project was that human service work in the out of home care sector (and elsewhere) was being subject to increasing levels of practice constraint and prescription. It framed a human service practice context characterised by the greater emphasis on accountability, the increased quantification of human service work coupled with the implementation of prescriptive techniques of practice; an environment where the application of worker discretion was viewed as increasingly constrained.

The analysis of the interview material has been divided between two chapters. This chapter sets out an analysis of the habitus of human service workers to explore the key knowledge and interpretations deployed by human service workers and how practice is configured. The following chapter (Chapter Seven) moves on to an account of the governance of practice and how external rationalities are experienced at the front line.

At first glance the interviews conducted with front line workers for this research present an alternative view of contemporary practice. It appeared that the literature as to the demise of discretion was greatly exaggerated. With relatively few exceptions, workers initially reported a pronounced level of autonomy in their work. This scenario suggests a sector awash with *laissez faire* discretionary practice. Beyond the initial claims there is little to support this assertion even, on closer inspection, in the narratives of practice outlined by the interviewees themselves. What then are we to make of this anomaly? The out of home care sector may experience periods of creativity, chaos and crisis, but it is far from a consistent or defining feature of this service environment as the reports of limited

control and constraint would imply. The interpretations of the context of human service work may vary yet we are often presented with a response or practice that shares what Wittgenstein termed (cited in Shearing & Ericson 1991) a “family resemblance” (p. 491). There is an order to front line work in out of home care that can run counter to the accounts of unbridled practice.

As this section will examine, this characteristic of unbridled discretion is perhaps unsurprising given the particular narratives that populate the accounts of practice; narratives that prize the attributes of quick thinking in a crisis and the ability to work in extremes. These are stories rich in descriptions of practice pushing against a tide of trauma, abuse and criminality and trying to cast off the leaden clothing of bureaucratic process. This chapter seeks to navigate the disjunction between what we see, read, hear and experience to explore how workers articulate their practice and articulate examples of ‘discretion in action’. Is an individual practice an expression of individual agency (an exercise of discretion) or simply mandated or governed practice? Is the space of discretion something a worker ekes out with the tools of experience and professional knowledge or is it a space that is foisted upon them in the context of uncertain crisis situations? Is discretion simply any act that occurs in the absence of formal direction? With Shearing and Ericson (1991), I acknowledge the porous stature of rule based explanations of activity or practice. Human service workers rarely lay recourse to rules – explicit (for example policy, procedures or directives) or implicit (for example codes of practice, mission statements) – as explanations of their practice.

This chapter seeks to animate the concept of the habitus of the human service worker and the field of human service work to explore how this relates to and informs the spaces in which discretion is interpreted, enacted or described in this sector. Following the work of Chan (1997) and her model of the habitus of policing, I begin with an outline of the dispositions associated with a particular habitus of welfare work. I explore those practice-informing dispositions that influence worker

interpretations of service users, colleagues and the service context that set the parameters of possible action. This section argues that a worker's embodied history is a missing component in Chan's analysis of the habitus of policing by acknowledging that personal histories are central to the habitus of human service workers. The embodied inscription of past events informs the expression of the social work. This palimpsest of experience informs how and when (or not) workers identify and interpret practice constraint and prescription and configurations of calculation and strategy-forming. My discussion focuses on the intersections of the interpretive domain of habitus, the multiple and (the sometimes) conflicting accountabilities of practice.

It is not my intention to use the interviews conducted for this project as a foundation to construct (that is, prove/disprove) a theory of practice. The interviews, or more precisely the narratives deployed by the interview subjects and interpretive frames they represent, have been used to inhabit and bring to life the key conceptual constructs outlined in previous sections of this research project. My intention is to avoid fixing or situating a static form of the habitus of human service workers. The elements of the habitus are both resistant and responsive to change and comprise particular ways of seeing the social world. With Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), I recognise that through the prism of practice we can ascertain the relation between knowledge and the social world. This view allows a focus on the mutual constitutive relationship between the subjective and the social spheres. My aim is to articulate a theory of human service practice in all its fluidity and entrenchment, its commonality and its exclusivity.

The habitus of the front line worker

This section outlines five dispositions as representative of a particular habitus of welfare work. I have chosen to title these by naming them as they are, not markers to dictate practice but as dispositions which are frames or approaches to practice. I

have entitled these: 'It's because of who I am' habitus formation outside the workplace (personal belief systems); 'Boundaries and categories' (professional/formal knowledge); organisational habitus formation; 'outlaw / bandit' (practice); and, 'Stepping up' (heroic practice).

I cautiously use the language of dispositions due to the inference of fluidity or transience as such an inference is misleading. Each of these characteristics can be deeply rooted within an individual's sense of who they are and how they interpret their work. The habitus changes constantly (subject to perpetual revision), albeit change that is rarely fundamental or radical. It represents a combination of constancy and variation (Chan, 2007). This suggests that practice change in the human services (and elsewhere) can be deeply challenging. Models that assume a simple process of policy implementation rely on a false assumption that practice somehow sits outside of the individual (for example is a passive or rule bound activity). This assumption views practice change as a mere changing of technique rather than paying attention to practice as strongly grounded within an interpretive frame. In the human services sector (and elsewhere) this is clearly not the case. Work in the human service field is drenched in a moral dimension that attaches / corresponds to how individuals see their work but also how they see themselves. The narratives I draw on depict a particular habitus.

'It's because of who I am': habitus formation outside the workplace

In articulating the four elements of the habitus of policing, Chan (1997) described axiomatic knowledge as why things are done the way they are in organisations. In later work, Chan (2007) acknowledged how personal belief systems provide a lens for aspects of police work. As presented in this section, a worker's organisation was often, with few notable exceptions, an invisible presence. As such, to describe the organisation as providing the lead in formulating patterns of 'common sense' among workers is problematic on a number of levels. In human service work the

sources of 'common sense' assumptions often sit outside the spaces of work. While the habitus is constantly subject to revisions, the changes are rarely radical (Bourdieu, 2000). Such an understanding properly locates the lived history of human service workers as a key influence on the habitus playing a significant role in the interpretations of their social world both within and outside the workplace. It is a characteristic that is staggeringly axiomatic yet astonishingly absent in many (disembodied and segmented) analyses of practice. The experience of the workplace will inform a revision of the habitus while the habitus is ordering and 'making sense' of the workplace. The embodied history of the worker is not something formed from the time of employment; it has its roots in narratives of for example class, gender, religious beliefs and age (Bourdieu, 1990). This is not to assert that issues (class, gender, religion and so on) are not present within organisational narratives. At the centre of individual agency, the scripts and the analytical wherewithal that interpret 'why things happen the way they do' and inform 'why I respond in a particular way' link back to sense-making schema of a deeply personal kind.

While the narratives of training (professional or otherwise) were present in the stories of workers, the dominant narrative represented a habitus framed around the notion of 'authenticity' associated with how workers saw themselves beyond their particular role, agency or sector. It was present in the perception of young people they work with, colleagues and the entire field of practice. This habitus guided the perceptions of good and bad practice, of right and wrong and the desirability of particular outcomes. Whereas Chan's (1997) work on the habitus of policing suggests a unifying habitus that leads to a more congruent (good or bad) practice, human service workers appear to diverge given the prominence of extra-organisational influences on the habitus. The out of home care sector presents influences that are much more diffuse than the habitus-forming approach to inculcate practice as Chan highlighted in the New South Wales Police Service. The human service sector presents a landscape of multiple rationalities and practice alignments.

Extra-organisational influences on habitus formation are nowhere more evident than in particular stories that workers attach to describe the young people they are working with. Each story is exemplary of a particular habitus. Two stories are evident here. The first represents a positioning the young person as enacting 'wild' or 'bad' (and knowing) behaviour. Workers frame a behaviour that needs to be reigned in for their own good. Alternately, there was a narrative of the child or young person as vulnerable, a victim of the abuse or neglect of their parents or the harsh system within which they have been placed. This narrative locates the young person within a system with its priorities warped, with the young person adrift in a sea the defining feature of which is unreality. Each of these interpretive schemas provides a sense making frame that offers the justification for particular interventions. Based on the contrasting narratives it was a habitus defined by a disposition towards control or resistance. Both interpretations sit in stark contrast (albeit for different reasons) to the prevailing 'professional' discourse situating a young person's behaviour within the context of trauma and abuse. This contrast was often acknowledged by workers.

Personal morality: 'tough love' and other parables of human service work

The dominant interpretation is one rich in the conservative values of individual obligation and personal responsibility, a narrative of young people being held to account for their actions. This positions the young person as an active agent needing to be taught or socialised to exercise choices in a more responsible manner. It frames the young person in care as a danger to themselves and others and ill prepared to enter the 'real', post out of home care world. The descriptions of the young people were often couched in the language of the everyday, "Well, most of them have got a chip on their shoulder, most of them are – some of them are not very particularly friendly" (Interview 15). Workers often saw their role as ensuring young people 'grew up' and acknowledged the often harsher realities of life beyond care.

The metaphor of 'tough love', an approach that privileged personal responsibility, clear boundaries and a sink or swim method, characterised this disposition towards practice. For example:

I'm very clear about kids taking responsibilities for their actions and I suppose that's reinforced a bit with child investigation...but kids in life learn what responsibility is, kids out on the street walk down and spit at people or kids ...they'll get a hit in the mouth. They're not going to get somebody sitting down in order to chat about why are they feeling like that... and some people might say it's a bit rough around the edges or whatever. (Interview 1)

This particular view was echoed by another worker describing why he had initiated police involvement with a young person:

I believed he had to find out what were the comebacks of his actions, and this is what it was, and as far as I was concerned it was helping to guide him towards that path of making decisions and seeing what happens when you go down one road and what can happen when you go down another, and for me, you know, it was a good slap in the face for him to say, "Well you know, you didn't just break a window here or you didn't just tell someone to P off or, you know, steal a Mars Bar, you know, what you did was quite serious, and these are the starts of the ramifications in what you do". So you know, if you put your foot on that rung of the ladder, get ready for what comes down. (Interview 9)

For another interviewee, young people in care needed direction to grow up and exercise responsible choices, "I think the more we wrap these kids up in cotton wool the more we molly coddle them the worst. We're just not setting them up for life" (Interview 2). Such approaches are quite resilient and defy the prevailing professionalised narratives that are often present in public policy or agency articulated approaches:

I think it's sort of – in a way they get away with a lot of things from the teachers and other kids and that by being 'the poor little child in care'. I don't know what it is, but we try to instill in all of them that there is absolutely no reason for anyone to know. (Interview 15)

For others there was an explicit class dimension to the out of home care system, with expectations formulated based on a set of middle class sensibilities

(assumptions) of normal family life, “working class families don’t sit around the dinner table over a glass of wine talking about how they’re feeling you know... [it is] ‘shut up I’m watching the news’” (Interview 1). This view contrasts with a more hyper-critical view of parents or more particularly mothers, “some of these so-called ‘mothers’...some of them should have been shot at birth” (Interview 16).

The talk of enforcing consequences for actions populated many of these narratives.

Another worker noted:

I think you’ve got to instill in them your morals that you um...oh well um you know like when they bring um a stolen bike home [the residential unit] – to take it home to their home their family home you know their parents would’ve probably sold it – we’re likely to turn around and say ok well I’m going to get the police involved here because you’ve stolen this bike so you have to learn a lesson from stealing this bike – you’re not allowed to steal – um that has happened (Interview 12).

The quote below emphasises a habitus that is not enacted or configured solely in the workplace:

You can’t be dishonest with these kids...I’m brutally honest...when they tell me bullshit. This one out here (gestures towards a young person in another part of the unit) – the most lying, thieving thing you’ve ever come across in your life...he’s two different kids. I don’t pull any punches if you do they will walk all over you and I think I get on well with them because I don’t pull any punches...I’ve got a sister who is so fragile I’m told ‘don’t say this don’t say that’. (Interview 16)

This ‘talk’ can also be framed as a strategy to insulate the workers from taking too much of their work ‘on board’. As the interviewee cited directly above went on to explain:

Do you know I bawled for the first time last night...it just keeps going on and on and on. I feel like I don’t want to let the kids down but I also can’t keep up this pace and the expectation to do stuff. (Interview 16)

In relation to more formal interventions, another case worker identified the 'knowing' young person who could read inauthentic practice. This frames the young person as being able 'see through' formal interventions:

all your training formal training tells you that you...it sort of tells you not to get too attached to kids...but when you put that into practice it really doesn't work...kids know that you're somehow...they know that you're doing something that you bring from text books.

(Interview 13)

A number of workers, particularly residential workers expressed reservations, even dismay, about the response of other agency staff to the perceived poor behaviour of young people. Similar to the sentiment presented above of young people 'being wrapped in cotton wool', young people were perceived as having too many resources at their disposal for example "You make enough trouble as a child you can afford anything" (Interview 10) or benefiting from the lack of sanctions (consequences) for destructive actions, "...its setting the kids up for a fall because that's not real" (Interview 17).

For some workers the more procedural practices with children in out of home care were counterproductive, shielding young people or allowing them to free themselves from the consequences of their actions. This was also seen as undermining the authority of residential care workers as the boundaries or expectations they believed appropriate were overridden by case managers or protective workers. Such narratives have clear implications for investigating notions of the application of discretion. The narratives suggest the clear application of concepts of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' young person.

'What all kids need...'

The 'tough love' approach narrative (of boundaries and consequences) contrasts with an interpretation of young people that places an emphasis on the vulnerability of the young people in the care system. A vulnerability that is exacerbated by an out of home care systems that fails to provide 'care'. In contrast to the 'tough love' narrative, this approach frames young people as passive agents subject to abuse both within their families and at the hands of a pernicious care system. One interpretation emphasises difference, the other emphasises that young people are just like any other kid. The response here is one of 'care' rather than guidance or harsher lessons in exercising normative forms of personal morality. For example:

you've got a system now where you've got kids coming into a house and we're doing fire inductions with them we're doing this with them that ... you know most kids want a teddy bear and a cuddle. (Interview 1)

Not surprisingly in relation to this framing of young people in care, it is here that many workers self identify their practice as being more contentious. For one interviewee there were substantial barriers between young people in care and childhood experiences that are taken for granted, "sometimes even though you know you should get permission you want them to be the same as other children" (Interview 10). We can see a habitus that conforms more to prevailing gender and childhood narratives rather than professional, organisational or Departmental directives. For example:

depending where the kids are at when the kids are in crisis and they're using drugs all the time you want to do the mum thing and come in and take the can or take the marijuana or whatever it is and you know cuddle them and do that mothering. (Interview 2)

Linking with the heroic habitus in the coming section, in this sector the mundane issue of physical touch becomes a more contentious, charged activity:

I show kids that I care. I - it's very dangerous but I touch kids a lot, put a hand - you know, if they're upset then I hug them, I can't help that, that's part of me but if they're working really hard and they're looking tense...I'll pat their head because they don't get any of that ...whether they realise it or not, that I do care about that. That's not - I'm not just there to teach them some maths. (Interview 11)

Along with the 'tough love' framing of young people, this disposition is antagonistic towards the procedural constraints of the system of out of home care.

'...It's how I grew up': Personal narratives and practice

Defining appropriate responses to the young people they were working with workers constantly returned to a form of sense making that in a literal sense lay beyond the sphere of the workplace. Themes such as gender, class and religious beliefs are evident in the interpretation of the context for practice. For example:

I dunno and I guess in terms of values like I think you bring a lot of your personal sort of stuff and that too - like its not things you learn I guess you kind of grow up with particular sort of views on the world and I guess it does impact on you. (Interview 8)

As may be expected, the influences outside the workplace were quite diverse ranging from experiences of growing up, of parenting or even other seemingly unrelated employment experiences (for example, "working in pubs and driving taxis" (Interview 14)). For one worker the experience of being adopted had informed actions in both her personal and working life particularly ideas as to the desirability of blended families. The example is instructive of the use of formal knowledge and the constant revision of habitus. This worker acknowledged that she had not considered this link until she engaged in an activity on the use of genograms. This anecdote provides evidence to support the conceptualisation of the interrelationships between the structuring of self and the structuring of the social world.

The refrain of treating young people as if they were your own children was a recurring theme in the interviews, "Well, only having raised five girls of my own that was really all the qualifications I needed" (Interview 15). This was a theme that cut across different roles and qualifications and organisations, even if somewhat reluctantly proffered:

so in one sense I suppose I - for me my code is that I treat them all as if they were mine, as if I would - how I would want someone to treat my own child but yeah I treat - I suppose I treat them like I want them to treat me. I don't know whether that's what you're after but yeah. (Interview 11)

Another interview noted:

I think most of the skills that I've acquired are skills that are skills that any good parent really should have...the majority of those I've got from being a parent...basically its life experience and skills I've obtained through that rather than skills I've learnt through work or training although having said that I guess a lot of that training and a lot of the work practices build on basic parenting skills. (Interview 13)

Young people and their behaviour (or work in general) was often viewed through a prism not of the workplace or the out of home care sector but of personal history and background. A particularly explicit example of a workers personal background informing their work is set out below:

I grew up in a small country town as a copper's daughter – we actually lived behind a police station for a lot of years so I saw a lot from a fairly young age – it wasn't a 24 hour station – so when the station was closed people would come banging on our door – so I saw a lot as I was growing up in terms of that. I draw on lots of things my personal experience my personal life. (Interview 2)

This person's experience was then evident in the interpretation of how the behaviour of some young people coming into residential care was viewed:

its pretty normal teenage behaviour at 16 to go out and get shit faced and come home and spew and sleep it off all day the next day – I think we all did it you know – so I think um my biggest aim is separating what is resi kid behaviour and what is teenage appropriate behaviour and I think its very appropriate for kids to go out and experiment with alcohol and marijuana we all did it when we were teenagers – that's not that unusual. (Interview 2)

Another respondent noted that the way she worked was influenced by how and when she grew up:

Well, given my age, I come from an era where you tend to be a bit subservient. And so you know your limits, you know your restrictions, and you try and keep within them. (Interview 3)

This worker suggested a habitus of a kind that was comfortable working in an environment of clear practice boundaries and noted the importance of staying within organisational boundaries and how this was relayed to staff, “because if it can’t be done I’ll tell them [my staff]. If it’s just not possible, we haven’t got the budget for it or it’s outside what our role is or should be” (Interview 3).

For one interviewee, practice was informed by their religious faith:

I guess my faith I guess helps me in what I do. I’m a strong believer in God and Jesus and I think in terms of that for me there are a lot of values in that that I think help with the job that I do, you know, not judging people, being able to see a position from someone else’s point of view and not bringing your values to the table. (Interview 9)

This comment presents an interesting framing of values. Religious faith is viewed as providing a means of buffering against immediate or reflexive responses. It shares with the deployment of clinical knowledge the ability to abstract or objectify children and young people. What is suggested by this participant is not an absence of value judgement applied to the lives of young people; it is a judgement of a different kind.

The habitus of the front line worker depicted in these narratives is not a determinant of practice. Rather, it structures the parameters of the possible action through the provision of the interpretive frames for the social world. While different personal experiences are described, the personal can be clearly seen to shape the habitus. Some workers noted the tension between the personal motivations and contextual constraints. For one case manager this involved mediating their own ideas on parenting in working with a foster carer:

I mean my personal parenting style is sort of quite passive – sometimes I wonder who’s

boss in our house...now I'm working with a carer who has really tight boundaries and I struggle with that...then I think well a lot of research or literature information will talk about the need for children to have firm boundaries to make them feel safe. So in a sense I would justify what I would do personally to what this particular carer is actually doing but it doesn't stop me from going 'don't you think that's a bit harsh?'. (Interview 18)

At work here we can ascertain a relation between personal knowledge and professional knowledge. It is a point I will return to later in the section on strategy and calculation in front line practice.

'Boundaries and categories': formal knowledge at work

The child and family welfare sector in Victoria has consistently attempted to inculcate more formal approaches to practice in the out of home care setting. The employment of trained social workers and youth workers and the introduction of training programs (for example, Certificate IV in Protective Care directed at welfare workers) and the introduction of the *Looking After Children* framework are three such examples. The key concepts of attachment theory (see for example Bowlby, 1969) and developmental theory (Erikson, 1959; 1968) have permeated many levels of the out of home care sector (see Taylor & White, 2001). In addition, the out of home care sector reflects the characteristics of the profession of social work as outlined earlier. There is an absence of one unifying body of knowledge or methodology although there is evidence that particular approaches has been in the ascendant for periods of time in the out of home care sector (for example, developmental psychology, attachment theory, cognitive behavioural therapy). In the course of the interviews a panoply of different approaches were evident, demonstrating a consistent lack of unifying approaches to formal theory in practice.

At a superficial level the application of theoretical models to practice would appear to be *ad hoc* or primarily as a post-practice interpretive device. For many human service workers formal theory is deployed to interpret why a particular event occurred as opposed to informing practice intervention in a methodical and

consistent manner. It is a process more aligned with sense-making after the fact than action-informing. In the first instance theories of practice were often identified but in a profligate manner or having a caricatured quality so as to render their explanations (literally) illogical. Formal knowledge was viewed as useful or having currency if it was not perceived as such (that is, formal). This suggests parallels with Carey's (2007) research that suggests the use of theoretical models by social workers in practice was increasingly subordinate to techniques of administrative rationality that were increasingly part of the human service landscape. As one recently graduated social worker noted:

I loved it every minute of it [social work degree] and you know and I came – I guess at the time like I was really quite passionate about particular areas and all this sort of thing and thought 'this is great' and I guess like and I don't know if it's working in this particular area that kills it in you. (Interview 8)

The language of workers was laden with terms that are associated with particular formalised models of practice. For example one interviewee with a degree in psychology and child development noted, "I guess its handy to have a theory base behind your practice but um again it changes on a day to day basis" (Interview 2) or another noted that in choosing a model to apply to practice, "the embarrassing answer is 'flavour of the month' ...my first training was psychodynamic and I've never quite lost those roots... the truth is I start with solution focused" (Interview 7).

While another noted:

I don't think I've ever been able to say that's the theory I'm working to and that's it – it more I'll take a bit of that one and I'll take a bit of that one and I'm going to take a bit of that one – and I'm going to put them all in my tool box and that'll be how I operate. (Interview 2)

For other workers practice wisdom was separate and distinct from formal theory although there were examples of co-opting elements of the latter into the former:

I guess you have that practice wisdom but you can integrate or use some of that theory – I think you feel more secure in your judgement sometimes so I guess like attachment theory is huge in the particular work that I do um there is an eclectic range of theories you could ...systems theory, developmental theory...you need to have an understanding of ages, stages and ranges. (Interview 18)

One social worker noted that during their social work degree approaches associated with structural theory and systems theory were in the ascendant but their experience of supervising social work students “now everyone is post modern these days” (Interview 5) while acknowledging that “post modern theory it’s kind of what we do...its more you can look at a situation in your own unique way...there’s no ‘this happened we should respond that way...you might try this and this doesn’t work try that and that doesn’t work” (Interview 5). Again we have here an explanation of theory that is caricatured. Workers tended to deploy the term 'practice wisdom' to suggest a more pragmatic amalgam of procedural and formal knowledge.

Theory was seen by some as something more associated with workers (especially social workers) who were newer to the field. The application of models was something to be trained (experienced) out. Other respondents articulated a more central role for theoretical frameworks, “theory is essential you can’t do this job without a theoretical background” (Interview 16). For example, “systems theory – takes the focus off the individual spreads it out a bit...I go back [to it] all the time, it gives me a basis to talk to staff...to explain to them why this kid behaves the way he does” (Interview 16). Another acknowledged that boundaries between practice that was informed by formal knowledge as opposed to that which was not were far from clear, “I can’t distinguish between the skills and the values because they’re both...you need to be authentic” (Interview 7).

One case worker was more explicit in describing the role of theory in their work, explaining their work with a young boy:

who [has] got problematic sexualised behaviour and so developmental theory along with other theories as well came into the decisions because at different stages there are certain expectations that you wouldn't see as within the boundaries of appropriate sexualised behaviour ... I guess so developmental theory comes in there certainly comes in with the nought to five it's particularly important. (Interview 18)

While much of the talk of human service workers reflects ambivalence toward theory, the language suggests that particular approaches have become imbedded. The thread of attachment theory and the concept of 'unattached children' or 'attachment disorder' were present in many of the worker's narratives. For example, "Children have attachment disorder...these children are different" (Interview 16). Such terms were used often to describe the children and young people in out of home care. For others terms more associated with cognitive behavioural theory were evident in the descriptions of 'behaviours', for example 'sexualised behaviour'. Such concepts assisted workers overcome personal judgements about 'good' and 'bad' to bring meaning to the particular characteristics of the young people they were working with. As one residential care worker explained:

Like I mean, you go to – unattached children, and you realise, yeah, that's just like so-and-so. They don't seem to have any feelings for anybody else's feelings, they just, no matter what you do, they don't see any loyalty, or they've still got that little fence around them. You might think you've got them and then they'll turn and they'll do something, you know? And you haven't really got them at all. (Interview 15)

One worker noted that framing young people in a particular way and using concepts associated with psychotherapy helped move beyond a baser, reactive response to young people:

How do I say this in a way that doesn't seem really crude...a lot of the young people I work with they're not nice...isn't that a terrible thing to say I'm thinking it is going to sound really ghastly...there's probably only about a couple of the ten or twelve young people I've

worked with here that I can honestly say when I've sat in the room with them I had a real sense of them being applaudable (sic), engaging young people. (Interview 7)

Here we see professional knowledge deployed as a way of overriding or mediating personal beliefs. The most consistent use of theory was in making sense of the children and young people in care sometime critically so. For example, "I think you are at much greater risk of being...burning out and worn down by the sheer weight of sad stories if you don't have a conceptual framework" (Interview 7). Formal knowledge is deployed as a way of disembodimenting their practice and to move beyond an immediate and personal response. The workers use this knowledge as a set of armor to allow a habitus that defends against the encroachment of deeper engagement with children and young people.

Organisational habitus formation

As outlined in the previous sections, human service practice is often conceptualised as influenced (directed) by a habitus that is reflective of formal and/or informal organisational imperatives. It is an analysis that positions practice as governed by particular organisational ways of working; frames of reference that inculcated, oriented and inducted workers into particular ways of seeing and doing things. Chan's (1997) work on the habitus of policing was tethered to the organisational context of the New South Wales Police Services. Chan's conceptualisation suggests a more unified habitus linked to consistent practice within an organisation or institution. Similarly, McDonald and Chenoweth (2009) explore the ways in which social work practice in a national income support agency (Centrelink) has responded to the implementation of values and rationalities that are at odds with those espoused by the profession of social work; an organisational context characterised by surveillance, oversight, concentrated location, fixed categories and tight techniques. It is a framing of social worker action that is tied to a rule-bound conceptualisation of practice.

McDonald and Chenoweth (2009) identify three values spheres (or rationalities); theoretical rationality, substantive rationality, and formal rationality. The authors provide an analysis to contrast how each of these rationalities is engaged or enacted (practiced) based on the logics of a liberal social work tradition as opposed to a practice aligned with neo-liberalism and New Public Management (NPM). While McDonald and Chenoweth define a practice within the organisation characterised by a clash of values, as professional autonomy is constrained by the shift towards an individualised participation agenda and the increasing presence of the modalities of NPM, they also identify acquiescence in addition to resistance to this realignment of practice. Through their interviews they explore the extent to which some social workers, through the language they deploy, had reconfigured the contemporary agenda to be more aligned with liberal social work values. Also of note in this research in relation to the question of resistance, is the recognition that for some social workers while not actively resisting, their rejection of managerial imperatives was played out internally. Such an experience was outlined by one of their participants as, "I am tired and have headaches daily. I am unable to have conversations about welfare. I have lost my passion. It is increasingly difficult for me to continue to feel positive" (McDonald & Chenoweth, 2009, p. 157).

In relation to my research, the importance and relevance of this analysis is the focus on the varied experience of external power and the ways in which the exercise of power is experienced by workers. McDonald and Chenoweth (2009) recognise that despite sustained attempts to control and reduce the exercise of discretion by social workers there is still scope for the expression of individual agency. Two significant points of departure exist between my own research and that conducted by McDonald and Chenoweth. Both relate to the organisational location of their research, Centrelink. It is an organisation that retains many the hallmarks of a large bureaucracy, a context where the rationalities associated with a greater singularity of purpose, physical (and other) surveillance and co-located hierarchies. Unlike the child and youth services sector in Victoria, there is a greater level of demarcation for the social work profession. In Centrelink the professional boundaries of social

work remain intact to a greater extent than they are in the Victorian out of home care sector. In this context their sole focus on the experience of social workers is justified.

In my research a focus of the interviews was the influence of formal markers of organisational intent such as the 'mission statement' or 'statement of purpose'. Perhaps unsurprisingly for front line staff, the interviewees indicated this formal technique of spreading organisationally defined intent was not successfully embedded within the milieu of front line practice. It was not a significant instrument to revise or restructure the habitus. For most there was awareness that there was one although it was not evident in any way, shape or form in the way front line practice was articulated. Each of the agencies consulted had developed what can be described as a Mission Statement. The interviewees were asked to describe and discuss the mission or values statement of their organisation. There was very little evidence that this device played a significant role in informing practice. Interviewees from one of the agencies noted a particular emphasis in their organisation on the practice of family preservation but for most of those interviewed the mission statement was a little visited foreign territory. It was not an instrument that had cascaded through the organisation. Most were aware of its existence but few could explain what was in it beyond paraphrasing or rephrasing their own world view. It was seen as a document that existed outside the world of front line practice, "there is something somewhere...I know we have these... I have the sense that I should be able to tell you but I can't" (Interview 7). In another interview conducted in the office of a residential unit the interviewee responded "The mission statement's in here somewhere...I don't know I think their main mission is to provide and find decent residential and foster care for kids under their wings" (Interview 14).

More surprising in the narratives of practice was the absence or invisibility of the individual agency within which interviewees were employed. Just as a personal

habitus originating outside the workplace is a strong feature of the narratives of practice, the organisations of which workers were a part were not.

As outlined in Chapter Two the mixed economy of welfare in Victoria and the key role of community (non-government) organisations in providing out of home care services suggests that these organisations would have a more pronounced presence in the way front line practitioners articulated the drivers of their practice. With few exceptions this was not the case. There was little evidence of an organisationally influenced habitus formation in the narratives of workers. This is not a conclusion based solely on the responses to questions regarding the mission statement. Rather, it reflects a silence on the subject of their agencies as informing practice. While stories of background, training, formal theory and collegial influences did feature in the narratives, organisations did not. This was not explored during the interviews but emerged through the analysis of the transcripts.

More evident in terms of institutional influences on the habitus were narratives referring to the Department of Human Services, 'the Department'. Workers would often identify 'the Department' as a singular entity. The organisation was framed in a manner beyond that characterised by the contact with protective workers or team leaders. In relation to their own agencies human services workers were more likely to identify sub-groups within agencies (residential workers, case workers) rather than their agency as a whole. 'The Department' was often the dominant, omnipresent entity for human service workers. The narrative of the Department provided a counter point to their own practice, as an entity representing the epitome of rationality and constraint and also as an emphasis for the need for their practice to mediate the formulaic incursions into the lives of young people and their families and the other harsh aspects of the system. Interestingly, this view of 'the Department' became more nuanced as the interviews progressed. Workers would acknowledge that there was some flexibility in working with the Department depending on the individual you were working with at the time, highlighting the

importance of relationships and rapport building with particular workers. I shall return to this issue in Chapter Seven.

With few exceptions, workers did not identify themselves with a logic or rationality determined by their own agency setting. At least in explicit terms, individual practice was not routinely (or occasionally) identified as informed by organisational (as opposed to for example, Departmental or personal) imperatives. The requirements attached to 'sleepovers' for young people at a friend's house is one salient and frequently cited example of perceived illogical yet unavoidable practice requirements of the Department. At the time of the interviews it was a Departmental requirement that all adult members of the household where the sleepover was planned would have to undergo a police check prior to it taking place. The onerous nature of this requirement was highlighted by a number of individuals interviewed. It was interpreted as stigmatising young people in care, and as risk management 'gone overboard'. Put simply, it was a process with no flexibility. There was no space for discretion in this practice. One worker highlighted the the absurdity of a young women who had run away from a residential care placement and had been living on the streets, having sex with older men and using illicit drugs but on coming back into the care system was required to get police checks completed on all occupants of her friend's house over the age of 18 if she wanted to stay overnight (Interview 2).

There was limited evidence of revisions of the habitus on the basis of organisational imperatives. On reflection this is to be expected given the number of characteristics actively working against the formation of organisational knowledge, including the fragmented composition of the sector, the dispersed sites of practice (for example. residential units in the community), the stratified workforce, the strong external techniques of accountability (the Department), the prominence of personalised narratives of practice outlined at the beginning of this chapter and staff mobility or turnover. Despite the long history of some organisations, the fragmented nature of

the out of home care sector ensures that the concept of a human service habitus inhabited by organisational knowledge or an agency-informed practice is problematic. In this context, Howe's (1991) assertion of social work practice as a "largely state-sponsored, agency-based and organisationally-tethered activity" (p. 204), reflects a jurisdictional context at odds with that experienced in Victoria. His analysis does not reflect the blindness to (or absence of) agency or organisational influences that are a feature of the narratives of front line workers in this study.

Moreover, the consistent invisibility or absence of agency talk or agency narratives was a sharp contrast to the habitus of policing described by Chan (1997). In so far as such narratives were articulated they were not representative of the imperatives of the organisation. The narratives represented a constellation of practices often highlighting the fissures within organisations (for example between residential workers and case workers, between colleagues of varying experience, front line practitioners and managers). The stories of practice also convey unsanctioned sub-organisational identities that served as a compass for localised practice. Each of these factors worked against the development of consistent, organisational-wide narratives of practice and nurtured the development of subgroup dynamics that were often antagonistic towards the wider agency or other parts of the organisation for example, "the structure of this place is all wrong" (Interview 5).

As one worker with a particularly strong self-professed professional identity noted, their organisation paid very little attention to developing a shared vision of practice, employing a particularly benign approach to the individual practice of workers. The prevailing attitude was non-interventionist and, in a sense, uninterested in practice to the point of isolating the worker:

I'm well aware of it now and I think I've acclimatised to it, and am absolutely starved professionally by these guys, and there's no nice way [to] go saying that because you sound like you're saying your colleagues are a bunch of dipsticks and they're not, it's just that this is so trying. There are only two staff; there's the manager, who has no - the current

manager has no sense of the practice, no interest in practice...if you try and talk to him about kids. So I know that's a dead end there. There's two colleagues, one of them has been a manager and fast-tracked into it and very thin in terms of practice experience; very bright, articulate, lovely lovely lady, but.... The other one, this is her second job; young woman in her 20s who's worked at DHS and therefore has got the protective stuff, beautiful, beautiful, again, very bright, intelligent, capable young woman who knows her DHS protocols and procedures back to front and who is absolutely process-driven. No - doesn't even ask the question what might be going on in the behaviour, and has only just started to think in those terms. And so it needs a lot of stuff from me about, well, OK, how do you start thinking contextually. (Interview 7)

There was very little suggestion of the development of a shared approach to practice within this part of the organisation. Practice was seen as a private space. To the extent the organisation was engaging in habitus-forming activity it reinforced a more individualised and insular process of sense making, "I don't draw any strength from colleagues and I draw absolutely nothing from supervision that is about the direct practice" (Interview 7). Others acknowledged the importance of working as part of a team or group working towards a shared goal, "I am a team player I need or I like to have people around me" (Interview 1). Other workers indicated that they were more comfortable acting within boundaries prescribed by their agency or the Department, "the more structure then the more clear cut everything is. And there's not a lot of rules but, you know, if they're adhered to by every staff, the kids are more settled" (Interview 15).

Some workers indicated a more circumspect or pragmatic approach to employing their personal values in their work and acknowledged a respect for, or deferral to, authority within their organisation. A caveat is attached to their actions; free will within boundaries, "I take that as a given...I wouldn't do anything I didn't feel comfortable with unless I was made to do it by someone who has higher authority than me ...I wouldn't do it unless I was told to" (Interview 4). For these workers discretion in their work is associated with or framed as the absence of direction from superiors, supervisors or the Department. If you are not actively being told what to do then you are exercising discretion, even if the activity falls broadly

within the boundaries of what is expected or permitted. Clearly this is an inert and reactive framing of the concept. This interpretation situates the application of discretion within such a broad frame as to render it a meaningless and ultimately passive activity. It is a space for practice that is only granted not enacted.

Interviewees from one agency alluded to a particular way of working, characterised by the maxim deployed by individuals occupying senior positions in the organisation, 'it's easier to get forgiveness than it is to get permission'. This phrase captures a way of working that prizes spontaneity over process and is closely aligned with the 'tough love' approach as articulated in the personal knowledge/s section. As one interviewee noted:

[Agency] is probably only nine years old a lot of the staff that are...have worked together for probably 15, maybe 20 years, ... there's probably half a dozen of them that still work at [agency] it's not incestuous in one sense but let's say the core staff of [agency] have known each other for a very long time so it helps to be on that - on that ladder or in that circle if you like...so that helps because if you're in there you sort of - you have a stronger bond I guess with co-workers. (Interview 11)

The 'circle' was an exemplar of quite a masculine approach to practice as the interviewee went on to explain, "I just reckon that because I'm a bloke I can get away with overstepping my mark sort of thing – I dunno" (Interview 12) or more specifically in their description of their role, "I'm making sure that everyone stays safe and make sure that [female co-worker] stays safe because we have sharp things down there and kids have got bad tempers and bad habits of doing – and lashing out and um react to different situations" (Interview 12). Another interviewee from this organisation noted that:

There's a lot of negative reinforcements, we see a lot of - especially young boys that we look after,...all of the male staff deal with it, it's a lot easier for them, they feel safer I guess ...instead of being pulled outside, "You go outside and calm down," they might be put outside if you know I mean. So there's a lot of negative - and I don't often know whether that actually reinforces the bad behaviour or not. To me it only just makes them angrier and "Well, OK, I reacted that way and they reacted that way so to me it must be OK to react that

way," so yeah, I think there's a few mixed messages with the way some people practice.
(Interview 11)

For this interviewee this 'old school' approach to working with young people was counterproductive at another level as:

New ideas are just not coming in. You can send people to training but that doesn't necessarily mean that when they come [back] that they follow that especially if they're in a house [residential unit] where the management doesn't see change as being a good thing so I think that that has created a gap as 20 years ago that's all you did do, provided a house and three meals a day and you didn't do anything else but I myself see that differently.
(Interview 11)

Particular ways of doing things were conveyed in organisations not necessarily through formal processes of induction but rather less formal modes such as observing the work of more experienced colleagues, "If you watch them [workmates] closely you work out different ways of working with kids" (Interview 13) or the other ways of conveying the message of what is and what is not expected of workers, "people have got their own little ideas and all that and I got the feeling that I was resented for all these new ideas" (Interview 14). There was a more subtle induction process. This was not usually organisationally sanctioned practice; it was more aligned with Kingfisher's (1998) concept of the coproduction of policy. The shared talk and storytelling between workers was also instructive in structuring a particular disposition to work and its meaning:

well sometimes its keeping the kids alive until the end of the day cos we do deal with you know out there kids that are possibly going to die before the end of the day um – and then we need to cope – take ourselves back from it (Interview 12).

This sentiment appeared to represent a kind of orthodoxy among some workers and was echoed by a worker in another agency:

I think at the end of the day a really experienced worker said to me once "if kids are alive when you wake up in the morning and the staff are alive and the other clients in the house are alive you've done a good job – and that's what I take on board now. (Interview 2)

As Chan (2007) suggests, “sense-making in organisations is a social process” (p. 326). The meanings enacted by workers were often the result of shared perspectives that were shaped within an organisation. For Kingfisher (1998), worker action (the co-production of policy) is shaped by the application of shared worker narratives with the example being the interpretation of clients accessing their services. Narratives that were not endorsed by the organisation although influenced the framing of categories of service users, and subsequently, guided the application of formal interventions and responses.

This again reinforces the influence on worker habitus that is more collegial than organisational, a practice that is developed within teams or subgroups rather than the organisation as a whole.

Outlaw / Bandit Practice

The outlaw disposition towards practice denotes an antagonism towards established ways of doing things with a perception of esoteric or flawed reasoning in the status quo. The narratives associated with a 'bandit' (Jordan, 1990) discourse share much with the personalised narratives outlined at the beginning of this chapter or the heroic narratives of the section to follow. The influence of the bandit narrative permeates more global descriptions of practice and the practice context but does not correspond to the frequency (rarity) of the events on which it is based.

Unlike the heroic narratives that seem underscored by bringing order to (or simply surviving) chaotic situations, the narratives here share a theme of undermining strict and ill-conceived boundaries or processes. Here the narratives were about taking risks in a risk-averse environment or more simply privileging a simple, 'down to earth' practice unhindered by the luggage of professional or sector/system canon. It is an interpretation of practice that works against the particular logics that are in the ascendant in the sector. For example, the logic of risk management, the

logic of cognitive behavioural therapy or attachment theory, the logic of personal accountability and the logic of financial accountability. More often than not workers associated these logics with a ossified bureaucratic system or techniques devoid of the humanity that is needed by young people in care, “none of the star chart and the elephant stamp stuff...we’ve got more practical stuff...using the vacuum cleaner” (Interview 14). Bandit practice was often directed to stymieing or undermining the application of professionalised approaches that were seen as removed from a need to normalise that was prevalent in the work with young people.

We have a young woman at the moment who has mental health issues. She asked me - we were speaking about that the other day and she said to me "Oh, they're just about finishing my assessment," and I said, "What assessment is that?" and she said, "The one that tells them what I've got." (Indistinct) "Oh the one that tells you whether you're crazy or not," and she said, "Yeah, that's the one," but, you know, I often think people don't believe that these kids can handle honesty and reality and the reality of it is these kids have handled more crap than any of us have and to just not be honest with them and you're expecting them to go out and work for themselves and cope with the rest of the world you're full of yourself. (Interview 11)

As mentioned earlier participants from one agency deployed the phrase ‘it’s easier to get forgiveness than permission’ as an ethos within parts of their agency, to highlight a way of working that was comfortable with taking risks and antagonistic towards sector orthodoxies.

This habitus interprets the experience of young people in care as ‘hyper real’. It is an experience perceived as too mired in the formalities of being ‘in care’ and subject to a plethora of interventions (professional and other) with an (often) impenetrable logic or priority that further removed the young person from ‘the real world’. For one worker, the professionals in her local area offered little to the young people she worked with, “yes [there are a range of services here] but I find them useless they find them [young people in care] interesting they see them as interesting – a curiosity” (Interview 16). As mentioned in the section on

organisational habitus, the entity that was being rebelled against was not necessarily their own agency rather it was more often the Department or their own agency as in league with (or merely an outpost of) the Department.

The practice here ranged from a bending of the rules or a strategic use of language “I’m yet to have them (DHS) say to me you can’t do that...I don’t ask them everything either” (Interview 16), to the out and out flouting of prescribed approaches. The most pronounced examples cited in the interviews imply a degree of calculation and reasoning and the balancing of possible outcomes. The following (lengthy) example illustrates how competing roles are played out and calculations are made to navigate (break) strict rules and responses to particular incidents:

the other one that really sticks in my mind is camping [young women] wanted to go camping – she was 17 and a half she had been going out with her boyfriend for about 12 months – she really wanted to go camping really wanted to go – she’d been invited she was really excited cause it was with a group of people she didn’t have a lot of social skills and she didn’t have a lot of friends and she was pretty excited that she’d got invited to go with her boyfriend and all his mates – and she wasn’t allowed to go – she came home “I’m going camping I’m going camping” and we’re going [we] have to go to the Department and find out and the answer going to be ‘no’ then she’s going to go off her head and then going to go anyway and then you know. So we rang the Department and of course they “she’s not going – she’s on a guardianship order” and again we thought the benefits outweighed the negatives of her going camping and um so we sat down with [young women] and said you’re not allowed to go [she replied] “get fucked I’m going anyway” so we kind of [said we] thought you might say that [young women] so here’s the plan OK this is what we will do for you – if you are to provide us with an address of th[is] camping site and if you are to ring us on the Saturday morning and the Saturday night and the Sunday morning and the Sunday night and if you’re home by lunchtime on the Monday we can stop a warrant going out ...she’s going anyway – what we’re saying is that you can minimise the consequences if you take responsibility and she was “oh” we’re saying that we think it’s a pretty good idea for you to go camping we can’t say ‘yes’ but we can hold the Department from putting a warrant out for you if you’re in contact with us and if you’re not substance affected when you ring us and you sound like you’re having a good time when we liaise After Hours Child Protection and go “she’s still not home we think she’s ok whatever” and we just sort of said you know 48 hours of... they’re not going to issue a warrant till the 48 hours abscontion (sic)

and she was sort of like “so I can’t go?” and um yeah anyway she’s packed all her stuff and she’s like “right I’m going I’m on a camping trip see youse later I’ll have a really good time” and we’re going “oh fuck you just don’t get it” and she did she had the best time and the positive so outweighed the negative and um she stuck to her deal she rung us you know in the morning and in the afternoon she wasn’t substance affected – what she did after she made that last phone call you know the afternoon and the next morning who cares and she came home and she was – she’d had a really normal time. (Interview 2)

This anecdote has many of the features that the stories of bandit practice share. Through the narrative a sense of the ‘common sense’ needs of young people is developed, highlighting the value of potential ‘normal’ experiences, a subversion of inflexible directives, taking advantage of the physical distance from the Department and an element of self-protection in the event that a worst case scenario was realised. This element of self-protection is evident in a further example of bandit practice outlined by this worker, this time directed against the agency not the Department:

it is very much frowned upon supplying young people with condoms...we’ve been told not to basically – I don’t care I would rather – you know I don’t say to kids “here you go do you need condoms” I have them in the unit they know that they’re in the unit they can grab them whenever they want to they’re in drawers in the bathroom and I just continue to grab them from the health centre whenever I’m going past – and they don’t have to come and ask for them and I don’t believe that I am supplying them – they’re there they can grab them and if that stops one of the kids getting their girlfriend up the duff then you know really I’d prefer to do that (Interview 2).

The narratives of outlaw or bandit correspond to the personal narratives of practice in re-authoring the dominant narratives or the prescribed ways of doing things. The key difference with this narrative was that it was not simply representative of a sense-making scheme, it was directed towards also disrupting the dominant assumptions of the sector. I will return to the issue of calculation and strategy forming in the following Chapter.

'Stepping up': Heroic Practice

It is no surprise to find that much of the practice of human services workers, or the narratives that populate the stories of work concentrate on the more extreme anecdotes of practice. Much like a drop of food dye in a glass of water the dye becomes the dominant feature, colouring all we see. The crisis, the violence, the need for immediate action, thinking on your feet, bringing order, control and safety to situations where there is none; these are the aspects of 'the real stuff' of human service work. It is not the mundane work of writing and reporting, the meetings, the formal accountabilities that define the real work. These things often get in the way of the real work. As one worker stated:

I'm quite prepared [to] step up when the shit hits the fan and take responsibility and take control of the situation but I guess growing up in a little country town there was a lot of unemployment and teenage pregnancy and a lot of suicide a lot of drug and alcohol problems – so I use all of my experience. (Interview 2)

With the bandit (Jordan, 1990) narrative, the stories take on an apocryphal quality, representing a celebration of individual agency or working against the odds:

I just think that common sense is such a big part of the stuff we do – if you can't be a quick thinker and a logical sort of thinker you can get into all sorts of trouble with the kids that we work with. (Interview 1)

Here workers interpret their work as representing the thin line between what is 'normal' and the chaos and uncertainty of out of home care. In the period of crisis there is no space for reflection as "at this moment consciousness is nothing other than the dialectic of milieu and action" (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, cited in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 21). The ability to 'act', not retreat, in response to crisis was consistently expressed as a prized characteristic of the 'good worker'. Thoughtful action was considered well and good but more of a luxurious quality than the capacity to occupy and act in the space of immediate crisis. The work is exacting and complicated but at the same time hidden and under-appreciated. In their analysis of the stories of policing, Shearing & Ericson (1991) question if such stories

(similar to those highlighted in the 'Bandit/Outlaw practice' and 'Stepping Up') are simply mythologising narratives as against more rational accounts of practice arguing that such accounts serve more to set the scene for practice:

It is especially important for the police to develop *general* sense-makers that can be used in the myriad of settings they face. Police stories function as a search-light rather than a spot-light, ensuring that they experience reality as a fluid and not a solid. (p. 489)

Similarly, the stories of human service practice situate the worker as managing the intersection of the chaotic behaviour of young people, the unrealistic and fickle demands of the bureaucracy, the erratic behaviour of families and the indifference of the wider community. Such stories, rather than providing a template or script for action, represent a sensibility or disposition of a particular type that can be applied across a range of scenarios (Shearing & Ericson, 1991). Framing the work in out of home care this way not only privileges and makes essential this characteristic of responding to crisis but it has the added effect of rendering the more mundane aspects of work, the majority of the day to day tasks, as inessential or peripheral. The planning, the paper work, the process is not 'the stuff of real work'. For many it is to be tolerated or endured and bears a limited relationship to their sense of themselves in their work.

The framing of practice wisdom shared a number of similarities with Bourdieu's (1990) construct of the feel for the game to describe a practice that was more reflexive than reflective. Here is a practice that cannot be taught and is not based on formal theory, although elements can be drawn on. It is characterised by pragmatism in the description of practice but is more valued and entrenched than other referential frames of practice as exemplified in the following, "but it just depends on the child and how well you get to know them. What pushes their buttons and what, to [do to] turn them around. It's a bit hard to explain but you do get to know which" (Interview 15).

Conclusion

In developing the concept of the habitus of human service workers, I have analysed the narratives of front line workers to explore how embodied history informs much of the interpretations of key actors in the field. The chapter has framed a habitus formation that is embodied and representative of experiences beyond the workplace. Key identities of practice have been articulated to sketch out the contrasting way in which practice is configured. The manner in which external rationalities are acquiesced to, resisted or reframed is influenced by the particular habitus of the individual worker.

This analysis contrasts with accounts of worker's sense-making and practice that emphasise organisational imperatives (for example Chan, 1997; Scott, 1989). The narratives analysed here convey little in the way of agency or organisational influences on habitus formation. There was very limited evidence of an organisation specific 'way of working'. Organisations did not provide workers with a clear unifying rationality of practice or the conceptual architecture to engage with prominent external rationalities of practice. Beyond the influence of personal experiences there was evidence that sub-groups within organisations, such as a team of case managers or workers within a residential unit, developed shared understandings of the work with children and young people.

The extent to which professional identities were represented in the narratives represents a paradox. While some conveyed the importance of practising from the perspective of a theoretical model, accounts of the application of professional knowledge in practice were rare. The abstract descriptions of professional knowledge and formal education were used by workers to suggest a disconnection between formal or clinical knowledge and a knowledge of practice that was contingent and more grounded in the everyday.

To the question of discretion, I have suggested that it is a paradox for front line human service workers. A meta-narrative that privileged the attribute of being able to respond to crisis was a strong theme in the interviews. The narratives of heroic and (to a lesser extent bandit) practice populate many of the accounts. The capacity to 'think on your feet' and 'be cool in a crisis' dominate the stories of practice yet questions remain about how well this reflects the work or the workers. While in the first instance this suggests a relative freedom in front line practice, free from control and with considerable discretion, this was far from the case. Many of the accounts of practice highlighted an ease with practising within strict parameters and a lack of confidence in both operating in the absence of control or simply defining rule-following as discretionary activity. It would be simple to suggest that this was a characteristic aligned with workers 'newer' to the field (which was sometimes the case) but there was also evidence of a degree of comfort with compliant responses from more experienced workers. While stories of extremes tend to dominate the narratives there is also a distinct thread of conservatism in evidence. This suggests that for some institutional logics had a role in habitus formation as the imperatives of external agencies such as the Department of Human Services and the concurrent apparatus of surveillance and control were more influential. This conservatism is evident in a practice that takes much for granted, or as inevitable, and focuses more on piecemeal change or resistance.

Chapter 7 – The practices of power and control in human services: the experience of the field

Having articulated the aspects of the habitus of human service work, I now move to explore the issue of power and control and how this is experienced by human service workers. The out of home care sector in Victoria can be characterised as both centralised and fragmented. While the State retains the responsibility for children removed from their families, the day to day care of children and young people is 'contracted out' to a multitude of non-government (community service) agencies. It is a realm of competing discourses. As Dickens (2008) explains the service environment in the United Kingdom, a context that shares some of the imperatives and priorities of the Victorian system of out of home care:

The point about complexity, contradiction and dynamism within overarching frameworks is especially relevant for local authority child and family social work, where managerialism runs in conjunction with the legal and welfare discourses as key sources of guiding beliefs and techniques. (p. 50)

While the service context may diverge, the Victorian context shares this feature of multiple and shifting discourses with the oeuvre of managerialism as a consistent feature.

I now move to a consideration of power and control, bringing together the analysis of the habitus of human services workers and its relation with the field. I examine how the relationships between the dispositions of agents within the field of out of home care are manifested in practice. As I have set out in the Chapter Six, the habitus of the human service worker is not a universal or shared disposition. For example, I have presented evidence both of different interpretations of the behaviour, motivation and needs of young people and the way in which formal (professional) knowledge is deployed in practice.

Through the analysis of the experience of power and compliance in human service work, this chapter seeks to explore the institutionalised timidity that appears to characterise much of the practice. It examines why *not* making mistakes or taking chances has achieved a position of preeminence within human service practice. How is it that a sector that valorises the talk of action and empowerment is often characterised by an adherence to the rule-bound activity and the maintenance of the *status quo*? As disparate and diverse as the sector is, it is characterised by high and increasing levels of regulation and surveillance.

The following section begins with a discussion of governance and resistance in practice (highlighting the power of the mundane / everyday work) before moving to focus on the narratives of (an often omnipotent) 'Department' exercising considerable control and influence on the practice of workers. I then move to the question of accountabilities of practice by positioning workers as constituents of multiple terrains of responsibility. This chapter concludes with a discussion of how the language of practice acts to frame behaviour and set particular 'parameters of the possible' in human service work. This section provides consideration of the 'spaces' of control and discretionary activity and an analysis of how the language of 'risk' has merged into the landscape of human service practice.

Governance and resistance in practice – immersed in the everyday

You've just got to run with it - make the best of it. (Interview 5)

In each of the interviews I began by asking participants to describe their previous day at work. It was a simple technique designed to put interviewees at ease, begin the task of framing workplace activity and action and to orient the discussion towards practice. An interesting number of interviewees chose not to do so instead focusing on another (more eventful) day. For example, "OK, all right, um, probably easier to describe Wednesday rather than yesterday, I got more action on

Wednesday" (Interview 11). This again reinforces the assertion that workers are more at ease in descriptions of their work that exclude the mundane.

While there were a number of narratives of resistance, in discussing the question of constraint on practice some were acutely aware of the need to 'follow the (externally applied) rules' or simply 'go with the flow'. The stories of the exercise and experience of power reinforce Foucault's (1991; Foucault et al, 1999) framing of power as diffuse not simply exercised on the basis of material location. In the positioning of young people we see interpretations that situate power with young people as active agents or alternatively as passive objects subject (or to be subject) to the dictates of the system of out of home care. Similarly, the interpretation of the Department of Human Services ranges from that of the omnipotent bureaucracy to the more nuanced account of an organisation populated with the foibles, emotions, preferences and malleability of a more 'lived in' entity. In the description of power the interpretive frame, the habitus, of individual workers informs this experience of the exercise of power. The habitus mediates or influences if an exercise of power is to be interpreted and experienced as guidance, constraint, threat or support. The narratives of some workers suggest a habitus that is more disposed or accepting of practice within parameters or prescriptive practice. This was often, but not always, associated with workers who were newer to the field suggesting a lack of confidence or experience on the part of the workers. For others, particularly more experienced workers it was a more pragmatic consideration stemming from a recognition that fundamental change or transformation was not practical or achievable and their role was more akin to 'tinkering with an imperfect system'.

Given the frequent accounts of control and compliance characterised in much of the literature regarding managerialism and contractualism and front line work (see Chapter Two), it was initially surprising that many of the workers interviewed for this research expressed a relatively high degree of autonomy in their work.

Consistent with narratives of the 'real' human service work, the more mundane areas of work are downplayed or (occasionally) derided. Or to put it another way, "...you can do what you want as long as its not stupid" (Interview 11). In elaborating examples of autonomy or discretion what is often evident is a practice that is defined by events of considerable rarity. That is, the infrequent crisis or other chaotic situation. In addition to outlining rare or extreme events as evidence of a high level of discretionary practice a further feature of the narratives was the description of activity that was organisationally sanctioned (following rules or within the boundaries of accepted agreed practice) as an example of the use of discretion.

For some workers the interpretation of control suggests the space for a discretionary practice is a residual space. As the following anecdote suggests, in addition to this more passive interpretation of discretion, we can interpret that the discretionary exercise of power is over children, young people and their families. This is a discretionary space that occupies a small void left in the margins of what is specified and directed by the Department:

you work within guidelines of the Department and you know the Children and Young Persons Act – that's what we have to do and we don't really have a choice in the matter but then I thought more of it and I guess um then I thought well our discretion comes in parts orientation things – like um – maybe every day – you know them joining particular activities or like girl guides or netball teams or whatever like that sort of stuff um – you know and I guess in terms of...schools or day programs all that sort of stuff um and then I thought a bit more about it and I thought well we actually make the recommendations to the Department – we're the people who sort of you know right with families [and] know exactly what's going on monitoring accesses, school, their placement you know their health all of that stuff so if I were to say 'look um despite the case plan saying that mum has access once a week if you know I were to say its not actually working its not positive for anybody and this is happening and that's happening I think we need to reduce that or we need to look at a different um format for accesses from now on then um yeah it can quite influence what they what the [Department does] – I guess in that sense I thought well we have a fair bit of discretion really but I guess I was thinking that we probably have a bit more power than what I really originally thought that we did have ...although it's the Department's power to

change that or to say yes or say no um I think that they do listen to what we might believe is the best interests of the child so yeah – does that sort of make sense? (Interview 8)

This narrative highlights the question of in whose interests is discretion enacted? The simple response to that question, based on this example, is the practitioners themselves. The complexity is then with whose interests do they align? For some interviewees there was an acknowledgement that constraint was a necessary feature of their role:

because you can't take the responsibility. If you're a parent you've taken the responsibility and if it goes wrong, well, so be it. But in these circumstances you can't, because it's actually your job and you've got to go by their rules. (Interview 15)

Others acknowledged certain immovable boundaries within which their work was contained, “we don't tend to know much about the money stuff” (Interview 4) or “I am quite patient but the rules are the rules” (Interview 10). One interviewee in describing the complexities of the arrangement for contracted and non-contracted case management concluded with “it's a bit of a roundabout way of doing things but that's the system” (Interview 5). Here we see evidence of a space devoid of a more critical reflection, a space where practice is unreflective. For these workers the exercise of power has merged with the landscape of their own practice. Systems that are given tacit acknowledgement as illogical are accepted as necessary and inevitable. As noted earlier, for one worker the high level principles of transformation that were expressed through the course of a social work degree were ground down in the practice environment of out of home care noting that “it's working in this particular area that kills it in you (Interview 8).

As set out in the previous section, how individual workers frame children and childhood will often inform how regulation and compliance is negotiated (resisted or enacted) by workers. With the concept of governmentality, Foucault (1991) provides a useful analytical frame. The analysis of practice as governed by an internalisation of relations of power rather than power as externally applied. Governmentality represents a form of analysis that allows description of power as

not solely residing within, and exercised by, the realm of the state. Rather, it describes power as dispersed throughout the social sphere but guided by particular rationalities of government. In simple terms this concept is illustrated by one participant:

I think as long as you stick within what is morally right for you then you're pretty safe and I think if you can justify why you did it why you did something *and its not stupid* [emphasis added] I reckon you'll get away with it. (Interview 12)

The question of what is or is not considered 'stupid' remains an interesting issue and suggests a practice that is unlikely to stray too far from the permissible and also aligned with the particular narrative of practice, a narrative that is inherently conservative.

Through their narratives of practice and the discussions of what informs this practice there is evidence of workers framing rule-bound or accepted activity as discretionary practice. Workers describe a practice that reconciles the dominant (and seemingly contradictory) narratives of front line independence (of being 'quick on your feet' and responding to crisis or extreme chaos) with that of a governed sectoral practice (of what is the right thing to do). Certain accepted rationalities are evident in the narratives or explanations of particular decisions where workers have taken on 'gate-keeping' responsibilities:

I think you go in hard with everyone and, you know, you have to look at what the situation is and ...so you've got to weigh up the pros and cons when you're asking for certain amounts of money. If you're doing a camp and you ask for \$300 for the camp, well that's one thing; if you're sort of asking for a few g's, well then you've got to make sure that what you're doing is going to have some benefit and even some benefit worst case scenario, because then someone else down the track who is going to want to do the right thing and is going to want to work hard, you're basically knocking them in the head. (Interview 9)

There is evidence here that the worker has internalised a particular discourse of scarce resources. This is consistent with Rose (1999) who suggests an expansion of financial calculation has populated domains previously government by bureaucratic and professional norms. In part Rose proposes this realignment was achieved

through translating 'public' values of value for money and efficiency and transparency and the more 'private' norms of judgement, calculation and aspiration.

The following explanation reinforces the perception of a more limited discretionary activity framed as the capacity to provide advice:

I think that in some ways that we're very tightly constrained, but at the same time we're able to offer suggestions to the Department of Human Services. 'Cos I guess in the - at the end of the day the Department of Human Services is who we answer to with - as far as children in care. So we have to follow their - their policy as far as how the children are cared for, and - and what sort of activities they might do or stuff like that. But quite often we'll offer suggestions as to how - how maybe we think that child can be best cared for, or - or what sort of activities we think that they would benefit from. (Interview 6)

This highlights discretion of an endorsed kind, a paternalistic framing of the relationship between the agency and the Department. Others hinted at a particular pragmatism towards practices of control and constraint by focusing on the value of incremental or small scale changes. This approach developed the longer you worked in the field. As one social worker noted:

I think it's really important that you look at that [small scale change] otherwise you can just go mad or just think 'I'm not even doing anything - what's the point' - but yeah definitely you have to look at the smaller scale and I think maybe um my first couple of years working it was like I didn't I kind of thought this is ridiculous 'why do they have social workers they can't do anything... I think when I came out with all of these ideals and its like 'no' - it'd be nice but no. (Interview 8)

Such a sentiment of limited possibilities for change sits uncomfortably with the language of transformation that is a strong feature of much of the contemporary social work literature.

Other interviewees characterised their experience of power and control in a slightly different way. Describing control in their work environment not as barriers or

blockages but more as wickets hats to be negotiated or systems that can be manoeuvred to serve their own interests. For example, the anecdote described earlier regarding the covert distribution of condoms demonstrates a strategic calculation in negotiating organisational dictates. Another worker describes how case contracting provides more flexibility in their work:

I case manage...I have case management she's not case managed by the Department um which requires me to write a 3 monthly report for her – I do that every 3 months on her placement her access that's great cause I've got a lot more power and I can cut the Department out – I organise her access in conjunction with my workplace um we organise her access we organise her funding and that kind of stuff we're the decision makers.

(Interview 2)

While far from a consistent theme, the majority of the interviewees conveyed a work that is situated within certain constraints. They described a practice setting located within defined parameters of possible action. I now turn to focus on the narratives of the Department of Human Services ('the Department'), the chief architect of these parameters.

'The panoptical Department': apocryphal or nuanced?

At first glance the depiction of the Department in the narratives of human service workers is not unlike 'the villain'; a role that combines both an omnipotent and abstract presence. It was an organisation that represents the system and was viewed as the standard bearer of a practice defined by the ascendancy of rationalities of risk management. The Department elicited responses ranging from something of a shrug of the shoulders to occasional uncontained white rage. The heroic and bandit narratives of practice demand a villain or foil. As such, the Department of Human Services can be interpreted as an essential feature of the narratives of practice, as an entity to be resisted and triumphed over. While occasionally this role was inhabited by children and young people in care or their families, the narratives of workers ensured that the Department made the role its

own. A recurring theme in many of the interviews was the constant fear and anxiety of the Department towards adverse media comment and coverage which in turn led to what one interviewee described as a pervasive 'culture of blame'.

The control over individual agencies that the Department wielded was evident in a range of areas. The issue of competition within the out of home care sector and its implications for practice was raised by a small number of interviewees. There was a sense that you could not create too much of a stir with the Department as there was the perception that services could be defunded and/or transferred elsewhere, “there is another service here that would love to get their hands on this service...there’s always the fear there that it could happen – you have to be a little bit careful – I hate that standover” (Interview 16). An interviewee from another agency also noted:

And I have to tell you that sometimes it's strained I think there's a great deal of competition amongst the services – I think there is still a lot of goodwill but there is an underlying sort of competition. (Interview 1)

In some circumstances this competition and the subsequent fragmented service environment led to bewildering scenarios that added particular layers of complexity. One interviewee relayed a scenario where three young people were placed with a foster carer and each one was case managed by workers from different agencies. Each agency worker applied different approaches (to access arrangements) and the allocation of resources (capacity to fund school camps).

The managerial imperative in Departmental practice was also evident in community agencies. A small number of interviewees noted that their own agencies had evolved to mirror many of the features of the Department:

I think we've become an organisation that can be quite wasteful at times and that comes with services getting really big and turning into bureaucracies you know you don't necessarily do things in a cost efficient way – you follow process and policy and sometimes they're very expensive. (Interview 1)

Another noted, “there’s deals done with placement and support with higher management [in my agency and not having a say in placement decisions] it’s frustrating” (Interview 5).

Interviewees were able to easily identify scenarios or regulations that represented a triumph of risk rationalities, as cited earlier in the example with the emphasis on completing fire inductions with young people when “most kids want a teddy bear and a cuddle...someone to look after them” (Interview 1).

In discussing the application of discretion, instances of formal knowledge deployed to eke out a discretionary space were rare. The use of formal knowledge to enact a discretionary space did not feature in the discussions. Discretionary spaces were gaps left in Departmentally prescribed practice; relatively minor details within the parameters of defined practice. Examples of directly confronting authority using practice wisdom or professional knowledge were very rare and in those rare cases unsuccessful. It was procedural knowledge that allowed / facilitated discretionary practice.

Some things – cynically enough...there is the availability of more funding for kids that have problems...every time he lights a fire I put an incident report in because I know this kid down the track extra services will be required. (Interview 18)

A number of interviewees related examples where they were granted little or no discretion. The most common examples related to the placement of young people in residential care. Workers were often given no recourse to accepting placements they considered ill-advised. Deploying their professional judgement or experience did little to stop the placements proceeding, “if they’ve got a kid to come in we’ve just got to cop it really” (Interview 16).

For another worker the need to 'fill the bed' had adverse consequences for the type of work that could be done with young people in residential care. In addition to working in the community sector a small number of interviewees had worked with the Department of Human Services, an experience that continued to temper their interpretation:

When I worked for DHS there weren't the backup systems. You're there, and their answer to you asking questions is, "You are the professional, we expect you to make professional decisions. That's what we employ you for." In other words, "We can't be bothered, you deal with it." You're out there, you're being paid, you make the decisions, you do the wrong thing, they will jump on you. The money. The money was freer than the support. (Interview 3)

Another noted, "I've worked in DHS they don't frighten me" (Interview 16).

In contrast to the interpretation of the power and control exerted by the Department was the acknowledgement that it did not simply rely on a physical presence. Due to case load demands, Departmental staff were consistently characterised as rarely present. While interviewees acknowledged the flexibility this circumstance afforded it was also considered a significant hindrance often creating a decision making vacuum. Not surprisingly, workers identified the lack of presence of Departmental protective workers as a both a positive and a negative:

they don't get as involved with the kids I mean that's a negative and a positive – because when we're trying to get a young person secured its very difficult and I don't have that power to say yes or no – it has to go through DHS – but in terms of um the kids living autonomously then and you know being able to use... creative discretion I suppose – its um a lot easier that the Department isn't as involved – but they do get involved in stupid things and that really shits me – like big things you know the kid been chroming for a week straight and hasn't been home and not coming home and being charged by the cops four times in a week – "oh you know (young person) she's alright" and you know (another young person) she goes and chromes for the first time and she gets thrown in secure its kind of like well hell! (second young person) is fine she chromed she was at home she was tucked up in bed an hours later she was vomiting she ain't going to do it again. (first young person) she's crazy she's off cut she needs containment – they make silly decisions that I just find difficult to wear)...yeah I think we don't have enough say in client placement – the way most NGO's

and funded – they're funded for their beds not their kids – and their funded at the start of the financial year or we're funded 12 beds the start of the year whether we've got 12 kid in our beds or not – um which really gives DHS the upper hand because basically they've already paid for that bed whether its filled empty whatever so when they ring me like they did last night at 6 o'clock going 'well (young person) is in secure you've got a bed free at (residential unit)" and I was like 'yes' - 'we've got a client coming in' and I'm going 'no' – and I have no right of refusal. (Interview 2)

For others, the lack of involvement by the protective workers was more problematic, "being ACP [Adolescent Community Placement] most of our work involves chasing up DHS workers...chasing up protective workers" (Interview 13).

No single interpretation of the Department was evident in the interviews. While the most pervasive accounts were of an organisation of great control and power with little capacity for flexibility there were more nuanced accounts. These accounts were counter to the narratives of a bureaucracy dominated by rules and restriction. Examples of collaboration and collegial working relationships were not entirely absent from the narratives of workers, for example:

It depends on who the DHS worker is. Some are really approachable and more accessible than others, and I guess that's more around building a rapport with the ones that aren't. There are a couple that we saw have different clients coming and going at different times, so, you know, there's that longstanding relationship with them...And I'm thinking of one lady in particular. And she's really approachable and she respects what we're trying to do. And if we have a request or a complaint – not a complaint but a whinge – she's very open to that. And I guess that also comes from the fact that she did do some resi work as well. (Interview 3)

For one worker the acknowledgement of a productive and supportive working relationship was something that marked her as unusual and unique:

I'm a bit perverse in this in that I actually have a good working relationship with DHS, but I know perfectly well that we're not talking about an entity, we're talking about personal relationships, a long history, and I don't know if other regions operate the same way because the [X] region is the only region I've ever worked in and people who've come from other regions into this region tell me that it's quite unusual, that it is vicious and people

have long memories and a lot of it is politics and a lot of it is, you know, who likes who...I just think that's - I feel like that's everywhere but maybe it isn't. But because the current liaison people that I have with DHS with our program adviser, our liaison person, our contracted person who oversees case management, the team leader of that, and the unit manager, I like all of them, and I find that if I put something before them which is lame and if I unravel it trying to argue it, then it's not going to happen. But if I put something that is well-reasoned and considered, then they come to the party. And they've actually been surprisingly good I think. The only - I don't know that the other two case workers would say that here though...And so it made me think well is it about personalities; is it because we like each other and that opens doors, and that's dangerous. If that's true, that's dangerous. I know the other case worker has run up against them several times, in their back covering and back-pacing and, "Oh, that's not my problem". (Interview 7)

More than the conceptualisation of risk or the deployment of professional knowledge, this interviewee suggests that personality is a significant driver of more productive interaction with the Department. This was a sentiment echoed by other interviewees:

Even with the Department you can have some discretion if you've got a worker relationship...I think worker relationships make a difference – people know...its like the judges that sit in the Children's Court – people know who's likely to go in what direction it's the same with the Department. (Interview 18)

The transience of accountability: the shifting sense of responsibility

you can do anything you like as long as its not stupid (Interview 12)

In the above discussion on the multiple narratives of practice, emphasis is given to the divergent interpretations and responses to particular situations. This coupled with the mixed and fragmented nature of the child protection system in Victoria poses a number of questions on the issue of accountability. The analysis of how workers frame accountability, in particular the narratives of acceding to accountability highlight this issue as a pivotal intersection between private practice and public policy decision making. Not surprisingly, the Department figured strongly in the discussion of the issue of accountability, although it was far from the dominant feature. There was no hegemony when it came to accountability for

practice. Accountability was not something that was fixed; it was situational, contingent and shifting.

The Department was clearly recognised as the dominant entity in the landscape of accountabilities. While workers would often speak of multiple accountabilities, to personal ethics, the children and young people they worked with, colleagues and so on, these accountabilities were related in a way to make them appear as residual. These accountabilities were exercised in the wake of the Department. Practice was personal but at the end of the day it was the Department that had to 'sign off' on the practice. Workers consistently and continually identified in their practice as deferring to the pre-eminence of the Department. For one worker the question of accountability was quite straightforward, “we’re very much influenced by the Department – like we’re basically doing their work – and we’re contracted you know – cases are contracted from them to us” (Interview 8).

There was no distinction between the bureaucracy and the community service organisation. The interaction was often characterised as a stark master/servant relationship, or to reflect the oeuvre of the time a clear purchaser/provider model of practice. While this framing of community service work dominates much of the literature regarding the impact of the techniques of managerialism in human services (see Chapter Two), it does not reflect the range of experiences of accountability for many of the workers interviewed. Others had a more paternalistic way of framing the relationship, “I think that in some ways that we're very tightly constrained, but at the same time we're able to offer suggestions to the Department of Human Services” (Interview 6).

Much like the narratives of practice the experiences of accountability were more complex and nuanced. For example:

I guess we'd like to think first and foremost the children and families um well yeah I mean yeah – like I think they are first and foremost but I guess I um that sometimes I guess it's a bit difficult or they might not agree with that because (unclear) they might not be happy with or they might not agree with whatever it might be so therefore its like it's the Department um yeah but I guess you know there's the scary ones that we've got to that we do everything in the correct process and that sort of stuff (Interview 8).

As with many of the worker responses to the questions regarding the application of discretion, we can see here the tenuous hold (or accountability) to the people they are working with. The example suggests that it is the interests of the service users that are paramount until those interests conflict with the interests or rationalities of the Department.

While the Department was often described an omnipotent presence, the practicalities associated with high staff turnover and staff shortages presented significant gaps in the panopticon influence of the Department. For some this context created an ambivalence on the issue of accountability and a practice context that was the equivalent of 'don't ask don't tell',

the way the organisation is structured and the work that I do...there is a strange lack of interest and a lack of accountability a lack of viewing audience in what I do other than the [residential] carers. If I build a strong relationship with the carers then I can probably run with whatever level of experiment or calculated risk or creative idea...I can do that if I don't say anything...and the times I do say things because I'm a blabbermouth and I have an acute sense of accountability I bring down on myself the most – I have been pushed into the most lacklustre and inane decisions by policy and people's fear of 'what if it goes wrong' and its pathetic. (Interview 7)

This provides evidence of a more nuanced framing of accountability. The worker frames a practice context that is characterised by a lack of external surveillance and control while also acknowledging that there are still occasions of being pushed into decisions.

Far from railing against the strict accountabilities, for others the absence of direction was a cause for concern for some workers:

dealing with unallocated young people...sometimes I find it difficult because I feel as though DHS is supposed to be case managing so they should be more directive with what we can do and what we cannot do when you can't get hold of anybody...you've got to make the decision yourself and as long as it doesn't backfire it's not a bad decision. (Interview 13)

Here is an example of a 'space' for the application of discretion that was not forged by design, through the deployment of expert knowledge or challenging the status quo, it was a decision-making space foisted upon the worker due to a vacuum caused by the absence of the Department. This example raises important questions as to how responsibility is negotiated by front line workers. While the worker identifies the need to make correct decisions, for some the overt exercise of power (having the responsibility to make decisions) did not sit comfortably. Some workers were more comfortable working within the confines of clearly delineated roles and responsibilities. Was the reluctance to make a decision due to apprehension regarding the adverse consequences of making a 'bad' decision or simply the unsettling experience of occupying a position to make decisions? That is, fear of getting it wrong or simply fear of having decision-making authority. For some interviewees there was a palpable sense that they did not possess a great deal of confidence in their practice, due to a lack of time in the sector (newly graduated social workers) or occupying a new position within the 'system', for example, moving from the position of residential care worker to that of a case manager. For example one worker noted that:

I guess you kind of always as well you err on the side of safety rather than you know – and I don't know whether that will change in time whether it's a personal thing for me maybe like it's a lack of assertiveness or something along that um because I guess as time has gone on like I've – I feel a lot differently about how I work as opposed to when I very first started – so whether over time that's going to change a bit more and I become more confident in the decisions that I make or whatever um yeah. (Interview 8)

As Thibaud (Foucault et al., 1999) suggests of social workers, while tied to sources of authority and having some freedom of action they nonetheless possess no real authority. This was certainly reflected in some of the interviews and not only with

social workers. While the lack of authority was expressed as problematic for some, others were more reluctant to assume the position of authority (or decision making) in the (rare) event that the circumstances arose.

For some who had worked in the field for some time there had been a noticeable shift in the culture of child and family welfare practice. A shift from an environment characterised by a lack of constraint and accountability to one where the techniques of accountability had descended onto most areas of practice:

because I feel like 15 years ago, 20 years ago, I would've tried so many more adventurous things and new things, but I'm not sure if that's because I think the culture of welfare has changed and that it was safer back then because we weren't up against it. But it feels to me as if the culture has changed. (Interview 7)

This had a stifling effect on practice as the need to 'not get it wrong' had become the zeitgeist of the time:

The only reason I didn't get into trouble was because it worked...people will not try anything new – if you have to feel like everything you do has to come off and come off with wonderful finesse then you're going to be very, very cautious and not exercise too much discretion. (Interview 7)

This sentiment was supported by another worker noting that a culture of blame had developed:

Well I suppose, you've got to follow the rules because you are taking a risk yourself. Like, I mean, there's a lot of the forms that we can't fill in, that they're going go-carting or horse riding or something that says that the other party won't be responsible for any – well, we can't fill them in. It's got to be that they are responsible, even if it means the child can't go on that particular outing. Well, I wouldn't take them, regardless, because it falls back on me. You always cover yourself if it's anything really important. But we can't let them just go to someone's place for a sleepover. (Interview 15)

The *Looking After Children* framework was in the early stages of implementation at the time of the interviews. The Framework was identified as a particularly

controlling technique of practice. It was framed as an instrument that had the potential to reconfigure practice with children and young people:

I think there's a need to be accountable but I think they have gone from one extreme to another they have gone from the extreme where kids were wards of the State you know every 12 months somebody might bring out the file but it wasn't for the kid – because they had to be moving offices – you that sort of ... to this over use of bits of paper and accountability and workers and stuff and we've lost the normalisation ...so the workers is not doing stuff for the kid anymore they're sitting down filling out forms and I think that is what happening in the UK – in fact they've worked out the good practice that comes out of the model but the workers are just filling out the mandatory forms and you're not actually enhancing the service to the young person. You know we've gone from a system that had no information about kids in care to a system now where we diary literally how many times they go to the toilet what they ate for their lunch – now how much of that do you need?

(Interview 1)

This and other areas of practice such as the writing of incident reports and day sheets were associated with the more administrative aspects of the work.

The interpretation of children and young people: 'these kids have too much' and other narratives of care

As presented earlier in this chapter, the interpretation of children and young people often governed the practice of individual workers. For some a strong thread of unreality characterised the existing system. It was a system perceived as acting in a way that was counter to providing a normalising environment for children and young people. This was a sector response to the needs of children and young people that reflected a discourse of compartmentalised practice. A system that held children in care to a higher level of accountability than their peers and encouraged a cafeteria style of practice that was represented by a 'medical model' of practice that was disconnected from areas of their lives:

we have too many medical models we over service those kids we don't teach them be able to find their own solutions to problems. We like to have you know kids will be involved with six or seven different services and um its not realistic it doesn't happen in the normal world and I think that's the stuff that we have to keep aiming for with our kids. (Interview 1)

Young people were seen as being denied normal childhood experiences due to a culture (practice) that privileged the potential for adverse consequences and an avoidance (as opposed to management) of risk:

I had an example yesterday – I was at a case plan meeting a young kid that's 15 and half who wants to go into the city on his own for a day – in daylight hours with a met[public transport] ticket and a phone card – he just wants to have a wander round – now I don't really have huge issues with that I think that's quite appropriate for a teenager to be doing and I certainly did it when I was his age and DHS is saying no - no you can't. I mean why? Oh no he's a DHS client. (Interview 2)

In paraphrasing Foucault's (1991) conceptualisation of power and resistance, a worker noted that young people's 'challenging' or 'problematic' behaviour could often be characterised as an exercise in gaining some control over their lives:

A lot of people have got to remember, is they are young people. A lot of the times the behaviour is around gaining a bit of control in their life. Like, they have no control of their parents not wanting them, they have no control over where they're placed, they have no control over who the case manager is, no control when they come into our units because we tell them, this is their time, this is the amount of pocket money. So sometimes the behaviour is around gaining a bit of control. (Interview 3)

The Language of Practice: 'what's the worst thing that could happen here?'

The manner and context within which particular language is deployed reflects the complex dimensions of power woven through the practice of human service workers. Despite the prevalence of the down-to-earth ways of seeing and practising prized in the narratives of workers, we can see the adoption of particular language in their work. This is nowhere more evident the use of the language of 'risk'. Regardless of the overt rejection of the risk management approaches accompanying the work with children and young people, and the familiar refrain that children in care were held to a higher standards than other children, workers often still used this language to describe their work. Beyond the simple adoption of the term ('risk') the consideration of what if things go wrong (the culture of blame)

was a key feature of their work. However the link between language and practice is not a simple one.

An interesting parallel is evident between the way workers framed their practice and the allocation of funding by the Department. The defining feature of human service work as described by workers was the relatively rare and extreme example of crisis and chaos. Such events are central to the narrative of human service work. There is an alignment between a focus on responding when things go wrong and the risk focus of the possibilities for things going wrong. The motivating paradigm suggests the primacy of avoiding errors in practice (Green, 2007). Each of these dispositions seemingly validates the other perhaps explaining that while resisted in some areas the practices of risk management are well embedded in others. For example, “But you're constantly thinking on your feet, you are just on a regular basis thinking, ‘OK, what's the worst scenario here?’ and you sort of think – you literally sort of just think on your feet sometimes, you literally are” (Interview 9). This type of calculation as a response to configurations of risk was evident in the narrative of workers. Practice was informed in part by workers reckoning as to how actions could be justified or rationalised after the fact in a manner that was seen as permissible (Chan, 1997).

The particular framing of young people in the formal interactions between workers (the agencies) and the Department often demonstrated a practice that had evolved to navigate the requirement to maintain or increase funding. There was a reluctance to paint ‘too rosy’ a picture of the child or young person in placement as there was a perception that funding could be reduced:

I was saying to my supervisor the other day just regarding um the writing of progress reports and we could have a child who's going along quite well you know maybe better than they have for quite a long time and they're going on alright at school and they're attending and you know they're not substance abusing or whatever but um because of the funding issue as well if you sort of paint a too much of a positive view you get funding reduced and

if we get funding reduced it effects the um care capacity for our – like a lot of the – it sounds terrible but we've got some really great carers who have children in specialised home based placement so they're actually paid the reimbursement for the child is higher than what foster care might be but realistically the care giver couldn't provide the care that they do on a lesser amount – so to reduce the risk of a placement breaking down we sort of try to talk a little bit more negatively about what has been going on so they don't think 'this child is going along great – we can reduce the funding now they don't need it – these specialist services or whatever it might be. (Interview 8)

As another case worker noted there was a strong perception that, "the better job you do the less money you get" (Interview 18).

For some human service workers the language of practice may have changed considerably over the years but the language had not penetrated into the practice. There was a sense that many workers had simply re-framed their practice to give it a more contemporary look (if not feel), "I'm wondering if it's kind of reinventing of the wheel. I don't see practice out there now that is that different, but I think it has different language" (Interview 7).

The use of language in practice is far from a straightforward concept. Workers did not uncritically take up and apply particular terms. Often, particularly in interactions with the Department, workers would consciously deploy particular ways of framing practice approaches that were more likely to be acceded to. Much like the managers that were the subject of Jackall's (1988) research into corporate culture, human services workers used language in the manner of a shibboleth, to mark themselves out as a particular group, a group that reflected the most contemporary approach to working with children and young people but also in a manner to mask (or even deflect) the more intractable challenges and problems with which they were confronted. Beyond simple shorthand phrases such as 'school attending', 'sexualised behaviour' or 'substance abusing' this extended into other areas of practice.

A host of phrases or concepts associated with particular discourses were deployed in a strategic manner:

Its almost like knowing what to say...I'll put in different funding applications...there are important things that people will look for [for example] 'good attachment opportunity for the child to be with their parents' [or] how detrimental it will be if the child didn't get this funding and why. (Interview 18)

This example highlights an aspect of the use of professional or clinical knowledge or more specifically professional or clinical 'language' in practice. It was a strategy linked to acquiescing to (or mimicry of) the prevailing paradigms of practice.

Conclusion

In applying the analytical frame of Bourdieu's (1990) concepts of habitus and field to interviews conducted with human services workers, this chapter has sought to articulate or animate the centrality of the relationship between the interpretive frame and the external context of human service work. The narratives of practice deployed by the interviewees reinforce that the interpretive frame of workers is constituted of more than simply the sum or combination of organisational, professional and procedural experience and knowledge. Also, the interviews reinforce the argument that practice cannot be understood as a simple rule-bound activity. Practice is not simply a response to the exercise of power. The embodied history of workers matters. It is a history that lies within and without the sphere of work and is far more complex than either one alone. There was consistent evidence presented that the interpretive frame of workers constantly referred to their experience outside the workplace. The narratives of practice were populated with experiences of growing up or personal experiences of parenting. The defining feature of much of the axiomatic knowledge evident in the interviews was based on experiences outside the workplace. It was these that often provided the lens to assess the logic of an action, direction or intervention. There was also evidence

presented that disrupting these interpretative frames was an unsettling or difficult experience for workers. This embodied history demonstrated an entrenched resistance (or resilience) to the external rationalities of practice that are in the ascendant at the particular time. As Kemshall (2010) suggests, “the situated rationalities of practitioners are often embedded in their value frames and ideological beliefs, and their systematic and organisational roots are often more difficult to eradicate” (p. 11).

The precursor to resistance was a rejection of the logic of a particular path or action. This logic is not a singular or (necessarily) shared entity. It is a reasoning that may be based on a personal and individualised sense of how things should be, a logic that interprets the way things are and a positioning of the worker and their role within the service context. In their narratives there is evidence of a discretionary practice based on a strategic calculation; reconciling the desirability or validity of a particular outcome balanced with the likelihood of this result.

In the narratives of practice the deployment of formal or what can more appropriately be described as 'clinical knowledge' was a relatively rare phenomenon, even for experienced and professionally trained practitioners. This is not to suggest that professional knowledge was absent from the practice. Clinical knowledge, or more specifically clinical language, was deployed strategically (Jackall, 1988). The deployment of this language works as a marker of membership of the 'group of contemporary practitioners', staking out greater currency for themselves or the strategy they wanted to employ. The procedural aspects of the work (for example, the introduction of the *Looking After Children* framework) was drenched in particular ways of interpreting and experiencing children and young people.

In the manner of Lipsky's (1980) street level bureaucrat I have sought to explain discretionary activity as occurring in a particular space. The interviews support Lipsky's argument (and in particular Evans & Harris, 2004) that even in highly regulated human service settings, workers (or in their case social workers) occupy spaces where they are required or able to enact discretion. Discretion is a fundamental aspect of working in human services. It is a space that is defined by a lack of surveillance or rules and/or possessing particular process or procedural knowledge. In this sense it may be more useful to describe proactive or reactive discretionary spaces, with proactive discretion being a practice space that is forged or enacted within the regulated environment. It is perhaps unsurprising that given the lack of evidence of formal (clinical) knowledge in practice it was process knowledge (for example, issuing warrants, developing working relationships with Departmental workers or able to anticipate responses from other agencies) that was most in evidence as enabling the enactment of discretion. This knowledge of technique, as opposed to knowledge of a formal discourse of practice, was more useful in enacting discretionary practice. The overwhelming evidence is of a discretion that is residual, most often occupying the 'gaps' left as a result of loopholes in regulatory frames or as a by-product of a Department with endemic shortages of staff and an out of home care sector that is diffuse in the community (that is, not a single institutional presence). This represents a context for discretionary practice characterised not by resistance but rather acquiescence.

This application of discretion was not necessarily equated with experience or time spent working in the field. While workers newer to the field expressed a lack of confidence in practice that was not closely aligned with Departmental imperatives, there were examples of experienced workers more comfortable practicing within strict parameters. There is evidence again that this characteristic links back to a habitus that is not necessarily tethered to the logic of Departmental regulation but is rather more disposed to following explicit direction. It is a habitus that is more disposed to the practice of compliance than resistance.

The Department occupies a position of considerable control as does the pre-eminence of techniques of constraint and control in the initial narrative of practice. It is a position that also contains some significant fissures. While there is a strong reflex towards risk avoidance and control for workers, it is also an organisation that often fails to live up to the architecture of control it has put in place due to resources constraints and the capacity of workers in community agencies, and the individual Departmental workers, to negotiate/mediate and to manoeuvre discretionary space. The theme of heavy-handed direction from above or a 'culture of blame' was not consistent in practice and there was evidence that even in circumstances where things went wrong there was not a punitive response.

While the Department featured strongly in the narratives of workers and their practice, their employing agencies (with few exceptions) did not. With few exceptions, organisations were absent from the narratives of practice or identified as working in collusion with the Department. The influences of organisational cultures articulated by Chan (1997) and Scott (1989) were not in evidence. The extent to which agencies were mentioned was in relation to sub-groups within the organisation (case workers, residential workers and support workers). It was often with these sub-groups that workers most identified when seeking direction or advice on their practice.

This suggests realignment in how discretion can be understood in human service work. As Evans and Harris (2004) argue, the increasing regulation of human service work has not eliminated discretionary practice but it has been significantly reconfigured. Consistent with Power's (1999) argument that the pervasive techniques of audit has led to a realignment of trust away from professions towards more actuarial process of practice, within the human services the application of discretion requires of human service workers an increased knowledge of process

and regulation. The capacity to enact discretion relies more on 'knowing the ropes' rather than the capacity to deploy clinical knowledge.

As set out at the beginning of this chapter, there is a disjuncture between many of the narratives of discretionary practice (and the narratives of heroic or bandit practice), the literature on the increasing constraint and control in human services work and the relatively settled context of child and family services in Victoria. As presented here and in earlier chapters, the dispersed and fragmented context of human services presents difficult terrain for the implementation of regulatory and surveillance regimes. In addition I have sought to emphasise (with Evans & Harris, 2004) that for actors engaging with such regulatory environments, the interpretive frame (habitus) of human services worker's practice is constantly employed. Regulatory regimes represent an element of the external conditions (or context) of human service work that structures (and also is structured by) the habitus of workers. The extent to which regulation is interpreted and experienced as for example, support, guidance, constraint, threat or necessary will be guided by their embodied history. The spaces for discretion occur at the intersections in the practice setting; at the point of interaction with, for example, colleagues, service users, Departmental workers or the regulations. It is at these points where the interpretative frame has its most profound influence on practice, with the understanding of policy, guidelines and direction and the interpretation of the logic attached to an intervention or action.

Chapter 8 – Reconfiguring and recovering discretion: navigating the rationalities of practice

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in

(Leonard Cohen, 'Anthem', 1992)

Introduction

Some years ago now during the course of a presentation I attended with a group of upper and middle community service managers, the presenter made an off the cuff remark to the effect that community sector agencies are simply in the business of delivering services for the Department of Human Services (DHS). The response was swift and to the point from some of those present. No that is not what community agencies do. We are not just a vehicle of government and we have our own way of doing things. The comment was considered ill advised, ignoring the attention organisations had devoted to establishing a particular identity and way of doing things. I spoke with the person who made the initial remark a few days later. He was surprised at the reaction and thought the comment relatively straightforward. His view was that in relation to all the important things, the Department had the last word. It is an interesting debate, one that defies easy resolution and that is debated all too rarely within community organisations. Based on my interviews, I suggest that the presenter's view would be considered unproblematic by most front line workers. The evidence I have outlined indicates that the interpretation of the relationship between government and the community sector is greatly influenced by a person's location within their organisation. The firm and visible hand of the Department is more salient in the field of the front line than that of their agency.

My time working in the children and youth services sector has been one characterised by considerable change. While there is substantial evidence to support this more recent change and restructuring process, I work in a sector where

this is a constant theme. It is not a new development. I sometimes feel but an *arriviste* in a sector that has progressed through the decentralisation and regionalisation of the human services, the profound change represented by the process of deinstitutionalisation and the introduction of mandatory reporting. A multitude of narratives of practice have been employed or are in the ascendant for certain periods, for example child saving/rescue, professionalisation, family-focused, resilience, risk and the more recent emphasis on trauma and abuse, brain development, therapeutic care responses and organisational congruence in out of home care. The sector of today is in no way divorced from the reforms of the past. Each of these reforms or narratives of practice can be seen to inhabit (or echo in) the contemporary setting. Within this milieu and in this concluding chapter, it is with hopefulness, tempered with some trepidation, that I consider 'what's next?'

From my dual vantage points of working and researching in the sector I find it interesting that the language and literature of managerialism and contractualism has fallen relatively silent in the more recent analyses. The processes that generated such debate in the 1980s and 1990s seem, to a certain extent, to have merged with the landscape of practice. The debate seems to have moved on and the ground has been conceded. The managerial way of doing things has maintained its orthodoxy. Equally, the debate seems to have moved on within community service organisations. The resistance to compliance regimes, such as the Registration Standards, is directed towards the regulatory burden and the redirection of resources, rather than the potential for such instruments of governance toward the creation of organisational sameness. The emphasis on strategic planning, corporate governance and the management of risk and demand has largely been taken 'on board' by the sector. Often the extent to which these instruments deploy the language of 'client outcomes' is in direct proportion to the focus on process and procedure. The evidence of practice becomes increasingly confined and quantified (Jordan, 2000). The presence of a plan or the provision of a service (for example, a medical examination) comes to be considered an outcome for a service user. As a colleague from another agency recently noted, human

services organisations are now spending a great deal of time, energy and expense managing financial and organisational risks but relatively little is devoted to paying attention to the risk of providing services to clients that do not make a positive difference in their lives.

At the risk of diluting or retreating from a position that challenges the imperatives of the contemporary setting, I have come to an understanding of practice and discretion that reflects a more pragmatic response to constraint and control. In reflecting on what working in this sector means, I acknowledge that the issue of complexity becomes more salient. Just as I question the uncritical adoption and application of practice tools such as those that make up the *Looking After Children* framework, I also oppose measures that would represent a return to the opaque and unregulated practices of the past with children and young people in care.

The arguments, set forth in the preceding pages, are that abstract examples of right and wrong are not the staple of front line practice. 'Either / or' arguments are rarely helpful. The issue of professionalism is not clear cut, boundaries lack clarity and obligations change over time. It is not my intention to convey a sector that is a mess, chaotic or devoid of certainty. Rather, it is a domain of competing rationalities, of competing certainties.

This chapter brings together the key themes of contemporary human service practice that have been developed through the course of this work. I examine how the external world of practice is experienced and interpreted at the front line and provide an outline of the key spaces for discretion. In addition I provide a direction for the development of a practice that better engages the challenges of contemporary work. The chapter concludes by highlighting some strategies to develop the logics of practice that work in the interests of services users to

inoculate the practice front line workers against the imperatives that can usurp the interests of children and young people and undermine good practice.

Coming together in practice: the field of contemporary human service

The opening chapters of this study articulated the key conditions of practice at the front line in out of home care services in Victoria. I outlined the objective conditions, the key changes and significant tensions that characterise the politics of front line practice. I do not suggest that what is outlined represents an exhaustive list or totality of the determinants or influences on practice. To do so would be counter to my proposition regarding the logic of practice as determined by the relationship between the habitus and the field and the interactions with a multitude of external conditions (Bourdieu, 1990). Based on this analysis, the pursuit of a complete chart of influences on practice is futile. My argument is that the historical development of community service organisations and the human service professions, coupled with the reconfiguration of service delivery and the new regimes of governance and surveillance, represent the primary objective conditions of practice. The field of practice is situated within these competing imperatives and rationalities, and is inseparable from it.

In the first instance, the argument regarding the evolution and unique role of community service organisations in the Victorian context seems at odds with how this sector was perceived (or in this case 'not perceived') by front line workers (see Chapter Seven). I argued for the significance of these organisations to be taken into account in the analysis of organisational restructuring and the emergence of the techniques associated with managerialism and contractualism. Many, although not all, of the community agencies in this sector (for example Berry Street Victoria, Anglicare, the Salvation Army, MacKillop Family Services, Jewish Care, Child and Family Services and others) can trace their beginnings to the early 1900s and beyond. Agencies that projected a particular, often faith-based, identity and

occupied a significant location in the area of publicly-funded service delivery well before the language of 'outsourcing' entered the contemporary practice or literature. In this way, out of home care in Victoria was and continues to be a mixed economy of service providers. The robust history and diversity of these organisations has not proven to be an antidote to the colonising and unifying narratives of reform. I have argued that the diversity of organisational types has engaged with the discourse and modalities of restructuring.

With the characterisation of the 'three waves' of human service restructuring I have set out to link the techniques associated with the governance of organisational practice and in turn the work of front line staff. Contemporary restructuring in this sector can be interpreted not as the movement of publicly funded services to non-government settings; rather it is more concerned with *how* the relationships between government and community service organisations were reconfigured and the techniques involved. For example, in relation to funding arrangements the progression from models of subsidy towards output-based funding has been positioned as exemplifying wider moves to codify and contain the organisation and practice of human services. Furthermore, I have used two case examples to highlight the emerging modalities directed towards governing both organisational and front line practice.

Focusing on social work and youth work I have made problematic the place of professions and the language of 'professional discretion' in out of home care services. The spectrum of social work approaches and knowledge/s sits in obvious tension to the pursuit of a professional methodology and the establishment of defined demarcations within the out of home care sector. Out of home care organisations comprise a range of occupation groupings, with the boundaries of demarcation absent or ill-defined. I suggest the narratives evident in accounts of the development of the social work profession and professional identity in Australia place too great an emphasis on its place within the public bureaucracy at the

expense of a focus that acknowledges the often more fluid context of community service organisations. Social workers and youth workers comprise a significant proportion of the human service sector workforce but the extent to which they are able to define their own practice appears clearly limited with significant parameters containing much of their work.

The new fashion: regimes of surveillance and governance in practice

Rather than deployed through the (professionally trained) individual at the front line, the expression of particular professional knowledges is to be found in practice tools or broader policy directions (the *Looking After Children* Framework and the Registration Standards for Community Service Organisations as discussed in Chapters Two and Three). Recent years have seen a growth and interconnection in the applications of these techniques to practice in the human services. The key organising principle of these modalities of governance is to police multiple populations, for example, children and young people, front line staff and the organisations they are a part of. The tools present an internal reasoning that is supported by an ordering of tasks that equates transparency, clarity and measurability with good practice. These instruments seek to open up and codify the lives of children and young people, the work of front line staff and the practices of their organisations. It is a feature of tools, such as the *Looking After Children* framework, that they encourage a practice that is depoliticised and individualised. The uncritical engagement of such tools presents a recipe for an emaciated practice with children and young people. Front line work can easily slip into a path that too closely aligns good practice with the maintenance of tactile sources of verification. It is evidence that configures both the characteristics and needs of the population of children and young people in care within the limited parameters of a positivist methodology.

Within the directions and constraints articulated by the tools, this remains an area of practice with evidence of resistance and discretionary practice. Despite the high level of emphasis given to completing the *Looking After Children* records, the compliance rates are uneven. While this may be the case, this recognition sits in the context that the monitoring apparatus and the linkage to the accreditation standards for organisations represent an 'uncracked whip' for the Department. While the Department has yet to act on this data in a punitive manner the possibility remains open. The possibility of enacting these provisions is itself an expression of control.

Towards an understanding of the person in the practice: the habitus of human service work

Taken at face value much of the material from the interviews provides support for the argument of Evans and Harris (2004) that the demise of discretion has been greatly exaggerated. The language of managerialism and contractualism did not appear in the narratives of front line workers. These concepts were not part of the meta-narrative of practice. This was less the case with the concept and practice language and management of risk. The language of risk has been well integrated into front line practice. While examples of resource rationing and bureaucratic procedure did populate some of the narratives of practice it was the practices symptomatic of risk management methodologies that were more in evidence. For front line workers, their practice was primarily interpreted through the dual prisms of their experience with children and young people in care and interactions with, and directions from, the Department of Human Services. A focus on risk and the possibility of adverse consequences tempered interactions with both.

Deploying the concepts of governmentality and habitus to the analysis of the work of front line human service workers has provides a lens to develop a more nuanced account of how external conditions (and constraints) are experienced by workers.

The analysis places interpretation at the centre of practice and recognises a more embodied experience of generating a logic for practice. The concept of governmentality possesses an explanatory power to accommodate many of the narratives that emerged during the interviews.

The emphasis in many of the interviews of the centrality of being able to navigate chaos and crises can be viewed as an individual employing “technologies of the self” (Foucault, 1988, cited in Foote and Frank, 1999, p. 161). This represents a disposition that privileged the capacity to subdue immediate responses to chaos, confrontation and crises; a method of cushioning or shielding against a more immediate or reflexive action. It is a measured way of being in the world – a particular shaping of their conduct. This was a recurring theme in the interviews and considered a prized attribute by those interviewed. The projection of this attribute extends well beyond the simple reaction to rare and extreme events. It serves to define the practice of working in out of home care providing a frame of 'real' work as opposed to the more technical and bureaucratic aspects of the work. It is a disposition that plays the role of a powerful orientation to the wider area of work. In effect this orientation serves to shield the mundane work from view and avoids the question of complicity in these tasks. The rationalities evident in these techniques become silently invested in practice.

For some of those interviewed, constraint was not acknowledged. They were free to pursue 'common sense' approaches to working with children and young people. It is also possible to configure this response or attribute as a strategy of resistance within a environment of overt expressions of power and control directed towards both service users and front line workers (Foucault, 1979; 1991). It is a narrative that emphasises control and action and also deflects attention from a service context rich in the techniques of discipline.

Experience and confidence and the practice of resistance

The interviews provide evidence to support the argument that human service staff internalise the politics and imperatives of the contemporary setting but also that this was far from a uniform experience and was most (but not always) associated with those human services workers that were newer to the sector or had received little formal training. Consistent with the concept of habitus and its relationship with the field (Bourdieu, 1990), it is evident that the experience of the conditions and constraints of the out of home care sector were interpreted differently by workers. There was little in the way of a universal experience of constraint. As outlined in the analysis of the interviews in the preceding two chapters, the personal stories of front line workers highlight the entrenchment of personal narratives. The resistance or acceptance of the prevailing logics of practice can be interpreted as inescapably linked to a workers sense of who they are and what they do. This disposition renders much of the day to day work, the banalities of routine, and compliance with process, as common sense and, by default, invisible. It is a logic that is at once strident and pragmatic.

The tools of analysis, represented by field and habitus, place an appropriate focus on the embodied experience of human service practice. This analysis provides an account of how the objective conditions of the worksite can be experienced differently. The literature on the practice of front line human service workers too often concentrates on the influence of education and training, peer and organisational cultures and the political and economic imperatives of welfare practice (as outlined in Chapters Two and Three). This has the consequence of configuring the workers as passive subjects, only existing within the practice space. The interviews conducted with workers provide rich evidence of how experiences outside the workplace also inform practice. The narratives of practice suggest the interpretation of the actions of children, young people and their families and other workers and the Department of Human Services are grounded in experiences both

within and outside the workplace. These interpretations informed how rationalities and priorities were ordered and engaged.

The willingness or otherwise to take on and employ modalities of control appears linked to the confidence and experience of front line staff. The interviews suggest that workers entering the field are not well equipped to respond to the uncertainties of working with children and young people in care and the complicated and dynamic architecture of institutional and policy practice. Techniques that offer clarity, direction and an easy logic in this context are more likely to be taken up by workers without the confidence of a conceptual toolkit that provides a clear alternative or the capacity to question the prevailing norms of practice. This remained the case for social work graduates who expressed a difficulty in applying the conceptual hardware gained from their university education to the dominant rationalities present in the out of home care sector. The accounts of theories of practice that were articulated provided little in the way of assistance to guide or inform practice. At best these educational experiences provided the reactive means of deconstructing or re-authoring events. At a more concerning level there was evidence of outlines of theories of practice that were caricatured and served little purpose and were of little relevance in the complicated and pragmatic context of practice. I shall respond further to this issue in the sections to follow. Moreover, there was evidence that formal knowledge can be used to abstract children, young people and their families to mediate the reactions of working with them or buffer their embodied experience and reactions. Again, consistent with the conceptualisation of technologies of the self (Foucault, 1990), clinical knowledge was used as a method of distancing or buffering the worker against their immediate reactions to children and young people.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

This research project advances a new way of considering how contemporary restructuring of human services is experienced by front line workers by exploring how practice is configured in the relationship between the actors and the external conditions within this milieu. While I believe this contributes a new analysis to the field of practice I acknowledge that my approach to this research is not without significant limitations, limitations brought about by the movement and fluidity of my research design and also work that could not be incorporated within the scope of this project. The primary limitations centre on the design and conduct of the empirical work of the research including the absence of an examination of working in faith-based as opposed to non-faith-based organisations, the practice of applying instruments of control and also the design of the interview questions.

Practice in faith-based and non-faith-based organisations

This research advances the proposition that agency settings, as opposed to the dominant presence of the Department of Human Services and to a much lesser extent localised team or unit based identities, are not a significant influence on front line practice. While initially this presented a surprising, even disturbing, theme it perhaps should have been anticipated. This is not to suggest a timidity or inconsequentiality on the part of these organisations. I would argue that these organisations have a significant presence in the sectoral and policy arena. What my research indicates is the instruments such as Mission Statements and organisational values do not imbue or populate the field of front line work in a manner that their prevalence in the out of home care sector would suggest. Relations with the Department of Human Services do not reflect this degree of passivity but the more robust interactions with the funding body are not played out or visible in the sphere of front line work.

Faith-based organisations represent a substantial proportion of the agencies providing out of home care services in Victoria. Within the very small sample size of this study there was no discernible difference in the lack of agency 'talk' at the front line of faith-based and non-faith-based organisations. On this question there is more work to be done. The sample size of my study was too small and the questions were not calibrated to generate a more detailed and meaningful account of this discussion although my experience suggests that as lay staff become more a feature (and larger proportion) of the community sector workforce, the influence of religious denominations on practice will be reconfigured further. These issues would benefit from a more detailed analysis.

The practice of Looking After Children and the Registration Standards

This research could have been strengthened by the adoption of an embedded methodology to the discussion of the key case examples examined. The two case examples highlighted in Chapter Two and Three, the Registration Standards for Community Service Organisations and the *Looking After Children* Framework, were analysed as particular modalities of governance. These instruments represent a form of governance and surveillance of both front line workers and also the population (of children and young people in out of home care) that were the subject of the records. What has not been possible with this study is deeper focus on how these modalities are negotiated in practice. There can be little doubt that they both present a formidable architecture of control. But what does the practice of these instruments look like and how are they experienced at the front line? Where are the discretionary spaces that live within this practice? There is some evidence that despite the rigour and constraint that these documents bring to practice there is resistance. The clear messages conveyed about the necessity of compliance with the *Looking After Children* framework and the linkages to accreditation and ongoing registration and funding have not translated into rates of compliance that could be characterised as high (DHS, 2007a; 2007b). A range of explanations may exist regarding the reasons for this 'non compliance', for example

a lack of training or staff workloads but it suggests that expressions of power and overt surveillance of front line practice are no guarantee of compliance with prescribed practice.

Moreover, there is considerably more work to be done to investigate the amount of worker time invested in complying and demonstrating compliance with instruments such as the *Looking After Children* framework and the Registration Standards.

While there is an emerging amount of anecdotal and organisational evidence that these are a burgeoning feature of the practice landscape, there is yet to be a robust source of evidence of how these instruments have (re)configured worker's time and more importantly if there is a demonstrable benefit, or otherwise, to service users.

There is some evidence to suggest that children and young people in care benefit from productive and open relationships with human service workers (see for example Raman, Inder & Forbes, 2005; London & Halfpenny, 2006). It is not clear how the tools of *Looking After Children* contribute to, or inhibit, the development and maintenance of these relationships. There is a strong case to be made to evaluate the efficacy of such models in terms of the benefits to children and young people in care and to configure an evaluation that moves beyond the insular or compartmentalised. As noted by Yeatman and Penglase (2004), despite the prevalence of its use much of the engagement with the *Looking After Children* framework has been criticised as self-referential and devoid of an analysis of the benefits to service users.

There is an emerging body of literature from the United Kingdom that focuses on how such assessment or practice frameworks are applied in practice (see for example White et al., 2009). As mentioned in Chapter Five, the interviews were conducted in the very early stages of the implementation of the *Looking After Children* Framework and well prior to the introduction of the Registration Standards. This was the knock-on effect of the change in focus of the research questions and the period of time over which this research project took place. This

represents a limitation of this research project. The question of the habitus of human services workers and the engagement with newly emerging regimes of control will continue to represent a rich subject of inquiry. Future research projects adopting a more ethnographic approach to explore how these frameworks and techniques are engaged would contribute greater insight into how these techniques of control are enacted or mediated in practice.

The design and analysis of the interviews

The interviews conducted for this research were not framed in a manner consistent with the analysis that was ultimately applied. The introduction of Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus (Bourdieu 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and the focus on the concept of governmentality (Foucault, 1991; Rose et al., 2006) came subsequent to the development of the interview questions and the completion of the interviews. This in and of itself is not a failure in the research design but does present a limitation of this research. I do not believe that the conceptual tools of analysis have to necessarily reflect the empirical material that is gathered. While this qualification remains, there can be little doubt that the empirical work and the research could have been strengthened if these concepts had more closely informed the development of the research method.

The interviews could have been used to both illicit the narrative of practice in a more focused manner and also used to engage the interview participants in the key theoretical ideas. For example, Charlesworth (2000) has adopted such an approach with his *Phenomenology of the Experience of the Working Class* and has engaged the participants in his study in Bourdieu's key concepts. This approach was not adopted for this study. Such a method would have been consistent with the reflexive methodology as articulated by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), an approach that seeks to make problematic the common sense assumptions about everyday practice and to use theory to disrupt dominant orthodoxies. The

questions that were posed in the course of the interviews were aimed at eliciting narratives rather than to facilitate an interrogation of the prevailing conditions of out of home care organisation and practice. Nonetheless, these narratives provided considerable insight into the configuration of practice and the engagement with competing rationalities at the front line.

Engaging the rationalities of practice at the front line

The capacity to critically engage with the front line manifestations and implications of public policy (such as the *Looking After Children* Framework and the Registration Standards) is increasingly a central feature for human service workers practising towards meaningful transformation for the benefit of children and young people service users. Workers in the out of home care sector are faced with service environments characterised by compartmentalisation and the individualisation of work with children and young people. These remain ongoing challenges that can undermine the ability to confront more entrenched social and political inequities. While the above sections have sought to outline some of the key challenges for human service practice, there are reasons for optimism. As the analysis of the habitus of human services workers illustrates, to infer that workers in the current climate are merely enactors of public policy is to ignore the complexity of front line work and to deny the oppositions between the 'lived in', messy and contingent nature of the welfare practice and the banality and repetition that can accompany much of the work. As I have argued, the analyses of a work site devoid of discretion and resistance tends to remove the worker from the sphere of welfare work and decision-making almost entirely. In arguing for the place and importance of critical reflection, I also include a focus on the habitus of human service workers and the importance of paying attention to how the external world is interpreted and the entrenched dispositions workers can bring to their practice. My analysis suggests the difficulty of implementing change at the front line. A reliance on authority to sustain change or the assumption of a unified meaning making (that is, the one size

fits all training packages that are popular in the out of home care sector) are destined to have a limited and often unintended influence on practice.

The predictions of the death of practice discretion in the face of prescriptive and actuarial (evidence heavy) models for social work tend to ignore the worker. Attempts to codify and systematise practice will no doubt continue to evolve but the inherent uncertainties of social work will allow scope for discretion and worker agency (Baldwin, 2000; Evans & Harris 2004). Lipsky's (1980) seminal work on the autonomy of front-line bureaucrats is of continued relevance.

In the concluding section I outline pathways through the contemporary milieu. I consider a number of interrelated strategies that can both heighten the critical engagement with the contemporary reform approaches including strategies of collective sense-making, the development of communities of practice, critical reflection and action and developing greater literacy of institutional and policy contexts .

Collective sense-making: peer collaboration and alliances with service users

With the prominence of non-government agencies (community service organisations) in the delivery of publicly-funded welfare services, there are dangers associated with dispersed practice settings. The institutional architecture of the out of home care sector is a fragmented one, particularly at the front line of practice. In this context it is unsurprising that the rationalities and techniques of the DHS provide the dominant external voice in the practice and narratives of front line workers. This is not to suggest the intervention of DHS into the practice of front line workers and the lives of children and young people in care is uniformly wayward or adverse. This is far from the case. But it is an intervention that would benefit from a more robust process of critical engagement.

Peer networks and collaborations can be a useful antidote to break down the prevailing constraints of dispersed practice settings. Wenger (2003) has argued the

benefits of developing 'communities of practice' as a strategy to develop knowledge and shared practices of meaning-making.

The work of Daly (2009) in collaborating with children and young people in out of home care to design a research project focusing on foster care provides a useful case study. His work demonstrates the benefits to the researcher, the research project and the children and young people of opening up to multiple perspectives. Similarly, the project undertaken in Canada by Dumbrill (2010) to work with parents who had been subject to child protection intervention provides considerable insight. Dumbrill advances a persuasive argument for the formation of a child welfare user's union or association as a method of responding to pronounced power imbalances in the area of child protection.

Communities of Practice

For Wenger (2003), in the context of the workplace, a community of practice is a subgroup within the organisation of people coming together to pursue common interests. Consistent with the conceptualisation of practice framed by field and habitus (Bourdieu, 1990), Wenger recognises that meaning-making is an inherent element of practice. Bringing together practitioners and creating communities of practice is a modality of social learning, allowing groups of staff to come together to negotiate shared understandings or meanings and developing or preserving knowledge (Wenger, 2003). This modality of learning is particularly suited to the dispersed and diverse out of home care setting and the goal of developing a sharpened knowledge of organisational dynamics and pathways to negotiate the technocratic approaches to practice.

The evidence from the interviews suggests that it is often the advice of colleagues and peers that has the most currency with staff when navigating uncertainty in their practice. The habitus of human service workers was more likely to undergo

revisions and alterations based on the experiences shared or relayed by peers or colleagues. The shared narratives or identities constructed and enacted by front line workers were often the most pronounced. When confronted with uncertainty, workers sought counselling from colleagues rather than other instruments of practice guidance.

Critical reflection and action

The capacity to engage in critical reflection is the single most important attribute for social workers and others practising in out of home care and other settings today (Fook, 2004; Morley 2007; 2009). Gardner, Fook and White (2006) outline a useful summary of the key characteristics of critical reflection. Particularly salient to the issues outlined in this chapter are the characteristics the authors identify that centre on opening up the politics of human service organisation and practice to critique and embracing approaches that build the capacity to question underlying assumptions and question dominant discourses and their technical manifestations in practice. This approach is consistent with the framework developed by Houston (2002), outlined in Chapter Four. He highlights the possibilities of change through focusing on the interactions and relationships between field, habitus and capital. He suggests social workers take the lead in driving a communal introspection to disrupt the dominant assumptions of social relations and thereby situate exercises of power as problematic. This would be a useful model to open up the dominant discourses in instruments of surveillance and control (for example, the Registration Standards and the *Looking After Children* framework) and the orthodoxies of risk management. In turn, this would also provide a valuable antidote to the discourses of deserving and undeserving children, young people and families that populated some of the narratives of workers.

The application of this model would need to avoid enshrining an insular approach to the consideration of practice, adopting a focus that simply reinforced the *status quo*

without applying a more critical gaze to practice. Badwall, O'Connor and Rossiter (2004) question the potential of critical reflection within learning organisations to overcome entrenched hierarchies and patterns of practice, "where the pain of inequity, the invisibility of privilege and the normalcy of historical legacies prevail" (p. 160). In this sense the process of reflection requires an orientation that does not skate over more pronounced issues of privilege and disadvantage. The approach outlined later in this chapter, developing the work of Nussbaum (1999; 2000), represents a means of overcoming the potential for the strategies of reflection to deflect attention from entrenched hierarchies and embedded relations of power.

Learning Circles in Out of Home Care

In the Victorian out of home care setting, the model of the Learning Circle, not unlike the community of practice, has been facilitated by the peak body for child and family service, the Centre for Excellence in Children and Family Welfare (the Centre). A *Looking After Children* Learning Circle and a Quality Learning Circle (with a primary focus on the Registration Standards) have been in operation for a number of years bringing together practitioners from a wide range of community service organisations. As a strategy to promote a more critical engagement with these instruments, as yet, neither group has realised its potential. As a member of both groups, my experience of the groups has been one where the focus has been more procedural, concentrating on the issues of workload associated with quality assurance and tinkering at the margins of the practice within these regimes of compliance. They are forums for information-sharing rather than critical engagement. My experience also suggests that such groups can also become de facto debriefing sessions for participants struggling to make sense of how to configure their organisation and organisational practice in a manner that match the prevailing model expressed in these instruments.

This Learning Circle approach has the potential to democratise practice by opening it up to colleagues to share experiences and to develop and support shared

approaches to a more critical practice. It provides a direction in developing a collaborative approach to resist attempts to locate service users and/or human services within programmatic or diagnostic categories (White et al., 2009).

Engaging with the public policy and institutional contexts of practice: creating the space for discretionary practice

The current conditions of welfare work require of human services workers an ever increasing literacy of the public policy implications for practice and the ways in which to negotiate these changes. To an extent the value of critical reflection is very much dependent on the resultant action. Workers are well positioned to highlight alternative interpretations, to challenge the assumptions that run through many public policy initiatives. In a climate that often deploys a narrow concept of 'evidence-based' approaches to inform human service policy and practice, social workers have a duty to both contest the meanings of 'evidence' and contribute more nuanced and robust understandings of how social policy can work in the interests of services users.

As with other areas of the health and welfare sector, the focus on evidence-based practice has sharpened in out of home care. Both the *Looking After Children* framework (DHS, 2008d) and the Registration Standards lay claim to a grounding in a robust evidence base. For Webb (2001) the increasing focus on evidence based practice represents a challenge to social work in that it introduces a narrowing of the scope of practice or more mechanistic approach to work with service users. In a later work, Webb (2006) argues that debates surrounding evidence-based approaches have focused on both what constitutes evidence and how it is interpreted. McDonald (2003) highlights the tension within social work regarding the place of evidence-based practice (see also Jordan, 2000). Jordan (2000) is sharply critical of the claims of methodological rigor attached to analyses of evidence-based practice. He suggests these analyses often represent a blinkered view on the question of context, lacking an appropriate account of cultural,

environmental and administrative circumstances. For McDonald (2003) the most appropriate response is to transcend the good/bad binary regarding the validity of evidence, to acknowledge that “all social science knowledge is partial” (p. 135). In doing so she highlights the role of social workers in advocating on behalf of multiple knowledges or ensuring that technical knowledge does not usurp approaches to practice informed by, for example human rights or feminist approaches.

The colonisation of supervision

The use of supervision, particularly for those that have received social work training, is seen as a valuable strategy in developing practice and practitioner knowledge (Ife, 2001; Jones, 2004; Karvinen-Niinikoski, 2004). Under the conditions presented by both the *Looking After Children* framework and more specifically the Registration Standards, the role and purpose of supervision is vulnerable to re-organisation. These instruments configure a practice focus for supervision that is in danger of moving from one of development towards performance management. Under these conditions supervision can become a forum where the monitoring of tasks begins to take precedence over a focus on developing a more reflective or critical perspective on practice. Supervision is included among the Registration Standards (3.5 Supervision, performance monitoring and review). It is a configuration of supervision that emphasises a primary focus on overseeing performance, a role inconsistent with that advanced in social work. For example, the Evidence Guide for the Standards (DHS, 2008b) states that a community organisation:

ensures staff, carers and volunteers are supervised and that issues identified via supervision are acted on to meet the ongoing safety and development needs of children and youth...[and]...has formal performance reviews and ongoing monitoring practices which confirm the appropriateness of staff and carers and identify the skill development that will contribute to the quality of services being provided. (p. 49.)

This represents a narrow and unambitious framing of supervision and sits in tension to the argument I advance regarding the importance of bringing a (collective) critical and developmental focus to practice. Also, as it is a component of the Standards, there is a strong focus on the ability of organisations to present an

evidentiary record of the frequency and content of supervision. This is a significant incursion into the practice especially for social workers and it is not yet clear how this may constrain practice development.

'Build it and they will come'? Negotiating change at the front line

The emphasis on techniques of transparency and surveillance has not been accompanied by a democratisation of practice. The monitoring and governance of front line practice has not led to an opening up of practice to a critical or developmental gaze. What then are the possibilities for a way better to negotiate change in the contemporary setting? As outlined above there is a strong tendency towards an individualisation of practice at the front line in terms of the formidable architecture of assessment and planning applied to children and young people (a configuration of a politics of a particular type that forecloses on issues of structural or cultural disadvantage), combined with a habitus of human service work that is strongly tied to often personal logics of practice and the framing of children and young people. As the analysis of the habitus indicated, practice is personal, rooted in the sense of who I am as a worker and what is the best (most logical) way to go about my practice. By implication, implementing sustained change becomes a more challenging prospect. Practice change is not simply a matter of policy development and implementation or an emaciated account of training and oversight. Front line practice is resilient to change and the goal of organisational congruence is elusive. Approaches to change that ignore the centrality of sense-making and interpretation as a fundamental aspect of practice are destined to have little impact. As argued by Wenger (2003), and acutely relevant in the context of out of home care, practice entails the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context. Understanding how practice is enacted involves paying attention to and unpacking this process of negotiation and interpretation. The following sketches out approaches to front line human service practice that move towards better negotiating the contemporary setting.

Positive discretionary spaces in the contemporary setting

Drawing on the interview data, I now turn my focus to the development of spaces for a positive discretionary practice. The term 'positive discretion' is applied to denote practice that is in the interests of service users. As highlighted earlier, the application or enactment of practice discretion in out of home care settings has facilitated and shielded poor and abusive practice. Discretionary spaces should exist solely in the interests of children and young people in care. I acknowledged that this framing of discretion is itself open to interpretation and dispute but there should be a clear link between the maintenance of discretionary practice and benefits to children and young people in care. If such a link is not clear, the discretionary space can be considered problematic.

Institutional and policy knowledge: knowing 'what's what' and 'who's who in the zoo'

Complexity is a defining feature of the Victorian out of home care sector. For the front line worker, the sector can present a bewildering range of organisations, relationships, and policy and practice instructions. Navigating this context is a challenging task; it represents both a strength and a weakness in the pursuit of developing discretionary spaces for practice. Despite increasing efforts to monitor and control practice there will always be an organisational and physical distance, coupled with a procedural ambiguity that makes surveillance and control problematic. While interviewees suggested significant limitations in the capacity of professional or clinical knowledge to enact discretionary practice at the front line, there were a number of examples to illustrate the importance of a clear knowledge of how to negotiate within and between organisations and rationalities of practice. For example, in knowing how to configure a case plan or court report to maximise the possibilities for maintaining funding levels for a young person, by deploying key terms (for example, 'attachment opportunity') in constructing the 'progress' of a service user or by ensuring the availability of condoms in a manner that is not inconsistent with a literal interpretation of procedures.

The social world of out of home care: relationships matter

The ability to develop and maintain relationships and open communication with Departmental workers remains a key to enacting discretionary practice in the interests of children and young people. While the narratives of the Department in the interviews often presented a picture, or caricature, of an immobile or technocratic bureaucracy, there were significant exceptions. Exceptions that illustrate that the oeuvre of risk management or administrative logics was not total or inevitable. There were opportunities for creative practice in partnership with the Department but these relied on a trust that had been established by workers.

The application of the concept of field and habitus applied to front line workers here would be equally applicable to workers within child protection or placement services within the DHS. Those workers who were able to foster working relationships, particularly with the DHS *and* were able to navigate often complex service systems and protocols to harness them in the interests of services users, were able to enact discretion. A key challenge in developing these relationships remains the very significant staff turnover experienced in these organisations. This is acutely the case in Child Protection services. These relationships take time to develop and the turnover and movement of staff represent great impediments to developing this further. The danger here, as acknowledged by one of the interviewees, is that good work for children and young people in care becomes too reliant on good relationships between the workers in their lives.

Situated knowledge

The term 'practice wisdom' may be used to describe this knowledge but it is in keeping with the more precise conceptualisation of 'recipe knowledge' developed by Chan (1997). It represents a method of knowing how to navigate certain circumstances and relates more to knowledge of how to negotiate policy and organisational settings as opposed to knowledge of more service user oriented

work. It is a practice that pushes at the margins of accepted and acceptable practice. This recognises that within the systems of governance and control in the out of home care sector there can be a range of competing rationalities in action. The adept worker has the opportunity to 'play off' these rationalities in the interests of service users. This is consistent with the analysis provided by Noordegraaf (2007) and the potential for the development of 'hybrid professions', a form of specialist knowledge that is more closely aligned with the idiosyncrasies of the institutional context of practice. The complex organisational and regulatory environment of out of home care requires of workers a situated expertise, rather than (or in addition to) an expertise generated from a particular discipline's cognitive base (or bases) (Murphy, 2009). For the front line worker this expertise extends beyond the capacity to engage in one-to-one practice with service users, to an appreciation of the rationalities, dynamics and politics of organisations and the sector they are a part of. I argue this is not to suggest that workers acquiesce to these logics but instead they are able to better critically engage within this sphere. The danger of this approach is the inclination to a pragmatic (or even Machiavellian) practice that loses sight of the service user by seeking only that which is achievable or possible rather than that which is right.

Beyond the differing needs of children and young people and the other competing rationalities of practice, due to the physical distance that is a feature of out of home care, discretionary activity will always inhabit this space. The sites of practice are physically isolated from the overt sources of institutional control. The residential unit, the foster carer's home or the other locations of front line work are dispersed and defy easy surveillance and control. As highlighted above, despite the application of detailed technologies (for example, the *Looking After Children* framework) deployed to govern front line practice and the evidence of the internalisations of technologies of the self, these are sites of significant variation in practice. Levels of surveillance and governance have increased but they are far from total.

I now turn to the possibilities for enacting discretionary spaces for practice by focusing on a discourse of rights and capabilities for children and young people in care.

The rights of children and young people and the Charter for Children in Out of Home Care

One possible example for enacting discretionary space is harnessing a recent initiative in Victoria, the Charter for Children in Out of Home Care (Office of the Child Safety Commissioner, 2007). The Charter ostensibly outlines sixteen rights for children in care, including the rights “to have a say and be heard, ... to be a child and be treated with respect,...to be safe and feel safe ... [and for] careful thought being given to where I will live so I will have a home that feels like a home” (Office of the Child Safety Commissioner, 2007, p. 1). At this time, the Charter does not occupy a significant location in the terrain of day to day practice in out of home care. The Charter has the potential to be used as an instrument to mediate or challenge the excesses of approaches that represent dominant administrative or economic rationalities. The approach to rights is also a discourse that militates against the possible use of worker discretion as a means of dominating or abusing children and young people. While the strategies aimed at establishing situated and shared identities of practice (communities of practice) within the field remain a useful way of developing meaning and knowledge with teams or subgroups within organisations, as Kingfisher (1998) usefully reminds us this can result in the coproduction of a policy that is oppressive to the clients of human service organisations. A shared practice is not in and of itself a positive development for service users. While the interests of staff and service users can align, this is not always so.

The Capabilities Approach

The capabilities approach developed by Nussbaum (1999; 2000) is instructive in considering the advancement of practice based on protecting the human dignity of children and young people in out of home care. Furthering the work of Amartya Sen within the field of developmental economics, Nussbaum developed her approach with a focus on women in developing countries, primarily India. For Nussbaum (1999) asserts:

human dignity is frequently violated on grounds of sex. Many women all over the world find themselves treated unequally with respect to employment, bodily safety and integrity, basic nutrition and health care, education and political voice. In many cases these hardships are caused by their being women, and in many cases laws and institutions construct or perpetuate these inequalities. (p. 227)

Nussbaum seeks to articulate an approach that transcends both the limitations and criticisms of universal human rights based practices.

Nussbaum (2000) summarises three common criticisms, or arguments, directed towards the implementation of rights-based approaches in the developing world: “the argument from culture” (p. 49), “the argument from the good of diversity” (p. 50) and “the argument from paternalism” (p. 51). She frames “the argument of culture” (p. 51) as a proposition that cultures have their own systems of norms and that practices considered to be oppressive or domineering to, for example, the external Western eye, may not be experienced as such by women. Similarly, with the “argument for the good of diversity” (p. 50), she describes a thesis that acknowledges the richness of diversity in human practices and accuses the universal rights approaches of representing a project of sameness or cultural imperialism, as “diminishing the expressive resources of human life” (p. 50). As the title suggests, with “the argument from paternalism” (p. 51), she summarises the line of reasoning consistent with classical liberalism:

when we use a set of universal norms as benchmarks for the world's various societies, telling people what is good for them, we show too little respect for people freedom as agents...people are the best judges of what is good for them. (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 51)

For Nussbaum each of these arguments tends to deflect attention away from the dominant interests within these communities and reinforce the subordination of women in developing countries.

Nussbaum (1999) moves to a discussion of the role of choice in contemporary narratives of liberty and it is on this point that the capabilities approach moves beyond the more liberal framing of how a rights discourse can be enacted. For Nussbaum (1999), the performance of individual rights relies on a basic assumption that, “the various liberties of choice have material preconditions, in whose absence there is only the simulacrum of choice” (p. 231). This assumption is problematic in circumstances of pronounced and entrenched disadvantage or domination.

Nussbaum (1999) explains the idea behind the capabilities approach:

that there are certain functions that are particularly central in human life, in the sense that their presence or absence is typically understood to be a mark of the presence or absence of human life. Second that there is something that it is to do these functions in a truly human...the senses of a human being can operate at a merely animal level — if they are not cultivated by appropriate education, by leisure for play and self-expression, by valuable associations with others...the core idea is that of the human being as a dignified free being who shapes his or her own life, rather than being passively shaped or pushed around by the world in the manner of a flock or herd animal. (p. 234)

For Nussbaum (1999) the ten “central human functional capabilities” (p. 235) are, Life, Bodily Health, Bodily Integrity, Sense, Imagination and Thought, Emotions, Practical Reason, Affiliation, Other Species (that is, to live with concern for an in relation to animals, plants and the world of nature), Play and Control (political and material) Over One's Environment. This method notes the centrality of creating

conditions where rights or essential human capabilities can be exercised. She notes the key contrast in the capabilities model:

The central question asked by the capabilities approach is not, "How satisfied is this woman?" or even "How much in the way of resources is she able to command?" It is, instead, "What is she actually able to do and to be?" Taking a stand for political purposes on a working list of functions that would appear to be of central importance in human life, users of this approach ask: "Is the person capable of this, or not?" (p.233)

At first glance the parallels between Nussbaum's (1999; 2000) work and practice with children and young people in out of home care children in Victoria is not immediately apparent. Nussbaum's analysis derives from focus on women in the context of profound inequality and disadvantage. My assertion is the capabilities approach provides those working to advocate on behalf of children and young people, a key strategy to respond to the more individualist and technocratic rationalities evident in the out of home care setting. For example, the focus on the conditions required to enact Nussbaum's central human functional capabilities sits in obvious tension to the methodology of 'technologies of care' (Webb, 2006) such as the *Looking After Children* framework.

Children and young people from both Aboriginal (Australian Institute for Health & Welfare, 2010) and low socio-economic background (Fernandez, 1996, cited in Bromfield, Higgins, Osborn, Panozzo & Richardson, 2005) continue to be overrepresented in out of home care services. In turn, this indicates that individualised and / or therapeutic approaches to practice may be counterproductive or even oppressive by marginalising or ignoring issues of institutionalised racism or structural inequality. This approach provides a lens with which to break from the procedural or programmatic logics that can constrain the field of practice.

As a means of better operationalising the Charter for Children in Out of Home Care, the capabilities method redirects a focus toward not simply articulating or communicating a collection of rights but poses the essential questions, 'are these

exercised' and 'if not why not?'. It presupposes a logic that the conditions of out of home care and positioning of children and young people (both those placed in out of home care and in the wider community) create a social sphere where the exercise of personal political power is uncertain and contingent; a social sphere where young people, and more particularly children, are often not positioned as rational actors capable of making informed judgements and the provision of care is strongly imbued with both economic and risk based imperatives.

With regard to disrupting the dominant rationalities in the workplace, Wenger (2003) provide a useful pathway forward with the application of the organisational learning model, 'communities of practice'. The silence of agencies in the talk of front line workers in the interviews suggests that the existing architecture and techniques of creating congruence and direction within an organisation (for example, strategic planning, mission statements, and so on) are failing to penetrate (and germinate) the area of front line practice. Organisational congruence is built up by developing methods of shared 'doing and talking'. This research suggests there has been a striking lack of success in formulating the modalities of making or articulating an 'organisational' way of practising at the front line. Such a context creates a range of vulnerabilities (or in the language of the day 'risks'). Practice does not occupy a void. In the absence of a clear organisational framework, other forms of meaning making fill the vacuum. As has been outlined in the previous chapter, it is the imperatives of the Department, or more precisely the administrative and managerial framing of a duty of care, that in large part occupy this space. The Department sets the agenda; an agenda that may be accepted, questioned or rejected based on the habitus of the workers, but it sets the tone for practice.

A further consequence of this muted organisational presence is that it creates the conditions for localised practice identities within residential units or case work teams. This is not necessarily problematic but it can lead to the alienation and isolation of workers or questionable characterisations of accountability. As

Kingfisher (1998) reminds us, it can also facilitate the toxic or oppressive coproduction of policy. A weak organisational presence places a strong reliance on the maintenance of personal or individual practice ethics. The history of the care of children and young people demonstrates that this is not a good recipe for protecting their interests.

Summary and concluding reflections

Blank canvases do not and have never existed in human service work. The longing or quest for a practice context free of constraint and obligation is a chimerical pursuit. To retreat from, or simply dismiss, the contemporary challenges outlined in the preceding chapters is counterproductive. The capacity to engage with service users to work towards transformation should remain the 'core business' of human service work. In the contemporary context this is neither simple nor unproblematic. Human service workers should be able to demonstrate the efficacy of the work they do with service users but not in a manner that is counter to the interests of justice, equity and transparency.

The rationalities of practice at the front line are manifold. Human service workers, and especially social workers, are required to navigate a moral and political practice environment that is laden with the implicit and explicit techniques of compliance and control. The capacity to mediate competing accountabilities has always been a feature of working in the human services. In out of home care, the challenge that remains is the capacity to resist the objectification of the lives of children and young people that is inherent in the logics of practice that are in the ascendant at the current time.

Discretionary activity is alive and well at the front line. As articulated so well in the lyrics of Leonard Cohen at the beginning of this chapter, it is the cracks that let the light in. It is front line discretionary practice that breathes life and possibility into much of the public policy in out of home care. I conclude this research project with a reflection on my learning as I journeyed through this process and turn my

attention to the question of the challenges that have been raised but not resolved on this path.

Throughout this thesis I have interrogated assumptions regarding the place and role of social work (and other) professions in the out of home care sector. Of the arguments proposed during the extended period of my research, this is the one that has generated the most discussion and disagreement when raised with my colleagues in (and outside) the sector. As a social worker it would appear to many that I am engaging in a project of vocational cannibalism. I identify as a social worker but I am cognisant of the question of what does this mean? It is not my intention to suggest social workers have no place in this sector or that social work (or youth work) education and training is or is about to become redundant. Far from it. I believe it is misguided to suggest that social workers have an institutional presence or occupy a privileged knowledge base that in some way is distinct or separate from their organisational and policy setting in the out of home care sector.

What I have argued is that good practice involves that ability to engage service users *and* the possession of a robust understanding of the institutional and policy context of work. To reinforce Howe's (1991) comment, social work is a state-based and organisationally-tethered activity. In reflecting back on my own social work degree I recall one, possibly two, subjects that made a concerted effort to configure social work practice within organisational or programmatic settings, under the banner of 'organisational studies' or some other equally ennui-inducing term. It was an area of my social work education that was not done well and I have reason to believe, based on discussions with new graduates and students on placement that this continues to be the case.

The approach to critical reflection remains a methodology of practice learning with considerable potential in out of home care, particularly in pulling apart the

intricacies of practice, intricacies that include a focus on organisational, jurisdictional and social policy imperatives that attempt to govern practice with service users.

As I have shown, despite a lively literature in the 1980s and 1990s (and a declining number in the 2000s) the critical analysis of the practices of managerialism and contractualism do not seem to have a significant presence and is slipping from view. The programmatic approach to service delivery and performance monitoring continues apace. Quite rightly, risk management is identified as a dominant paradigm in the organisation and delivery of services in out of home care.

It is encouraging to see an emerging literature, predominantly in the United Kingdom, that is interrogating the increasing use of assessment and planning tools. The arguments against these tools as instruments that are deskilling practitioners have been well rehearsed in the literature. Equally important is the extent to which these tools attempt to individualise and depoliticise service users and the interventions in their lives.

There is increasing pressure in this context to engage in a cafeteria style of service delivery, to deliver a targeted and time-limited service with an emphasis on moving service users along or referring to specialist services. This has the effect of compartmentalising the lives of service users and contributes to the further depoliticisation of disadvantage. In the capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 1999; 2000) there is considerable potential for human service workers to re-author the imperatives of the sector and bring to life the rights of children and young people.

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Appendices

RMIT Faculty of the Constructed Environment

Application for approval of research involving participants

1. This form is to be used by Masters, PhD and academic staff undertaking research in the ‘No risk’, ‘Minimum risk’ and ‘At risk’ categories as described in the accompanying guidelines. All applications must be completed by filling out this form in its electronic form and printing it out.
2. This form is available from the Faculty of the Constructed Environment (FCE) web page under the heading Research Committee. Advice about how to complete the form is found in *Ethical research: Guidelines for completing the FCE research ethics form*, also available from the FCE web page under the heading Research Committee.

Section A: Approvals and declarations

Project Title: Professional Discretion in child and youth services: the impact of the Contract State

Complete this column if you are undertaking research for a research degree at RMIT Or another university (Masters/PhD)	Complete this column if your research is not for any degree.
Investigator	Principal investigator

<p>Name: Nicholas Halfpenny</p> <p>Student No: 9711896j</p> <p>Qualifications Bach. of Social Work (Hon)</p> <p>School: Social Science and Planning</p> <p>Address: 212 Gooch Street, Thornbury, 3071</p> <p>Phone: 9484 7092</p> <p>Email nicholas.halfpenny@rmit.edu.au</p> <p>Degree for which Research is undertaken: Doctor of Philosophy</p>	<p>Name:</p> <p>Qualifications:</p> <p>Department:</p> <p>Phone:</p> <p>Email:</p>
Supervisor	Other investigator/s
<p>Name: A/Prof Linda Briskman</p> <p>Qualifications: PhD.</p> <p>Department: School of Social Science and Planning</p> <p>Phone: 9925 1079</p>	<p>Name/s:</p> <p>Qualifications:</p> <p>Department:</p> <p>Phone:</p>

2. Declaration by the investigator(s)

I/We, the undersigned, accept responsibility for the ethical conduct of the research detailed below.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

(Signature of investigator)

Signed: _____ Date: _____

(Signature of supervisor if applicable)

3. Declaration by the Head of School

The project set out in the attached application, including the adequacy of its research design and compliance with recognised ethical standards, has the approval of the School. I certify that I am prepared to have this project undertaken in my School.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

(Signature of Head of School)

Comments:

School: SOCIAL SCIENCE AND PLANNING _____ Extn: City 52675 _____

4. FCE Ethics Sub-Committee use only

Date application received: _____ FCE Ethics Sub-Committee Register No. _____

Recommended project classification: AR MR NR (circle one)

Approved by FCE Ethics Sub-Committee Date: _____

Period of Approval - From: _____ To: _____

or

Referred to RMIT HREC Date:.....

Comments/Provisos:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

(FCE Ethics Sub-Committee Chair)

Section B: Project particulars

1. Title of Project

Professional discretion in child and youth services: the impact of the Contract State

2. Project description: for HREC assessment of ethical issues

Aims and significance of the project

The aim of this research is to explore the impact of contemporary organisational and policy reform on frontline human service workers in the child and youth welfare sector. Such reforms are based primarily on economic considerations - the desire to improve the efficiency of private, government and non-government organisations (Dalton, Draper, Weeks & Wiseman, 1996; Lyons, 1998; Considine, 1988; Keating 1990). One of the manifestations of Australia's patterns of governance restructuring has been clear evidence of increasing reliance on contracts to regulate the delivery of welfare services (Alford & O'Neill, 1994; Lyons, 1998, Yeatman & Owler, 2001). The expression *Contractualism (or New Managerialism)* describes the formal process of separating policy formulation from program management or service delivery - a process defined by Osborne and Gaebler as government 'steering not rowing' (1992: 32). In effect, this development allowed for government departments to concentrate on the general direction of social policy formulation, with non-government agencies taking responsibility for operational management with the desired aim being to increase efficiency, accountability and competition in the delivery of services (Alford & O'Neill, 1994).

With the increase in contractualist practices there has been less of an emphasis on professionalism and more on standardisation and a reduction in flexibility and professional. Flynn argues one of the adverse effects of this emphasis on service outputs has been to "...deprofessionalize expert labour... subject it to increased fragmentation and deskilling, more bureaucratic monitoring and performance evaluation" (1999: 31). The central question to be explored with this research is: **What are the factors which contribute to human services workers being able to utilise their professional discretion within a policy context based on new managerialist contractual arrangements?**

This research aims to fill a major and increasingly important knowledge gap in social policy implementation. While a considerable body of literature has stressed the need for human service professionals to respond to the challenges imposed by new managerialist reform (Jones & May, 1997; Bessant, 1997; Jones, 2000), little research has been completed to examine how human service workers have engaged with these reforms (Muetzelfeldt, 2000). As such, this research seeks to explore how workers in the child and youth services agencies in the non-government sector pro-actively engage with the new policy direction that emphasises contractualism and new managerialism.

Proposed methodology and methods involved in the project

The research will employ a case study methodology to explore human service workers' responses to restructuring in the sector. Interviews and case vignettes will be used to examine the extent to which workers can exercise their professional discretion so that their public interest purposes can be fulfilled, and also to investigate how workers can contribute their expertise in this new organisational and policy environment. Additionally, the agencies participating in this study will be drawn from metropolitan, regional and rural settings to allow for the experience of human service workers in different environments to be examined.

As this research is an Australian Research Council Industry Partnership, formal links are already in place with MacKillop Family Services. The partnership with MacKillop Family Services brings to bear a considerable research pool. MacKillop currently provides a range of child and youth services in Melbourne and Geelong. As such, this research will benefit from a range of existing networks in the child and youth services field. Participants in this research will be selected from within MacKillop Family Services and other selected agencies. In addition, this research is designed to build on the existing collaborative links with a European social policy research group, based at the University of Bielefeld. As such, the methodology for this project reflects the research design employed in these studies to facilitate an international comparison.

The research comprises two stages of primary data collection with a total of five child and youth service agencies involved in the project. Using purposive sampling techniques, participants will be selected based on their ability to provide information (Padgett, 1998; Robson, 1999). Agencies will be selected in the following locations:

- metropolitan Melbourne (2);
- Geelong (2); and,
- Warrnambool (1)

The first stage involves conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with four human service workers in each of the selected agencies. This technique has been chosen as it allows for a detailed exploration of issues and accommodates a variety of responses to the subject (Alston & Bowles, 1998). The interviews will be piloted and assessed prior to proceeding. Questions will focus on models of discretion and the relationship between the different parameters of decision-making. Specific attention will be given to the role of economic considerations as an organisational pressure, and the gap between organisational and professional rhetoric and reality. Interviews will be designed to incorporate additional factors that impact on rural and regional settings, particularly those concerning formal and informal accountability to the local communities in which practitioners and their clients live. Questions will encourage participants to elaborate on answers using specific examples from their practice/experience. All interviews will be taped and transcribed.

The interviews will be used to develop case vignettes that capture the issues faced by practitioners. The vignettes will comprise hypothetical scenarios based themes drawn from the interview data. The vignette technique will be employed as it provides an opportunity to explore responses to complicated situations that anticipate the participants' own experience (Finch, 1987). As with the initial interviews, the case vignettes will be trialed and assessed prior to proceeding. To reflect the range of organisational, client and social/community contexts that the practitioners work in, it is anticipated that up to six vignettes will be required. Interview participants will be asked to describe how they would respond to the case scenarios presented, and to provide a rationale for their decisions. The case scenarios will incorporate policy and organisational contexts, as well as client information. Informants will be asked to respond to each case vignette, including those that are different from their current work situation so that their tacit knowledge will be articulated more explicitly. This process will be completed over several weeks or months with interviews taped and transcribed. The case vignettes are designed to make plain the professionals' implicit knowledge, so that it can become part of the shared professional knowledge base and be used by others. This knowledge will be sensitive to the differences between urban and rural settings. Where possible, these participants will be different from those involved in the first round of interviews.

3. Research timetable

Timetable

Stage 1, May 2001-March 2002

- Literature review, refining the research aims and questions, and developing the theoretical concepts and main empirical issues to be explored;
- Identification of the agency sample - five agencies chosen.

Stage 2, May 2002-October 2002

- Examination of worker practices in the selected organisations. Completion of first round of interviews (20) to determine how workers in the five agencies operate within new governance models;
- develop, write up and pilot up to eight case vignettes or case scenarios for use in Stage 3.

Stage 3, November 2002-June 2003

- Case vignettes will be presented to twenty human service workers in the previously selected five metropolitan, regional and rural agencies.
- Analysis of the interview data to identify the elements of the professionals' creative engagement with the contemporary policy context within the various organisational and social environments.

Stage 4, July 2003-February 2004

- Write up and submission. The completion of preliminary papers and draft chapters produced during the literature search and research phases.

4. Research funding

As this research is an Australian Research Council Industry Partnership, formal links are already in place with MacKillop Family Services. The partnership with MacKillop Family Services brings to bear a considerable research pool. MacKillop currently provides a range of child and youth services in Melbourne and Geelong. MacKillop Family Services is contributing a total of \$41,500 (15,000 cash and 26,500 in kind) over the three years of this project. As such, this research will benefit from a range of existing networks in the child and youth services field. Participants in this research will be selected from agencies within and outside MacKillop Family Services.

Section C: Details of participants

NB: The numbered bolded headings in this form must remain in your completed application for ethics approval. Please leave these headings and delete the detailed guidelines as you go through and complete the form. If a heading is not relevant write 'Not applicable' under it.

1. Number, type, age range, and any special characteristics of participants

This research comprises two stages of interviews with 20 participants involved in both stages. Participants will be human service workers (including social workers and youth workers) employed in the child and youth services sector. Specifically, the participants will be residential care workers, caseworkers and youth support workers drawn from the residential care setting - working with children and young people placed in out-of-home care.

2. Source of participants (attach written permission where appropriate)

The child and youth welfare agencies to be involved in this study will be selected based on discussions between the investigator, the supervisors and the industry partner (MacKillop Family Services) based on their perceived ability to provide information. While a number of participants will be drawn from within MacKillop Family Services, it is anticipated that the majority of participants will be from other agencies. All community welfare service agencies involved will be organisations with contracts to provide services with the Department of Human Services (DHS).

3. Means by which participants are to be recruited

Participants will be recruited using purposive sampling techniques, whereby individuals are selected on their ability to provide information. The investigator will utilize existing links and networks with the industry partners to recruit participants. A steering committee has been formed to assist in

directing the project comprising the investigator (Nick Halfpenny), the supervisor (A/Prof Linda Briskman, RMIT University), the second supervisor (Prof. Michael Muetzelfeldt, Victoria University), the CEO MacKillop Family Services (Paul Linossier) and the Coordinator of Mission and Social Policy, MacKillop Family Services (John Honner). To date the steering committee has identified a number of agencies from which participants could be drawn.

Following the selection of potential agencies, key informants within the selected agencies will be asked to circulate a letter of introduction (copy attached) to child and youth service staff in selected agencies. Subsequent to the circulation of the introductory letter the investigator will make contact with potential participants (copy of letter attached). Prior to the interviews, a summary of the areas to be covered will be circulated (copy attached). A similar letter will be circulated to recruit participants for the second stage of interviews to detail the interview process and the material to be explored. The second stage of interviews will be centred on the case vignettes that will be compiled following the completion of the first round of interviews. As such, the letter to potential participants for the second round of interviews has not yet been finalised.

4. Are any of the participants ‘vulnerable’ or in a dependent relationship with any of the investigators, particularly those involved in recruiting for or conducting the project?

No

Section D: Estimation of potential risk to participants and project classification

NB: The numbered bolded headings in this form must remain in your completed application for ethics approval. Please leave these headings and delete the detailed guidelines as you go through and complete the form. If a heading is not relevant write ‘Not applicable’ underneath it.

1. Please identify the project classification by assessing the level of risk to participants

The participants in this research will be human service workers who have consented to be involved in tape recorded interviews to discuss their work practices within their agency. Based on the FCE research ethics guidelines this project is classified as Minimal Risk (MR).

2. If you believe the project should be classified category MR or category NR please explain why you believe there are minimal or no risks to the participants.

The risk associated with this project related primarily to the tape recording of interviews. It is reasonable to assume that issues will arise in the interviews that may not be 'common knowledge' within the organisation. Sensitive material such as the dynamics of the agency, conflicts within and outside the agency and identifying details of services users may be raised during the course of the interviews. The procedures to be adopted to protect the confidentiality of participants are outlined in **Section F Question 1.**

3. Please explain how the potential benefits to the participants, or contributions to the general body of knowledge, outweigh the risks.

The value of this research lies in the exploration of contemporary human service practice. A review of the current literature regarding managerialist/contractualist reform reveals a significant gap in the understanding of how the restructuring of human services sector has influenced the practices of human service workers. As the use of contracts to regulate the activities of human service agencies has become a key aspect of welfare service delivery this project seeks to explore an underdeveloped aspect of this trend on human service workers. Beyond exploring the costs and benefits associated by these reforms, this study seeks to explore how human service workers have responded to such developments. Specifically, this research seeks to examine the experience of workers in mediating the demands of agencies, funding bodies, personal and professional ethics. In developing a clearer

understanding of the application of practice knowledge in this restructuring sector, this research will allow a positive engagement with continuing reform in the human services.

4. Please detail any other ethical issues which may be particularly associated with this project.

Tick the appropriate boxes (Do not delete any questions in this section).

	Yes	No
(a) Is deception to be used?		X
(b) Does the data collection process involve access to confidential data without the prior consent of participants?		X
(c) Will participants have pictures taken of them eg, photographs or videos ?		X
(d) If interviews are to be conducted will they be tape-recorded?	X	
(e) Do you plan to use an interpreter?		X
(f) Does the research involve any tasks or processes which participants may experience as stressful or unpleasant during or after the data collection?		X
(g) Are the participants in a dependent relationship with the investigator/s?		X
(h) Are there in your opinion any other ethical issues involved in the research?		X

Where you have ticked 'YES' to any of the above questions, please give details and state what action you intend to take to ensure that no difficulties arise for your participants.

Section E: Informed consent

NB: The numbered bolded headings in this form must remain in your completed application for ethics approval. Please leave these headings and delete the detailed guidelines as you go through and complete the form. If a heading is not relevant write 'Not applicable' underneath it.

1. Attach to your application

(a) a copy of the letter to participants providing plain language information about the research. This will often be the letter inviting people's participation. This should normally be on RMIT letterhead.

(b) a copy of the *Consent form* (see Appendix 1) or *Assignment of copyright form* (see Appendix 2). If you are not obtaining consent in writing please explain why.

2. Dissemination of results

Participants will be informed that material collected in the interviews may appear in the research report (thesis) and in publications during and following the completion of the final report.

Participants will be informed that where material is included in the final report or related publications, identifying material will be altered to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Section F: Confidentiality of research records

1. Describe the procedures you will adopt to ensure confidentiality

To address the risks to participants the investigator will institute a process aimed at protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. In addition to providing written consent, the confidentiality of the participants will be protected throughout the research process. Tape recordings of interviews and responses to case scenarios will be store in a locked cabinet in the investigators office or home for the duration of the project. Additionally, all taped material will be coded to protect the identity of the participants. A list linking participants with coded transcripts and taped interviews will be securely stored separately from the tapes and transcripts. Identifying data regarding the participants name and employer will be altered in the final report to protect the identity of the participants with transcripts of the interviews also coded and kept in a secure location. Participants will be informed that a transcript of the interview will be made available on request.

As the research seeks to explore and contrast the experience of human service workers in rural, regional and urban environments, identifying data related to the location (i.e. rural, regional and urban as opposed to naming the town or suburb) may be included in the final report. Participants will be made aware that where relevant, material relating to the size, mission, funding arrangements and services provided by the participants' agencies involved may also be included.

As the interview questions are designed to allow participants to elaborate on practice examples, it is foreseeable that details regarding the identity of services users may be raised. The investigator will ensure that any identifying data is altered to protect the identity of service users.

2. Who will be responsible for security of confidential data?

The investigator will be responsible for ensuring that the data remains secure.

3. How long will data be held?

In line with RMIT University policy the tapes of all interviews will be held for five years.

4. Who will have access to the data and for what purpose?

In addition to the investigator, the recognised supervisors of this project will have access to the transcripts and tapes of interviews. Such access is predicated on the supervisor/s respecting the confidentiality of research participants.

5. Does this project involve the use of private personal information obtained from a Commonwealth department or agency?

No

6. Archival storage of non-confidential research data

Not applicable

Section G: Other issues

NB: The numbered bolded headings in this form must remain in your completed application for ethics approval. Please leave these headings and delete the detailed guidelines as you go through and complete the form. If a heading is not relevant write 'Not applicable' underneath it.

1. Do you propose to pay participants? If so, how much and for what purpose?

No

2. Where will the project be conducted?

It is anticipated that interviews will be conducted at participating agencies subject to negotiation with interview participants.

3. Is this project being submitted to another human research ethics committee, or has it been previously submitted to a human research ethics committee?

It is anticipated that the investigator will be required to obtain formal ethics approval from each of the agencies from which participants will be drawn. The investigator is in the process of obtaining ethics approval from MacKillop Family Services with other agencies to follow (where applicable).

RMIT Faculty of the Constructed Environment

School of Social Science and Planning

Consent form for persons being interviewed

Name of participant:

Project Title: Professional discretion in child and youth services: The impact of the Contract State

Name of investigator	Tel: (bus)	Tel: (home)
Nicholas Halfpenny	9639 1890	9484 7092

1. I consent to participate in the above research project. This research project has been explained to me and I have read and kept a plain language description of the research.

2. I have agreed to participate in an interview.

3. I acknowledge that:

- I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data.

- The project is for the purpose of research and/or teaching and may not directly benefit me.
- My anonymity and the confidentiality of information provided is assured.
- The security of the data obtained is assured following completion of the study.
- The research outcomes may be published and a report will be provided to me.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

(Participant)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

(Investigator)

Any queries or complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chair of the Faculty of the Constructed Environment Research Ethics Sub-Committee, RMIT, GPO Box 2476 V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is 9925 3957.

References

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Yeatman, A. & Owler, K., (2001) 'The role of contract in the democratisation of service delivery', *Law in Context*, 18 (2), pp. 34-56.

Appendix II – Letter to interview participants

October 15, 2003

(Participant name)

(Agency)

(Address)

(Address)

Dear (name),

My name is Nick Halfpenny and I am post graduate research student in the School of Social Science and Planning at RMIT University. I am undertaking a research project to examine worker practices in the child and youth services sector. The central aim of this project is to explore human service workers' experience of restructuring in this sector and how workers have responded to these changes.

My project is titled:

Professional discretion in child and youth services: the impact of the Contract State

While debates regarding the reform and restructuring within the human service sector have received considerable attention, little work has been undertaken to investigate how front line workers have been affected by these changes. As such, I am interested in interviewing residential care workers and caseworkers currently working in child and youth service agencies. I am particularly interested in exploring how workers have adapted their work practices to the restructuring policy, organisational and funding environment.

This study is designed to give participants an opportunity to reflect on their work and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the work of human service practitioners.

The study will involve your participation in a one-to-one interview (approximately one hour). With your consent I plan to tape-record the interviews. The following issues relating to your work will be discussed:

- The skills, values and knowledge associated with your work
- The role of funding arrangements and policy guideline in shaping work practices

- Organisational dynamics of your agency
- Forms of accountability
- Mediating competing interests
- Dealing with uncertainty or ambiguity
- The 'spaces' where professional discretion is utilised

Included with this letter is a brief summary of the areas to be covered in the interviews. This has been included to allow participants to reflect on specific areas of their work to be explored in the interviews.

Participation in the interviews is strictly voluntary and participants will be free to withdraw at any time. Material from the interviews may appear in the thesis and/or in forums such as conference papers or journal articles. Where this is the case identifying data will be altered to protect your anonymity. Copies of the transcripts of the interviews will be made available on request.

I appreciate the time pressures associated with your work and I am happy to work with you to arrange a suitable time and venue for the interviews. Should you be interested in participating in this project, or you wish to clarify any of the above information, please contact me on **9639 1890 (bh)** or **9484 7092 (h)**.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Halfpenny

School of Social Science and Planning

RMIT University

Appendix III – Summary of questions for interview participants

Summary of areas to be covered in interviews

Outlined below is a summary of the areas to be covered in the interviews. The purpose of circulating this prior to the interview is to allow you time to remember specific examples and think about particular aspects of your work. If you have any queries regarding the areas I have outlined please do not hesitate to contact me on the numbers listed in the accompanying letter.

Nick Halfpenny

Background Information

Areas to be covered will include the tasks associated with your work and the extent of your work experience in this field. In addition, the interview will explore the types of formal training you have completed e.g. TAFE, university qualifications, in-service training or other forms of education/training. I am also interested in what you would describe as your key responsibilities to those children and young people you work with.

Practice Knowledge

I am interested to hear specific examples from your own experience where you put your skills, values or knowledge into practice. The way you work may be influenced by a recognised body of knowledge (or theory) of practice. I would also like to hear what you believe to be the 'core values' or ethics related to your work and the skills you draw on in your work.

Workplace Issues

The amount of discretion you have may differ depending on the circumstances. I would like to hear about examples where you exercised significant discretion and examples where you may not have been able to apply discretion. I am endeavouring to explore what enhances or detracts from your ability to apply your own discretion in the course of completing your work. You may find it useful to relate examples from your own experience to illustrate how you have responded in these situations.

I am also interested in the reporting requirements of your work and the type of information you are required to pass on - this information may be required by your agency or the Department of Human Services (DHS). I would be interested to hear your reflections on the purpose of this information and your views on the relationship between this information and the work you do.

Practice Dilemmas

I am endeavouring to explore issues of uncertainty or conflict in your work. In particular, how you respond when these situations arise and where you seek guidance or advice. I am also interested in examining the question of accountability in your work. That is, who are you accountable to and does this change depending on the circumstances? As with other sections, I am eager for you to relate examples from your own experience.

Policy

There may (or may not) be opportunities within your agency to provide input into the development of policy or the tendering for new services. I am endeavouring to explore the types of contribution you are able to make in these areas.

Inter-agency Contact

Part of your work may involve referring service users to specialist services. I am interested to explore the type of, if any, contact you have with workers in other agencies providing similar services. This section is designed to give you the opportunity to elaborate on what type of services are accessed and what is involved in gaining access to these services.

The Future

Traditionally there has been a view that one of the features of the non-government sector has been a greater degree of flexibility for workers. I am interested to explore if this accords with your own experience. Do you believe being a part of a non-government agency is a positive aspect in your area of work?