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Sense-Making in Child Protection:

Interpreting social workers' reasoning processes through applying Archer's theory of reflexivity

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PhD

2016

Sense-Making in Child Protection:

Interpreting social workers' reasoning processes through applying Archer's theory of reflexivity

John Mark Cavener

A thesis submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Northumbria at Newcastle for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Sense-making is an important practice accomplishment in child protection. This is because the judgement and decisions which follow can have life changing consequences for children and families. A contemporary social constructionist perspective identifies critical-reflexivity as a concept drawing attention to the influence discourse, knowledge, language and culture can have on human sense-making processes. In all social settings, these often taken-for-granted phenomena can shape human sense-making, action and agency. Empirical studies exploring practitioners' sense-making and reflexive practice(s) in social work settings remain underrepresented within the literature. Therefore, informed by Margaret Archer's theory of reflexivity, this study examines sense-making in child protection and the reflexive practice(s) of social workers situated in a statutory setting.

The research questions guiding the study are: *'How do social workers 'make sense' in child protection?'* And: *'Is sense-making in child protection informed by reflexivity?'* Utilising methods commonly applied in ethnography the study combined participant observation with in-depth interviews. Interviews included participant reflections on case studies. A thematic analysis was utilised to interpret the study data. Key themes drawn from the study data included how sense-making in child protection was influenced by: (1) prescriptive policy and practice frameworks (2) practitioners' biographical backgrounds, perspectives, approaches, values, beliefs and concerns and (3) their differing 'modes' of personal reflexivity.

The study findings highlight how sense-making in child protection and the practice of personal reflexivity is a multi-faceted activity embedded within a range of formal and informal reasoning processes. Practitioners' differing reflexive modes are identified as causally influenced by their personal biographies, knowledge, experiences, values, beliefs, concerns and their professional practice contexts, approaches and relationships. Highlighting how social workers think, talk about, experience and assign meaning to their day-to-day practice realities this study contributes knowledge to understanding sense-making, personal reflexivity and the development of 'practice-depth' in child protection.

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List of abbreviations

- BCS – Battered Child Syndrome
- BITS – Behavioural Insights Team
- CA – Core Assessment
- CAF – Common Assessment Framework
- CBP – Critical Best Practice
- CFA – Child and Family Assessment

- CCN – Child Concern Notification
- CPD – Continuing Professional Development
- CPP – Child Protection Plan
- EBP – Evidence-Based Practice
- EHA – Early Help Assessment
- ERA – Enquiry and Referral Administrator
- IA – Initial Assessment
- ICONI – Internal Conversation Indicator
- ICT - Information and Communication Technologies
- NFA – No Further Action
- NPM – New Public Management
- NQSW – Newly Qualified Social Worker
- PAS – Professional Accommodation Syndrome
- PIA – Provision of Information and Advice
- SCR – Serious Case Review
- SOS – Signs of Safety
- STT – Social Transformation Theory
- SWMC – Social Worker for Missing Children
- SWSA – Social Work Support Assistant
- TMSA – Transformation Model of Social Action
- UEC – University Ethics Committee

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Declaration

I declare the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and is all my own work. I also confirm this work fully acknowledges the views, opinions, ideas and contributions of all other authors referenced within the text.

All ethical issues allied to the research presented in this thesis have been formally reviewed. Ethics approval for the study was granted by the Northumbria University Ethics Committee in August 2012.

The fieldwork informing this thesis was carried out with senior managerial approval to undertake primary research in the study setting. The full approval and formal consent of all participants who took part in the study was secured on written agreement.

I declare the word count of this thesis is: 84,963 words.

Name: **John Cavener**

Signature:

Date: **March 1st 2016**

Chapter 1: Introduction

Sense-making in child protection

Introduction

This thesis is a study of sense-making in child protection and the practice of personal reflexivity. Within this thesis, I examine social workers' reasoning processes and reflexive practice(s) as they make sense of their day-to-day experience and/or act in response to those events which occur during their longer-term engagement with children and families. I demonstrate why sense-making informed by a critically-reflexive approach is an important practice accomplishment in child protection. I highlight how this is because the judgement and decision-making that follows can have life changing consequences for children and families (Helm, 2013).

I begin by presenting the definitions of human sense-making and personal reflexivity informing this thesis. I then summarise a fieldwork study I designed and undertook to gather primary data on sense-making in child protection and social workers' reflexive practice(s). Following an outline of my study findings, I introduce the epistemological position informing this thesis. I then explain the study rationale before presenting a brief overview of the following chapters.

Defining sense-making

Weick (1995) argues sense-making is a cognitive-psychological process influenced by the social and cultural (socio-cultural) rules and practices of the settings we occupy. Having been socialised into a range of social settings, as we make sense of our day-to-day experience, Weick indicates we do so in a contextual and culturally conditioned way. In organisational settings, Elder-Vass (2012: 17) states the shared

cultural rules and practices individuals engage in as members of a 'norm circle' are among the social structures which will influence their sense-making, action and agency.¹ White and Featherstone (2005) highlight, where situated in organisational settings as members of a professional norm circle, social workers will assign meaning to their day-to-day experience as they reflect in-and-on their practice while performing their identities and talking their realities into existence.

Influenced by the taken-for-granted dimensions of their practice, Cunliffe (ibid: 46) implies social workers will utilise talk as a reasoning process as they engage in 'living dialogical relationships' with managers, colleagues and other professionals. Combining the ideas of Weick (1995), White and Featherstone (2005), Elder-Vass (2012) and Cunliffe (2014) to inform this thesis sense-making is defined as:

The intra-subjective and/or inter-subjective discursive-dialogical means by which individuals utilise internal and/or external talk to interpret and assign meaning to their day-to-day experience

Defining reflexivity

On reviewing the social work literature D'Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez (2007) highlight how reflexivity is identified as a multi-faceted concept with a range of meanings and interpretations. Taylor and White (2000: 35) describe 'epistemic reflexivity' as concerned with a social worker's capacity to critically reflect upon their taken-for-granted knowledge and/or ways of knowing. Gardener (2014: 23) argues reflexivity to be a practitioner's 'capacity to be [critically] reflective and understand how that reflection is influenced by [their] social context'. Consequently, 'reflexivity'

¹ Within the context of a critical realist philosophy a sense of personal agency can be understood as allied to and influenced by the inherent power individuals have to practice personal reflexivity as they make sense of and act in response to the constraints and enablements of their everyday experience.

and 'critical reflection' as frequently conflated terms are often used interchangeably within the social work literature. However, some commentators view these as distinct forms of reflective practice. These include Trevelyan, Crath and Chambon (2014: 15) who argue on making sense social workers will either practice a standardised form of critical reflection involving reflexivity or they will not!

In contradistinction to the idea of reflexivity being a homogenous practice, social theorist and critical realist Margaret Archer (2003: 163) suggests it is through their differing 'modes' of reflexivity that social workers will make sense of their day-to-day experience(s). Archer (2012: 6) states, as the multi-faceted reasoning 'process mediating the effects of our circumstances upon our actions' in any social context, reflexivity is the central faculty influencing all human sense-making, action and agency. In the context of statutory settings, despite similarly experienced circumstances, as a heterogeneous practice Archer (ibid: 7) indicates it is through their 'personal reflexivity' that social workers engage in the reasoning, judgement and decision-making process. As a key concept informing this thesis, I will return to discuss reflexivity in more detail in chapter 2. However, for the purpose of this introduction I draw on Archer's (2007: 4) theorising to define personal reflexivity as an 'inner conversation' and/or external communicative process constituting:

The regular exercise of the mental ability shared by all normal² people to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and visa versa

² In June 2015 I attended a workshop led by Margaret Archer where I was able to ask her what she meant by the term 'normal' within her definition of reflexivity? Professor Archer stated what she considered otherwise to be 'normal' was any individual who may, for example, be brain damaged to the extent they were unable to engage in any form of intra-subjective or inter-subjective reflexive dialogue.

Defining techno-rationality

With the development of this thesis, alongside seeking to contribute knowledge to sense-making in child protection and practice of personal reflexivity, I offer a critique of the techno-rational paradigm.³ Reviewing the work of Lonne et al. (2009), I identified how a techno-rational paradigm dominates child protection practice across Anglophone societies.⁴ While policies in relation to reporting of child abuse remain diverse, Lonne et al. (2009: 3) highlight how the United Kingdom (UK) and other Anglophone societies are unified in their approach to child protection.⁵ This unified approach includes: (1) the use of the term 'child protection' (2) the adoption of a risk-averse child welfare orientation and (3) the view protection of children is the primary function of social work. Consequently, Lonne et al. (2009) argue Anglophone societies are inclined to utilise prescriptive policy and practice frameworks which encourage a standardised approach to social work that are: (1) forensic (2) diagnostic (3) legalistic and (4) risk-opposed. As a result, the unique problems children and families experience, as well as the day-to-day complexities of social workers' reasoning processes, are overlooked within a techno-rational paradigm.

Schön (1987: 3) defines techno-rationality as an 'epistemology of practice derived from a positivist philosophy'. Consequently, Schön highlights how techno-rationality requires social workers to view all problems as having calculable, predictable and logical solutions. However, while challenging the scientific and rule-bound nature of

³ In basic terms a paradigm is understood as a dominant theory, method or belief system that influences the taken-for-granted dimensions of practice which guide the way in which things are done.

⁴ Those countries which Lonne et al. (2009) refer to as Anglophone societies include the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

⁵ Parton and Berridge (2011) highlight, while government guidance asserts professionals and members of the public must refer to the local authority where they are concerned a child may be at risk of significant harm, the UK does not have a mandatory system for reporting suspected child maltreatment.

techno-rationality, White (2013) advocates the importance of criticality and reflexivity in social work. Through adopting a critically-reflexive approach, White (ibid: 51) argues, increased awareness of the taken-for-granted dimensions of practice can encourage a more 'just' and 'humane' approach to child protection practice.

Advocating a just and humane approach to child protection Featherstone, White and Morris (2014) suggest how a critically-reflexive approach can safeguard against erroneous reasoning and judgement while encouraging family-minded practice. Family-minded practice is concerned with a social worker's understanding of how their knowledge of what constitutes risk, child abuse and safe parenting is socially constructed and therefore should remain contested and (re)negotiable. However, while discouraging a child welfare orientation that nurtures a healthy uncertainty in child protection, Schön (1987: 3) highlights how:

Techno-rationality holds that practitioners remain instrumental problem solvers who select technical means best suited to...solve well-formed...problems by applying theory and technique derived from systematic [and] preferable scientific knowledge

The study

My approach to developing this thesis began with an initial review of the academic literature. The review highlighted how sense-making and/or the way(s) social workers reason and practice reflexivity in child protection remains under-theorised. My evaluation of empirical studies in statutory settings (e.g. Helm, 2013) revealed their design and interpretation of findings presented under-investigated the relationship between social workers' reasoning processes, sense-making and reflexive practice(s). Therefore, to contribute to this important area of knowledge for

social work, I decided to undertake a fieldwork study to gather primary data. Beginning in September 2012 my study took place across a 6-month period. The study was conducted within a statutory setting where I was employed as a senior child and family social worker.

Methods, participants, aims and objectives

The study fieldwork was designed using methods commonly utilised within ethnography. These included participant observation and semi-structured, in-depth interviews. On utilising in-depth interviews, I incorporated a case study sample. Adopting this approach, within study interviews social workers were requested to reflect on cases where they felt a positive outcome for children and families had been achieved.⁶ The main aim of the study was to identify how social workers make sense in child protection. The main objective of the study was to identify how social workers' reasoning processes were informed by the practice of personal reflexivity.

Research questions

As highlighted, within the social work literature reflexivity is primarily identified as a homogenous practice that is considered either part of a social worker's practice repertoire or not! However, as Archer's (2003: 16) theorising suggests, as a personal power all normal humans possess, social workers will apply their differing 'modes' of reflexivity to inform their day-to-day reasoning processes. Formulated

⁶ My rationale for adopting this approach was concerned with wanting to contribute to the limited range of studies where 'best practice' (Jones, Cooper and Ferguson, 2008) in child protection is identified as informed by the practice of critical-reflexivity.

based on my review of the social work literature and the theorising of Margaret Archer, the research questions guiding the study are:

(1) 'How do social workers 'make sense' in child protection?'

(2) 'Is sense-making in child protection informed by reflexivity?'

Data analysis and findings

The method of analysis used to interpret the study data utilised a hybrid inductive-deductive thematic approach presented by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). Themes identified as phenomena influencing social workers' reasoning and reflexive practice(s) were: (1) prescriptive policy and practice frameworks (2) practitioners' biography, knowledge, experience, values, beliefs, concerns and practice approaches and (3) practitioners' reflexive modalities. Practitioners' differing modes of reflexivity were identified as situated broadly within the four categories making up Archer's (2003) theory. However, as discussed in chapter 4, evidence of a fifth 'hybrid' or 'overlapping' mode of reflexivity interpreted outside of Archer's theorising was identified.

Epistemology, rationale and structure

Josselson and Lieblich (1995) argue the first step in the design of any worthwhile study should be consideration of one's own worldview. Mason (2002: 14) argues, how we interpret reality will be influenced by our epistemology or way(s) of knowing and our ontology or way(s) of being in the world. The epistemological position I have adopted to inform this thesis is considered a contemporary social constructionist

perspective. Discussing this perspective, Elder-Vass (2012: 4) states, as with traditional constructionist ideas this viewpoint invites us to acknowledge how language and the 'way...we collectively...think [about and] ...communicate [our ideas, thoughts and understandings] about our world affects the way the world is'.

However, as a less radical version of social constructionism, a contemporary perspective also draws on critical realist ideas. It does so through emphasising the importance of understanding how there are 'real' social structures in society that influence our sense-making, action(s) and agency. Among those social structures which can influence our sense-making, action(s) and agency are the taken-for-granted discourse, language, knowledge and cultural rules and practices existent in the settings we occupy (Elder-Vass, 2012).⁷ As indicated, empirical studies exploring personal reflexivity and how discourse, language, knowledge and culture influence sense-making in child protection have remained under-represented in the social work literature. Therefore, the rationale for developing this thesis is to contribute research-based knowledge to this important area of social work practice.⁸

This thesis is divided into 6 chapters. In chapter 2 I present a 3-part literature review. The purpose of chapter 2 is two-fold and comprises: (1) a comprehensive literature review and (2) a means by which theoretical ideas drawn from the literature are applied to inform a conceptual framework for developing critical-reflexivity. In part 1 of chapter 2, I continue to set the scene for my study. I do so by exploring the day-

⁷ Highlighting there are multiple definitions, and how the distinction between language and discourse is often unclear within the social theory literature, Elder-Vass (2012: 11) describes how 'language provides us with the tools to express meaning and therefore shapes *how* we may do so. Discourse...relates to...the regulation of the content of *what* we may [or can or cannot] say'.

⁸ The impetus which led me to develop this thesis is outlined in Appendix 1.

to-day practice context of statutory social work. Having reviewed the studies of Broadhurst et al. (2010a, 2010b) and White (2013) I discuss some common practices contributing to reasoning and erroneous judgement in child protection. Reviewing the work of Bevan and Hood (2006), Lonne et al. (2009) and Trevithick (2014) I highlight some of the complexities encountered by social workers operating within the culturally conditioning context of a new public management (NPM) agenda.

In part 1 of chapter 2 I introduce the concept of reflexivity as theorised by Archer (2003). I also apply ideas presented by Taylor and White (2000) and White (2013). I consider how these ideas contribute to the development of a conceptual framework for developing a critically-reflexive approach to sense-making in child protection. I then discuss the 'humane' enterprise in child protection and how this can be promoted through practising critical-reflexivity (White, 2013: 39). I outline the three-dimensional model of practice-depth in child protection presented by Chapman and Field (2007). Chapman and Field highlight how it is important for social workers to understand cultural and contextual constraints that can limit their capacity for practice-depth in child protection. Consequently, I discuss how these might be recognised and navigated through development of a critically-reflexive approach to practice. The key review questions informing part 1 of chapter 1 are: (1) *'What are some of the complexities of the contemporary child protection context?'* And: (2) *'Why is a critically-reflexive approach to child protection practice important?'*

In part 2 of chapter 2 I examine the concept of reflexivity as discussed within the social theory literature. I begin with a review of the work of Lynch (2000), Sayer (2010) and Archer (2003). I then discuss some central aspects of Bhaskar's (1978)

critical realist philosophy. I describe how Bhaskar's (1986) Transformation Model of Social Action (TMSA) informs Archer's (1995) Social Transformation Theory (STT). Discussing Archer's STT, I consider how this may be applied to inform a critically-reflexive approach to sense-making in child protection. By applying aspects of Archer's STT I illustrate how a low 'habitual' or high 'epistemic' reflexivity in the context of social work encounters with children and families might be practised. I then outline some of the central tenets of Archer's (2003) theory of reflexivity. In my summary and evaluation of part 2 of chapter 2 I offer some critical analysis of Archer's theorising.

Reviewing the work of D'Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez (2007) I explore the meaning and relevance of reflexivity for social work practice as discussed within the literature. In my review of the social work literature, I highlight how the conceptualisation of reflexivity as an approach to practice remains under-theorised. I consider some of the similarities and disparities between 'critical reflection' and 'reflexive' practice as discussed within the literature. To assist in discerning the important differences between these two concepts I draw on the work of Argyris and Schön (1974). On discussing Argyris and Schön's theory of double-loop learning, I consider how this can be applied to encourage reflexivity through encouraging practitioners' critical questioning of the taken-for-granted dimensions of practice informing their sense-making in child protection. The review questions informing part 2 of chapter 2 are: (1) *'How has the concept of reflexivity been developed within social theory?'* And: (2) *'How has reflexivity been interpreted in the social work literature?'*

Within the cognitive psychology literature (e.g. Glöckner and Witteman, 2010) intuitive reasoning processes are identified as central to understanding human sense-making, judgement and decision-making. Traditionally, judgement and decision-making, where discussed in the social work literature (e.g. Taylor, 2012), tends to draw on theoretical perspectives developed within cognitive psychology. Consequently, in part 3 of chapter 2, to inform my discussion on what is understood about individual and inter-professional reasoning processes in child protection, I draw on the social work literature (e.g. Kelly, 2000) exploring knowledge of judgement and decision-making developed within cognitive psychology. Highlighting, for example, the phenomenon of heuristics and bias as processes influencing human reasoning, I discuss how social workers make sense and formulate judgement under conditions of uncertainty. Drawing on the work of Weinberg (2014: 150), the rationale for examining models of judgement and decision-making developed within cognitive psychology is to demonstrate a contemporary social constructionist appreciation of how knowledge created within differing social scientific disciplines can be drawn on to enhance understanding of how particular phenomena are understood in society.

As argued throughout this thesis, a critically-reflexive approach to practice informed by a contemporary social constructionist perspective draws practitioners' attention to their cognitive biases and the potential for erroneous judgement where decision-making is based on taken-for-granted, intuitive reasoning processes. Examining the work of Munro (2008) I discuss the concepts of intuitive and analytical reasoning as they apply to child protection practice. Exploring the work of Hammond (1996), I consider the importance of acknowledging the potential for combining intuitive and analytical reasoning to develop a quasi-rational approach to sense-making,

judgement and decision-making in child protection. Consequently, as required from a contemporary social constructionist viewpoint, my discussion is concerned with highlighting the range of competing knowledge, theories and/or epistemological positions informing understanding of sense-making in child protection. The review questions guiding part 3 of chapter 2 are: (1) *'What 'kinds' of knowledge inform social workers' sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection?'* And: (2) *'How do social workers make decisions independently and inter-professionally in child protection?'*

In chapter 3 I discuss the methodology informing my study fieldwork. To capture primary data on practitioners' reasoning processes and reflexive practice(s) I discuss how I combined methods common in ethnography with case study samples. As noted, I outline how I adopted a hybrid inductive-deductive thematic analysis based on an approach developed by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). I consider the limitations of my study fieldwork and the impact this has on the validity of the findings. After discussing some of the ethical dilemmas I encountered, I conclude chapter 3 with a summary and evaluation of the study fieldwork.

In chapter 4 I present my interpretation of the study findings. Chapter 4 is divided into 2 parts. Described in part 1 are my observations of: (1) the study site physical layout (2) the situated and subjective nature of day-to-day practice in a child protection setting and (3) the complexities of parent-practitioner and inter-professional relationships. Among data presented in part 2 are findings on: (1) the nature of social workers' relationships with peers and supervisors (2) knowledge informing sense-making and (3) practitioners' reflexive practices. I highlight how

social workers' reflexive modes were identified as broadly situated within the categories theorised by Archer (2003). Illustrated is how a 'hybrid' or 'overlapping' mode of reflexivity outside of Archer's theorising was also identified in my study.

In chapter 5 I synthesise my study findings and discuss the multi-faceted phenomena influencing social workers' sense-making in child protection. To inform my discussion I draw from the literature and highlight gaps in knowledge the findings of my study address. Based on my study findings, I contribute to development of the model of practice-depth in child protection outlined by Chapman and Field (2007). I do so by proposing a fourth-level of practice-depth informed by a critically-reflexive approach to practice. Again informed by my study findings, and underpinned by a contemporary social constructionist perspective, I outline a four-stage model for enhancing sense-making in child protection through the supervision process. I conclude chapter 5 with an evaluation of my interpretation of the study findings.

In chapter 6 I briefly review the content of my thesis and further discuss the limitations of the study. On reviewing the study findings, I outline the contribution made to the knowledge-base related to sense-making in child protection. I consider how my study findings contribute knowledge to understanding reflexivity as a heterogeneous practice in social work. My contribution to the development of practice-depth in child protection is discussed. In chapter 6 I offer some ideas for further research for developing understanding of reflexive practice in social work settings. I also offer an account of the implications of my study for the development of critical-reflexivity through social work education and training. On concluding this thesis, I offer some final thoughts on the implications of my study findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – Part: 1

Contemporary child protection context

Introduction

I begin this chapter by continuing to set the scene for my study. I do so by discussing the child protection context and the day-to-day complexities of statutory social work. Drawing on Broadhurst et al. (2010a, 2010b) and White (2013) I discuss some of the processes contributing to reasoning and erroneous judgement in child protection. While developing a critique of the techno-rational paradigm, by drawing on the work of Bevan and Hood (2006) Lonne et al. (2009) and Trevithick (2014), I examine the consequences of a NPM agenda in social work settings. I discuss practitioners' responses to uncertainty in statutory settings and examine how discourses of risk can influence their sense-making in child protection. Drawing on the ideas of Elder-Vass (2012: 3) I consider how knowledge, discourse, language and culture as phenomena influencing social workers' sense-making in child protection can be mediated through their reflexive practice(s).

I discuss the three-dimensional model of practice-depth in child protection presented by Chapman and Field (2007). I consider how practice-depth in child protection can be enhanced through the development of a critically-reflexive approach to practice. As I begin to consider how social workers make sense in child protection and practice reflexivity I do so by drawing on Archer's (2003) theory. Prior to summarising and evaluating part 1 of this chapter, I discuss the notion of the reflexive practitioner as 'trickster' (White, 2006). Proposed by White, I highlight how the trickster represents the critically-reflexive practitioner concerned with creating a space where the discourse, language, knowledge, culture, myths, stereotypes and 'received ideas' (Rojek, Peacock and Collins, 1988) of practice can be challenged. The review questions informing part 1 of this chapter are: (1) *'What are some of the*

complexities of the contemporary child protection context?’ And: (2) ‘Why is a critically-reflexive approach to child protection practice important?’

The child protection context

Statutory social workers operate at what is often described as the ‘sharp end’ or ‘front-line’ of child protection. Chapman and Field (2007) highlight how statutory social workers are often situated in organisational settings where stress, anxiety and the frustration of balancing complex caseloads with limited resources is experienced on a daily basis. Further influencing the ever-changing context of statutory social work are performance targets and the prescriptive policy and practice frameworks which continue to regulate the UK child protection system (Munro, 2011). Bevan and Hood (2006) discuss how the emergence of performance measures allied to a NPM agenda, which has continued to be developed across UK public services since the 2000s, has influenced practice cultures. Bevin and Hood (ibid: 518) describe some of the problems associated with a NPM agenda within organisational cultures including, for example, the ‘coupling of operational targets with elements of terror’.

Likening the ethos to the early twentieth-century ‘targets and terror’ regime of the Soviet Union⁹, Bevin and Hood offer insight into how a NPM agenda in statutory settings has a tendency to be experienced as punitive by managers. This is due to a process where managers of poorly performing agencies risk being publicly named and shamed, and/or possibly sacked, where they fail to reach target-driven

⁹ The nature and implications of the ‘classic Soviet-type economy’, which utilised a punitive target-driven system which lasted until the Soviet Union collapse in the early 1990s, are examined by Ericson (1991).

organisational goals (Guilfoyle, 2012). Developed through the notion public services reform required a managerialist model to enhance performance, accountability and transparency, Guilfoyle describes how a NPM-influenced approach has become the cultural norm across the range of public services within the UK. However, while describing how a system that places emphasis on public accountability might appear morally conducive, Bevan and Hood (2006) draw attention to the potentially unethical consequences of practising within a NPM culture.

Exploring the influence of a NPM ethos within the UK health system, Bevan and Hood identified two major shortcomings allied to the target-driven control of public services. These shortcomings are concerned with managerial-led public systems being identified as reliant upon what Bevan and Hood (ibid: 520-521) describe as: (1) 'synecdoche', or the idea the performative measure of one part of an organisation can be understood as representative of the whole, and (2) invulnerability to the phenomenon of 'gaming' or the idea the target-driven measure(s) of an organisational system might somehow remain immune to human manipulation. Bevan and Hood argue the culturally conditioned behaviour of organisational members is influenced by a NPM agenda as they alter conduct to productively meet the targets used to measure their performance. Consequently, the phenomenon of 'gaming' occurs where managers introduce perverse activities which can emerge as 'by-products' of target-driven organisations (Guilfoyle, 2012: 3).

Among subversive gaming practice(s), as Bevan and Hood (2006: 521) argue, are skewed activities including, for example, the manipulation of data to meet organisational targets and/or other 'perverse incentives' designed to ensure desired

targets are not surpassed. Discussing different types of gaming identified in their research examining NHS ambulance responses, accident and emergency waiting times and the length of admission waiting lists, Bevan and Hood (ibid) describe phenomena including: (1) ratchet effects (2) threshold effects and (3) output distortions. The ratchet effect is concerned with incentives designed to under-report performance to ensure the coming year organisational targets remain achievable (Guilfoyle, 2012). Threshold effects are concerned with utilising the concept of synecdoche to mask the poor performance of particular areas of an organisation (Carter et al., 1995). Meanwhile, output distortion is concerned with a practice whereby measured organisational goals are reached at the expense of other important aspects of performance remaining unmeasured and/or otherwise unacknowledged (Guilfoyle, 2012).

Citing the research conducted by Bevan and Hood (2006), Guilfoyle (2012: 3-4) identifies how the numerous indicators and targets of the NHS as a performance-managed public system 'are often incongruous, confusing and contradictory'. Consequently, Bevan and Hood (2006: 526-528) describe how quality becomes difficult to define in the context of public services due to: (1) performance target-data manipulation (2) unmeasured performance being overlooked due to being seen as representative of an unquantified/non-applicable output and (3) the relationship between overall performance and quality of service becoming a skewed priority. Bevan and Hood (ibid: 523) conclude, where organisations are governed by a NPM agenda 'knights can turn into knaves' as managers become contextually and culturally conditioned to manipulate performance data to meet target requirements.

New Public Management and techno-rationality

In statutory social work settings, Trevithick (2014) highlights how a NPM agenda has developed as a bureaucratic structure introduced in part to address the inefficiencies within child protection. Characterised by a 'top-down' performance managed approach, Trevithick (ibid: 299) describes how a 'one-size-fits-all' philosophy has produced an (over)standardised child protection system. However, the move toward a system centred on what Wastell et al. (2011: 310) describe as the 'iron cage' of performance management remains inadequate in addressing the complex needs of children and families. As an initiative seen to erode trust in professional judgement, a NPM agenda is identified by Munro (2010a) as also encouraging of skewed priorities in child protection.

Highlighting the impact of a NPM agenda on child protection practice, Ferguson (2004a: 211) describes how skewed priorities have contributed to a 'conveyor belt' culture in statutory settings. Stalker (2003) indicates within conveyor-belt culture social workers become pre-occupied with standardised responses to risk and the management of uncertainty. Utilising: (1) narrowly-defined thresholds for intervention (2) key targets indicators and (3) efficiency-drivers, Howe (2002) argues a conveyor-belt culture prioritises performance management and cost-effectiveness above the needs of children and families. Consequently, in the context of a conveyor-belt culture the face-to-face contact and/or the strength of engagement practitioners have with children and families becomes, what Broadhurst et al. (2010c: 253) describe as, a 'second-order' social work activity.

In my experience as a social worker situated in a statutory setting influenced by a NPM agenda, an office-bound '*I would like to but I am too busy to see families*' practice culture was evident. Within this culture, I observed adversarial relationships develop with parents where their engagement was based primarily on practitioners' mandatory response to family crisis. Congruent with a NPM agenda, such office-bound practice cultures, encouraged by the prioritisation of management of service user data via information and communication technologies (ICT), do encourage second-order social work activities. They do so while the desktop surveillance of children and families becomes more important than direct contact (Wrennall, 2010).

Helm (2013) describes how in statutory settings a NPM agenda has encouraged an approach where managers hold the monopoly to discern child abuse. On undertaking an ethnographic study, White (1997a) highlighted how, in the context of a NPM culture, children's services managers were encouraged to engage in sense-making activity whilst performing techno-rationality. Similarly, in response to agency referrals, D'Cruz (2004a) found a NPM discourse informing practitioners' reasoning processes was used to construct parental identities as either trustworthy or dangerous. Consequently, within a NPM culture mid-management credibility can be understood as dependent on personal capacity to: (1) regulate workflow (2) discern categories of abuse congruent with organisational thresholds, resources and/or other priorities and (3) motivate staff to meet performance targets (White, 2009).

The child protection process

D'Cruz (2004a) describes three stages in the child protection process including: (1) the intake (2) categorisation and (3) response to referrals and/or child concern notifications (CCN). From: (1) receiving information (2) planning and undertaking intervention (3) reviewing and (4) closing cases each step involves sense-making, judgement and decision-making. Throughout this process, a practitioner's approach to sense-making will influence their judgement and the decisions which determine the outcomes children and families experience (Taylor and White, 2001). Encouragingly, on examining the child protection process, Broadhurst et al. (2010a) identified how some social workers adopted a critical and reflexive approach to sense-making. In doing so, despite being situated within settings influenced by a NPM agenda, practitioners were able to reason, formulate judgement and decide on responses to CCNs tailored to the complex needs of children and families. Broadhurst et al. (2010a) noted this 'informal logic of risk management' was most evident where practitioners demonstrated a willingness to engage parents in reflexive dialogue to discuss concerns, discern risk and negotiate child safety.

However, findings of a study undertaken by Kirkman and Melrose (2014: 29) indicated how some social workers, while required to make 'sequential decisions' throughout the course of a day, did not demonstrate an approach to sense-making informed by criticality or reflexivity. Consequently, Kirkman and Melrose (ibid: 30) illustrate how sense-making 'short-cuts' informed by intuitive reasoning processes were utilised by those practitioners observed as experiencing 'decision-making

fatigue¹⁰. Conclusions drawn from the study by Kirkman and Melrose imply how practitioners' potential for critical-reflexivity is constrained by a NPM agenda that encourages biased reasoning processes as a means of addressing the problems of: (1) high referral intake (2) management of workload (3) determination of thresholds and (4) establishment of practice priorities.

Despite some informative conclusions, the findings of Kirkman and Melrose's (2014) study can be viewed as tenuous. This is due, for example, to the single source of data collection being participant observation. In contrast to Broadhurst et al. (2010a) who combined research methods, with participant observation alone potential for identifying aspects of judgement informed by reflexive practice through in-depth interviews and/or case study samples was overlooked. The researchers' data examination was informed by the evidence-base developed within cognitive psychology. Consequently, with an a priori template for a deductive (theory-driven) analysis, the benefit of an inductive (data-driven) analysis was overlooked.

In addition, Kirkman and Melrose are members of the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT). The BIT was established by the coalition government with the key objective of producing knowledge to contribute to policy-making. According to BIT the development of 'intelligent ways to encourage, support and enable people to make better choices for themselves' is achieved through applying behavioural and social psychological approaches to practice (BIT, 2001: 3). Adoption of this approach offers insight into the epistemological bias of Kirkman and Melrose (2014), and

¹⁰ Social psychologist Roy Baumeister (2003) defines decision-making fatigue as the deterioration in human reasoning and self-regulation which can influence their quality of judgement where an individual is required to make decisions across a prolonged period.

consequently the limitations of a study where the cognitive and social psychological evidence-base has been adopted to inform data analysis and interpretation. Primarily overlooked within the study is the potential reasoning, self-regulation and/or causal power of practitioners' reflexivity on their sense-making activity.

In contrast to the findings of Kirkman and Melrose, in my experience decision-making in child protection is far from the mentally depleting exercise the idea of 'decision-making fatigue' proposes. This is especially so where practitioners are supported in their sense-making and judgement formulation through reflexive dialogue with managers and/or colleagues. However, as Rojek, Peacock and Collins (1988) and Elder-Vass (2012) indicate, sense-making in child protection remains a discursive-dialogical process potentially informed by the dominant culture and/or received ideas of practitioners where situated as collective members of a professional norm circle.

Although, while offering insight into how inter-professional perspectives might influence sense-making in child protection, Rojek, Peacock and Collins overlook practitioners' capacity to challenge the perspectives of other professionals through practising critical-reflexivity. Nevertheless, as Taylor and White (2000: 15) highlight, social workers' sense-making will be influenced by their everyday 'professional talk' with colleagues and/or the dominant perspectives of managers which are often administratively focused and culturally defined. Consequently, where sense-making is uninformed by critical-reflexivity, Broadhurst et al. (2010b) highlight a key pitfall in the child protection process is where erroneous judgement can lead to children 'at risk' being categorised as 'in need'.

This was the case with Peter Connolly whose (mis)categorisation as a child 'in need' contributed to fatal consequences. In Peter's case, despite bruising being identified by practitioners as present on his body, agreed was an inter-professional decision for him to remain in the care of his mother (Laming, 2009). White (2013: 46) highlights how this sense-making (mis)calculation was exasperated by Peter's care teams' collective reasoning being based on: (1) a 'psychological commitment' to the shared notion his mother was a safe carer and (2) an erroneous judgement about the perceived self-inflicted cause of markings on his body. Resultantly, it was through a lack of critical-reflexivity, and therefore a biased approach to sense-making based on 'unquestioning, comfortable collective settlement' about the reality of Peter's family functioning, which contributed to his death (White, *ibid*: 48).

Following Peter's death, Eileen Munro¹¹ undertook a government sanctioned review of the UK child protection system. Among recommendations made within the Munro Report (2011) was the need for a child-focused and relationship-based practice orientation. Munro argued, to move the UK system forward, child protection needed to be informed by 'expert' knowledge and an up-to-date research and evidence-base. However, Featherstone, White and Morris (2014) argue child-focused and evidence-based practices are not new ideas. Although, what is forward-looking, as Munro (2011) recommended, is how increased timescales for child and family assessment (CFA) can create opportunities for relationship-based practice and/or 'first-order' social work encounters with children and families.

¹¹ Professor Eileen Munro is a leading researcher, academic and commentator on child protection with the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Following Munro's recommendation for research-based evidence to support child protection practice(s) this has continued to be developed within the academic literature (e.g. Holt and Kelly, 2012, 2014). However, despite evidence regarding the negative consequences of prescriptive policy and practice frameworks on the outcomes experienced by children and families, proposals within research-based literature remain limited in their utilisation. Despite the recommendations of Munro (2011) therefore, a techno-rational paradigm and NPM agenda continues to dominate practitioners' sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection. It does so by encouraging prescriptive policies and practices that emphasise the imperative for social workers to meet agency targets and manage performance. Meanwhile, as Featherstone, White and Morris (2014) argue, the need for development of an anti-prescriptive, multi-rational and family-minded child welfare practice remains outstanding.

Trevithick (2014) identifies how, since the Munro Report (2011), early intervention into family life using the early help assessment (EHA) has been encouraged. However, on criticising the preceding EHA format known as the CAF (Common Assessment Framework), White, Hall and Peckover (2009) argue the early help approach to child and family assessment has contributed to higher thresholds for statutory intervention. Consequently, the range of social, economic and psychological constraints experienced by children and families continues to be overlooked within a one-size-fits-all child protection discourse. This is especially so where EHAs are encouraged as an alternative to the single assessment process when a high level of CCNs are received by children's services (White, Hall and Peckover, 2009).

Although, it is reasonable to acknowledge some family-based problems will be similar and/or less complicated than others. Therefore, it may be some needs can be addressed through a residual early help-child protection system? Nevertheless, a mother's passiveness toward her child due, for example, to undisclosed fear of a violent partner is not a problem easily identified via: (1) ambiguous referral information (2) non-statutory EHAs and/or (3) a single home visit from a social worker utilising a one-size-fits-all child and family assessment (CFA) format. Where family interventions are undertaken, a contemporary social constructionist perspective can help draw practitioners' attention to the ontological impact unobservable causal mechanisms can have on a parent's: (1) personal reflexivity (2) sense of (in)active agency and/or (3) (in)capacity to provide safe care.

However, without a critically-reflexive understanding of the influence a range of structural constraints can have on parent-child relationships, social workers informed by a child-focused discourse risk practising oppressively. They do so where a mother's lack of warmth towards her child due to fear of undisclosed male violence, for example, becomes the foci of concern and consequent rationale for their removal. Anger displayed by parents toward social workers perceived as acting in the 'best interests' of a child in these kinds of circumstances has been noted in serious case reviews (SCR) (e.g. Laming, 2003). However, a mother's hostility toward social workers, due to fear for the future of her family, is often misinterpreted by 'child rescuing' practitioners as a lack of capacity to be a safe parent (Featherstone, White and Morris, 2014: 17).

Messages from Research (Department of Health, 1995) highlighted how, potentially dubious intervention into the life of children and families can result in parents being left feeling angry, frustrated and stigmatised. In my experience, this is often the case at the close of child protection 'investigations' where child abuse allegations remained unsubstantiated. I recall how families identified as 'in need' were often left under-supported due to a lack of resources and/or where 'at risk' families remained an agency priority. Although, due to their high degree of reasoning accuracy, White (2013) indicates many social workers will be able to discern the required action(s) following receipt of a CCN. Nevertheless, when it comes to deciding whether to intervene into the life of a family, practitioners remain caught in a double-bind. This double-bind, as discussed by Dingwall et al. (1995), can be understood in the context of an 'uncertainty dilemma' where social workers contemplating family intervention are damned if they do, and damned if they do not!

Fook (2002: 3) claims social work in the twenty-first century with its 'expert' knowledge, 'theories, perceptions, function[s] and espoused ideas [about]...safe and normal' parenting, represents a morally conservative profession. Meanwhile, White (2009) argues social work intervention into the life of a family can be seen to serve the dominant ideological interests of the state. In my experience, confusing to many parents is the ambiguous 'care-control' role of social workers that is often not made clear during visits to families. Consequently, I have felt disheartened by those practitioners who, while welcomed by parents who desperately seek their support, prefer to look in the kitchen cupboards and/or examine a child's bedroom to determine capacity for safe care. As Parton and O'Byrne (2000: 135) argue, historically the UK child protection system has remained 'riddled with moral, civic and

theoretical' assumptions about what constitutes safe parenting. Despite the identified need for a more just and humane approach to practice, where sense-making in child protection remains uninformed by a critically-reflexive approach, as White (2013) argues, social workers will continue to practice as morally naïve representatives of the state.

Sense-making, certitude and discourses of risk

Ferguson (2004a) highlights how, while operating under conditions of uncertainty, social workers are required to make sense and formulate judgement that should be moral, decisive and timely. However, White (2009: 223) suggests categorisation and 'disposal' of CCNs in child protection is characteristically a 'dubious, uncertain and rushed' process. White indicates sense-making informing hasty judgement has been encouraged by the demands of a techno-rational paradigm and NPM agenda that precludes the uncertainty surrounding many cases of suspected child abuse. As noted, Helm (2013) argues a technocratic ethos encourages a standardised referral filtering process through indiscriminate use of high and/or low threshold criteria. Congruently, a NPM agenda encourages the statutory response to child and family difficulties as a prescriptive, predictive and one-dimensional process.

Munro (2008) highlights the danger of utilising standardised criteria to inform sense-making in child protection. These encourage potential erroneous reasoning and error of judgement where established threshold criteria create false negatives and positives. Munro (2008: 40) states with false negatives and positives determining thresholds 'some families may be falsely accused of being dangerous while others

are incorrectly cleared'. Techno-rationality and a NPM agenda therefore fail to address the ambiguity arising from threshold criteria where information received on CCNs is: (1) limited (2) inconsistent and/or (3) otherwise incomplete.

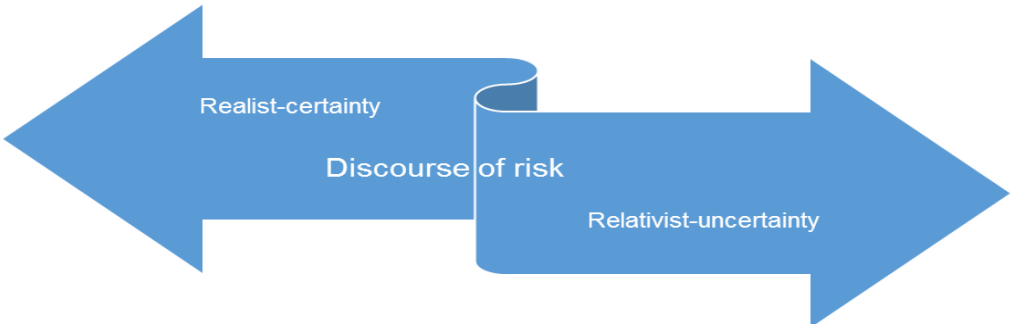
While operating within the context of a techno-rational paradigm, Spafford et al. (2007) argue managing uncertainty should be understood as a hallmark of professional capability. However, White (2009) argues social workers inclined to manage uncertainty through seeking confirmation of their reasoning risk formulating erroneous judgement. This is especially so, as Taylor and White (2000) highlight, where reasoning and judgement does not, for example, involve a practitioner's critically-reflexive questioning of prescriptive policy and taken-for-granted practice(s). On reviewing the article produced by Spafford et al. (2007) several criticisms are identified. These include the way in which the authors overlook how judgement and decision-making informed by standardised 'tick-box' risk assessment tools undermine unidentified safety factors present within families. Additional criticism relates to how tacit and/or anecdotal knowledge informing sense-making in child protection may be overlooked in favour of a diagnostic approach to risk assessment.

White (2013) suggests in suspected child abuse cases a sense of safety and certitude may be established through practitioners seeking disconfirming evidence that challenges their formulating hypothesis. This perspective demonstrates how a practitioner's professional scepticism and/or healthy sense of uncertainty might be encouraged by a critically-reflexive approach to practice which challenges standard formulations of risk constructed through 'technical vocabulary' (White, 2013: 48). In her review of literature, Kelly (2000) describes how there are many psychological

theories about human sense-making and judgement informed by dominant conceptualisations of risk. Kelly highlights how the way in which risk is understood and talked about by a social worker as either: (1) the probability of something happening (2) a kind of objective fact or (3) as a dominant discourse and/or social construct will determine how they will make sense in suspected child abuse cases.

Lupton (1999) argues, where based on a realist epistemology, risk can be understood as an objective fact. In contrast, a relativist epistemology acknowledges risk as a dominant discourse. From a contemporary social constructionist perspective, where the idea of ‘intersectionality’ (Weinberg, 2014: 150) and/or an understanding of the benefit of combining differing epistemologies is encouraged, risk can be interpreted as: (1) a fluid concept and (2) as a phenomenon situated on a continuum between a realist and relativist way of knowing. Consequently, for those practitioners who operate from a relativist epistemology risk will remain an ambiguous and uncertain construct. Contrastingly, for those who view the concept from a realist epistemology risk remains a real, measurable scientific fact. Drawing on the work of Lupton (1999) in Figure 1 illustrated is how, where considered a discourse, risk can be understood as a fluid concept situated on a realist-relativist epistemological continuum:

Figure 1: Discourse of risk continuum



Broadhurst et al. (2010a) indicate, where practitioners' perceptions of risk are based on a realist epistemology, the real-world experience of children and families is undermined by a standardised, scientific risk assessment process. In contrast, as Broadhurst et al. argue, a parent's capacity for promoting child safety should be based on a relativist approach which encourages reflexive dialogue as part of the risk assessment process. As discussed, as part of the planning process for child safety, and where their knowledge of risk is acknowledged as informed by a dominant discourse, practitioners should become engaged in reflexive dialogue with parents. In this collaborative sense-making process, problem perception(s) and/or what constitutes risk can be (re)negotiated and/or (re)defined. However, as Broadhurst et al. (2010b) observed, determination(s) of risk are more often constructed in the context of the inter-subjective talk between social workers and/or other professionals.

Within the context of inter-professional relationships, there may be differing interpretations of risk across the practitioner group (Kelly, 2000). As Kelly highlights, influenced by their professional knowledge, established practice repertoires and/or the dominant language(s) and discourse(s) of their respective professions, inter-professional sense-making can become polarised and/or coalesced. Resultantly, dependent on their capacity to practice critical-reflexivity, sense-making 'shifts and joins' can influence practitioners' reasoning in response to risk discourse(s) informing inter-professional judgement and decision-making processes. As White (2013) highlights, it is through non-critically-reflexive inter-professional sense-making processes that social workers can pose a risk to children and families. They do so as they engage in inter-professional talk which supports interpretations of risk rather

than acknowledging risk to be indicative of a discourse responsible for contributing to the construction of parental identities in child protection (D'Cruz, 2004a).

Exploring the theme of meaning-making, professional talk and the construction of identities in child protection, D'Cruz undertook an ethnographic inquiry where practitioners located within a statutory setting were observed and interviewed. D'Cruz identified how the language and discourse used by social workers contributed to their reasoning processes and the construction of their professional identities. In cases of suspected child abuse, D'Cruz highlighted how professional opinion also often coalesced to construct parental identities as dangerous while dismissing their alternative 'versions' of what happened as lies and/or denial of the truth. As White (1997a) found, D'Cruz identified how practitioners utilised talk within the context of her study interviews as a display of professional identity. D'Cruz also identified how interviews highlighted the causal influence practitioners' biographies, knowledge, assumptions, beliefs and values had on their sense-making in child protection. D'Cruz additionally noted how discourse, language and organisational culture shaped practitioners' interpretations of risk, child abuse and parenting practices. D'Cruz was able to explore reflexively how her own taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs and values influenced her interpretation of the study findings. However, overlooked by D'Cruz was identification of practitioners' different reflexivities and the causal influence these may have had on their sense-making in child protection.

Taylor and White (2000: 121) argue the 'inter-professional talk' which takes place in social work settings will continue to influence practitioners' sense-making and knowledge production. The knowledge produced in child protection can inform the

sense-making, judgement and decisions which determine the outcomes children and families experience (Helm, 2013). Taylor and White (2000) highlight knowledge-making, and/or the kind of sense made through professional talk, will rarely be acknowledged between practitioners. Therefore, in terms of the potential range of outcomes children and families might experience, here the imperative for understanding the importance of a critically-reflexive approach to sense-making in child protection is illuminated.

As indicated, utilising ethnography White (1997a) examined professional talk in a statutory setting. Describing how as a team manager she was able to conduct research with the consent of team members, White offers a comprehensive account of statutory social work. Guided by a performance management agenda, White describes how she identified how managers sought to balance organisational priorities with loyalty and protectiveness toward practitioners. Congruently, while managers were identified as 'performing' their professional identity in the context of study interviews, White (ibid: 194) describes how a collective professional identity was constructed by practitioners through 'story telling sessions'. White (ibid: 233) describes how social workers used storytelling sessions and study interviews to affirm their professional identities and reassert their 'mandate as protectors of children'. As I discuss in chapter 5, identified in my study and as found by White, observation of the 'everyday talk' of practitioners was interpreted as primarily administratively focused. Additionally, and again as noted in my study, the performative nature of social work as observed in practice and during study interviews highlights the influence contextual conditioning, culturally defined

practice(s) and the research process can have on variable display(s) of professional identity.

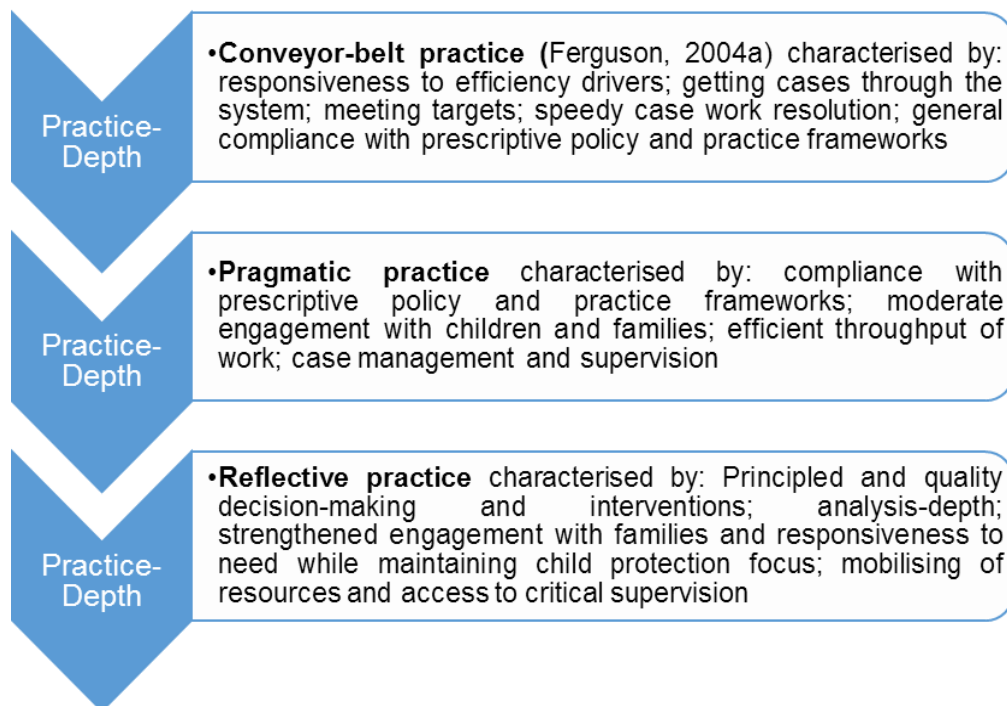
That practitioners tell stories about themselves and/or others that challenged the normative practice of the setting was theoretical insight developed by White. However, findings on those practices identifying social workers as differently reflexive practitioners inclined to: (1) challenge language, ideas and professional routines and/or (2) otherwise operate outside the cultural rules and practices of their professional norm circle remained outside the boundaries of White's study. Resultantly, despite the seminal work of White, the idea different social workers will practice different 'modes' of reflexivity in the context of their discursive-dialogical relationships with managers, colleagues and other professionals remains an under-investigated area.

Practice-depth in child protection

Chapman and Field (2007) draw attention to the different levels of practice-depth in child protection considered available to social workers. Chapman and Field describe the differing levels of practice-depth as: (1) conveyor-belt practice (2) pragmatic practice and (3) reflective practice. By identifying these different levels, Chapman and Field argue social workers can begin to develop a critical awareness of how a techno-rational paradigm and/or NPM agenda encourages their sense-making in child protection through compliance with prescriptive policies and practices. Connolly and Morris (2012: 139) state what is essential to the development of practice-depth in child protection is a social worker's acknowledgment of the different

'drivers of practice'. In Figure 2, illustrated is an adaptation of the model of practice-depth as presented by Chapman and Field (2007):

Figure 2: Model of practice-depth in child protection



Practice-depth and critical-reflexivity

While social workers operate in contexts constrained by techno-rationality and a NPM agenda, Chapman and Field (2007) argue reflective practice is the optimum level of practice-depth to be achievable. However, despite 'conveyor-belt' and 'pragmatic practice' seeming to be approaches to circumvent, Connolly and Morris (2012: 139) point out there will be occasions where practising these levels of practice-depth is appropriate. For example, a pragmatic approach may be necessary where a child's needs are identified as adequately met through a particular service, resource and/or intervention. Despite the important contribution made by Chapman

and Field (2007) a detailed discussion on the multi-faceted nature of reflective practice as presented, for example, by Ruch (2010) is overlooked by the authors. Additionally, overlooked is how a fourth level of practice-depth in child protection might be achieved through social workers practising critical-reflexivity.

As indicated, a critically-reflexive level of practice-depth can be achieved where the taken-for-granted dimensions of practice are identified by social workers. However, White (2013) indicates how developing a critical form of reflexivity may continue to prove difficult for some social workers. Unfortunately, White does not discuss why some practitioners may be capable of practising critical-reflexivity while others may not. Although, as White (2006) has argued previously, one reason for this may be due to some practitioners being reluctant to engage in reflexive dialogue which can attract uncertainty. Consequently, by indicating differing enthusiasms, motivations and capabilities for practising critical-reflexivity or otherwise might exist, as I seek answers to my research questions, White (2013) creates a space for me to further investigate this important area of practice.

The critically-reflexive practitioner as ‘trickster’

White (2001: 102) advocates the importance of criticality and reflexivity for social work and encourages practitioners to question the ‘social and cultural artefacts and forms of thought which saturate [their] practice’. To encourage practitioners to move beyond critical reflection, White (2006) introduces the metaphor of the reflexive practitioner as the ‘trickster’. The trickster, as White discusses, is based on a mythical character who reminds us of our tendency to reason and formulate

judgement based on our taken-for-granted ways of knowing. White argues tricksters are those social workers who are prepared to initiate reflexive dialogue with other professionals as they seek to challenge the knowledge, discourse, language and/or cultural rules and practices of their employing agencies.

While alert to the causal influence of formal knowledge on their sense-making, the child protection practitioner as trickster will value a position of uncertainty and/or not-knowing as they seek to unsettle established practices. Discussing disruption of the normative dimensions of professional practice, White (2006) describes how in her personal and professional life she has sought to disturb some of the dominant cultural rules and practices she has encountered. By encouraging critical questioning of the dominant language, culture, discourse, knowledge and belief systems she has experienced, White highlights how she has evoked new ideas and/or different ways of knowing, thinking about and/or doing established practice.¹²

Summary and evaluation

In part 1 of this chapter I have continued to set the scene for my study. I have done so by outlining some of the complexities within the child protection process. I have highlighted how through a discursive-dialogical process on making sense some practitioners will be inclined to seek confirming evidence from those professionals who support their judgement formulations. Consequently, it seems some practitioners may choose to avoid colleagues who may demonstrate different reasoning processes and/or who may be critically-reflexively aware. I have

¹² I highlight an example of my own practice as 'trickster' in Appendix 2.

highlighted how where a critically-reflexive approach to child protection is absent sense-making can encourage erroneous judgement formulation and/or create the potential for practitioners to categorise children 'at risk' as 'in need'.

The consequences of practising without a critical form of reflexivity have been identified within the work of Broadhurst et al. (2010b) and White (2013). A potent example was highlighted in my brief discussion of the case of Peter Connolly. Where Peter was concerned, a lack of inter-professional criticality and reflexivity was identified as leading to the erroneous judgement and decision-making that contributed to his death. As with the Laming Report (2003), identified in this chapter is how SCRs do not highlight how a critically-reflexive approach to practice might contribute to equitable sense-making in child protection. As Broadhurst et al. (2010a) advocate, as part of the reasoning process risk, child abuse and what constitutes safe parenting are concepts that should be discussed and negotiated reflexively and dialogically with parents.

Evaluating the work of Broadhurst et al. (ibid: 1060) proposed is a process of sense-making in child protection informed by an 'informal logic of risk management'. This approach requires social workers to critically-reflexively examine their authoritative knowledge-claims and/or their taken-for-granted assumptions about what constitutes risk and child abuse in society. Evaluating the work of White (2013), I highlighted how a research opportunity emerges in relation to understanding what might constrain or enable a social worker's capacity, willingness and/or desire to develop as a reflexive practitioner.

Drawing on the work of Elder-Vass (2012) and Rojek, Peacock and Collins (1988) I identified the potential normative constraints to practising reflexivity. These include challenges posed to practitioners as members of a professional norm circle where they are encouraged to operate within the dominant cultural rules and practices of their employing agencies. I have highlighted the nature of the received ideas of social work and indicated how these might be passed, for example, from senior practitioners to newly qualified social workers (NQSW). Although, a criticism of the claims made by Rojek, Peacock and Collins (1988) and Elder-Vass (2012) is how these authors indicate all NQSWs will fail to critically and reflexively challenge taken-for-granted cultural practices and perspectives of colleagues. Illustrating the model presented by Chapman and Field (2007), I highlight how a critically-reflexive approach can contribute to the development of practice-depth in child protection.

Drawing on combined ideas of Rojek, Peacock and Collins (1988), Taylor and White (2000), Elder-Vass (2012) and Archer (2003), some important questions arise within part 1 of this chapter. These include: (1) *'Why might some practitioners be more or less inclined to develop as critically-reflexive practitioners?'* (2) *'How might sense-making in child protection be influenced by practitioners' different 'modes' of reflexivity?'* (3) *'How might different modes of reflexivity be allied to a social worker's biography, values, beliefs, concerns and/or approaches to practice?'* These are important questions I will explore in part 2 of this chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – Part: 2

Reflexivity, social work and child protection practice

Introduction

In part 2 of this chapter I explore the social theory and social work literature examining the concept of reflexivity. I begin with the work of Lynch (2000: 53-56) who outlines the differences between 'habitual' and 'epistemic' reflexivity. I examine how these seemingly opposed kinds or levels of reflexivity can be understood as the implicit-explicit mental processes informing human sense-making, action and agency. I then present a critique of traditional social constructionism before discussing some central tenets of a contemporary perspective that informs this thesis. On discussing key aspects of contemporary social constructionism, I consider how the perspective is informed by critical realist ideas.

To inform my discussion I examine some of the central tenets of a critical realist philosophy as proposed by Bhaskar (1979, 1993). Discussing Bhaskar's (1979) Transformational Model of Social Action (TMSA) I consider how this informs Archer's (1995) Social Transformation Theory (STT). After presenting a concise overview of Archer's STT I discuss her notion of social transformation through the morphogenetic cycle. I propose how the morphogenetic process in social work links to practice of a 'high' epistemic or 'low' habitual reflexivity. On examining Archer's (1995) STT, I illustrate how this contributes to understanding the process of sense-making in child protection and the reflexive practice(s) taking place in the context of social work encounters. I then outline some of the key characteristics of Archer's (2003) theory of reflexivity. Within my summary and evaluation of part 2 of this chapter I present a critical analysis of Archer's (2003) theory of reflexivity.

After examining the concept as theorised by Archer, I explore some of the different interpretations of reflexive practice presented within the social work literature. In my review of the social work literature I examine the work of D’Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez (2007), Gardner (2014) and Trevelyan, Crath and Chambon (2014). In seeking to discern the difference between ‘critical reflection’ and ‘critically-reflexive’ practice, I draw on the work of Fook (2012) and Taylor and White (2000). To inform my discussion on the development and practice of critical-reflexivity I consider the work of Argyris and Schön (1974). I highlight how Argyris and Schön’s concept of double-loop learning proves useful for understanding how taken-for-granted knowledge and practice assumptions can influence social workers’ sense-making in child protection. Discussing the practice of critical-reflexivity in the context of the supervisor-supervisee relationship, I highlight the importance of supervision and relational-responsiveness in child protection practice. The review questions informing part 2 of this chapter are: (1) *‘How has reflexivity been developed as a concept within social theory?’* And: (2) *‘How has reflexivity been interpreted within the social work literature?’*

Levels of reflexivity

While being presented as a complex area of knowledge that can be difficult to understand, ideas about human reflexivity continue to be developed within the social theory literature (e.g. Ashmore 1989; Lynch, 2000; Archer, 2012). Within the literature reflexivity is identified as a multi-faceted concept located across an epistemological continuum. For Bourdieu (1990: 56) reflexivity, or what he terms the ‘habitus’, are those conditioned human responses which through ‘spontaneity without consciousness or will’ represent our implicit reactions to our routine everyday

experience(s). However, for Archer (2003) reflexivity can be understood as a more explicit and conscious mental power which humans utilise to make sense of and act in relation to their everyday circumstances.

Habitual reflexivity

The idea of a 'low' or 'habitual' reflexivity is most notable in the work of Bourdieu (1990) and Garfinkel (1967). Garfinkel (1967: 8) describes reflexivity as the inherent means by which all humans make sense of their experience as they respond to the practicalities of everyday existence. Garfinkel claims reflexivity is indicative of the subconscious sense-making all individuals engage in as they utilise socially and culturally (socio-cultural) conditioned responses to interpret and inform their actions. Garfinkel therefore construes human sense-making as a routinised reflexive accomplishment organised around each individual's taken-for-granted assumptions about their social circumstances. Similarly, Bourdieu (1990) infers human sense-making is implicitly accomplished as a result of contextually accustomed response(s) to everyday experience(s).

What Bourdieu theorises as the habitus are among those reflexive dispositions which constitute the innate responses which encourage individuals to reproduce the dominant social and cultural practices in society. However, as Archer (2003, 2010a) argues, with the idea of the habitus Bourdieu underestimates the practice of human reflexivity which involves a critically-conscious inner or external dialogue being utilised to mediate responses to the constraints and enablements of social structures. In agreement with Archer, Elder-Vass (2010) criticises Bourdieu in relation to denial

of human reflexivity as a deliberative conscious means for negotiating social structures and informing an individual's sense-making, action and agency.

Several authors (e.g. Elder-Vass, 2010; Sayer, 2010) have sought to reconcile Bourdieu and Archer. However, Bourdieu (2000) refutes a fully conscious reflexivity as the foundation for informing human sense-making, action and agency. Meanwhile, Archer (2003: 25) maintains a conscious intra-subjective dialogical-deliberation or 'internal conversation' is the starting point for the practice of personal reflexivity. Consequently, while a habitual form of reflexivity may offer some explanation as to what might implicitly inform human sense-making some important considerations are overlooked by Bourdieu (1990) and Garfinkel (1967). These include, for example, the question of: *'How can an individual respond in a habitually reflexive and/or conditioned way to make sense of a situation, event or circumstance they have never experienced?'*

In response to this type of question Bourdieu (2000: 149) has conceded some conscious deliberation may take place to determine human sense-making as part of a habitus (re)modification. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, Sayer (2010: 109) discusses how a low or habitual reflexivity will remain allied to the habitus as the 'dispositions, inclinations, expectations and skills' individuals acquire through their early natal and post-natal socio-cultural and/or contextual conditioning are practised. However, despite practising a low or habitual reflexivity Sayer indicates, where social workers are concerned, they hold potentiality to enhance their capacity for a more consciously reflexive approach to sense-making in child protection. They do so, Sayer suggests, where required to question their taken-for-granted assumptions

and/or their socio-culturally conditioned responses when presented with unfamiliar scenarios.

However, while presenting the foundation for an argument for the social conditions that facilitate the development of a more conscious and therefore less habitual reflexive approach to sense-making, Sayer does not provide any empirical evidence to support this argument. Nonetheless, advocating the idea a higher level reflexivity may be triggered by an unfamiliar practice-based experience, Sayer (ibid: 112) indicates a social worker's inherent 'ethical dispositions...[may] have some inertia, but their strength depends on the frequency with which they are activated as well as on...[their] reflexive monitoring of them'. Consequently, in their day-to-day sense-making on the one hand the literature (e.g. Bourdieu, 2000) indicates social workers will be inclined to practice low reflexivity. However, practitioners will have potential to develop a higher reflexivity when presented with a scenario that requires them to engage in internal conversation and/or external reflexive deliberation (Archer, 2003).

Consequently, the idea of a low or high reflexivity raises important implications for my study. This is because the indication is, where presented with uncertainty, a deeper kind of reflexivity will be encouraged as practitioners are compelled to question their taken-for-granted assumptions. This is especially so where a socio-culturally conditioned habitual reflexive response does not help practitioners make sense of unfamiliar scenarios. Although, as Taylor and White (2000: 35) indicate, while uncertainty constitutes the contextual conditions of statutory social work, a practitioner's capacity to engage in critical sense-making will be dependent on their ability to practice 'epistemic' reflexivity.

Epistemic reflexivity

Epistemic reflexivity is described by Taylor and White (2000) as a critical form of reflexivity concerned with a practitioner's conscious capacity to question their knowledge and/or meaning-making processes. Taylor and White (ibid: 35) argue epistemic reflexivity is accomplished where practitioners subject the taken-for-granted dimensions of their practice and 'knowledge claims to critical analyses'. However, White (1997b: 747) argues 'epistemic reflexivity may only be achieved by social workers becoming critically aware of the dominant constructions influencing their practice'. In the context of child protection, the idea of practising epistemic reflexivity therefore indicates social workers will need to be aware of the taken-for-granted dimensions of practice and how these represent what Elder-Vass (2012: 55) describes as their 'institutional reality'.

On practising epistemic reflexivity, a deeper level of critical self-awareness will assist social workers in understanding, for example, the causal influence of prescriptive policy and practice frameworks on their sense-making in child protection. Kinsella and Whiteford (2009: 253) describe prescriptive policies and practice frameworks as representatives of the 'disciplinary knowledge' in statutory settings will be challenged where social workers demonstrate epistemic reflexivity. As Kinsella and Whiteford (ibid) contend, where alerted to 'social conditions under which disciplinary knowledge comes into being and gains credence' those practising epistemic reflexivity will hold potential to engage in transformative social work. Transformative social work is concerned with challenging formal practice logic and supporting the critique of a techno-rational paradigm which discourages reflexive dialogue with children and families (Broadhurst et al., 2010a).

Although, as Kinsella and Whiteford (2009: 251) argue, due to the pervasive nature of techno-rationality not all social workers will be able to utilise epistemic reflexivity to 'crack the code' of the professional language(s) and discourse(s) which influence their practice. Nevertheless, as Kinsella and Whiteford (ibid) infer, the goal of epistemic reflexivity in contributing to transformative social worker should be practitioners' acknowledgment of the taken-for-granted knowledge, language and assumptions influencing their sense-making. The literature discussing epistemic reflexivity proposes the benefits of a critically-reflexive approach to practice including identifying the taken-for-granted phenomena influencing sense-making in child protection. However, conjured up within the literature is the question: *'How can a critically-reflexive questioning of the taken-for-granted dimensions of practice take place without contributing to a social worker's sense of uncertainty?'* In response to this question, as White (2013) argues, the objective of epistemic reflexivity should be to contribute to a culture of healthy uncertainty where the critical questioning of taken-for-granted practice(s) becomes an agency's organising principle.

Contemporary social constructionist perspectives, critical realism and social transformation theory

As outlined in the introduction the epistemological position informing this thesis is a contemporary social constructionist perspective. Within this section I outline my interpretation of contemporary social constructionism. I demonstrate how the perspective can inform the development of a critically-reflexive approach to sense-making in child protection. I begin by examining how contemporary social constructionism informed by critical realist ideas moves beyond the epistemological

boundaries of a conventional perspective. I discuss Bhaskar's (1979, 1993) critical realist ideas informing his Transformational Model of Social Action (TMSA). I then consider how Bhaskar's TMSA offers insight into the relationship between the causal power of social structures and human sense-making, action and agency.

On exploring the relationship between Bhaskar's TMSA and Archer's (1995) notion of social transformation and morphogenesis, I consider how change occurs within the context of social interaction. Buckley (1967: 58) defines 'morphogenesis as those processes that tend to elaborate or change a system's given form, structure or state'. Morphostasis is defined by Buckley (ibid) as 'those processes in complex system-environment exchanges that tend to preserve or maintain a system's given, form, organisation or state'. I illustrate how Archer's (1995) notion of the morphogenetic cycle, where applied as a means of understanding the dynamic processes taking place within social work encounters, might assist practitioners in developing a critically-reflexive approach to practice.

Conventional social constructionism

Longhofer and Floersch (2012) propose the crisis in the legitimation of knowledge has not been fully articulated within the social work literature. Subsequently, many social workers persist in their application of transitive theories developed within psychology and sociology. However, the central deficiency of psycho-social theories, according to Archer (2003), is while representing the dominant discourses informing professional practice the factuality proposed within these remains fallible. Alongside intimations that all paradigms and theories are transitive, conventional social

constructionism as a theory of knowledge production has acted as the main intellectual critique of fact-claiming epistemologies.

Resultantly, while offering a critique of the taken-for-granted knowledge informing social work practice social constructionism has been seen as chief opponent to the realist-scientific way of knowing informing techno-rationality (Schön, 1987). Among the undermining criticism towards techno-rationality are assertions within social constructionism about: (1) how our knowledge of the world and/or reality is constructed through language and discourse and (2) how our knowledge of the world and/or our reality is historically, socially and culturally contingent. Houston (2001) highlights how these epistemological underpinnings have led social constructionism to be defined within two broad categories. These include: (1) a social constructionism that emphasises the role humans play in constituting their world and/or their social reality, and (2) a social constructionism emphasising the role language and discourse play in determining reality and human experience.

Within the social work literature, it is the latter relativist-social constructionism that is identified as the dominant perspective informing practice (Payne, 2014). Drawing on the idea of the dominant influence language and discourse have on human subjectivity relativist-social constructionists (e.g. Gergen, 2009) argue: (1) 'everything' depends on the way we think about it and (2) all that is real including knowledge and human subjectivity is created through linguistic activity. Based on these defining features a relativist-social constructionism has been outlined in several texts examining child protection (e.g. Witkin, 2012). Due to the application of a relativist-social constructionism informed by postmodernist ideas there has been a

tendency for social workers drawing on the literature to conceptualise the knowledge applied to practice as provisional (Houston, 2001). However, this knowledge application has failed to consider the existence of 'real' social structures which influence human sense-making, action and agency (Elder-Vass, 2010). Elder-Vass highlights how, in contrast to a traditional [relativist]-social constructionist perspective, a contemporary [realist]-social constructionism proposes a reality existent independent of the language and/or discourse used to define it.

Contemporary social constructionism

Contemporary social constructionist perspectives appear to remain outside the present discussion within the social work literature. However, a relativist-based social constructionism has been applied in an attempt to address the epistemic nihilism of conventional perspectives. For example, Parton and O'Byrne (2000: 23) introduce mitigating principles by proposing a relativist-constructivist epistemology for social work informed by a 'sceptical' postmodernism. Rosenau (1992) proposes 'sceptical' and 'affirmative' postmodern perspectives. Drawing on the former distinction, Parton and O'Byrne (2000) consider this useful for understanding how some interpretations of events, for example, can be seen as more real than others.

However, Houston (2001: 894) indicates any attempt to validate a social constructionism which does not acknowledge the causal influence of prescriptive policy and practice(s) as 'real' structures influencing sense-making in social work remains limited. This is due, as Sayer (2000: 47) argues, to the fallible nature of a 'judgemental relativism' which is based on the notion it is possible to choose between

competing discourses and/or discern one account of a situation or happening as more convincing, real and/or factual than another. However, despite this proposed weaknesses of social constructionist epistemology, the importance of acknowledging the idea of competing claims about what is real is emphasised by several commentators. For example, promoting the need for sense-making to be informed by a 'sturdy relativism' Taylor and White (2000) acknowledge how all knowledge is contestable. Although, Taylor and White describe how some accounts of practice can be interpreted as more credible than others. Subsequently, Taylor and White (ibid: 34) assert, when it comes to making sense and formulating judgement, a 'sturdy relativism' or 'subtle realism' can inform the process where:

Acknowledging multiple accounts and...analysing how they are constructed to warrant particular claims and to [therefore] undermine others we can in fact achieve a more rigorous approach to professional practice

With the argument of multiple explanations of events and happenings being dependent on different accounts, Taylor and White acknowledge the fallibility of transitive knowledge(s) applied to inform social work practice. Here the assertion of Taylor and White to resist a defining epistemological, knowledge or theoretical stance is in keeping with a critical realist philosophy. However, inexplicit in the assertions of Taylor and White is how a contemporary social constructionism as subtle realism might be underpinned by critical realist ideas. In the introduction to my thesis I highlighted how critical realist ideas informed my interpretation of what constitutes a contemporary social constructionist perspective. A critical realist philosophy considers how sense-making, action and agency are influenced by the 'real' causal power of knowledge, discourse, language and culture which represent the normative-based phenomena making up our reality (Elder-Vass, 2010, 2012).

Critical realist philosophy

To make sense of what constitutes social reality critical realists argue it is important to understand the generative mechanisms influencing and being influenced by social structures, cultures and agency (Archer, 2003). For critical realists, the world can be understood as made up of 'real' social structures that operate as the causal powers that influence human action and agency (Elder-Vass, 2010: 64). However, based on a critical realist philosophy, where the structures making up our 'real' world are experienced as constraining, social constructions are applied to help us interpret and assign meaning to our experience (Archer, 2003). Among the constructs applied to assist with our interpretation of experience, Searle (1995: 28) argues, are those 'institutional facts' created to provide explanations of reality. While dependent on mutual human understanding and agreement, as institutional facts become more intransitive and complex they are transformed into what Searle (ibid) terms 'brut facts'. While never entirely representative of reality, Searle claims, when utilised brut facts become sophisticated and refined. As brut facts¹³ become more collectively acknowledged, interpreted and understood they move closer to representing an intransitive or 'actual' reality (Bhaskar, 1978).

The 'empirical' the 'actual' and the 'real'

Contributing to the idea of a transitive and intransitive world, Bhaskar distinguishes between a reality existing independent of our interpretations of it and a reality made up of fallible understandings. Bhaskar in Archer et al. (2008: 41) argues, the

¹³ A brut fact is something which is collectively understood as existing without being questioned and remains a physical phenomenon that does not require an explanation to be understood. While existent independent of our collective understanding of them, examples of what constitutes a brut fact include such things as rivers, trees, mountains and snow.

complex multi-faceted nature of our 'real' world is represented by three inter-related levels including the 'empirical' the 'actual' and the 'real'. The 'empirical' level is concerned with how things appear to be based on our experience of observable events. Our ability to observe events and make sense of experience may increase our understanding of what we think we know about what is real in the world. However, what is 'real' or 'actual' remains independent of our observations, interpretations and/or experience.

Critical realists claim our fallible conceptualisations about the world do not represent the 'real' because they are always theory-driven. While theoretically determined our interpretation(s) of the world are never unmediated by the principles we apply. Meanwhile, the 'real' artefacts of our world are those things remaining independent of our theoretical conceptualisations. Emphasising this point, critical realists draw attention to the level of the 'real' as distinct from the level of the 'empirical' or the 'actual'. Where actual or real events are concerned, Archer (2003) argues how these are not caused by any single process but rather by causal mechanisms including those allied to social structures, culture and human agency.

Those physical, social and psychological structures with causal power to produce discernible effects or tendencies include the knowledge, language, discourse and cultural practices in society (Elder-Vass, 2010). Arguing society consists of a range of open systems (e.g. familial, personal, social and organisational) critical realists move away from the idea that the world can only be understood through observable experience. While developing understanding of social structures and the combined effects of these on human sense-making, action and agency it is important to

understand how what might otherwise be happening outside of our conceptualisations becomes difficult to know or therefore predict.

Consequently, it is at the level of the 'real' that critical realist ideas become important for child protection. For example, even though the concept of risk may have discernible and/or calculable causes and effects these remain conceptually contingent. Meanwhile, the idea risk can be predicted with any real certainty is demonstrated as difficult where a high or low intervention threshold leads to false negatives or positives (Munro, 2008: 42). Causation, or the reason why a child may be at risk according to critical realist ideas cannot therefore be predicted through observation of the cause and effect consistencies within any sequence of events. This is because by focusing solely on theory-driven 'correlations' important structural factors, and the influence these may have on risk causality and the potentially range of outcome effects, are overlooked within deductive theories.

To offer an example, with a focus on the 'empirical' level the observation of a relationally-unresponsive parent may help a practitioner discern the potential risk of attachment disorder due to a child's poor bonding. Having utilised attachment theory to make sense of the situation an intervention strategy may encourage a parent-child interaction. Education of the parent about a child's bonding needs may be prioritised. However, while attachment becomes the sole approach to informing practice, a range of potential causes of the mother's passivity towards her child are overlooked. Consequently, the 'real' root of the mother's relational-unresponsiveness, and/or what it is that is actually causing her to be passive towards her child, remains unassessed. Taking account of the causal influence of a potential

range of structural and cultural constraints on the parent's sense of agency, and the potential outcome on her child's well-being, will increase the ontological-depth of a child and family assessment (Houston, 2001).

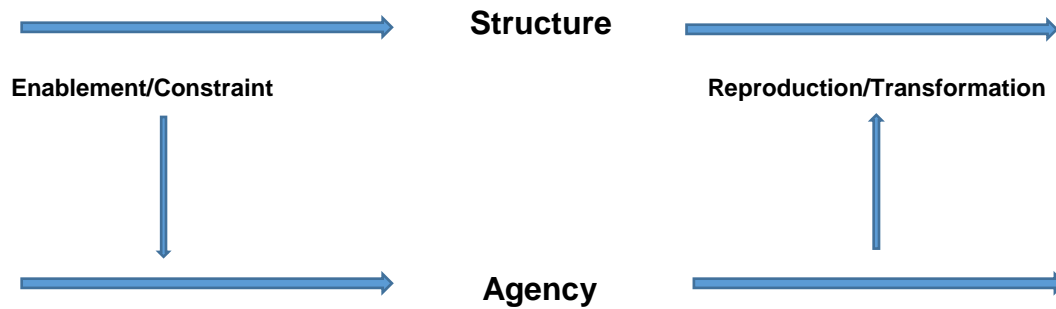
Transformational model of social action

As a means of understanding the causal influence of social structures, and how an individual's socio-cultural conditioning might be experienced as constraining or enabling, Bhaskar's (1978) TMSA proves useful. In my interpretation, Bhaskar's TMSA consists of three broad principles including:

- (1) An explanation of human socio-cultural conditioning and how the social structures surrounding each individual hold causal power to constrain or enable their sense-making, action(s) and agency
- (2) An explanation of human agency and how a person's socio-culturally conditioned taken-for-granted knowledge, values, beliefs and concerns might determine what constitutes a constraint or enablement
- (3) An explanation of the outcomes of social encounters based on an individual's ability to reflexively mediate the structural constraints and enablements of their socio-cultural conditioning which either encourage their sense of active agency or are experienced as constraining towards it

Illustrated in Figure 3 are the principles presented by Bhaskar (1993: 155) as developed within a model for understanding the constraining and/or enabling relationship between structure and agency:

Figure 3: Transformational model of social action



Structure, social transformation and morphogenetic cycles

Drawing on Bhaskar's TMSA, Archer (1995) offers a theoretical understanding of how the structures in society have the causal power to influence human sense-making, action and agency. Among those social structures Elder-Vass (2012) considers to have casual power are the dominant discourse, language, knowledge and cultural rules and practices in society. Archer (2003) links the causal power of these taken-for-granted phenomena to the practice of human reflexivity. On discussing human reflexivity, Archer claims within their everyday social interaction individuals will practice different reflexive modalities. Dependent on their reflexive mode, Archer suggests different individuals will negotiate the constraints and enablements of their day-to-day experience in different ways.

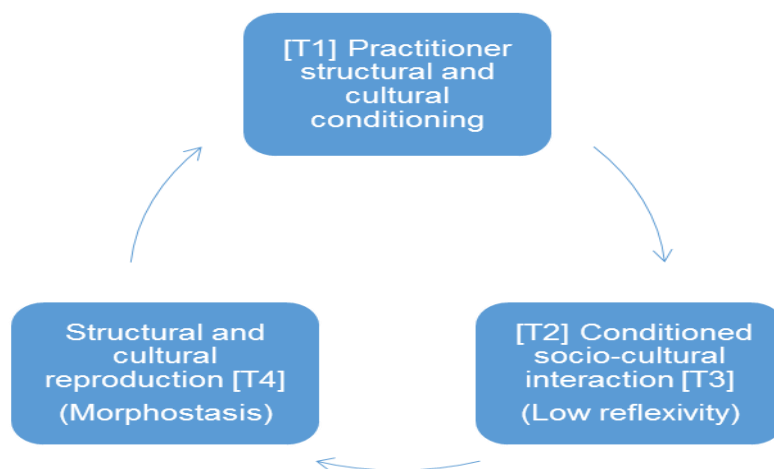
Archer (1995) indicates it is their level of critical awareness of the causal influence of their socio-cultural conditioning and how this is reproduced or transformed in the context of social interactions, for example, that will encourage a 'morphogenetic' or 'morphostatic experience. On discussing her theory of social transformation Archer

(Ibid: 9) describes what she means by the 'morphogenetic approach' as she explains:

The 'morpho' element is an acknowledgement society has no pre-set form or preferred state: the 'genetic' part is recognition that it takes its shape from and is formed by [human] agents originating from the intended and unintended consequences of their activities

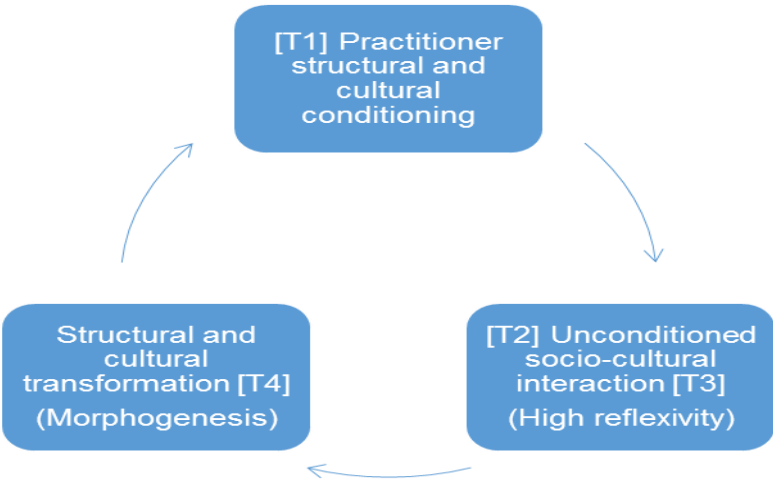
Applying Bhaskar's (1979) TMSA model Archer's morphogenetic approach offers a basis for theorising social reproduction or transformation based on negotiation of the constraints or enablements of social structures. Below I consider how Archer's ideas might be applied to inform a model for understanding the consequences of practising a high or low reflexivity in child protection. I use the term 'model' as opposed to theory as it is my intention to simply apply Archer's (1995) ideas as a useful means of understanding social work encounters as potentially reproductive or transformative of the cultural rules and practices of statutory agencies. In Figure 4 presented is a morphostatic cycle that can occur where a social worker practices a low habitual reflexivity within an encounter with children and families:

Figure 4: Morphostasis through low (habitual) reflexivity



Drawing on Archer’s (1995) theory of morphostasis in Figure 4 what I have sought to demonstrate are the implications of a practitioner’s unacknowledged socio-cultural conditioning which can influence the outcome of their encounters with children and families. As noted, based on application of Archer’s STT theory, where social work encounters with children and families take place with practitioners applying a low habitual reflexivity they will be inclined to engage with them in a routinised and/or prescriptive way. Consequently, in the context of a social work encounter where taken-for-granted dimensions of practice are not critically-reflexively acknowledged by practitioners these can have a constraining influence on the experience of children and families. Contrastingly, as a result of practising a high epistemic reflexivity, where a social worker is critically aware of the influence of their contextual conditioning, a potential enabling outcome for children and families is created within the morphogenetic cycle. This is due to practitioners being aware of the taken-for-granted assumptions informing their practice, and therefore being mindful not to reproduce these within social work encounters. Illustrated in Figure 5 is how a social worker’s high epistemic reflexive awareness of their socio-cultural conditioning can lead to enabling encounters with children and families:

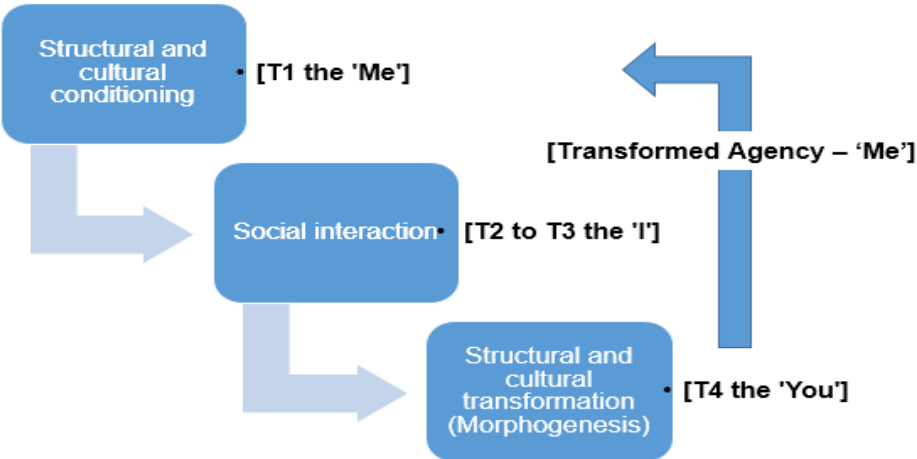
Figure 5: Morphogenesis through high (epistemic) reflexivity



Archer (1995) illustrates how in the context of social encounters the practice of reflexivity, where experienced as constraining or enabling, can influence human sense-making, action and agency. In their day-to-day sense-making, Archer (2003) proposes an individual's high or low reflexive practice can be broken down into a three-stage cycle. The first stage [T1], which Archer (ibid: 72) describes as the 'me' or 'self', are made up of the habitual, context conditioned practice(s) predisposing an individual to act in a predetermined way. At the second stage [T2 to T3] the 'critical-self' as the 'I' (Archer, ibid) can overrule habitual and/or predisposed interactions.

This overruling occurs where an individual is provoked to seek to exercise high reflexive control over their contextually conditioned interactions. At the third stage [T4], and in reflexive response to the constraints of contextual conditioning, the 'me' the 'I' and 'the transformed 'you' or 'new me' comes into being' (Archer, 2003: 74). Through self-transformation new enabling responses to routine actions become possible through practising critical-reflexivity. Illustrated in Figure 6 is how, with each transformative encounter, as Archer (2012: 53) claims 'not only are social structures transformed but so is [human] agency' through a 'double' morphogenesis:

Figure 6: Double morphogenetic cycle



Based on Archer's (1995, 2003) theorising the high or low reflexivity informing human sense-making, action and agency is identified as the catalyst determining whether social structures are experienced as constraining or enabling. Whilst engaged in morphogenetic cycles with managers, colleagues and service users social workers can therefore be understood to mediate their sense-making, action and agency dependent on their level of reflexivity. Due to the taken-for-granted dimensions informing their practice some social workers may be predisposed to engage with others based on a low habitual reflexive and/or unacknowledged contextually conditioned response. However, practitioners will be able to circumvent a socio-culturally conditioned response through developing a critical level of self-awareness while practising a high epistemic reflexivity.

Archer's theory of reflexivity

Within her social transformation theory Archer (1995) highlights how human sense-making and agency are contextualised. How individuals experience and/or act in relation to the socio-cultural and/or contextual constraints they encounter, as Archer (2003: 163) argues, is moderated through their 'mode' of reflexivity. On discussing modes of reflexivity, Archer (ibid) indicates it is through our internal and/or external conversation about our objective realities that: (1) sense-making is accomplished (2) active agency is encouraged and (3) courses of action are discerned. Archer proposes internal and/or external reflexive dialogue is how we make sense of experience. We make sense and experience our sense of identity and agency, Archer (ibid: 148) argues, as we reflect upon our social context and consider how our experience of this 'dovetails' with our personal concerns, life project(s) and practice(s).

Archer (ibid: 149) defines our life project or 'modus vivendi' as those concerns and social practices where combined 'both respect that which is ineluctable but also privilege that which matters most' to us. Archer argues our sense of self and identity is concerned with our life-long search for authenticity through creation of order within our reality and realisation of our modus vivendi. It is through our reflexive deliberations about our ultimate concerns and life projects, as Archer claims, that we develop our identity and strive to become who we are meant to be. Archer argues, all humans will have three main concerns or things they care about most. These include: (1) physical well-being (2) self-worth and (3) performative achievement (Archer, ibid: 120). We order these concerns through the internal and external conversations we have with ourselves and others (Archer, 2003). It is through internal conversation as reflexivity that we define and maintain who we are. We do so, Archer (2003) contends, as we mediate our subjective and objective realities and the constraints and/or enablements these pose to our modus vivendi.

In her book *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation* Archer (2003) illustrates how her theory of human reflexivity was developed. Archer reports on an empirical study where participants from a range of backgrounds engaged in semi-structured interviews. The interviews were designed to capture data on the relationship between the participants' natal and post-natal situational contexts, and where these was identified as constraining or enabling of their concerns, practices and life projects. Within the study, participants were introduced to the idea of the internal conversation and the agential role played by reflexivity. Archer (2003) informed participants the internal conversation, which is utilised to make sense of their experience, was

representative of their mental reasoning processes as they negotiated and made sense of their day-to-day experience.

In Archer's study, participants were asked questions about their mental activities including how they planned and decided upon particular actions. In a second study (Archer, 2007) participants were asked in order of priority about their current concerns and by utilising a Likert Scale¹⁴ the things that mattered most to them. Within her studies, Archer theorises how internal conversation, while influenced by different reflexive modes, assisted participants in: (1) defining their concerns (2) negotiating their social contexts and (3) defining and practising their life projects. Through a further empirical study (Archer, 2012) using interviews and the Likert Scale further developed as an Internal Conversation Indicator (ICONI)¹⁵ Archer has developed her theory of reflexivity.

Archer's theory proposes four modes of reflexivity described as: (1) communicative reflexivity (2) autonomous reflexivity (3) meta-reflexivity and (4) fractured reflexivity. In proposing a theory of reflexivity, Archer's main claim is all normal humans practice reflexive. However, according to Archer (2003: 163), our 'mode' of reflexivity will be dependent on a range of past and present natal and post-natal contextual conditions and our concerns and life projects. Additionally, Archer theorises, where exercised in different ways under different circumstances, our reflexive mode will causally

¹⁴ In basic terms, a Likert Scale is a psychometric measure or means of measuring traits and attitudes used in the form of a questionnaire. The questionnaire typically utilises a bi-polar format where study participants are required to indicate, for example, if they 'agree' or 'disagree' with a particular statement.

¹⁵ The ICONI is a multi-dimensional questionnaire Archer designed and used (Archer, 2012: 326) to discern the different modes of reflexivity practised by her study participants.

influence our sense-making, action(s) and agency. Therefore, while considered a mental exercise utilised by all normal people, reflexivity is not proposed by Archer (2003) to be a homogeneous practice. Rather Archer argues reflexivity is experienced and exerted in heterogeneous ways. These different ways of practising reflexivity are influenced by the relationships individuals have with their social context and/or how they make sense of their experience through internal or external conversation. Development and practice of their different reflexive modes, Archer (2003) argues, are dependent on what is of value, concern and relevance to an individual. In the paragraphs to follow, I draw on Archer's ideas while outlining criteria, which define the differing modes of reflexivity, presented within her theory.

Communicative reflexives

Communicative reflexives are viewed by Archer (2003) as those individuals who, after intra-subjective deliberation, will seek others to assist them in sense-making. Archer (2012: 127) highlights how communicative reflexives will seek out 'interlocutors' who are those trusted individuals considered 'similar and familiar' to themselves. Interlocutors, Archer argues, will be those individuals seen as most likely to help complete a communicative reflexives' sense-making activity. Archer (ibid: 128) describes communicative reflexives as 'natal identifiers' who are individuals who seek environments where 'contextual continuity' and/or replication of birth family type of relationships with trusted interlocutors can be experienced.

Retention of this reflexive mode and an active sense of personal agency, as Archer (ibid) claims, is dependent upon 'congruent relational dynamics' in the context of a

person's day-to-day experience. As indicated in part 1, among those who practice a communicative reflexivity may be those social workers inclined to seek out 'similar and familiar' practitioners as colleagues who will confirm their sense-making and judgement formulations. Potentially inclined to avoid conflict and/or easily influenced by alternative perspectives, communicative reflexive practitioners may be considered those potentially likely to (mis)categorise cases of suspected child abuse. This may be especially the case where communicative reflexives remain uncritical of practitioners who reinforce their formulating hypothesis or assert differing perspectives.

Although, Archer (2012: 165) proposes communicative reflexives will tend to 'filter out' those 'novel ideas' that do not fit with their personal values, concerns and/or belief systems. According to Archer (2003: 167), while not necessarily alert to their need for an assisted active agency, communicative reflexives will 'initiate internal dialogues in the privacy of their own minds'. However, Archer (ibid) emphasises communicative reflexives must have at least one person with a similar 'thought and talk' pattern with whom they can resolve any issues which might be raised intra-subjectively. Archer argues, without a trusted interlocutor with whom they can interpersonally negotiate their day-to-day experience, communicative reflexives risk developing a passive agency that can lead to a fractured reflexivity.

Autonomous reflexives

In contrast to a communicative reflexive, for an autonomous reflexive the experience of contextual discontinuity, relational-unresponsiveness and/or a lack of trusted interlocutors is not a serious problem. This is because, as Archer (2007: 194) argues, autonomous reflexives are independent active agents who are primarily able to negotiate the constraints and enablements of their social context intra-subjectively. As they do so, autonomous reflexives make sense and/or decide on their action(s) in a self-determined way. Archer (2003) conceptualises autonomous reflexives as those individuals who are introspective and/or self-reflective and who engage in internal conversations that can lead to action(s) or inaction(s) without the validation of others. In the context of social settings, Archer (2007) claims, autonomous reflexives will have a tendency to present as those dynamic, productive individuals who are able to inject new ideas into established ways of doing things.

This claim is supported within a study by Maclean, Harvey and Chai (2012) who identified autonomous reflexives as those individuals most likely to achieve upward mobility through pursuit of elite employment opportunities. Archer (2003) conceptualises autonomous and communicative reflexives as on a continuum. In doing so, Archer highlights how one modality becomes more or less of the other. The move from a communicative to autonomous reflexive may translate to what appears to be happening where the a newly qualified social worker (NQS) begins to acquire independence to make decisions through experience and/or 'practice wisdom' (Dybicz, 2004). Although, in a study applying Archer's (2003) theory, Porpora and Shumar (2010) found communicative reflexives tended to maintain a

low autonomous reflexive tendency. In her book *Making our Way through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility* Archer (2007: 229) argues:

Intrinsic to each dominant mode of reflexivity are relations between what people care about most and their patterns of social mobility

Considering this statement, Archer (ibid) discusses how those who occupy senior positions in organisations are likely to practice an autonomous reflexivity. Here there are implications for the findings of my study where, for example, practitioners identified as autonomous reflexives might occupy senior positions. Also, where practitioners identified as practising a communicative mode may not aspire to occupy a senior position and/or may also be seen as unable to do so and/or may otherwise choose not to do so. As indicated in part 1, where practising whichever reflexive mode, what needs to be considered by social workers seeking to develop critical-reflexivity is how the constraints and enablements of their setting might influence their sense-making. However, according to Archer (2003), a tendency for critical-reflexivity is most likely to be present where social workers practice a meta-reflexive mode. Although, even where inclined to inherently question the taken-for-granted aspects of their day-to-day practice, those who practice meta-reflexivity may not necessarily be conscious of the influence this has on their sense-making activity.

Meta-reflexives

Like autonomous reflexives, meta-reflexives are identified by Archer (2003) as those individuals who can use internal conversation to make sense and decide on action. Meta-reflexives are characterised by Archer (2007: 93) as ‘those who are critically reflexively about their own internal conversation’. Archer (ibid) highlights meta-

reflexives are orientated towards social and ethical practices. This is because their concerns, life projects and practices are allied to the welfare of others. Archer (2007: 229) argues it is in this sense meta-reflexives can 'present as a conundrum' in society.

They do so, Archer (ibid) argues, as their often lateral social mobility pattern(s) tend to reflect their search for a context where their concerns, life projects and practices can be played out. As self-critiquing, typical meta-reflexives are identified by Archer (2003) as those individuals who while remaining active agents are also vulnerable to social awkwardness and/or a lack of confidence. This is especially the case in settings where a contextual incongruity with their concerns, life projects and practices is experienced as prolonged, unchangeable and constraining (Archer, 2012: 323). Archer (ibid) argues in their fallible search for settings compatible with their concerns, life projects and practices meta-reflexives will be those individuals who frequently move within and across occupational contexts.

In a study utilising Archer's research methodology, Porpora and Shumar (2010) measured meta-reflexivity by requesting participants to reflect on their emotions and what was most important to them. The researchers requested participants describe incidents where they might: (1) reflect and make sense through internal conversation, and (2) where made sense through discussion with family and friends. The researchers found two types of meta-reflexivity were evident. These included a meta-reflexivity where reflection involved an autonomous mode of reflexivity and where reflection was assisted by a communicative mode. The implication of these findings suggests while remaining a dominant meta-reflexive an individual may, for

example, practice a hybrid communicative-meta-reflexivity. This finding is not an area fully theorised by Archer (2003). Therefore, as I will examine in my evaluation of part 2 of this chapter there are implications in relation to the limitations of Archer's theory of reflexivity.

Discussing formation of the social work identity, Miehl and Moffatt (2000) describe how this can be conceptualised as a developing through a complex intra-subjective reflexive-dialogical process. Miehl and Moffatt (ibid: 339) argue, where student social workers are required to develop a deeper more critical self-awareness, their potentially 'disassembled self' can cause them to experience anxiety. Anxiety is identified as a natural emotional response to disruption of an individual's sense of active agency and is an important part of the experiential learning process in social work education (Miehl and Moffatt, 2000). However, in my interpretation of Archer's (2003) theoretical insight, the reason why some students and NQSWs might experience feelings of uncertainty, fear and anxiety is offered by the idea of a temporarily impeded or where prolonged fractured reflexivity.¹⁶

Fractured reflexives

Discussing the concept of a fractured reflexivity, Archer (2007) highlights how this mode can be experienced by those individuals whose inner conversation does not assist them in make sense of their social circumstances. Archer (2003) highlights

¹⁶ While the term 'fractured reflexivity' may sound like a diagnostic category it is important to note this is not Archer's intention within her theory. While the process may be prolonged in extreme cases, Archer is clear that a fractured reflexivity is often a temporal process and in a dynamic sense is indicative of those fleeting aspects of most peoples' reasoning processes as they negotiate the constraints and enablements of their day-to-day experience.

how experience of a fractured reflexivity can intensify an individual's feelings of uncertainty and/or passive agency increase. Opposed to looking forward, Archer (2012: 149) identifies how in extreme cases fractured reflexives are 'survivalists' who will engage only in day-to-day life planning as a means of coping with the pressure of prolonged contextual discontinuity. According to Archer (2012: 250), where situated without 'similar and familiar' interlocutors in whom they can trust and confide, fractured reflexives can become 'paralysed' in their capacity to practice a reflexivity capable of informing their sense-making and sense of active agency.

A fleeting fractured reflexivity will be experienced by most individuals on a day-to-day basis. However, for those who experience a prolonged fractured reflexivity, Archer (2003) claims they will be unable to resume an enabling response to prolonged contextual discontinuity and/or make sense of the ongoing disparate relationship between their circumstances and their personal concerns, life projects or practices. Archer (2012) describes aspects of an impeded reflexivity being experienced also where an individual has an under developed dominant reflexive mode. Archer states, an under-developed reflexive is a person who may make sense intra-subjectively and have an active sense of personal agency whilst also functioning without an identified dominant reflexive mode. An under-developed reflexivity and active agency can be nurtured through the development of self-awareness to encourage a dominant mode. However, Archer (2012: *ibid*) claims, those who may have an identified dominant reflexive mode who experience a prolonged fractured reflexivity will lack capacity to practice any form of active agency.

In their study, Porpora and Shumar (2010) found fractured reflexives were individuals who were low in both communicative and autonomous reflexive mode. This finding indicates those social workers best able to acknowledge the anxiety provoking and personal agency constraining influence of their practice experience will demonstrate a communicative, autonomous or meta-reflexive modality. However, this is not a claim supported empirically, for example, in the context of an ethnographic inquiry within a statutory agency. Although, as Ferguson (2004b) argues, where social workers do not acknowledge fear and anxiety a passive-avoidance and/or defensive-interventionist approach to practice can develop. In my experience practitioners' fear and anxiety is usually disclosed within supervision and/or within the reflexive dialogue practitioners engage in with trusted team members.

However, in some social work settings it has been identified as against the cultural rules and norms to communicate feelings of fear and risk anxiety (Helm, 2010). This is especially so within the context of a NPM culture where supervisors remain relationally-unresponsive toward those practitioners who may be experiencing feelings of fear and anxiety (Morrison, 2010). In this kind of practice culture, as Morrison (1993: 7) argues, practitioners' retention of fear and anxiety can be encouraged through the 'dangerous dynamics' which develop within a 'compromised environment'. Professional isolation, and the potential for a fractured reflexivity, can increase in compromised environments where managers remain relationally-unresponsive and therefore encourage practitioners' accommodation of feelings of fear and anxiety. Within these types of practice contexts, the potential for a fractured reflexivity encouraged through the development of what Morrison (2010: 1) describes

as 'professional accommodation syndrome' can lead to practitioner experiencing: (1) an inactive sense of agency (2) sickness and/or (3) burn-out.

Reflexivity and social work practice

D'Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez (2007) describe how the concept of reflexivity has been presented within the social work literature. This is especially in relation to approaches to working with uncertainty and where advocates (e.g. White, 2013) are concerned with developing just and humane social work practice. However, as D'Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez (2007) and others (e.g. Kessl, 2009) highlight, there remains a lack of clarity in terms of what it means to practice reflexivity. D'Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez (2007) identify three ways in which reflexivity has been interpreted within the social work literature. These include reflexivity as a practitioner's capacity to: (1) interpret information, formulate judgement and construct knowledge informing the decisions which determine the outcomes children and families experience (2) be self-critical and aware of taken-for-granted knowledge and the part power plays in the process of sense-making and judgement formulation and (3) acknowledge the part emotions can play in relation to influencing sense-making, action and agency.

Despite these interpretative complexities Gardner (2014) describes how there has been various attempts to apply reflexivity as a theory 'for' social work practice. For example, Fook (2012) has sought to describe reflexivity as a form of critical reflection. Fook highlights how with critical reflection the social worker's review of their application of propositional or 'expert' knowledge is identified as concerned with

how and why a particular approach was applied. However, Taylor and White (2000) suggest practising a critical form of reflexivity involves a deeper self-awareness where practitioners' taken-for-granted assumptions are exposed and analysed. Discussing reflexivity as the capacity for critical self-awareness, Woolgar (1984: 10) suggests the concept is concerned with a 'benign introspection'. In the process of compassionate introspection practitioners are encouraged to critically evaluate their professional ethics, beliefs and ways of knowing alongside what they do, how they do it and why.

Drawing on the work of D'Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez (2007), Kessl (2009) identifies critical-reflexivity as concerned with the central role and responsibilities of the practitioner. Cooper (2011a) agrees critical-reflexivity should involve a practitioner's introspection as a process for encouraging self-understanding and consideration of how professional knowledge, power, language and authority influence their sense-making. However, apart from White (2013), what is assumed by most authors within the social work literature is how practitioners will have the inherent capacity and/or willingness to practice critical-reflexivity. Cooper (2008a) argues it is through critical-reflexivity different choices and/or hidden possibilities emerge as social workers challenge taken-for-granted ways of practising with children and families. However, empirical evidence highlighting examples of a critically-reflexive approach to sense-making in child protection remains elusive in the UK. As indicated in part 1 of this chapter, this may be because the techno-rational paradigm and a NPM agenda encourages a low habitual reflexivity. Additionally, it could be due to the fallible notion techno-rationality and a NPM agenda can help with the search for truth in child protection while creating a sense of certainty.

As I continue my inherent critique of the techno-rational paradigm I demonstrate why developing a critically-reflexive approach to sense-making in child protection is important. For those practitioners concerned with developing critical-reflexivity I argue this will involve engaging in a deeply illuminating self-awareness. As a critical self-awareness continues to develop fundamental questions will arise for some practitioners. These reflexive questions will include a practitioner's consideration of themselves as a person and as a professional and the questioning of what concerns, life projects and practices are most important to them?

In an article titled *Promoting Critical Reflexivity through Arts-Based Media: A Case Study* Trevelyan, Crath and Chambon (2014) highlight challenges associated with teaching critical-reflexivity. This is due to the existence of different interpretations of the concept within the literature. In their interpretation Trevelyan, Crath and Chambon (2014) identify how tacit knowledge in social work is viewed by some practitioners as a habitual reflexive resource to be deployed to make-sense of complex situations. Prior to being introduced to the concept, a habitual form of reflexivity was identified as indicative of social workers' approach to practice in a study by D'Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez (2009). This was especially so where social workers failed to recognise the causal influence of the taken-for-granted dimensions of their practice on their sense-making activity. In an earlier study, D'Cruz (2004a) found discourse and relations of power and authority informed practitioners' sense-making in child protection. While the methodology used by D'Cruz overlooked the idea social workers might practice differing reflexivities, Broadhurst et al. (2010a) found reflexive practice(s) in their study. However, as with

D'Cruz, outside the scope of the study conducted by Broadhurst et al was the idea social workers might practice differing modes of reflexivity.

The social theory literature suggested, where a practitioner's low habitual reflexive disposition is evident, their sense-making will concentrate on the 'nuts and bolts' of the sense-making process. During a low reflexive sense-making process the power dynamic between professionals, and the causal influence of taken-for-granted dimensions of practice, remain unquestioned. However, these assumptions are not supported by empirical evidence within the social work literature. Nevertheless, Trevelyan, Crath and Chambon (2014) indicate sense-making in child protection may be the product of a critical or non-critical reflexive disposition. Trevelyan, Crath and Chambon argue, the subjective self and sense of identity of social workers will be dependent on 'how' and 'if' they are able to practice a critical form of reflexivity.

Where practitioners are concerned Trevelyan, Crath and Chambon indicate sense-making in child protection will be facilitated through a capacity to manage anxiety as uncertainty becomes self-generated through critical-reflexivity. In contrast to Archer's (2003) idea of a fractured reflexivity, even where they do not practice critical-reflexivity, Trevelyan, Crath and Chambon argue social workers will still experience a sense of active agency. Whether critically-reflexive or not, Trevelyan, Crath and Chambon (2014: 43) argue, practitioners will remain self-determining agents and 'a unified, rational subject who decides and acts as author of their place in society'. While useful, Trevelyan, Crath and Chambon's discussion on critically-reflexivity as a heterogeneous practice remains undertheorised. This is because practising reflexivity is identified empirically as a heterogeneous reasoning process

informed by and depended upon different modalities (Archer, 2003, 2007). As Archer (2003) has demonstrated, at all times an individual will practice a dominant mode of reflexivity. Contrastingly, Trevelyan, Crath and Chambon (2014) propose a reflexive-non-reflexive practice dichotomy.

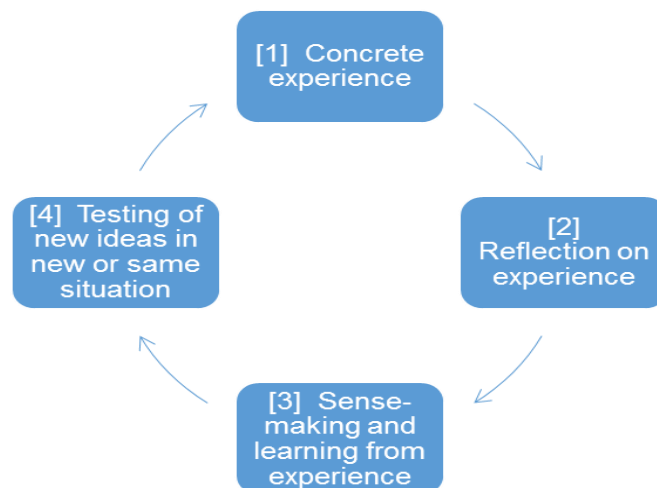
Reflexivity and critical reflection

Understood as useful in enabling practitioners to learn from experience, the orthodox approach to understanding reflective practice is based on a realist epistemology (Cunliffe, 2009a). A realist epistemology invites practitioners to see human conduct as made up of scientifically measurable patterns of behaviour. These perceived intransitive patterns can be categorised and used in the development of knowledge informed by theories. Consequently, while reflective practice encourages questioning of the application of formal knowledge, the approach remains founded upon uncritical application of scientific theory (Chapman and Field, 2007).

Resultantly, on reviewing the literature there appears to remain a lack of understanding about personal reflexivity as a mode applied to enhance critical reflection. Whilst seeking to interpret critical reflection, Blewett (2011) identifies the concept as allied to models of experiential learning. These include those, for example, by Kolb (1984) and Honey and Mumford (1992) which are often discussed in the social work literature. On discussing critical reflection, Blewett (2011) recognises the importance of the questioning of concrete practice experience and sense-making encouraged through a critically-reflexive mind-set. However, as illustrated in Figure 7, it appears the experience-reflection-learning-change cycle as

presented by Kolb (1984) and others including Honey and Mumford (1992), which continue to inform the practice of critical reflection, does not emphasise the importance of critical-reflexivity:

Figure 7: Experiential learning cycle



Barnett (1997) confirms how, within the social work literature, propositional knowledge(s) and taken-for-granted practice(s) are not always reflexively critiqued as part of the reflective practice process. Consequently, Webb (2006: 35) summarises the role reflexivity can play where encouraged within the process of critical reflection:

In social work terms if a reflective practitioner is one who thinks carefully and critically about her or his own practice, the reflexive practitioner is engaged in a radical confrontation with the very ethical basis and legitimisation of practice

Reflexivity and the supervisor-supervisee relationship

Discussing the supervisor-supervisee relationship Poole (2010: 1) argues 'how' these are experienced will have a life-long impact on practitioners. Drawing on feminist approaches that challenge taken-for-granted practices privileging patriarchal

discourses, Poole advocates the importance of reflexivity within the supervisor-supervisee relationship. A reflexive and relationally-responsive approach, Austen and Hopkins (2004) argue, encourages collaborative sense-making and active agency. It does so through, for example, mutual acknowledgement of the social and cultural constraints influencing sense-making in statutory agencies. However, overlooked by Austen and Hopkins (2004) is the idea of collaborative sense-making within supervision being causally influenced by participants' differing reflexive modes.

Featherstone, White and Morris (2014: 84) suggest a reflexive and relationally-responsive approach to supervision will attend to the 'human factor' in child protection. It does so where intra-subjective perspectives are exchanged inter-subjectively between supervisee and supervisor. Within a critically-reflexive and relationally-responsive supervision model the taken-for-granted knowledge, values, concerns and beliefs of participants are explored, questioned and (re)evaluated (Poole, 2010). Pare et al. (2004) indicate a reflexive approach to reasoning is concerned with a critical self-examination in supervision of the interpretations and meanings practitioners apply to make sense of their day-to-day practice.

Drawing on Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) notion of dialogism this concept informs the development of a reflexive and relationally-responsive approach to sense-making in child protection. On discussing speech genres Bakhtin (1984) distinguishes between monologic and dialogic language. Drawing on the work of Bakhtin, in context of supervision, Cunliffe (2014) attributes the supervisor's monologic or dialogic approach as causally influential of the supervisee's sense-making, agency and construction of professional identity. As Cunliffe highlights, the causal influence of

supervision encounters where collaborative dialogue is discouraged contributes to criticism of the oppressive nature of directive and/or monologic managerial approaches in organisational contexts. Within the context of supervisor-supervisee relationships in social work settings, directive and/or monologic approaches will encourage supervisee's passive reception of the dominant cultural rules and practices informed by techno-rationality and a NPM agenda.

However, dialogical approaches and the relational-responsiveness of managers in the context of supervision can create an opportunity for practitioners to explore the discourse, knowledge and cultural rules and practices that influence their sense-making (Morrison, 1993). As Morrison indicates, supervisors are therefore encouraged to be dialogical, reflexive and relationally-responsive. This is so they can recognise, hear and act in response to their supervisees' experiences and/or perspectives and encourage their sense of active agency. Within critically-reflexive supervision, Gardner (2014) suggests discussing practitioners' interpretations of fear and anxiety, and the casual influence these can have on their sense-making, can encourage an active sense of personal agency. Helm (2010: 193) indicates how reflexive supervision plays an essential role in assisting practitioners in 'unravelling' their sense-making and/or what they think they may have seen, heard or experienced within the complex context of their day-to-day experience.

However, Ruch (2007: 12) suggests, where managers are not dialogical, reflexive and/or remain 'contextually [and culturally] connected' to techno-rationality and a NPM agenda, supervision will encourage a practitioner's sense of passive agency. This is especially so, Ruch indicates, where managers 'perform' their identities and

dominant role(s) and responsibilities to ensure agency targets are met. However, while performing their determined role(s) and/or statutory responsibilities without reflexively questioning their culturally conditioned practice, managers risk overlooking the causal influence they can have on their supervisees' sense-making tendencies.

Reflection, reflexivity and 'double-loop' learning

As noted, reflection and reflexivity are terms often used interchangeably within the social work literature. To assist in differentiating these concepts I have found the work of Cunliffe (2004) useful. Drawing on the work of Argyris (1991) and Argyris and Schön (1974) Cunliffe discusses 'single-loop' and 'double-loop' learning. Discussing similar processes, Taylor and White (2000: 191) highlight how human interactions draw on an individual's 'knowing-in-action' where their sense-making entails reflective analysis in the form of a 'spontaneous, skilful performance'. With this kind of knowing-in-action sense-making is considered to occur habitually (Cunliffe, 2004). It does so when practitioners draw on their practice wisdom and/or their taken-for-granted knowledge of a situation, event or phenomenon.

Discussing the two-way relationship between human interaction and reflective analyses, Cunliffe (2004: 413) states this involves what Argyris (1991) describes as single-loop learning. With single-loop learning sense-making is accomplished when individuals draw on what they think they know to assign meaning to experience. Schön (1987: 56) describes this analytical process as 'reflection-in-action'. With reflection-in-action our understanding of a situation is constructed moment-by-moment. Sense-making therefore principally occurs heuristically because of intuitive

understanding of a previously experienced event and/or situation. Schön (1987) suggests our heuristic 'in-the-moment' understanding of experience based on spontaneous, routinised responses can be disrupted where the need to reflect in a reflexive way presents. Disruption can occur when we are presented with an experience, event or situation that does not 'fit' with our existing way of knowing. Fook (2012: 113) describes this occurrence as a 'critical incident'. Critical incidents occur where a situation, event or happening leads to a (re)valuation of our taken-for-granted way(s) of knowing.

Drawing on Wittgenstein (1980), Cunliffe (2004: 409) describes this reflexive process as experiential learning which occurs due to being 'struck'. Cunliffe suggests, on being struck by a critical incident our reflexive deliberations can lead to new meaning. Eruat (1994) suggests it is through reflection-in-and/or-on-action (re)interpretations of taken-for-granted assumptions can lead to self-knowledge. It does so through what Argyris and Schön (1974) describe as double-loop learning. In Figure 8 highlighted is how double-loop learning can occur through critically-reflexive questioning of taken-for-granted experiences and/or normative assumptions:

Figure 8: Double-loop learning process



Where double-loop learning occurs, new meanings arise from experience. In double-loop learning, Argyris and Schön (1974) argue, a critically conscious acknowledgement of the incongruence between our espoused theory and our theory-in-use takes place through reflexive deliberation. It does so where, for example, our taken-for-granted assumptions, values and beliefs are called into question. Argyris and Schön (1974) propose double-loop learning is concerned with a critically-reflexive self-questioning and willingness to challenge what we think we know as we learn from experience. Acknowledging the complexities of applying the idea of double-loop learning to inform a critically-reflexive approach to practice, and considering how this might differ from a more orthodox approach to reflective practice, Taylor and White (2000: 197) state:

Reflexivity...problematizes issues reflection takes for granted. Reflection takes propositional knowledge at face value. Through reflection we can become more adept at applying child development and attachment theory...[practising] reflexivity suggests we interrogate these [theories and their] taken-for-granted assumptions

Drawing on the ideas of Argyris and Schön (1974), Cunliffe (2004) and Taylor and White (2000), where social workers have developed a critically-reflexive approach to practice, the taken-for-granted assumptions informing their sense-making will be called into question. Meanwhile, where prescriptive policy and practice frameworks continue to be followed, albeit without critically-reflexive questioning, at best D'Cruz (2004a: viii) argues practitioners risk continuing to operate as 'techno-rational representatives of state power and authority'. Some of the insights drawn from Argyris and Schön (1974), Cunliffe (2004) and Taylor and White (2000) challenge the theorising of Archer (2003). For example, Archer claims that individuals will practice a dominant mode of reflexive that will remain exclusive to them, and where presented with challenging social circumstances will risk developing a fractured

reflexivity. However, Argyris and Schön (1974), Cunliffe (2004) and Taylor and White (2000) suggest a meta-reflexive mode will be inherently encouraged where individuals encounter new experience(s) and/or critical incident(s).

Summary and evaluation

I began with a review of the concept of reflexivity as discussed by Lynch (2000), Sayer (2010) and Archer (2003). Drawing on the work of Lynch (2000) and Sayer (2010) I highlighted different 'kinds' of reflexivity discussed in the literature including 'habitual' and 'epistemic' reflexivity. How these 'reflexivities' can be equated to a low habitual and high epistemic level was discussed. I reviewed the work of Archer (1995) and her ideas about social transformation through morphogenetic cycles. Archer's (2003) theory of reflexivity was also discussed. Applying Archer's (1995) theory of social transformation I considered how with the notion of a morphogenetic cycle it is possible to theorise about the possible containing or enabling consequences of practitioners' encounters with children and families.

Consequently, based on Archer's idea of the morphogenetic cycle the influence of social workers' contextual conditioning, and where this may be transformed or reproduced in the context of their encounters with children and families, has been illustrated. Identified was how practitioners' interpretations of the nature of social work with children and families might be determined by their different modes of reflexivity. Where a social worker's reflexive mode does not encourage a critical questioning of the taken-for-granted dimensions of their practice in child protection I

demonstrated how positive outcomes for children and families might be discouraged. However, while I highlighted the need for the development of practice-depth in child protection through a high epistemic reflexivity, I discussed how Houston (2001) describes how a low habitual reflexive practice encouraged by techno-rationality and as NPM agenda is of limited use to children and families. This is because, as Houston (ibid: 853) states, 'trauma, loss, broken attachment, suicidal intent, adolescent pathos, impoverished social networks and atrophying communities' cannot be understood and addressed through applying techno-rationality as a scientific epistemology. Drawing on a contemporary social constructionist perspective, I have highlighted how the task of social work should therefore be to discover the social structures and/or causal mechanisms that can reproduce and/or transform the suffering and oppression of children and families.

By assisting families to identify constraining structures and consider why these exist, and how they can be ameliorated, their capacity for personal transformation can be enhanced (Houston, 2001). On practising epistemic reflexivity, this suggests the need for a double morphogenetic approach to practice as I have illustrated. With this approach, social workers could identify the causal influence of social structures operating as cultural constraints within their practice contexts and those experienced by children and families. Adopting a double morphogenetic approach social workers create potential to find answers to: (1) the reason(s) why they practice the way they do and (2) why some parents might experience a constraint, or restricted sense of personal agency and/or (3) choose to consider a non-prescriptive course of action.

In child protection, Archer's (2003) theory suggests different modes of reflexivity will inform practitioners' sense-making, actions and agency. In my review of Archer's theory these claims prove useful in relation to exploring my research questions. This is because Archer argues that all social work practitioners' sense-making will be informed by the practice of reflexivity. However, prior to applying Archer's theory of reflexivity to inform my study there is a need for some critical analysis. For example, as discussed with the idea of the habitus, Bourdieu (1990) does not share Archer's view of reflexivity as the conscious means by which human agency and action is determined. Opposed to the idea of reflexivity as a conscious inner conversation guiding action, Bourdieu argues for an understanding of reflexivity as an implicit process informing human sense-making.

Contrastingly, while undervaluing Bourdieu's theorising, Archer's (2003) theory of reflexivity does not allow for what Caetano (2014: 3) describes as the 'conceptualisation of individual interiority'. With the concept of individual interiority Caetano theorises reflexivity as a conscious deliberation and habitual subconscious processes which potentially combine to determine human sense-making, action and agency. Applying Caetano's concept, in relation to sense-making and social transformation in child protection, individual interiority may be utilised to inform understanding of the morphogenetic cycle. For example, where a practitioner's conscious-unconscious reflexivity combined is understood as causally influencing their interactions with children and families, sense-making would involve them acknowledging potential errors of culturally conditioned and/or personified thought.

As Sayer (2010: 117) indicates, encouraging morphogenesis requires the potential for 'becoming a different person with different embodied habits of thought'. Some of our innermost and embodied habits may have been shaped during our early years. Therefore, these may be difficult to transcend as they may be subconsciously shaping our dispositions and/or our mode of reflexivity as practised within the morphogenetic cycle. As Caetano (2014) argues, the concept of individual interiority makes it possible to understand the non-reflexive aspects of social work practice where a critically-reflexive practitioner's deeply embedded personal perception(s) and interpretation(s) may continue to influence their sense-making, actions and agency.

Dependent on their personal experience of the constraints and enablements of the setting, a practitioner's mode of reflexivity might change across time. This is a potential phenomenon under-theorised by Archer (2003). In relation to my research questions what emerges here is the question of: *'How might practitioners demonstrate a static, changing or hybrid mode of reflexivity?'* In the case of a hybrid reflexivity, where reflexive modes may combine and/or change across time, how this happens remains under-investigated. Due to a focus on personal reflexivity, Archer's (2003) theorising does not fully explain the causal influence the taken-for-granted cultural rules and practices of a professional norm circle will have on a social worker's mode of reflexivity.

Although, the idea of practising critical-reflexivity challenges the arguments presented by Elder-Vass (2012) who emphasises the pervasive influence of professional norm circles on practitioners' reasoning processes. The potential for

social workers to practice critical-reflexivity, and the causal influence a professional norm circle might have on their capacity and/or willingness to do so, is an important consideration in relation to my research questions. This is because, for example, even where a meta-reflexive mode might be present, how the cultural rules and practices of their professional norm circle might be influencing a social worker's sense-making, action and agency needs to be understood empirically.

In my review, I have highlighted the range of reflexive modes Archer (2003) indicates may be potentially practised by social workers. In relation to the complexities of day-to-day practice, I discussed how communicative reflexive practitioners may find themselves with a fractured reflexivity. As noted, this is due to potential difficulties of personal agency arising where a practitioner's need to seek the support and advice of managers and/or colleagues is impeded by a lack of relational-responsiveness. Archer (2003) theorising indicates there is a need for communicative reflexive practitioners to complete their inner conversation with trusted others to make sense and formulate judgement in child protection. However, unanswered within Archer's theorising is the question of how some practitioners located within statutory settings might be encouraged to move between differing modalities where required to practice reflexivity.

Overlooked by Archer is how internal and/or external conversation as linguistic activity may act as the mediating mechanism between structure and agency regardless of an individual's mode of reflexivity. Caetano (2014) highlights how several commentators have stressed the centrality of language as how people will: (1) express their concerns (2) negotiate goals and (3) challenge and/or adhere to

what is expected of them. As Vandenberghe (1995: 259) points out, Archer (2003) neglects the 'linguistic turn' in social theory where language is considered constitutive of human meaning-making. Nevertheless, despite criticism of Archer's theory of reflexivity, it remains a useful foundation for informing my study. This is because outside of any variation(s) arising inductively, Archer's theory offers a deductive template by which social workers' reflexive practices can be interpreted.

Throughout this thesis, I apply Archer's (2003) theory to interpret practitioners' reasoning processes. It is apparent from my review of Archer's theory an awareness of the implications different modes of reflexivity might have on social workers' sense-making, judgement and decision-making is important. However, while reflexivity remains undertheorised within the social work literature, what is understood about reasoning processes, judgement and decision-making in child protection is primarily based on theories developed within cognitive psychology. As noted in chapter 1, contemporary social constructionists (e.g. Weinberg, 2015: 150) argue for an appreciation of examining studied phenomena through a desegregation of theoretical perspectives and integration of differing epistemologies. Therefore, to fully explore what might inform social workers' sense-making tendencies, in the final part of this chapter I examine human reasoning and models of judgement and decision-making formulated within cognitive psychology.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – Part: 3

Sense-making, judgement and decision-making theory

Introduction

In this final part of my literature review, I begin by briefly examining understanding of sense-making in organisational contexts. The focus of my discussion is based on the work of Weber and Glynn (2006) and Elder-Vass (2012) both of whom present ideas to inform an analysis of organisational sense-making processes. I then examine some of the cognitive psychology literature (e.g. Taylor, 2012) highlighting models of professional judgement and theories of decision-making in social work. On reviewing the literature, I identified how judgement and decision-making are terms often used interchangeably. However, Taylor (2012) offers a useful distinction that I have adopted to discern the differences as discussed within this chapter.

Drawing on the work of Helm (2012) judgement in child protection can be viewed as a second stage within the sense-making process where inference begins to be drawn from the information being interpreted by practitioners. At the third stage, as Helm argues, decision-making is concerned with practitioners drawing conclusions and choosing between different courses of action. Discerning the differences between stages of the sense-making process, Taylor (2012: 165) offers a useful definition of judgement in child protection as the:

Considered evaluation of evidence by an individual using their cognitive faculties so as to reach an opinion on a preferred course of action based on available information

Subsequently, decision-making is defined by Taylor (2012: 164) as concerned with the 'conscious, [reasoning] process leading to the selection of a course of action among two or more alternatives'. While discerning these differences below I consider intuitive and analytical reasoning and how, particularly under conditions of

uncertainty, practitioners can utilise heuristics and bias to inform their judgement and decision-making (Tversky and Khaneman, 1974). On reviewing the work of Helm (2012) and Hammond (1996), I highlight the importance of practising a hybrid intuitive-analytical approach to sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection.

Drawing on the work of Kelly (2000) I discuss some of the reasoning processes influencing inter-professional judgement and decision-making in child protection. On exploring inter-professional judgement and decision-making, for the purpose of illustration, I offer a critical overview of the signs of safety (SOS) approach developed by Turnell and Edwards (1999). The questions which guide part 3 of my literature review are: (1) *'What 'kinds' of knowledge inform social workers sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection?'* And: (2) *'How do social workers make decisions independently and inter-professionally in child protection?'*

Sense-making, judgement and decision-making in organisational settings

Weber and Glynn (2006) highlight how much of the literature argues sense-making in organisational settings is a cultural, cognitive and contextualised process. Whilst collective activities establish and reinforce imbued organisational practices, institutionalised roles and cognitive psychological 'templates for action', as Weber and Glynn (ibid: 1642) describe, will influence sense-making as a normative process. Examining the process of practitioner reasoning in organisational contexts, Weber and Glynn describe how institutionalised practices inform sense-making in several

ways. Weber and Glynn (ibid: 1644) highlight how taken-for-granted cultural rules and practices will 'guide, script and edit' a practitioner's sense-making activity.

Elder-Vass (2012) indicates cultural rules and practices, as examples of the social structures existent within statutory settings, will not only influence practitioners' sense-making and personal agency but will also discern what kinds of action(s) they can take. Discussing sense-making and the nature of subjective experience, Weick (1995) argues organisations can be understood as social structures which will enable or constrain the action(s) of individuals as they interpret experience in an institutionalised way. Weber and Glynn (2006) argue, while internalised practice cultures may be an influence, where reflexively acknowledged by practitioners their conditioned sense-making, action(s) and agency can become less prescribed.

Weick (1995), Weber and Glynn (2006) and Elder-Vass (2012) collectively highlight the causal power of organisational cultures. In doing so, insight is offered into how dominant cultural rules and practices might influence practitioners' sense-making in child protection. However, undertheorised by these commentators is how social workers' sense-making and judgement might be informed by their differing modes of reflexivity. Additionally, undertheorised is how social workers' sense-making might be informed by biased reasoning processes and/or heuristic principles developed within cognitive psychology. Throughout this thesis, I have drawn on contemporary social constructionist perspectives to highlight how a critically-reflexive approach to sense-making in child protection might be developed. However, important to the development of a critically-reflexive approach to practice is the need to understand how taken-for-granted knowledge of sense-making, judgement and decision-making

might be informed by ideas developed within cognitive psychology including heuristics and diagnostic models of reasoning.

Heuristics and bias

Discussing models of professional judgement, Taylor (2012: 548) outlines those considered most applicable to social work practice. These include heuristics and bias models. Taylor (ibid) describes a 'heuristic' as any approach to problem-solving where an individual utilises informal and/or intuitive methods to make sense of a situation to formulate a judgement. Tversky and Kahneman (1974) consider how in uncertain situations a heuristic explains the way in which an individual might formulate a judgement based on a perceived outcome. According to Tversky and Khaneman, heuristic principles are concerned with utilising informal judgement and decision-making rules as a short-cut for processing large amounts of information. In child protection, on receipt of a CCN heuristic principles may be applied to the process of filtering out information deemed relevant or unnecessary based on previously similar presenting scenarios (White, 2013).

Munro (2008: 12) describes how this biased and/or 'descriptive' reasoning process involves a form of 'cognitive diagnostic analysis' (CDA). With CDA practitioners begin by reviewing information and looking for similarities in previous case scenarios. Then, matching information to previous experience, judgement formulation about what might have happened takes place. Munro (2008) indicates heuristics and/or biased reasoning processes often inform practitioners' decision-making in child protection. Proposing a recognition-primed model of decision-making, Klein (2000)

claims heuristics and/or taken-for-granted practice wisdom(s) are key elements of intuitive reasoning. However, while intuitive reasoning may prove useful for informing sense-making in child protection by assisting speedy interpretation of CCNs, what Munro (2008: 102) describes as ‘tunnel vision’ and/or ‘short-sighted decision-making’ is encouraged.

With these intuitive-based sense-making approaches erroneous judgement can lead to (mis)categorisation in child protection (Broadhurst et al., 2010b). Resultantly, Broadhurst et al. argue critical and reflexive examination of alternative and/or competing perspectives is overlooked. In relation to sense-making, Taylor (2012) claims developing an understanding of heuristics can draw attention to the potential for biased judgement and decision-making based on a range of personal, professional and organisational factors. These include: (1) a practitioner’s predisposition to be risk-averse and/or risk anxious (2) risk-taking and (3) the causal influence of taken-for-granted knowledge, beliefs, values and concerns.

Other potential biases include the application of ‘tacit’ and/or ‘propositional’ knowledge to inform sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection. As Munro (2008) identifies, the findings of studies informing the existing evidence-based in child protection are either limited or have been drawn from differing professional contexts. In terms of the direct application of heuristics and recognition-primed models, findings allied to differing contextual studies as they apply to sense-making in child protection therefore remain empirically weak. Although, as discussed, Melrose and Kirkman (2014) have highlighted how some social workers will draw on heuristics as a form of intuitive reasoning.

Analytical and intuitive reasoning

On discussing judgement and decision-making processes in child protection, Munro (2002: 95) highlights how studies examine the contrasting approaches of 'intuitive' (naturalistic) and 'analytical' (rational) reasoning. Munro describes how analytical decision-makers tend to invest time in considering the range of possible consequences of their judgement formulations. Applying formal reasoning processes, those inclined to make analytical decisions tend to do so in situations where error of judgement can be costly (Kelly, 2000). Discussed by Taylor (2012) as expected utility models, where analytical reasoning is applied a calculated estimate of a probable outcome of a judgement is determined. Although, with expected utility models, what Taylor (2012) describes as decision-making bias can occur where practitioners are reluctant to formulate judgement outside of calculated consequences.

Taylor describes how some social workers in adopting analytical reasoning can be risk-averse and/or risk anxious while utilising decision-making trees so they can be more decisive in their judgement. The use of a decision-making tree is identified as a means of breaking down a complicated scenario where different options, outcomes, probabilities and corresponding utilities can be identified (Munro, 2008). In child protection, Munro identifies how decision-making trees can present practitioners with an overwhelming range of optional responses to a presenting scenario. In such cases, decision-making requires practitioners to consider both the outcome(s) most desirable personally and professionally and in relation to children and families.

Saltiel (2014) identified how this can prove difficult in child protection where the outcomes desired by professionals are contested by parents or visa versa. Saltiel found for many practitioners, despite the use of analytical tools such as decision-making trees, decision-making in child protection remains an ambiguous and uncertain accomplishment. This is especially so where professional values, beliefs and concerns ensure the 'problem of judgement' (Taylor and White, 2001: 31) remains characterised by social workers' practice of critical-reflexivity. However, discussing intuitive reasoning, Munro (2008) suggests this is less a reflexive process and more a type of grounded theory.

Munro states intuitive reasoning involves the use of two common forms of cognitive diagnostic analysis. First, the practitioner will interpret the presenting information and look for similarities in previous cases. Second, having matched information to previous experience, a judgement about what might have occurred in the presenting case is formulated. A decision about the most appropriate course of action is then reached. Where change in events requires a practitioner to (re)evaluate initial courses of action, situation-matching rules are applied (Keddell, 2012). On applying situation-matching rules, Keddell found some practitioners continued to offer further consideration to previously similar circumstances, actions and outcomes.

Drawing on alternative employment contexts, Munro (2002: 98) highlights how naturalistic decision-making (NDM) research has focused on studies of how people make decisions in the work place. While NDM individuals tend to be reluctant decision-makers, studies (e.g. Klein, 2000) identify decisions required under pressure tend to involve learning from previous experience. This process is what Tversky and Kahneman (1974: 57) term 'availability heuristics'. In child protection

availability heuristic is concerned with social workers' tacit knowledge and/or practice wisdom determining judgement where particular outcomes are predicated based on previous experience.

Discussing practice wisdom, Dybicz (2004: 202) suggests this is an organic 'skill set' acquired by practitioners 'in and through' practice. Despite potential for bias, Dybicz (ibid) suggests practice wisdom can contribute to competent judgement and decision-making in child protection. This is possible, for example, where social workers critically-reflexively acknowledge the taken-for-granted assumptions they are making when their judgement is: (1) intuitive (2) based on practice wisdom and/or (3) informed by experiential learning. It is also possible for practitioners to utilise a form of recall bias where this is influenced by the positive outcomes achieved due to appropriate action(s) being taken in a previously similar case (Taylor, 2012). However, with recall bias it seems without critical-reflexivity a judgement based on something that may have been previously (mis)interpreted and/or (mis)understood as a positive outcome could be erroneous.

Summarising the perspective as a pattern recognition-primed decision-making model, Klein (2000) suggests two main intuitive elements will inform NDM. These include: (1) decision-making based on intuition and an availability heuristic and/or acquired practice wisdom allied to previous familiar scenario, and (2) intuitive evaluation of the likely outcome of a decision made in respect of an unfamiliar scenario. On discussing NDM, Keddel (2012) argues this approach best fits with a conventional social constructionist perspective. This is due to opposing analytical decision-making theories being informed by probability-based, scientific data.

However, analytical decision-making, whilst concerned with all possible options and outcomes, cannot address the uncertain nature of sense-making in child protection.

Limitations of analytical and intuitive reasoning

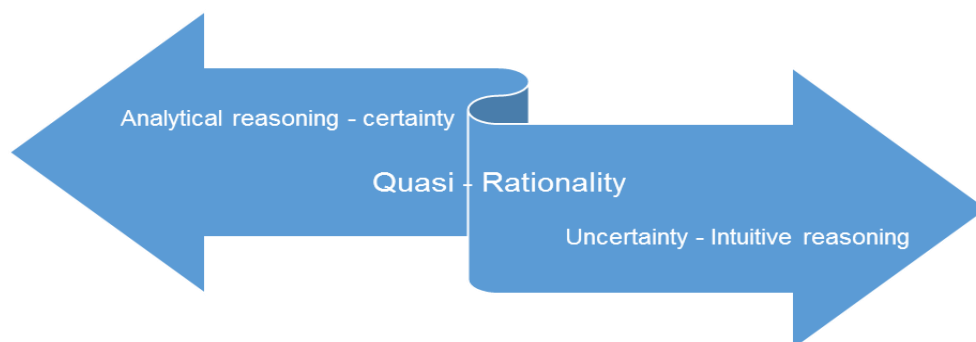
Intuitive reasoning appears to be conducive to the development of practice wisdom in child protection. However, limitations include where a NQSW's decision-making competence is based on minimal experiential learning. As I have discussed, White (2013) draws attention to the problem of intuitive reasoning leading to practitioners developing a psychological commitment to erroneous judgement formulations. From a contemporary social constructionist perspective, as all knowledge is considered transitive, limitations of analytical reasoning include where cause of family problems and decision(s) about action(s) needed are based on an application of theory.

An additional limitation is potential abuse of power where a families' right to participate in the decision-making process is negated in favour of an empirically predicted outcome. Although, on exploring the strengths of analytical reasoning, Munro (2008) draws attention to how judgement and decision-making in child protection can be facilitated through the application of logic and/or scientific reason. White (2013) suggests however, there is a need for practitioners to remain critically-reflexively aware of the taken-for-granted evidence-base that can influence analytical reasoning in child protection.

Quasi-rationality

Hammond (1996) suggests analytic and intuitive reasoning need to be combined in child protection work. Due to the potential to combine analytic and intuitive reasoning in the context of a realist-relativist epistemology, Hammond (1981) highlights the potential application of 'quasi-rationality' to the process of sense-making in child protection. Munro (2008) agrees it is important practitioners develop a quasi-rational approach to sense-making in child protection. This is because judgement and decision-making in cases where ambiguity and uncertainty remain often requires a 'common sense' form of reasoning that has combined characteristics of intuition and analytic reasoning. Illustrating the potential complementary nature of intuition and analytical reasoning in child protection, in Figure 9 I highlight how Hammond (1996) advocates a 'quasi-rational' approach to practice:

Figure 9: Quasi-rationality continuum



As illustrated, with an adaptation of quasi-rationality, Hammond (1991) presents intuitive and analytical reasoning as polarised points of an epistemological continuum. While considering quasi-rationality as a mode of reasoning most associated with common sense, Hammond argues how the dichotomy of intuitive

and analytical reasoning is replaced by a type of epistemology of human sense-making that is fluid and dynamic. Hammond (1991: 175) states, quasi-rationality has a range of advantages including an application to everyday sense-making which calls for a mixture of intuitive (common-sense) and analytical (logical) reasoning. Hammond (ibid) states the application of quasi-rationality may explain why 'common-sense has been valued...for so long, despite the fact...no one has convincingly described it'. Although, as White (2013: 51) highlights, it is through practising reflexivity the 'fallibility of our own [common-sense] reasoning processes' will be identified.

While Hammond (1991) argues quasi-rationality may help practitioners avoid heuristics and bias by encouraging them to maintain the balance between intuition and analytical reasoning, what is overlooked is the influence of reflexivity on sense-making processes. Archer's (2003) theory suggests an individual's positioning on the continuum, and/or their potential for quasi-rational sense-making, will be determined by their mode of reflexivity. Applying Archer's theory, therefore it appears more likely, for example, autonomous reflexives will formulate judgement intuitively and communicative reflexives will be more inclined to engage with the sense-making process in an analytical way. Meanwhile, while meta-reflexives seem most likely to utilise quasi-rational reasoning, whatever their mode of reflexivity a practitioner's potential for biased sense-making becomes most probable due to inter-professional decision-making activity (Kelly, 2000).

Inter-professional sense-making, judgement and decision-making

In an analysis of group decision-making Kelly (2000) highlights how research has focused on individual subjectivity and inter-professional sense-making phenomena. Kelly's review of literature highlights how group decision-making can be influenced by an individual practitioner's stereotyping, social identity and self-concept. Hood (2012a) highlights group decision-making can be undermined by the dynamic characteristics of social work teams and/or multi-agency inter-professional groups. However, psychological processes influencing inter-professional judgement and decision-making in complex cases have been overlooked in some social work studies. Exploring the effects of psychological processes on inter-professional decision-making in child protection, Kelly and Milner (1996) examined the phenomenon of groupthink and polarisation. Kelly and Milner identify how these concepts can inform practitioners' reasoning processes.

Inter-professional sense-making, judgement and groupthink

Highlighting how the concept can help explain the defective inter-professional decision-making that led to the death of Peter Connolly, Kelly and Milner (1996) discuss how groupthink was identified as a phenomenon by Janis (1982). Describing how the concept was identified initially within political circles, Janis considers groupthink to be a mode of reasoning where high-powered professional group members are inclined to engage in decision-making processes that encourage harmony. Kelly and Milner (1996) highlight how groupthink skews alternative reasoning processes in child protection as collective rationalisation is encouraged by the opinions of those most powerful and/or influential in a professional norm circle.

The causal power of dominant individuals as members of a professional norm circle has been identified by Elder-Vass (2010: 125) as affecting the behaviour of others as they are motivated to engage in 'norm-compliant' acts. This may indicate why, despite the foundation for erroneous judgement being identified within the literature (e.g. Broadhurst et al., 2010b; White, 2013), groupthink leading to defective decision-making in child protection continues to occur. As Elder-Vass (2010: 126) indicates, members of an inter-professional group where, for example, they may hold a non-compliant opinion, will withhold expression to avoid an encounter with a negative sanction. Drawing on the work Kelly and Milner (1996) and Kelly (2000) identified in the literature is how groupthink is indicative of the causal power within professional norm circles that can encourage biased sense-making in child protection.

Although, in relation to my research questions there are some important points overlooked within the literature exploring inter-professional sense-making based on psychological and social theory. Among these are in relation to issues concerned with groupthink and some of the critically-reflexive processes which can lead to the avoidance of the causal influence of this phenomenon on sense-making in child protection. As Archer (2003) indicates, those who practice a critical mode of reflexivity will be aware of the causal influence of groupthink on their sense-making, actions and agency. Therefore, those practising reflexivity are identified as likely to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions of a professional norm circle that can influence coalesced or polarised decision-making in child protection (Kelly, 2000).

Inter-professional sense-making, judgement and polarisation

Kelly identifies a range of studies that reveal how the phenomenon of group polarisation is concerned with the disparate inter-professional sense-making,

judgement and decision-making in child protection which can influence the outcomes for children and families. Drawing on group decision-making research, Kelly highlights how to reach consensus members of a professional group may need to compromise personal beliefs and values in support of the different opinions of others. Consequently, Kelly reveals how group members may begin with shared opinions, which in child protection could be one of risk aversion involving exercising extreme caution or one of risk taking. In such cases, Kelly and Milner (2006) highlight how the certainty effect will predict whether individuals become risk averse or risk taking and therefore potentially coalesced or polarised in their sense-making.

Concerned with the perceived gains and losses in relation to a particular decision, the certainty effect discourages group polarisation. It does so as individuals become influenced by the frames of reference used by particular group members. Kelly and Milner (2006) highlighted how in child protection case conferences often there will be a proportion of attendees who will frame their professional opinion in terms of the gains for the family. Similarly, as Kelly (2000) discusses, other professionals may frame their opinion in terms of losses to the child. It is with this context that group polarisation takes place and where, for example, the frames of more dominant professionals can counter the frames of those less powerful. Inter-professional groups hold the mandate to construct risk and formulate judgements. However, the literature indicates inter-professional sense-making will be biased by groupthink and/or polarised opinion informing the reasoning processes (Kelly and Milner, 2006).

In an ethnographic inquiry examining sense-making in a child protection setting Helm (2013) used participant observation to identify how social workers used framing within their dialogue with other practitioners. Helm found initial statements made by

practitioners in response to CCNs acted as a frame of reference for inter-subjective sense-making with managers and other professionals. Where initiating discursive dialogue with other professionals, Helm noted social workers used an opening statement that acted as a precursor to making sense of the information presented. Among opening frames was the statement made by a team leader *'this one is worrying'*. What Helm observed was, due to perceived credibility of team leaders' risk assessment, the team manager was inclined to use the frame to agree a working hypothesis for necessary action.

Helm observed not all practitioners' referential frames were accepted without question by the team manager and often other rhetorical devices were utilised. Helm does not elaborate on these other devices but notes in some cases the manager's interpretation of CCNs conflicted with that of the practitioner. In these cases, the opinion of the manager was observed as taking precedence. Helm's study draws attention to the way problem framing can act as a precursor to sense-making in child protection. Several important points were overlooked within the study. For example, how practitioners had come to frame CCNs, and where framing may have been based on a practitioner's accommodated fear and/or risk anxiety was not discussed. Additionally, Helm concludes discursive dialogue with peers, where taken-for-granted assumptions were explored, was encourage through social workers practising reflexivity. However, how social workers might practice different modes of reflexivity was overlooked. Although, highlighted was why sense-making, especially in more complex cases, needed to utilise the group decision-making process within the context of multi-agency meetings including, for example, those informed by signs of safety (Turnell and Edwards, 1999).

Inter-professional sense-making and signs of safety

Through the work of Turnell and Edwards the language of child protection has been reframed through their multi-agency signs of safety (SOS) framework. Within the SOS framework parents become potential stakeholders in the sense-making, judgement formulation and decision-making process in child protection. They do so through a range of practice tools the SOS approach is designed to encourage strength of engagement with children and families by creating an alliance designed to tackle the issues leading to a CCN. Turnell (2010) describes how the SOS framework acknowledges the forensic nature of child protection and the need to rigorously explore CCNs.

SOS is dependent upon inter-professional groups meeting where their collective knowledge of a parent, child or family is sought to help make sense of concerns to formulate a plan of intervention. Within the SOS framework the eliciting of family knowledge from parents and their interpretation of events is considered equally relevant to professional opinion. Turnell (2010: 22) indicates how, at its most simple, SOS can be understood as comprising four domains of inquiry to be undertaken in the context of inter-professional meetings. These include: (1) identifying past harm (2) present and/or future danger(s) (3) family strengths and any (4) complicating factors. Identifying: '*What professionals are worried about?*' '*What is working well?*' and/or '*What needs to change and/or happen?*' using a rating scale (e.g. 0 to 10), Turnell (2010) suggests it is possible for an inter-professional group to decide if there is safety enough in a family. Alternatively, if a family situation is scaled as unsafe an inter-professional decision can be made for a child to have a Child Protection Plan (CPP) or in some cases to be removed from their family.

In my experience of attending SOS meetings, in cases where a child has been identified as in need of a CPP, the risk-scaling process has utilised a collective 'danger statement' constructed by the inter-professional group. Here the limitations of the SOS approach become visible as the potential for groupthink and/or polarisation to occur becomes apparent. Among examples of these phenomena are where, despite the differing opinion of other professionals, the following of the dominant 'expert' opinion of the social worker involved as lead case manager results in a differentiated outcome. Another phenomenon I have observed is how a parent's view of what is in the best interests of their child is shared by some but not all professionals. In these kinds of scenarios parent's views are often skewed or 'nudged' in the perceived safer and/or opposing direction by the pervasive views of dominant members of the inter-professional group.

While groupthink might be taking place in the context of SOS meetings, an open discussion on the potential influence of the phenomenon on the decision-making process is often overlooked. Also, overlooked in my experience is consideration of how discourses of risk and/or the impact of risk anxiety might be influencing sense-making and professional judgement. What a contemporary social constructionist perspective implies is the need for a critically-reflexive approach to be fostered within the context of SOS meetings. Within this approach the causal influence of risk anxiety, discourses of risk, groupthink, polarisation, heuristics and bias could be discussed as part of the SOS process. However, despite empirical evidence (e.g. Kelly, 2000) to support this approach, this is not identified within the literature as adopted where, for example, SOS is utilised to guide sense-making within strategy meetings.

Summary and evaluation

On reviewing the literature, it appears the complex nature of sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection will present as a dilemma for many social workers. This is especially so where uncertainty surrounding suspected child abuse runs parallel to requirements they act decisively about the necessary action to be taken (Munro, 2002). The literature highlights the complexities associated with sense-making in the context of organisations where cognitive constraints arise as standardised, taken-for-granted practices are imbued. Models of professional judgement may be oversimplified in their application to child protection where heuristics and biases are identified as influencing decision-making. Nevertheless, how social workers are inclined to use sense-making and judgement short-cuts by drawing on previous case scenarios is evidenced within the literature.

Accomplishment of sense-making in child protection is of crucial importance in terms of the outcomes experienced by children and families. However, the literature indicates judgement and decision-making may be influenced not only by heuristics and biases but a range of phenomena. Among these is the intuitive and analytical reasoning of individual practitioners. Informed by intuitive and analytical reasoning a practitioner's judgement may be based on tacit knowledge, experiential learning and/or practice wisdom. Drawing on the work of Hammond (1996) I presented a continuum of reasoning to demonstrate how intuitive and analytical sense-making in child protection can be understood as a quasi-rational process.

On examining inter-professional practice, the literature highlights group rationalisation can influence sense-making in child protection. In so doing, sense-

making is identified as biased by a range of phenomena including groupthink and polarisation. What is needed it seems for practitioners situated within the context of an inter-professional group or norm circle are opportunities to reflexively explore their knowledge of risk and the influence risk anxiety may be having on their sense-making activity. What additionally needs to be encouraged is a process where disconfirming evidence and/or a lack of agreement become part of the sense-making process.

While the cognitive psychology literature may offer some insight into reasoning processes, what is under-theorised is how practitioners' modes of reflexivity might inform their sense-making activity. Whereas the focus may be on the insight gained from cognitive and social psychology, how group sense-making might be informed by critical-reflexivity remains an under-researched activity. In addition, while inter-professional reasoning processes are identified as allied to the expression of dominant professional opinion, how this may be challenged through criticality and reflexivity in child protection is overlooked within the literature. Drawing on Archer's (2003) theory, explicit consideration should be offered to practitioners' modes of reflexivity and how these may encourage or discourage group decision-making in child protection.

On reviewing the literature criticism of SOS as an inter-professional decision-making process can be allied to the idea of a danger statement contributing to construction of parental identities in child protection (D'Cruz, 2004a). Problems associated with groupthink and polarisation needs to be acknowledged by those professionals engage in the process of sense-making in child protection using SOS. Research indicates children and families often do not have opportunities to contribute to the

decisions that affect their life trajectories in child protection (Gilligan, 2000). Identified within my literature review is how SOS proves useful for eliciting the views and wishes of children and families. However, it is important to reflexively consider how a child's wish to return to their family, for example, where an abusing parent remains will not be compatible with SOS plans to ensure their safety.

Keddell (2011) highlights the ubiquitous sense-making construct in child protection is the concept of risk. It seems however how risk is interpreted and managed inter-professionally in SOS meetings will inform sense-making and judgement in child protection. If the concept is understood and engaged with critically and reflexively the SOS approach could be utilised as a means of challenging dominant discourses of risk and encouraging social workers' enhanced strength of engagement with children and families. This could be achieved, for example, where negotiation of what constitutes risk and child safety takes place between practitioners and parents within the context of SOS meetings.

As Broadhurst et al. (2010a) found strength of parental engagement through collaborative relationships and informal management of risk can take place parallel to the necessary action needed to safeguard children. As highlighted in part 1 of this chapter, Broadhurst et al. stress how informal and relational aspects of sense-making in child protection and the practice of reflexivity remains undertheorised. Having examined the literature, due to a lack of empirical evidence discerning the relationship between sense-making in child protection and reflexivity, I decided to undertake a study to gather primary data which I will discuss in the following chapter.

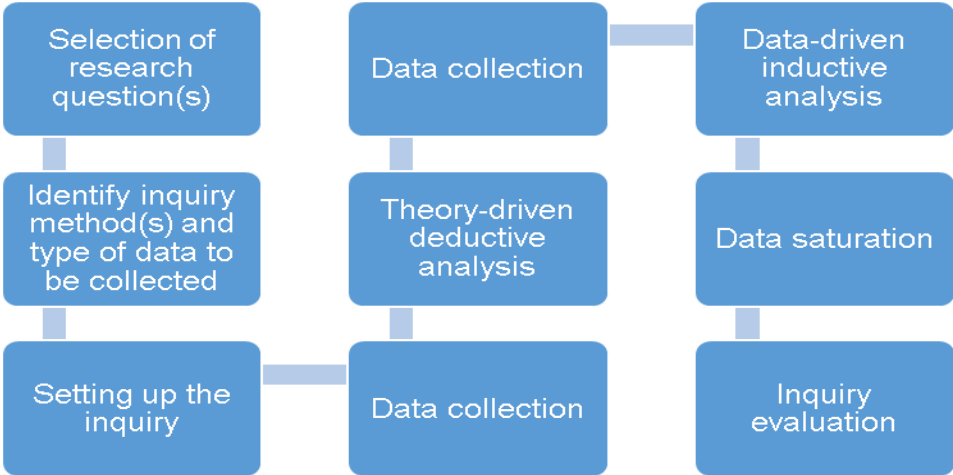
Chapter 3: Methodology

Studying sense-making in child protection

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the fieldwork study I designed and undertook to collect primary data to inform my thesis. I begin with an overview of the epistemological position informing the study fieldwork design. I then discuss my approach to data collection. I highlight how my data collection approach utilised methods commonly used in ethnography. I consider the advantages and disadvantages of being situated within the main study site as an ‘insider’ (Jorgenson, 1988) researcher-practitioner. Following this I outline my research strategy before presenting a comprehensive overview of the methods used to inform my study design. For illustration, in Figure 10 I present a model of the research process to be discussed in this chapter:

Figure 10: Study design and research process



Epistemological position

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) highlight the importance of outlining an epistemological position as a researcher. This is because the researcher’s theoretical lens can bias their: (1) choice of study design (2) method of collection and

(3) interpretation of data. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009: 7) suggest the use of qualitative methodologies can prove useful where questions regarding aspects of epistemology are of interest. Conversely, where applied as a dominant discourse, a researcher's epistemological position can undervalue the equal or potentially more valid theoretical perspective(s) of participants.

Researchers informed by a critical realist epistemology encourage what Danermark et al. (2002: 57) term 'methodological pluralism'. Danermark et al. highlight how critical realism challenges scientific research paradigms (e.g. positivism) which conflate (pre)supposedly observable levels of reality. Meanwhile, a wholly interpretive approach to reality through a radical or extreme social constructionism is critiqued for being too relativistic in nature (Elder-Vass, 2012: 5). As discussed in chapter 2, while drawing attention to conflated knowledge-claims, contemporary social constructionists argue for an explanatory paradigm that does not seek to establish truth but rather contributes to empirical intransitivity.

This is because what constitutes social 'fact' remains dependent upon the epistemology informing a researcher's interpretation of data. As discussed, my study is informed by a contemporary social constructionist perspective. As I have highlighted, a contemporary social constructionist perspective utilises ideas from critical realism as a philosophical under labourer (Bhaskar, 1989). Critical-reflexivity is a central concept within contemporary social constructionism. Applying a critically-reflexive approach to my study fieldwork design encouraged me to consider the influence my epistemological position would have on my choice of data collection methods, analysis and interpretation of findings.

Developing as a critically-reflexive researcher is concerned with making explicit data collection and analysis processes whilst viewing participants as expert in their own experience (May and Perry, 2011). Silverman (2014) indicates how critically-reflexive research can offer the means by which the natural, authentic experiences of participants can be observed, captured and interpreted in a transparent way. A central purpose of my study was to observe how social workers 'do' child protection while developing insight into their day-to-day sense-making and reflexive practice(s). It was for this reason I decided a qualitative inquiry utilising methods common in ethnography was an appropriate research method.

Traditional quantitative research has been concerned with the assumed neutrality of researchers (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). In traditional approaches, scientific data collection methods are applied within study sites to capture data considered to be the concrete 'artefacts' of the setting (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009: 1). Traditional research methods are informed by a positivist paradigm that claims to present unbiased findings representing objective reality (Renold et al., 2008). Therefore, as Renold et al. highlight, traditional methods fail to acknowledge how the relationship between researcher and participant influences the way knowledge is received and produced.

Renold et al. identify traditional methodologies do not acknowledge the multiple causal influences informing the research process. These include how differing meanings are generated within the inter-subjective context of the discursive dialogue between participants and researchers. White (1997a) highlights studies of social work have tended to be reliant upon the generation of a range of criteria against

which practice can be evaluated. Consequently, the sense-making and reflexive practice(s) which inform their intervention, White argues, have remained free from critical analysis. To address the issue, White emphasises the importance of developing interpretative research strategies informed by hermeneutics. As indicated, Danermark et al. (2002) claim understanding any social phenomena is concerned with a 'double hermeneutic'.

With a double hermeneutic the researcher's observation and interpretation of an event is concerned with making sense of the participant's interpretation of the occurrence and visa versa. Hood (2012b: 9) indicates researchers gathering data on sense-making as a social phenomenon need to understand this 'reflexive-hermeneutic-complexity' where themselves and study participants co-construct knowledge in the context of research encounters. Critically-reflexive researchers are required to continually reflect on their participation within research and the causal influence this will have on the research process. On developing as a critically-reflexive researcher I have considered how my personal values, beliefs, concerns and epistemological assumptions informed my choice of interview question, data analysis and interpretation of findings. Having formulated my research design based on my theoretical viewpoint I have been able consider the implications of this in terms of encouraging the 'epistemic permeability' (May and Perry: 2011: 28) of my study data.¹⁷

¹⁷ In Appendix 3 I offer an overview of the concept of epistemic permeability as presented by May and Perry (2011) and the implications of this for my study.

Data collection methods and a note about ethnography

The methods I used for data collection were participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews. Participant observation and in-depth interviews are methods commonly used in ethnography. Brewer (2000: 6) defines ethnography as:

The study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'field' by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner

However, while this definition is a summary of the approach I adopted it would be incorrect for me to state my study was a pure ethnography. This is because I did not follow the fundamental rules of an ethnographic design. Silverman (2014: 231) highlights how ethnography is concerned with the researcher immersing themselves in the 'community of study' for a prolonged period and: (1) interacting with members (2) observing (3) building relationships and (4) participating in community life. I engaged in these activities however, I departed from rules of ethnography in utilising a thematic analysis which used a part theory-driven approach.

As Silverman (2014: 231) states ethnography leading to a reliable 'telling' of the life of a community cannot be 'achieved by testing propositions and [then] generating predictive and generalisable knowledge'. This point raises an important methodological issue in relation to my study as Archer's (2003) theory of reflexivity was used as an a priori set of codes for my data analysis. Atkinson and Hammersley (1994: 248) emphasise ethnography should be concerned with exploring social phenomena without testing hypothesis or 'filtering' data through an a priori set of categories. This is because study objectivity may be questioned due to a researcher

being inclined to pay insufficient attention to any atypical data arising during analysis. White (1997a: 59) points to the danger of an 'artificial homogeneity and order' being assigned to naturally occurring phenomena through deductive analysis. To counter this problem, my inductive analysis allowed atypical findings to be highlighted.

The main study site and acting as an 'insider'

Beginning in September 2012 my study fieldwork took place across a 6-month period whilst I was employed as a social worker in a statutory setting. The main study participants were a small cohort of social workers situated within my employing agency that represented the main study site. Silverman (2014) highlights how being situated in a practice setting will alter the dynamics of the studied group simply by the researcher being present. It is in this sense the researcher-practitioner must address the inherent problematics of assuming a fieldwork identity.

Silverman (ibid: 249) lists some of the considerations for researchers including: (1) whether to be known as a researcher to none, some or all of those being studied (2) deciding what sorts of investigative activity researchers and participants should be and/or will be willing to engage in and (3) whether to act as an 'outsider or 'insider'. Robson (1993) highlights how it is common for practitioners to undertake studies in settings where they are employed. White (1997a) highlights how this proves useful as the institutional realities of the researcher and participants are shared experiences.

However, White (1997a) expresses concern that researcher-practitioners can inherently operate as borderline natives. This is due to the researcher and the participant sharing roles and responsibilities and therefore having a mutual professional identity. White (1997a) indicates insider researchers risk compromising their objectivity due to their inherent 'complete membership' role and/or where they are required to adhere to the normative practice(s) of the study setting. White also indicates where practitioners act as insiders, temptation to manipulate the study process to answer research questions is a potential bias.

On developing my study an initial issue that arose was where I was informally observing the practices of colleagues and attempting to applying Archer's (2003) theory to determine their reasoning and reflexive processes. I was able to identify how my team members' sense-making and reflexive practices were being determined by the dominant cultural practices of the agency. However, as I was also a member of the social work team, I found myself having to consider my own approach to sense-making and mode of reflexivity and how this was being determined by the cultural constraints of the agency. In addition, as a senior member of the team I had to consider how my role and responsibilities contributed to and/or was influenced by the culture of my employing agency.

To explore potential pitfalls arising in relation to undertaking a study in my employing agency I reviewed the work of Goffman (1959), White (1997a), Schön (1987), D'Cruz (2004a), D'Cruz and Jones (2004) and Silverman (2014). D'Cruz and Jones (2004) argue to develop the social work profession there needs to be blending of practice and research by practitioners. Similarly, as a mark of professionalism, Schön (1987)

encourages practice-based social work evaluation. D'Cruz (2004a: 34) argues while in the practitioner-researcher role social workers can provide insights that help develop 'localised' practices.

However, on undertaking research 'at home' as a team member White (1997a: 64) highlights some important considerations. Among these is how practitioners acting as researchers in their employing agencies can become orientated towards discovering erroneous practices. Consequently, findings on acts of transgression can be produced without relevance to practice development (White, 1997a). In such cases the importance of presenting findings which have a positive influence on outcomes for children and families can remain overlooked. In relation to my study, I was concerned with examining sense-making and reflexive practices. I was orientated towards gathering evidence of positive practice and contributing knowledge to inform best practice in child protection. Therefore, my research focus was on producing findings of relevance to the profession as opposed to a localised problem-focused orientation.

Nevertheless, while acting as a research insider and a practitioner with a complete membership role a range of issues did arise. Among these was where practitioners who were aware of my research-practitioner role would request that I did not report a statement they might have made about their work that could be interpreted as transgressive in nature. Jorgenson (1989) draws attention to the influence researcher-practitioners can have on participants' ability to act naturally once aware their actions are being observed. White (1997a) confers how, on knowing their practices are being observed, it can be difficult for social workers to behave as they

would if they were not being scrutinised. As my study progressed, and as participants became more attuned to my role as a research, I recorded how some became concerned about my potential reporting on what Goffman (1959: 67) describes as unseen 'acts' or 'backstage performances'.

Utilising the idea of the social presentation of self as a staged act Goffman argues performances are evident within all settings where human interaction takes place. Goffman's theorising offers useful ideas for researchers to assist in understanding participants as social actors inclined to perform the cultural norms and expectations of occupied settings. Although, White (2006) argues this is not always the case as reflexive practitioners may be observed as inclined to critically questioning the taken-for-granted cultural rules and practices of their employing agencies. Goffman (1959) argues to avoid performance insiders can conceal their studies. Conversely, as Jorgenson (1989) advocates they can make clear their research intent and purpose.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) argue covert and overt observations are located on either end of an ethical continuum. Hammersley and Atkinson (ibid: 93) state how the role of participant observer can be separated into four categories. These include: (1) complete-participant (2) participant-as-observer (3) observer-as-participant, and (4) complete-observer. Spradley (1980) identifies five types of participation including: (1) non-participation (2) passive-participation (3) moderate-participation (4) active-participation and (4) complete-participation.

Initially it seemed an overt approach might discourage a more authentic performance of participants' sense-making and reflexive practices. However, I decided on an overt approach as I wanted to demonstrate my transparency as a trusted member of the team and as an ethical researcher. Although, as White (1997a) points out, it is something of a fallacy to think a researcher can be fully on the inside and out. This was evidenced where, for example, social workers who attended strategy meetings at the office where I was located were unaware they were being observed.

Advantages and disadvantages of acting as an 'insider'

Among advantages of 'insider' studies are the knowledge(s) researchers hold in relation to organisational policy and procedures and/or the normative cultural rules and practices of the agency (D'Cruz, 2004a). Among the disadvantages are issues concerned with balancing a dual role and managing dilemmas associated with competing occupational expectations. Reviewing the literature (e.g. Robson, 1993) I could consider how my dual identity as a researcher-practitioner might influence my colleagues' view of me as an 'insider' and/or 'outsider'. While seen as an outsider, Robson (ibid: 300) drew my attention to how undertaking interviews with colleagues might be experienced as an 'uncomfortable business'. This is due to the real and/or perceived power differential present within interviews. The issue of power differentials can be problematic, Robson (1993) argues, where participants may hold a higher or lower professional status than a researcher-practitioner.

Silverman (2014: 252) highlights how finding a workable identity in the field may not just be about professional affiliation or status. For example, Silverman draws

attention to the importance of gender and the impact this can have on the research process. Silverman highlights how participants have been shown to say different things to different researchers dependent upon whether they were male or female. Drawing on Silverman I was able to consider my role as a male researcher and how this might encourage or discourage authentic or performative behaviour. Where participants are identified as modifying behaviour due to an awareness of being observed McCarney et al. (2007: 7) describe this as the 'Hawthorne Effect'. McCarney et al. highlight the Hawthorne Effect can result in increased productivity where individuals are observed in the work place. Although, based on observation of health professionals Strong (2001) argues, where scrutinised by researchers professionals in practice contexts will be inclined to perform roles as per usual.

Jorgenson (1989) highlights the range of disadvantages allied to being an insider researcher-practitioner. These include not being accepted as a trusted colleague. Additionally, being accepted as an insider then later rejected as an outsider is also a potential disadvantage. As noted, through my review of White's (1997a) ethnography a further disadvantage I was able to consider was how I might struggle to maintain independence. Jorgenson (1989: 62) describes the researcher's inability to maintain any sense of independence in an ethnographic study as having 'gone native'. Going native, Jorgensen (ibid) states, involves a researcher's move toward performing the participant role or become the phenomenon under study.

On exploring the literature, I became aware of how essential it was for me to maintain relationships with colleagues. However, preserving the authenticity of my role as a researcher remained essential. Throughout the study I sought to achieve a

balance by periodically reminding participants of my dual role and being clear (most of the time!) when I was and was not collecting data. As my study progressed, I offered regular informal feedback and sought participant views using several focus groups. The purpose of seeking feedback from participants was to encourage what Danermark et al., 2002: 97) describe as a 'double hermeneutic'.

With a double hermeneutic I could consider my interpretation(s) of the data and how these compared to those of study participants'. For a critical realist standpoint, I anticipated the way in which participants made sense of their day-to-day experience would be accomplished through a range of multi-interacting causal influences. These included: (1) their contextual conditioning and/or what they have learned about what they should do (2) their interactions managers, colleagues and other members of their inter-professional network and (3) their individual cognitive psychological processes and/or reflexive modalities.

Setting up the inquiry

My previous research experience proved useful in helping me consider how I might go about seeking approval to undertake research. Some of the key prior learning I achieved was how study proposals can be rejected by formal ethics committees on a range of unforeseen grounds and/or conditionally approved pending amendments. I was also aware stakeholders responsible for maintaining integrity of organisations can be cautious where approached by researchers wishing to act as insiders.

Ethics approval and negotiation of access

Because of previous experience, I was familiar with the design of research proposals and how these needed to be transparent to formal scrutiny by research ethics committees. Through focused consultation with my academic supervisor I could explore the integrity of my study design and the specific considerations needed to fulfil the ethical requirements of the University Ethics Committee (UEC). After agreeing a research design my study proposal was written up and submitted to the UEC. My study design was approved by the UEC in 2012.

Due to my specialist role and status as a senior practitioner, I was personally known to all team managers within the organisation. I was also known to and familiar with the differing roles, responsibilities and personalities of staff employed at an operational level. Despite being aware of a level of respect offered to me by most senior staff, I considered the possibility of being refused permission to be situated within the organisation as a researcher-practitioner. As White (1997a: 74) highlighted in her study, I was aware some senior managers may have interpreted my study as a potential critical 'gaze' at the operational function of the organisation. Should my study be approved by senior staff, I also aware how some social workers might interpret my role as official scrutiniser of their practice.

Consequently, I understood the importance of being strategic when deciding on who would be the best person to approach to ask if I could undertake a study within the agency. As an influential member of the organisation and my senior supervisor I therefore decided to approach one of the operational managers within the

organisation. This choice was influenced by the fact that I had a trusting and respectful relationship with my senior supervisor and she was aware of the principled approach to undertaking research I had adopted on a previous occasion. I therefore approached my supervisor in the first instance to discuss the aims and objectives of my study and negotiate access to study participants. I drafted a formal letter to the manager outlining the purpose of my study and requested permission to undertake participant observation and in-depth interviews (Appendix 4). A positive response resulted in a second meeting with the head of safeguarding within children's services. Within this meeting I demonstrated how the study aims and objectives would provide a learning opportunity for practitioners.¹⁸

This resulted in formal approval to undertake my study in my practice setting. Following direction of the head of safeguarding, several additional study sites were identified. These included long-term social work teams where participants could be recruited to undertake interviews, and sites where multi-agency signs of safety (SOS) strategy meetings could be observed. D'Cruz (2004a: 33) highlights where managers acting as 'gatekeepers' encourage particular sampling by identifying participants research becomes a political process. Data collection under these conditions offers an example of how particular kinds of knowledge are captured and/or constructed in the research process.

White (1997a: 77) identifies how a request for access to a study site can easily be denied on moral or ethical grounds where sensitive material might be scrutinised by

¹⁸ Here it would be unfair for me to underestimate how my deliberate approach to those senior managers, who I was aware afforded me the status of a trusted member of staff, did not influence the decision granted for me to undertake the study.

researchers. I was particularly aware of this point due to a previous experience where I had been refused access to a statutory agency as a researcher because the material I wish to examine was confidential. Consequently, as White (1997a) points out, I viewed securing permission to undertake my study as process where the person most likely to grant permission was targeted. D'Cruz (2004a) describes how, through the process of gaining access to a study site and whether this is experienced as problematic or otherwise negotiation is never a neutral process. Exploring this point, D'Cruz (2004a) emphasises how senior staff acting as gatekeepers and the validators or discreditors of a study proposal operate can exercise significant power and influence. On targeting a staff member who was powerful and influential within the agency, and the person most likely to grant me permission to undertake my study, I was aware of how what White (1997a: 78) describes as the 'ethics of research' were manipulated as part of my research strategy.

Research strategy

My research strategy was concerned with observing professional practice, undertaking in-depth interviews and gathering data in the form of case study samples. Prior to deciding on my research strategy, I considered alternative methodologies. For example, I considered presenting practitioners with hypothetical child protection case study vignettes. With this approach, I considered how a request would have been for practitioners to: *'Describe how you might have made-sense of the situation being presented?'* Practitioners would have then been asked about: *'How they might you have decided on what has happened?'* Or: *'What risk might be posed to a child and who might be responsible in the case presented?'*

Practitioners would then have been required to describe: *'What do you feel might inform your sense-making?'*

Barter and Renold (1999) highlight how vignettes provide a less threatening means of exploring sensitive topics which do not require participants to reflect on personal experience. Consequently, vignettes appear useful for developing research strategies. However, as Barter and Renold (1999) point out, methodological challenges arise where personal beliefs, behaviour and actions are the topic of interest. Barter and Renold suggest whilst studies have concluded participant responses to vignettes reflect how they would act in real-life scenarios this is not always the case.

For example, Carlson (1999) highlights where vignettes depicting domestic violence (DV) incidents were presented victims reviewing these stated they would leave the relationship if they found themselves in the type of scenario portrayed. However, Carson argues in many real-life studies victims are identified as remaining within violent relationships. It was clear therefore vignettes may not prove a useful approach to collect data. Other research methodologies including questionnaires were considered but I felt it unlikely these would provide answers to my research questions. This was because of method weaknesses including: (1) inability to capture emotional and behavioural responses to information provided and (2) difficulties in determine where respondents are untruthful.

Entering the setting and establishing rapport

My choice of a combined methodology was prompted by my return to statutory social work within a children's services initial response team (IRT). My placement within the IRT coincided with my post-graduate studies and was because of securing a 36-month secondment as a senior social worker within the local authority. My relocation within the setting presented a unique opportunity to undertake a study like those conducted by other researchers including White, (1997a), Broadhurst et al. (2010a, 2010c), Helm (2013) and Saltiel (2014).

My initial approach to fieldwork was based on informal observation of the practice setting. Prior to undertaking any formal research activity across the first 12 months of the study I concentrated on developing a rapport with individual team members. From the outset, I made it known I was a post-graduate researcher and interested in studying child protection practice. Through day-to-day social interactions I learned of colleagues' professional backgrounds, roles and responsibilities as well as of aspects of their personal biographies.

As I continued to develop my thesis my role as a researcher began to influence my day-to-day practice. For example, I began to consider the nature of practicing relationships and what might constitute the taken-for-granted cultural rules and practices of the setting. Drawing on the work of Archer (2003), I began to consider where practitioners demonstrated different modes of reflexivity. Drawing on the model presented by Chapman and Field (2007) I familiarised myself with different levels of practice-depth being demonstrated by practitioners. As I prepared to

formalise my researcher role I reviewed the literature (e.g. Silverman, 2014). Through the literature I developed understanding of how my gender, age, role and status as a researcher-practitioner might impact recruitment of study participants. Silverman (2014: 20) highlights importance of this first-stage where researchers familiarise with study settings 'before the serious sampling and counting begin[s]'.

After familiarisation with the study site Silverman (ibid: 4) highlights how the development of a rapport between researcher and participant is a crucial second-stage in the research process. From the outset, I was keen to communicate my concern and interest in the professional experiences of potential participants. As a practitioner, I was able to develop a positive rapport with colleagues through participating and sharing in the day-to-day practices of the setting. Following a period of 'settling in' and getting to know staff, in my role as a practitioner I began to introduce my role as a researcher. It was at this point that individual practitioners within the team began to agree to take part in the study. Here I had to consider the alternative approaches to the study where practitioners might have refused to participate. Consideration was given to the potential scenario where my observation would need to take place at those times and/or on those days when practitioners now wishing to participate were out of the office and/or on leave.

Participant recruitment

After formal permission was granted to recruit participants I approached each individual practitioner within my work setting and invited them to take part in my study. All of the practitioners situated within the main study site agreed to take part

following discussion about the research aims and objectives. I then recruited an additional cohort of social workers situated in social work teams across the local authority using the same format. As I will discuss in more detail the reason for this was to ensure reaching a point of theoretical saturation.

To formalise the recruitment process, I wrote a letter to each individual practitioner. Included in the letter was a formal invite (Appendix 5), a participant information sheet (Appendix 6) and an informed consent form (Appendix 7). I followed up all written invites with a series of telephone, email and face-to-face discussions. This allowed each potential participant to agree a date, time and venue for a study interview to take place. It also allowed an initial opportunity for social workers to opt out of the study if they wished to do so.

Informed consent

Renold et al. (2008) identify how the researcher seeks particular outcomes in securing access to a study site. These include identification and selection of participants. On recruiting participants Renold et al. (2008: 450) state 'informed consent' of those engaged in the study should be 'always-in-process'. As always-in-process a reflexive dialogue about informed consent should continue between participant and researcher throughout the life of a study. Renold et al. (2008: 451) emphasise how on-going researcher-participant reflexive dialogue forms part of the 'micro-ethical' complexities surrounding informed consent in qualitative inquiries.

On developing a critically-reflexive approach to practising always-in-process informed consent, I began with the written consent form and encouraged a series of on-going verbal permissions to take part in the study from participants. This included what Renold et al. (2008: 451) suggests as a 'review mechanism' where my observation of individual participants and interpretation of data was discussed with them as the study progressed. This helped address an ethical dilemma arising where some participants felt they were 'under surveillance' and/or being 'spied' on by an insider.

To embed what Renold et al. (2008: 457) describe as 'ethical talk' into the fieldwork relationship I encouraged practitioners to reflect on their experience of being a research participant while stressing the data I collected would remain confidential. Throughout the fieldwork I referred to observation notes and some of the themes I had identified feeding back my interpretations to participants. Periodically, and especially where they questioned my observations, participants were reminded they could withdraw from the study at any point in time. I was aware participant withdrawal would prove difficult due to the situational context and individuals being members of an established norm circle. To address these issues participants were informed their withdrawal from the study would remain confidential.

On suggesting how a critically-reflexive approach offers a means of managing some of the 'micro-ethical' issues in ethnography, Renold et al. (2008: 456) summarise the following principles which informed my approach to informed consent:

- (1) Researchers should always render the act of participation visible through 'ethical talk' which should be encouraged in the context of fieldwork relation

- (2) Informed consent should remain a fluid, relationally dynamic process which should always be 'in-negotiation'
- (3) Beyond ethics approval and initial informed consent of participants, managing the process of ethical practice should be the sole responsibility of the researcher
- (4) As part of the research process participants should be offered the opportunity to become non-participants periodically and throughout the life of the study

Participant sampling and 'localised' consent

The recruitment of participants represented a balance between: (1) recruiting those social workers willing and able to take part in my study and (2) purposefully selecting those whom I felt could provide the data to answer my research questions. Despite the senior manager's approval to recruit practitioners I had to engage in a process of securing localised permissions. This entailed what Burgess (1982: 48) describes as a securing a 'hierarchy of consent' from social work team managers responsible for supervising participants.

Here potential consent issues were raised due to some managers describing feeling obligated to encourage practitioners to take part in the study due to senior management approval. However, I sought to address this issue in two ways including through: (1) verbally reiterating participation was voluntary and (2) written assurance of this on the participant information sheet. Prior to participant selection I reviewed the literature on study sampling, and the process of recruiting subjects to qualitative studies (e.g. Silverman, 2014). Silverman (ibid: 61) highlighted how 'purposeful sampling' is means by which members of a population or social group are recruited by researchers for a particular type of study. Robson (1993: 141) describes how 'probability' and 'non-probability' sampling are two broad categories of

purposeful sampling within social research. Probability sampling involves the random selection of a required number of participants from a general study population. Whereas, 'non-probability' or 'theoretical' (Silverman, 2014: 62) sampling is deliberate recruiting of selected participants to answer a research question.

I was concerned with identifying how social workers made sense in child protection and where this was informed by reflexivity. It was for this reason social workers who represented a purposeful sample were recruited as participants. The relationship between purposeful sampling and the development of theory is discussed by Mason (1996: 93-94) who states:

Theoretical sampling means selecting groups...on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical position...and most importantly the account or explanation you are developing

Data collection

The combined methods used to collect data included participant observation and in-depth interviews utilising case study samples. Silverman (2014) highlights how observation and interviews are commonly used in ethnography. Brewer (2000: 6) describes how ethnography is concerned with the 'study of people in naturally occurring settings' where study methods 'capture their social meaning and ordinary activities'. In this section I discuss the data collection process highlighting advantages and disadvantages associated with methods I used.

Participant observation

Jorgenson (1989: 82) pointed out how informal participant observation begins the moment a researcher enters a study setting. From the outset of my secondment I had begun to identify examples of practice which represented specific areas of my study interest. As I began to develop relationships with team members I learned of their personal interests, their hopes, fears and frustrations and their future career aspirations etc. A key aspect of my study approach was to engage in what D'Cruz and Jones (2004: 111) describe as 'informal conversational interviews'. These occurred on occasion where I noted a particular interaction, or where a particular comment was made by a practitioner about a situation with which they were dealing.

D'Cruz and Jones (2004) highlight how informal conversation is useful for clarifying meaning and therefore avoiding imposing meaning upon an event what might be happening. Patton (1987: 110) describes how informal conversation raises ethical issues as informants may not be alert to the fact they are being studied. To address this issue, participants were made aware when conversation was being recorded for my study. Jorgensen (1989) highlights how informal conversations reflect interactions that occur in everyday life. Nevertheless, Jorgensen suggests it is important for researchers to consider when participants should be asked for consent to be interviewed.

Jorgenson argues a participant observer does not have any more or less an ethical obligation toward people they encountered during the course of a study than they would, for example, had they come across them under everyday circumstances.

Nevertheless, prior to gathering observed data I was conscious informal collection of any conversation of interest could be unethical. After making practitioners aware of the process and periods during which these would take place I undertook formal participant observations. As illustrated in Table 1 formal observation took place for a total of four hours one day a week across a five-week period:

Table 1: Participant observation schedule

Day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week: 1	8am – 12pm				
Week: 2		8am – 12pm			
Week: 3			8am – 12pm		
Week: 4				8am – 12pm	
Week: 5					12pm – 4pm

While the participant observation table highlights the period of formal observation to be a total of 20 hours it is important to note how informal observation took place across a prolonged period. As I was employed within the study setting as a practitioner while studying part-time working in the field led to a range of additional insights. Among these were the differing ways practitioners performed their professional identities in differing ways in different contexts including within their teams and multi-agency meetings. These informal observations influence the study findings where professional talk, identity performance and the practice of different reflexivity is discussed.

Silverman (2014: 256) describes how it is important for researchers to look for answers to their research questions and avoid the danger of reporting 'everything' recorded in field notes. Therefore, by developing a variation of a template outlined by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995: 146) I utilised a set of four broad questions to structure my observation field notes. These included:

- (1) What is the participant doing in this scenario?
- (2) How, why and where are they doing this?
- (3) What assumptions is the participant making in this scenario?
- (4) How are participants making sense and/or practising reflexivity?

Having developed a field note record format, I concentrated on seeking to observe small-scale practice episodes and office-based encounters and record these verbatim. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) highlight how it is important to consider using participants' talk or language as much as possible as on repetition these can form thematic codes. This kind of data when summarised in written form can develop as the rich data which results from observation (Lofland et al., 2006). My approach to processing the observation notes was to write these up on a Microsoft Word Document at the end of each period. Utilising a Word Document, I analysed, interpreted and coded data and themes based on my a priori deductive categories and those unanticipated codes drawn inductively.

Both Emerson Fretz and Shaw (1995) and Silverman (2014) argue the importance of writing up field notes as soon as possible after observation. While my goal was to write up each evening this was not always possible due to time constraints and other personal commitments. Resultantly, I often returned to field notes taken a week

previously or so. Therefore, my interpretations of the data were not always based on a clear recollection of events. Here, a bias is identified in my interpretation of data where coding was based more on a textual analysis and less on my theorising within the actual scenario. This was a similar issue that occurred after interviews were transcribed. This was due to the process of data analysis and thematic coding taking place at a time and distance away from the interaction that produced the data.

My observations were concerned providing answers to my research questions and theory development. Therefore, I was reflexively aware my 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973: 155) of selected areas of observed practice were biased due to thinner description and/or in some cases omission of notes on other areas of practice described. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and captured the verbal data provided by participants. Due to a critically-reflexive approach I was able to appreciate my analysis of the data was based on my 'way of seeing things' (Silverman, 2014: 263). Consequently, my theoretical interpretation of participants' sense-making and reflexive practice(s) was viewed as transitive in nature rather than evidence of scientific fact.

In-depth interviews

During and following the period of participant observation I undertook a series of fifteen semi-structured in-depth interviews with practitioners. As the second and by far most comprehensive method of data collection interviews produced most of the study data. Robson (2003) highlights how in-depth interviews can be structured or semi-structured. In her approach to capturing reflexive modalities Archer (2003)

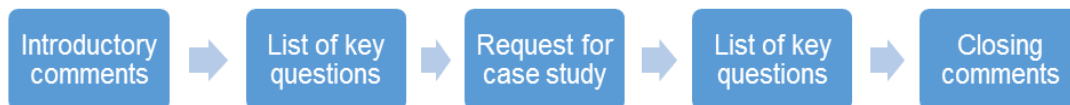
utilised a semi-structured interview where she asked participants to explain their reasoning on a range of themes including planning, prioritising, deciding and so on. Archer used open-ended interviews to allow participants to communicate their approach to practising reflexivity.

Implicit within Archer's method is the assumption participants will have a capacity to communicate in a reflexive way. By allowing participants to demonstrate their reflexive practice(s) inside and outside of a semi-interview Hung and Appleton (2015) state researchers will have more opportunities to observe their dominant reflexive mode in action. To testing Hung and Appleton's assertions, I decided on an interview design where the concept of human reflexivity was not introduced to participants. This conflicted with Archer's (2003) approach that I felt did not afford participants the opportunity to practice their dominant mode of reflexivity in a naturalistic way. I also felt Archer's approach might encourage participants to perform their reflections that could have been edited and/or elaborated upon.

Jorgenson (1989: 90) identifies how in-depth interviews are valuable in the context of qualitative inquiry where participant observation has identified individuals knowledgeable and/or experienced in an area of interest. It was for these reasons I felt interviews incorporating case study samples would be a useful means of collecting data to answer my research questions. My approach to undertaking interviews was informed by a design by Robson (2003). Robson (ibid: 238) suggested developing a fluid 'interview schedule' where initial 'set' questions change to further test, substantiate and/or establish dominant themes as they emerge from the interview data. Drawing on Robson (2003) I devised a standard interview

schedule (Appendix 8) utilising case study samples. As outlined in Figure 11 in-depth interviews were five-staged including: (1) introductory comments (2) list of key questions (3) case study request (4) list of key questions (5) closing comments:

Figure 11: Study interview process



In-depth interview advantages and disadvantages

Drawing on the literature (e.g. Silverman, 2014) I was able to consider how in-depth interviews have several advantages and disadvantages. For example, Silverman (ibid) highlights how qualitative interviews allow flexibility in the data collection process in relation to the direction of a discussion. Whilst guided by the researcher interviews remain dialogical in nature and therefore information can be reflected upon, clarified and/or elaborated. Data on what is not being said can be captured and unexpected responses can be noted (Silverman, 2014). Archer (2003) indicates how interviews are useful when the phenomena under study cannot be observed directly. Informed by observation of practice I felt semi-structured interviews offered a flexible method allowing me to explore my research questions.

While frequently used to discover the way in which individuals construct their world (Morse and Field, 1996), there are a range of disadvantages to semi-structured

interviews. These include the potential to gather inappropriate data due to misinterpretation and/or the wrong kinds of prompts being used while asking questions unrelated to research objectives (Robson, 2003). Holstein and Gubrium (1997) argue research interviews are in themselves meaning-making activities. As Holstein and Gubrium (ibid: 114) state, I was therefore able to consider how participants were situated as 'collaborators within the meaning-making process'.

Interviews took place at a range of sites and at the convenience of participants. Each interview began with a discussion of how participants' anonymity would be protected. The issue of informed consent was (re)discussed and participants' written agreement to take part in the study was secured. Despite having signed the informed consent form participants were reminded involvement in the study was voluntary. It was made clear to participants they could withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. Prior to conducting interviews, I explained how ethics approval had been secured and how confidentiality would be maintained. Participants were reminded the interview would be digitally recorded and all recordings would be transcribed into a Word Document prior to being deleted. All interviews had a predetermined start and finishing time of up to one and a half hours. Prior to commencement, the interview schedule was briefly reviewed and the broad range of themes and issues to be discussed were outlined to participants.

Case studies

As noted, my review of literature identified how some studies have used case vignettes to compliment in-depth interviews (Fook et al., 1997). In these cases, social workers have been asked to comment on how they might make a decision and undertake intervention in hypothetical child abuse cases. However, I identified this approach as prescriptive and therefore felt it too reliant upon elements of artificiality. For this reason, I decided social workers would be asked to provide practice accounts through reflection on real-life cases.

In advance of study interviews participants were requested to consider cases they might wish to discuss. Specifically, participants were encouraged to select case examples where they felt a positive outcome for children and families had been experienced. In relation to my research questions I hoped reflections on positive practice might illuminate where examples of best practice in child protection was informed by the practice of reflexivity. Sheppard (2004) argues when participants engage in interviews they co-create meaning as they examine their view of the world and how they make sense of it.

Whilst meaning making takes place in the context of the social encounter participants have with researchers, Sheppard argues their interpretation of the researcher will influence their responses. On conducting interviews, as Saltiel (2014) found, due to the structure of the opening question I found participants were inclined to offer extensive personal accounts that were biographical in nature. Biographical accounts presented by participants often took up a considerable amount of the total interview

time. However, on transcribing interviews I noted thick descriptions offered rich data allied to my research questions.

The rapport I had developed with participants prior to undertaking interviews, and my position as a social worker, contributed to the personal accounts of practice shared by some participants. I had recorded this phenomenon in my field notes following an initial interview I had undertaken as a pilot and where the participant was a colleague I had worked with for a number of years. Here I was able to acknowledge the influence of being a member of the team, and how this might encourage what Nichols and Maner (2008: 17) term 'demand characteristics'. Nichols and Maner describe the range of issues associated with demand characteristics including where: (1) participants anticipate responses to questions the researcher is asking and (2) offer data to answer research questions. Resultant, demand characteristics displayed in the context of research interviews can result in participants behaving in a way unlike their authentic self. To address issues of demand characteristics participants were informed the study was concerned with reporting on real-life experiences.

During and following case study description participants were encouraged to reflect on the policies, procedures and 'in-the-moment' personal and professional practice knowledge, assumptions, values and beliefs informing their sense-making. The purpose of this approach was to gather data identifying phenomena influencing sense-making and reflexive practice(s). Drawing collectively on the work of Fook et al. (1997), Stanley (2005) and Fook (2012) I identified five steps to encouraging critical reflection on case studies. These included:

- (1) Identifying participants and ask them to undertake interviews
- (2) Pre-determining the aim of the study and the 'type' of case studies to be discussed
- (3) Requesting participants describe case studies where a positive outcome was achieved
- (4) Collecting data highlighting themes and categories of interest
- (5) Transcribing, analysing and interpreting data

Transcription

D'Cruz and Jones (2004) suggest prior to analysis the data emerging from a study, and how this has been organised by the researcher, must be made explicit. While raw data is primarily gathered in a form not easily analysed, Wolfe (1992: 293) suggests organisation must ensure data is not 'miscoded, mislabelled, mislinked and mislaid'. As noted, interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim on to a Microsoft Word Document (Appendix 9). Once transcribed and Word processed recordings were deleted. Documents were stored electronically on a secure, passworded computer.

A research journal was kept to periodically record my thoughts and feeling about the study process. These were organised alongside themes emerging from the transcribed data. This pattern of developing analytical insight was also a feature when conducting interviews. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) highlight in the active interview data analysis insights are developed as research questions are answered and/or generated. D'Cruz and Jones (2004) discuss the development of analytical insights during the transcription process. D'Cruz and Jones highlight data

management becomes a reflexive process where analytical insight occurs during transcription, analysis and review.

Data analysis

My method of data analysis was a hybrid inductive-deductive thematic approach based on a method outlined by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). With this method I incorporated inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) coding and category development. The method complimented the research questions by utilising Archer's (2003) categories of reflexivity as an a priori coding template. Deductive thematic analysis is identified by Crabtree and Miller (1999: 170) as involving a process of 'corroboration'. During corroboration confirmation of findings where a coding template is used can result in the fabrication of data. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006: 7) state fabrication occurs where the researcher's unconscious 'seeing' of data based on their expectations takes place. It was for this reason I felt a hybrid deductive-inductive data analysis would bring rigor to my study design.

In contrast to quantitative data, where numbers and/or statistics determine findings, qualitative studies typically result in large amounts of textual data (Silverman, 2014). Silverman highlights how there are no set rules for analysing and interpreting qualitative data. However, Silverman indicates thematic analysis is an approach often adopted by qualitative researchers to assist in coding data into themes and categories. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) identify how thematic analysis is concerned with the search for text samples drawn from the data as important

examples of the studied phenomena. Rice and Ezzy (1999: 258) state analysis is concerned with identification of themes through a 'careful reading and re-reading of the data' which I conducted. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006: 4) define thematic analysis as a 'form of pattern recognition' where data becomes categories for analysis.

Silverman (2014) highlights how coding and memo writing is an invaluable tool within thematic approaches to analysis. Silverman argues coding through memo writing, where initial thoughts and ideas are written down, is a process where conceptual thinking begins. Silverman (ibid: 119) describes how the practicalities of coding involve highlighting a word, a sentence or a paragraph and labelling it. With my initial approach to analysis, where a category had been decided on, similarly coded data was identified across transcribed interviews. This approach was used as an initial means of organising my study data.

Silverman (2014: 121) highlights how while coding organises the data the 'voice' of participants should remain prominent. This is so the 'meaning' of their accounts can be evidenced. At every stage the researcher will be making decisions about how to code and reorganise the data (Mason, 2002). Whatever choice is made Mason (ibid) argues the thick descriptions of participants should remain clear. This is so the evidence being presented by the researcher can be tested against participant quotations as textual samples. As demonstrated within chapter 4, with the range of themes drawn from the data this was an approach I adopted to present findings and highlight what was evidenced through the study process. Blaikie (2009) highlights how qualitative data analysis often combines inductive and deductive methods.

Deductive (theory-driven) data analysis

The deductive stage of my data analysis began with a 'template organising style' (Crabtree and Miller, 1999: 165). Crabtree and Miller describe how when using an a priori template the researcher pre-determines thematic codes to be explored. The researcher applies codes to the data before moving to the stage where 'legitimising samples' are identified as part of analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006: 4). Adopting this approach, codes used as the template for my study were the four modes of reflexivity outlined by Archer (2003). In Table 2 highlighted is an example of an a priori code used to guide my deductive data analysis:

Table 2: Example of deductive code template

Code 1:	Communicative reflexive
Definition:	Participant who needs to engage (dialogically) with a manager or colleague as a trusted interlocutor in a one-to-one relationship to assist them in sense-making and formulation of judgement
Description:	Participant reports on interactional relationship that facilitates opportunity to verbally question information or developing hypothesis in order to make sense and formulate judgement
Sample - Transcript: 5 SW: 5	There has never been a point where I didn't ask a manager whether I am doing the right thing or run something past them...If I just need to ask a question it might be something trivial that doesn't need to be asked...but that support is always there [SW:5]

Drawing on Archer's (2003) criteria for different reflexive modalities on each individual transcript I identified segments of data as text I considered examples of

pre-determined thematic codes. Reading and re-reading transcribed interviews I then cut and pasted on to a Word Document text segments I felt were a 'rich sample' under the relevant thematic code. My approach to doing a deductive analysis was based on a process outlined by Crabtree and Miller (1999: 166) involving:

- (1) Pre-determining of codes as themes based on Archer's (2003) theory of reflexivity
- (2) Review of individual interviews as transcribed text formatted as Word Document to identify 'rich samples' of thematic code
- (3) Sorting of text segments and collating these as rich samples of thematic codes from each interview on separate individual Word Documents
- (4) Re-reading of the sorted text segments to establish clear connections and corroborate as legitimate rich samples of the thematic code across transcribed interview texts as collection of Word Documents
- (5) Re-producing samples in the findings as themes representational of Archer's (2003) reflexive modes through the deductive thematic analysis and interpretation of data process

Inductive (data-driven) analysis

My inductive (data-driven) analysis took place simultaneous to the deductive (theory-driven) approach. Drawing on the methods outlined by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), an inductive approach required me to begin collecting and analysing data using a five-step process as follows:

- (1) Collect and reviewing the data
- (2) Construct codes as potential themes and sub-themes through initial data analysis
- (3) Develop any new theoretical insights through ongoing data collection and analysis
- (4) Build on deductive themes noting any gaps in the data or theoretical insight
- (5) Recruit participants to pursue and develop dominant/overarching themes and sub-themes

Alongside transcribed text my approach to collection and coding of data involved: (1) reviewing handwritten observation notes and (2) Identifying those concepts, ideas and/or categories which related to my research questions. In Table 3 highlighted is an example of a code drawn from the data set used to guide my inductive data analysis:

Table 3: Example of inductive code template

Code-Name	Definition	Example	Participant
Factors influencing sense-making in child protection	Explicit statement about what informs the practitioner's sense-making, judgement and decision-making	Text Sample	Social Worker: 7 Reflexive Mode
Historical factors	Sense-making influenced by case history	Historical evidence is always important as we know the surest predictor of behaviour is what happened before...but this is where I tread a fine wire as most would stick with that and go with it because it's easier...to take them [children] into care than actually argue for rehab and things like that because you have to put support in [SW:7]	M-R

As indicated, I had utilised an a priori template for a deductive analysis. However, as I began to draw new themes and sub-themes inductively from the raw data these were coded and categorised. I was seeking representative thematic samples allied to my research questions. Therefore, a decision about how focused and/or 'fine-tuned' my analysis should be as the research process progressed (Silverman, 2014). Once initial data was collected, transcribed and coded I compared new collected data to identify samples of 'good fit' codes. I also noted where new and predominant text samples as code 'misfits' suggested the need for a different theme or sub-theme to be developed. Throughout the data collection and analysis process

I continued to review and refine inductive themes and sub-themes while searching for what Thomas (2003) describes as 'contradictory viewpoints, sub-topics and/or new insights'. Throughout my data analysis I selected what I considered to be 'qualitatively rich' quotes to use as textual examples of relevant themes and sub-themes (Silverman, 2014: 98).

On reviewing the transcribed texts, it was evident there was significant thematic overlap in some case studies. This led to the development of some preliminary theoretical insight. With the deductive analysis, what I considered as theoretical insight was those sections of textual data that provided evidence of reflexive practices which broadly fit with the theory presented by Archer (2003). Those that did not fit, for example, where a practitioner identified as meta-reflexive also demonstrated a communicative mode were noted. As I began to commit to a selected range of themes I decided some large sections of text were outside my research interest.

During categorisation in some instances it proved necessary to reduce a useful text sample or 'good fit' code from representing a main theme to constituting a sub-theme. For example, under the category of 'prescriptive policy and practice frameworks' the dominant theme of 'the duty system' was reduced to a sub-theme. Due to a linear data collection and analysis process I continually updated the questions on the in-depth interview schedule so emerging themes could be explored. In parallel I continued to purposefully recruit study participants. As I began to settle on themes and sub-themes I decided these would prove useful for structuring the

findings section while reflecting some key aspects of the 'research experience' (Charmaz, 2006: 117).

For ethnographic type research to fulfil its purpose Jarzabkowski and Bednarek (2014) argue data presentation should offer the reader a sense of the research experience. While I had familiarised myself with this method of presenting ethnographic data due to means of data analysis my approach to presenting findings deviated from this expectation. As I wanted to highlight examples of reflexive practice based on an a priori data analysis template my reporting on findings utilised a more systematic approach. As the style adopted within the findings chapter this approach utilised a meta-interpretation of data presented following thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis overview

My approach to inductive-deductive analysis proved useful for analysing data by beginning with the use of an a priori template. Where inductive data-driven themes including, for example 'participants' values, beliefs and concerns' were identified as allied to their sense-making and reflexive practices this became an important area of interest. As Charmaz (2006) indicates, where answers to research questions are being sought, an inductive-deductive method has an inherent logical order. On beginning the analysis process, it seemed logical to use a deductive approach to data examination. Then utilising an inductive approach, I thought it appropriate to consider how participants were communicating their sense-making and reflexivity.

As the study progressed I ended up working across the inductive-deductive analysis process. This process occurred inherently as I considered how inductive and deductive categories 'fit' or 'did not fit' together to answer my research questions. With my research questions in mind my inductive-deductive analysis of case studies, for example, highlighted participant sense-making activity and reflexive responses to change in certain circumstances and/or contexts. As Kedell (2012) found, case study data analysis highlighted how 'process and change' can be examined at a: (1) micro level (2) a macro level (3) within the professional organisational context and/or (4) within the participant's practice approach.

Case study analysis examined constraints and enablements of the organisational context on participants' sense-making and reflexive practice(s). These were identified as influential in relation to factors including: (1) supervisors' relational-responsiveness (2) prescriptive practices and (3) normative cultural rules. Case study analysis involved building on themes whilst comparing sub-themes in case study samples. With inductive-deductive analysis I identified examples where participants' approach to practice was evidenced as best practice (see Appendix 10).

Linking themes to context and methodological assumptions

My data analysis was primarily undertaken to answer my research questions. Subsequently, I engaged in a constant updating of the interview schedule to explore these and link them to the interview process. I developed themes and sub-themes and interpreted these as they related to the categories presented by Archer (2003). Thomas (2003) argues while thematic data analysis is multi-interpretive it does not fit

into any epistemological position. This is due to the method using steps which can be followed without researchers having to concern themselves with 'jargon' associated with more 'technical' approaches, for example, grounded theory. However, the approach is founded upon a range of assumption that I was able make transparent. As Thomas (2003) highlights, these include how:

- (1) Data analysis was first determined 'deductively' based on what I was looking for and then 'inductively' based on what was found
- (2) Findings drawn from the data were shaped by my epistemology and/or biased assumptions and the study research questions
- (3) Consequently, I acknowledge how different researchers with opposing theoretical positions and/or study objectives would have likely produced findings which are incompatible to my own

Whilst a deductive-inductive approach is identified as a useful means of data analysis the wider literature (e.g. Charmaz, 2006) suggests several criticisms. Among these is how the approach might be identified as biased and/or 'un-scientific'. As with a grounded theory approach, Charmaz (2006) highlights how deductive-inductive method encourages researchers to remain central to the data analysis. Therefore, researchers decide how data should be coded and categorised. Thus, Thomas and James (2006) argue the method is criticised in relation to knowledge-claims being made by researchers. Thomas and James claim, while researchers may not seek to prove a theory, the formulaic aspects of the deductive element mean there is limited scope for abstract data interpretation.

Although, Stanley (2005) indicates through critical-reflexive engagement with data researchers can employ a process of constant comparison, questioning and creative thinking as theory emerges. Nevertheless, Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) suggest

deductive-inductive approaches can appear non-reflexive. This is the case where researchers make sense of data based on epistemological positioning. My approach to addressing this issue was to outline my epistemological position. Encouraging transparency, I focused on positive coding and utilised a stepped approach to collection and analysis of data to a point of saturation.

Data triangulation, theoretical sampling and saturation

The use of multiple qualitative methods employed within my study represented an approach which Denzin (1988: 45) terms data 'triangulation'. Robson (1993) describes how data triangulation is a useful technique that contributes to study validity and trustworthiness. Cohen and Manion (2000) identify how validity within research is achieved through the cross-referencing of information from the same sources gathered with different methods. By using a dual-tactic approach to data collection across a primary and a secondary study site potential to contribute knowledge-depth into the process of sense-making in child protection and reflexive practice(s) was created.

Primarily, I felt a knowledge-depth was likely to be achieved through targeted data sampling leading to theoretical saturation of themes. Data sampling is identified by Strauss (1987: 38-39) as:

A means whereby the analyst decides on analytic grounds what data to collect next and where to find [it]...And: For what theoretical purpose?

Using Archer's (2003) categories, I had an a priori template to guide my approach to theoretical sampling. Drawing on Charmaz (2006: 107) I could understand why it was important to 'check, qualifying and elaborate' on the boundaries of the categories if necessary. I was aware of the 'So *what?*' question when qualifying pre-determined hypothesis. Therefore, I considered the question: '*What might the data produce in relation to findings outside of Archer's (2003) theorising?*'

As Charmaz (2006: 107) warns there were several pitfalls I tried to avoid when sampling data and conducting my analysis including: (1) closing categories prematurely (2) utilising redundant categories (3) being over-reliant on textual statements for demonstrating categories and (4) using unfocused or non-specific categories. This helped me to: (1) be consistent with my analysis (2) shape my ideas and (3) consider the categorical variations emerging from the data. I continued to refine categories throughout the process of theoretical sampling. I did so until I felt categories I selected had been saturated and further theoretical insight within the boundaries of my research questions was no longer required.

Strauss (1987: 21) suggests 'theoretical saturation' is achieved where further data collection and sample analysis reaffirms but does not reveal anything new about a particular category. Theoretical saturation was achieved within my study where, for example, themes indicative of practitioners' reflexive modes reoccurred during the data collection and analysis process. To support my decision that I had reached a point of saturation I drew on a series of questions presented by Glaser (2001: 191) including: (1) '*What comparisons can I make between and within the data?*' (2) '*What sense can I make of these comparisons?*' (3) '*How do these comparisons support my*

theoretical categories?' (4): *'What, if any, new conceptual findings do the data present?'* Having answered these questions, I felt content data satisfied the study purpose in terms of answering my research questions.

Ethics

D'Cruz and Jones (2004) highlight ethical principles in research are closely aligned to those articulated by professional codes of conduct. Among these are ethical responsibilities towards colleagues within the study settings and toward the social work profession. Subsequently, ethical issues I considered included:

- (1) Protecting the rights, privacy and dignity of study participants
- (2) Obtaining participants' informed consent
- (3) Protecting participants from unwarranted discomfort, harm or danger
- (4) Ensuring anonymity and confidentiality
- (5) Evaluating research and reporting accurately and objectively
- (6) Storing study data securely and for the required period

Ethical considerations also included:

- (1) Ensuring permission of supervisors was obtained to approach participants with a view to recruiting them voluntarily and
- (2) Ensuring participants had access to support needed to address any personal issues the study might raise

The wider ethical issues I considered included: (1) ensuring participants' willingness to engage in the study was continually evaluated during interviews and (2) upholding their right to withdraw at any point during the study. Robson (1993) suggests

participants should be debriefed following study interviews and a contact procedure for post-study questions should be established. These issues were addressed via a statement produced as a written Participant Information and Informed Consent Form that was read and signed by participants.

Confidentiality

D'Cruz (2004a: 40) highlights how social work academics have reported on studies undertaken within statutory settings (e.g. White, 1997a). These studies suggest how research encouraging analysis of child protection policy and practice offers practitioners the opportunity to begin reflexively engaging with the context of their employing agency. On producing findings that are critical of child protection practice there is a risk of reproach from a wider political, academic and public audience. Consequently, I sought to omit identifiable characteristics of the study setting and protected the identities of study participants. Where I identified professionals who took part in this study I did not use their names to describe them. Similarly, where the study site was concerned, the demographic details I presented were limited to a description of the physical layout of the building. Such a description is considered representative of many statutory childcare agencies across the UK.

Ethical dilemmas and safeguarding against iatrogenic injury

White (1997a) highlights how difficulties in respect of practitioners being concerned about reporting on their 'backstage performances' being considered transgressional in nature need to be considered. In my study, on occasion where practitioners made

a comment or acted in a particular way they would state '*please don't put that in your research*' or '*I hope you're not spying on me*'. Throughout the study period I had to reassure practitioners I would only report on incidents they gave permission for me to do so, and I would inform them when I was to undertake my formal observations. Following the initiative of White (1997a), it was made clear to participants my intended aim for the research was a contribution to: (1) the practice-based knowledge (2) best practice and the (3) education of social workers.

I was able to consider the dynamics of the researcher-participant relationship in the context of the in-depth interview, and some of the ethical implications of encouraging practitioners to reflect on their practice. For example, Darlington and Scott (2002) drew my attention to how research interviews and clinical-supervisory interviews can be experienced as similar by participants. The authors highlight how this may create the conditions for participants to explore experiences as they might in a therapeutic encounter. Darlington (1993) describes how, during a study related to sexual abuse, one interviewee began talking of their childhood experience where previously they had not disclosed this within formal counselling sessions. Alert to possibility of having to work with disclosure, I ensured all participants who took part in my study understood the nature of the interview and had access to ongoing supervision.

Charmaz (2006) highlights participants who have experienced crisis and/or who are requested to reflect upon significant life events may seek direction from interviewers. In such cases, difference in power and professional status may be played out, and interviewers who remain unalert to participant vulnerabilities risk disempowering individuals causing them distress and/or what O'Hanlon (1994: 56) describes as

'iatrogenic injury'.¹⁹ On developing my understanding of the dynamics of power and status of researchers, and the influence this has on interviewees, I was able to consider the added impact of my age, race and gender. Importantly, as a white British male with a senior social work position, I felt it useful to explore the implications of undertaking interviews with both men and women of different age, status and ethnic origin.

Study limitations

I undertook my study to explore social workers' sense-making in child protection and their reflexive practice(s). My location within the main study site allowed me to observe practice and collect social workers' personal accounts of sense-making, judgement and decision-making processes. The significant limitations of my study were that I relied on social workers' self-reporting and did not include the views of children and/or their parents/carers or wider family members. Additionally, I did not gather the views of any other professionals who may have had an influence on the outcomes of the case studies described by participants.

While the purpose of my fieldwork was to observe practice, and secure the reflections of practitioners, it is acknowledged collecting the views of relevant others, and especially service users, may have produced a more comprehensive triangulated data set. A central implication is other 'actors' being described by participants within case studies including children, parents/carer and/or other

¹⁹'Iatrogenic injury' is a term used within the medical profession where a patient may acquire an illness, or otherwise experience harm due to the actions or inactions of a practitioners or due to negative effects of the treatment being provided.

members of their families may have communicated different versions/interpretations of the situation being described by practitioners. Chandler (1990: 129) identifies how there is an assumption in the context of a research study researchers and participants are in 'asymmetrical' relationships. This is because the researcher sets the agenda by asking specific questions that participants must answer.

However, participants occupy a position of power as they can choose to share or withhold information (D'Cruz, 2004a). D'Cruz highlights participants in my study may have exercised power in various ways. For example, where they may have refused to answer questions or where they may have made partial, misleading and/or false responses. Consequently, it cannot be assumed participants took part in my study without bias or prejudice. 'Subject bias' (Robson, 1993: 67) may have resulted in participants describing areas of practice they thought I might be interested in. However, guarded in their disclosure participants may have also withheld information to avoid criticism and/or detection of transgressive practice.

Trustworthiness, validity and transferability

Robson (1993: 66) identifies how trustworthiness in qualitative research is concerned with establishing study credibility and validity. Central to validity is being explicit about epistemology and a reflexive examination of the 'process and content' of the inquiry (Lincoln and Guba, 1995: 283). Glaser and Strauss (1967) agree explicit research design and concept formulation in qualitative inquiry is important. D'Cruz and Jones (2004) highlight how the unsoundness of a study design is concerned with a range of contradictory issues including: (1) unethical data collection methodologies

(2) researcher bias and (3) inconsideration of the social, economic and political implications of a study.

Guba and Lincoln (1982: 246) describe four criteria for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative inquiries. These include: (1) credibility (2) transferability (3) dependability and (4) confirmability. To achieve credibility within my study several key strategies were employed. In the first instance, during participant observation informal discussion was held with social workers to clarify the meaning of events and/or comments. In addition, following interviews, participants were debriefed and themes and issues discussed were clarified against my interpretations.

Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006: 3) discuss 'member checks' as a method to validate participants' responses to a researcher's conclusion(s). Although, Fereday and Muir-Cochrane question whether a participant can interpret what constitutes valid findings drawn from the research process. The authors subsequently raise the issue of managing participants' responses to the researcher's interpretation of phenomena. A limitation of a study can be where, for example, post-analysis debriefing and/or focus groups are not utilised to discuss findings.

My study fieldwork took place within a statutory setting where practice principles are shared across the organisation. Therefore, I consider the methodology has transferability and could be used in other teams located in other areas. Transferability may be applicable to partner agencies where capturing data in order to answer research questions allied to sense-making and reflexivity proves useful for

contributing professional knowledge. Dependability in design is identified by Guba and Lincoln (1982: 247) as concerned with the replicability of a study 'under the same circumstances in another place and time'.

Where a discrepancy in study replication occurs in different situations the research design is considered unreliable. However, with the exclusive nature of ethnographies, Guba and Lincoln (1982) suggest exact replication of a study is impossible due to issues of participant and contextual difference. Therefore, as D'Cruz and Jones (2004) argue, to achieve dependability a study design needs to demonstrate stability despite inherent differences. To achieve dependability, despite data capture on diverse practice, my study was concerned with identifying standardised practice(s) in a statutory setting

A contemporary social constructionist perspective questions the presentation of objective truth (Elder-Vass, 2012). However, verifiability and transferability of qualitative research can emerge through production of situational knowledge generalisable across contexts (Keddell, 2012). Keddell argues detailed description of research methods and the study context is central to determining validity and transferability. This is so other researchers can then replicate a study and establish similarities or disparity in their subsequent findings. Throughout this chapter I have sought to outline my methodology and theoretical position. This is so the reader can make an informed decision about the quality of my study design and the validity of the findings to be discussed in the following chapter.

Summary and conclusion

In this chapter I have described the methods used to undertake my study fieldwork. I have outlined how a combined participant observation and in-depth interview method was applied. I have discussed how the use of multiple data collection methods is understood as a common approach in ethnographic inquiries. I have outlined how a hybrid inductive-deductive thematic analysis facilitated development of a circular process of data collection, analysis and development of answers to my research questions. The strengths and weaknesses of my methodology were discussed.

The ethical issues arising in the context of the study have been discussed including the impact of the privileged position I held as researcher-practitioner and the consequences of acting as an 'insider' participant observer. These included where participants felt they were under surveillance and therefore were concerned about their 'backstage performances' being interpreted as acts of transgression. This highlighted one of the tensions in child protection research discussed in the introductory chapter where practice takes place under intense political and public scrutiny. Within this organisational context I have described how my professional identity and academic integrity had to be managed. As highlighted, this was achieved through an ongoing process of negotiating informed consent of participants.

Drawing conclusions, it is important to acknowledge limitations in relation to interviews with practitioners and data informed by reflections on events discussed within case studies. This may be particularly relevant in relation to recollections where sense-making, judgement and decision-making and the impact this had on the

outcomes experienced by children and families was described. Interpretations and/or 'versions' of what constitutes 'positive practice' may have been edited, restoried or sanitised by participants. These are considerations I have undertaken and which inform my interpretation of findings presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings – Part: 1
Situated and subjective nature of
sense-making in child protection

Introduction

In this chapter I present data on sense-making in child protection and the practice of reflexivity. Sense-making and reflexive practices are influenced by the situated and subjective nature of the child protection practice context. Therefore, so understanding of this area of practice can be enhanced, in part 1 of this chapter I begin by presenting data offering insight into: (1) the main study site physical layout (2) the team structure (3) the office-based 'duty system' and (4) how study participants acting as duty social workers interpreted and acted in response to referrals and/or CCNs they received each day.

For this chapter a formative understanding of the practice context where my study fieldwork took place is considered essential. Therefore, throughout this chapter where data on the determinative aspects of the practice context is presented this is done so in a purposefully descriptive way. However, moving beyond a descriptive account data is presented highlighting some of the key practice approaches employed by social workers required to make sense and formulate judgement in a practice context identified as uncertain and complex. In part 1, among key aspects of the data presented are how practitioners acting as duty social workers: (1) determine thresholds for intervention (2) manage workflow and practice priorities (3) define need for assessment and (4) the nature of ongoing work with children and families.

Office-based practices including operation of the duty system was the main focus of the observations I undertook for the purpose of my study. However, throughout part 1 of this chapter I present data on other practice areas drawn from study interviews including reflections on initial home visits and other family-based interventions in

longer-term cases. Among key aspects of data illustrated is where sense-making and reflexive practices were accomplished in the context of: (1) the homes of child and families (2) professional-parent relationships and (3) inter-professional relationships. In my literature review I identified how ambiguity and uncertainty constitutes the day-to-day child protection context. Throughout this chapter I present data illustrating how social workers make sense and practice reflexivity in a professional practice context experienced as inherently complex. I engage in a process where the data presented is subject to preliminary description. However, a synthesis of findings and an interpretative discussion is reserved for the following chapter.

Demographics and study site physical layout

The main study site was a community-based children's services office constituting a two-story terraced house that was in an urban residential area. The community-based office offered an initial statutory social work response to children and families resident across a large demographic area. Specific demographic statistics allied to those children and families accessing the service were not of immediate relevance to the aims and objectives of my study. However, for illustration those identified as accessing support were mainly children and families of white British origin.

Through study interviews many parents accessing the service were identified as single, unemployed and living in private rented or council owned social housing. Therefore, many children and families receiving direct support from those social workers who took part in the study could be considered socially and economically disadvantaged. Although, there was a minority of children and families from

backgrounds that are more affluent identified as in receipt of support from participants who took part in the study. For illustration, this point is highlighted in the following interview extract:

A lot of people we work with are from disadvantaged backgrounds...a certain sector of society...either one parent families or those on benefits...living in social housing...but we do get cases where it's the opposite...although in my whole career I can count on my hand how many families I've dealt with of that description [SW: 13]

The study site 'front -door' (Broadhurst et al., 2010c: 352) and inner physical layout was one typical of my experience of children's services offices. For example, on entering the building visitors were required to make themselves known to administrative workers who were located on the ground floor in a secured office that prevented public entry. On being advised via a written not to ring a bell located within the building foyer visitors were directed to wait in a designated area for administrative workers to respond. Visitors were then spoken to by administration staff through a large reinforced Perspex glass window. If it was deemed necessary by an administrative worker for a visitor to speak with a social worker, they were then directed to wait again in the designated area until the duty practitioner was available to speak with them.

My study diary notes based on my observations of the office front of house were recorded as a reflection on how I felt the study site physical layout encouraged an implicit 'us and them' culture. This was due to the layout presenting as a structural barrier between social workers and those seeking their support. Alongside a sense of 'othering' (Hacking, 1999), I noted how the front of house invoked an ironic sense of depersonalisation of a personal service. Here my reflections resonated with

Broadhurst et al. (2010c: 354) who describe the 'customer interface' of children's services where visitors' contact with social workers is depersonalised through mediation at the 'front door' by administration staff.

While experienced in the day-to-day management of agency referrals, the administrative workers were not qualified social workers. Nevertheless, as the first point of contact, all visitors were potentially assessed as eligible for support or otherwise by administrative staff. Due to the management of the service customer interface in this stratified way I observed how social workers' face-to-face engagement with children and families at first point of contact was cultivated as a 'second-order' (Broadhurst et al., 2010c: 354) practice activity. Again, here my reflections on the structural barriers observed at my study site resonated with the findings of Broadhurst et al. (ibid). Broadhurst et al. describe how, while unqualified staff with varying degrees of knowledge and experience were observed in their study as acting as service gatekeepers, where customer contact with social workers was restricted a contribution to sense-making leading to erroneous judgement was evidenced.

The social work team

The social workers who took part in my study, and who were the participants located at the main study site, where those practitioners who made up the local authority children's services initial response team (IRT). As a member of the IRT the role of this group of research participants differed from those others who took part in my

study.²⁰ This was due to the IRT having a specific remit to ‘process’ most of the referrals and/or CCNs received by children’s services across the locality. The IRT consisted of one manager and eight qualified social work practitioners including myself.

The team manager and five practitioners were employed full-time by the local authority. The other three were either part-time or full-time practitioners hired from an employment agency. In addition to eight qualified practitioners there were two social work support assistants (SWSAs) and two enquiry and referral administrators (ERAs). All practitioners, SWSAs and ERAs were located within the three rooms making up the second-floor of my study site. The ERAs were situated together in a room shared with one of the SWSAs. Two of the three agency staff occupied the smallest room on the second-floor. I was located with the remaining five social workers and SWSA within the largest room in the building. The team manager had a separate room and held what I observed as an ‘open door policy’. This meant the door to the manager’s office was always open signalling an implicit cultural rule she was available to support practitioners in their day-to-day role as case manager and duty social worker.

The main room in the building had an open-plan design and represented the office ‘hub’ where ‘duty’ work took place. The main room setup was conducive to the practice of ‘professional talk’ (Taylor and White, 2000: 61) which was observed as a

²⁰ In addition to IRT members, the other participants who took part in the study were practitioners located in several longer-term social work teams situated at different sites across the local authority. The more complete participant profile and personal characteristics summary is presented as Appendix 11 and 12.

daily routine. As I have experienced throughout my career as a social worker the everyday concurrence of 'home life' and 'work life' talk was observed as part of the office-based culture. A key observation I made was how, despite the potentially devastating impact on children and families, practitioners often discussed child abuse cases in a matter-of-fact way. As Saltiel (2014: 117) found, the office talk was often characterised by a 'gallows' type of humour where the shortcoming of some parents, and perceived poor practices of other professionals, were discussed by practitioners.

One notable child abuse case discussion I observed was concerned with the suicide of a father of a thirteen-year-old child. After the child's school friend had disclosed the child's father had tried to have sex with her a referral to the IRT resulted in the father's arrest. The father's arrest took place after it was established the child had been groomed and coerced into engaging in sexual activity from an earlier age. After the child was removed to the care of a relative the father, a soldier and war veteran, was charged and bailed to his home address. He promptly hung himself before being trialled and potentially convicted of a range of sexual offences. The discussion following the practitioner's receipt of the news of the suicide from the arresting officer focused on the savings to the taxpayer due to a trial not now needing to take place. The prison maintenance fees and how these would have been charged to the taxpayer had the father been convicted for the abuse of his daughter was also discussed.

This case highlights the type of 'backstage performance' (Goffman, 1959) I observed as a means by which some social workers made sense of the experience of being exposed to acts of child abuse. Although, irreverent displays of humour were often

contrasted with what I observed as practitioners' deep concern for the families with whom they worked. This concern was demonstrated through practitioners' tears and talk of fear, anxiety and disgust where they were required to respond to particular cases. A further office-based juxtaposition to my observation of participants' humour and tears I noted was how each practitioner's workspace was personalised. On personalising their workspace, I recorded how some practitioners had decorated their desks with pictures of their children and/or other personal objects that had meaning to them. While family pictures and personal artefacts encouraged a pleasant and homely atmosphere a record I made was how this seemed in stark contrast to the work being discussed and experienced each day.

The duty system

The duty system was operated on a rota basis where all qualified team members were required to 'do duty' for a period of one week in every three. Those practitioners situated as 'duty social worker' were required to make sense and formulate judgement in response to the range of referrals and CCNs they received each day.²¹ While 'on duty' I observed how an implicit cultural rule deterred duty workers from taking calls from parents and/or arranging any direct work with children and families who were open cases on their existing 'case load'. However, in critical situations practitioners were observed as willing to respond to requests from parents and/or other professionals for telephone support in open cases. This data contrasts with Broadhurst et al. (2010c) who found priority of 'workflow' management their

²¹ All CCNs received by the agency were generated by police and forwarded to ERAs electronically via email. Referrals, received by ERAs either by telephone or via email or post on a standardised form, were generated by a wider range of agencies. These agencies included schools, youth offending services, health services, youth services and voluntary organisations etc.

study setting meant duty social workers were discouraged by managers to respond to calls from parents in open cases.

In their role as duty social worker, and with a responsibility to respond to all referrals and CCNs, participants in my study were observed as being required to make sense of information being presented. This was so a judgement could be formulated in relation to whether: (1) an initial assessment (IA) (2) no further action (NFA) (3) the provision of information and/or advice (PIA) or (4) a different type of response was required. If an IA was identified as needed, dependent on information presented, the required response was determined by the duty social worker prior to agreement with the team manager. In many cases, again because of information presented, I observed how most IAs were not considered as needing to be undertaken on the same day. Consistent with statutory guidance (e.g. Department of Health, 2000) on assessing children in need and their families, IAs therefore were identified as required to be completed within a prescribed number of working days. However, in all cases where information received indicated potential risk to a child, I observed how the manager was consulted and duty social workers would be directed to complete an IA on the same day.

After an IA was completed, if further work was identified 'the case' often remained 'allocated' to the social worker who had acquired it on duty. At the point of IA completion, if the case was identified as requiring longer-term work, I observed how this was usually identified as being eligible to be passed to the longer-term team for a

core assessment (CA).²² Although, this was not always the case as I observed how some practitioners would approach the manager and request to continue to 'run' with cases. This was dependent on the nature of work required. On discussing this with several study participants I identified how 'running with cases' could either: (1) offer a level of consistency to children and families or (2) help practitioners acquire particular practice experience.

If a decision was made a CA and/or ongoing support for a particular family was needed I observed how a 'case transfer' to the longer-term team often took a significant period of time. This was due to the workload of the long-term team being at a constant high level. With the transfer process, I observed how the 'handover' of cases between the IRT and long-term team resulted in the managers concerned being in a perpetual 'sword fight'. This sword fight entailed dates and quantities of cases being negotiated and renegotiated between managers as they tried to manage their respective workloads.

In cases where presenting information meant a decision was made a child protection response was required procedures as outlined within the 'working together' (Department for Education, 2013) document would be followed. I observed how this often resulted in a multi-agency strategy²³ meeting being convened by the duty social worker and chaired by the IRT manager. On observing strategy meetings, I identified how a decision would be made to either offer support to a family on a child in need

²² Following the Munro Report (2011) the initial and core assessment format was changed to the single child and family assessment (CFA).

²³ As I will discuss, all multi-agency strategy meetings held within the local authority utilised a standardised signs of safety (SOS) (Turnell and Edwards, 1999) approach.

basis under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 or undertake a child protection 'investigation' under Section 47 of the Act. Following subsequent Case Conferences where a child became subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP), I observed how these cases often continued to be managed by duty social workers who had undertaken investigations.

Several participants located within the IRT felt their role as duty social worker was more stressful than that of practitioners who were situated within longer-term teams. This was due to whatever existing workloads consisted of members of the IRT were required to respond to CCNs as part of their role as duty social worker. Again, through observation of professional talk, where participants discussed work at the 'front-line' and described how this was more demanding and/or at the 'high-end' of child protection, data on how participants constructed their professional identity as 'child protectors' was captured.

However, the idea the IRT social work was more complex or stressful role than that of longer-term team members was dismissed by one practitioner who took part in my study. Having moved to the IRT from a longer-term team during an informal discussion the practitioner described a range of difficult 'long-term' practice scenarios. These included how, for example, he had often got 'bogged down' with cases where parents were not 'on board' or where he had found it difficult to engage them to affect any change. Other scenarios described as stressful by the practitioner were those 'unpredictable cases' where, for example, children had moved from being 'in need' of support to being 'at risk' of harm.

The busy, complicated and unpredictable nature of the work in the IRT meant practitioners could be presented with information on referrals leading to a range of outcomes. As noted, these might include the need for an IA or in some cases an immediate removal of a child from their birth parents to a place of safety. Being a member of the IRT was therefore seen by several of my study participants as an important part of being a child protection social worker. In terms of the complex nature of 'doing duty' for some study participants this extended beyond the worst-case scenario of removing a child from their birth parents to include: (1) managing personal dilemmas over thresholds for intervention (2) gatekeeping scarce resources and/or determining practice priorities and (3) deliberating the consequences of potentially unwarranted/dubious interventions into the lives of children and families. In the following sections observation and interview extracts highlighting some scenarios as themes drawn from the data are presented.

Doing duty

Doing 'duty' work was in important area of child protection practice where participants' sense-making and professional judgement was observed as being accomplished. Dependent upon the nature of a referral, I observed how sense-making and judgement formulation was achieved by several practitioners primarily through a discursive dialogue either with the team manager, other team members and/or other professionals. However, I noted how this was not always the case as some practitioners were inclined to respond to referrals in a way where their sense-making and judgement formulation was accomplished independently. I observed how this was often the case where information on referrals suggested the need for a

standardised response. With a CCN reporting an incident of domestic violence (DV), for example, duty social workers were required to undertake an IA in all cases.

Where a standardised response to a CCN was required, I observed the contribution to workflow efficiency the 'disposal' of a referral through a prescribed practice afforded some duty social workers. However, the consistently high number of referrals received meant doing duty remained a busy, unpredictable and anxiety provoking experience. Although a standardised response was required in some cases, practitioners were observed as not always happy to 'process' CCNs in a prescriptive way. This occurrence was reflected across the data set where, for example, despite feeling pressurised to do so some social workers' frustration at having to practice in an uncompromising way was evidenced. This is highlighted in the following observation extract where on doing duty the social worker communicates her irritation at being encouraged to respond to referrals in a narrowly-defined way:

Sometimes it feels like...the phone never stops and it's the same issues, same responses required but with different names on the sheet type of thing and it can be quite overwhelming at times...but you don't want to treat everybody the same you don't want to assume the same issues apply...because nine out of ten times they don't they just look the same...but we start to get into it the same...the same response but every family is different...you have to keep that in your head [Field note extract]

Here the data illustrates how the practitioner was feeling pressurised to make sense and formulate judgement in a biased, narrowly-defined way. This was due to the presenting information being interpreted as familiar scenarios that are interpreted as potentially requiring a standard response. However, by stating '*you don't want to assume the same issues apply*', the social worker demonstrates a critically-reflexive

awareness of the danger of adopting a heuristic or biased approach to sense-making in child protection. Despite feeling '*quite overwhelmed*' and under pressure to get cases through the duty system, the data highlights how the practitioner communicates her reluctance to practice in a delineated and/or routinised manner.

In their study Broadhurst et al. (2010c: 365) describe how routinised sense-making and/or 'patterns of tacit reasoning' can contribute to erroneous judgement as they become established where duty social workers are placed under pressure to process a high level of referrals. However, with the data presented within the above extract the practitioner demonstrates a level of criticality and reflexivity indicated by Broadhurst et al. (2010b) as required to safeguard against the potential error of hasty judgement formulation in child protection. Here the data offers evidence of how practice-depth can be achieved where practitioners are willing to curtail sense-making short-cuts encouraged by the need to maintain workflow management within the context of a 'conveyer-belt' culture.

However, data highlighting the frustration of some social workers in relation to duty system management, and how this acted as a constraint to practice-depth in child protection, is highlighted in the following interview extract:

Sometimes I am working on duty and you go into a family...responding to a report or whatever...a concern about the child and because we have the policies and practice standards and performance indicators we have to respond as a duty worker and have to go in...and we work up this incredible whirlwind and then we leave...and the family is left in disarray [SW: 7]

While the IA process is concerned with understanding the importance of an initial response to CCNs, the data presented above highlights how a bureaucratic, performance driven pre-occupation with risk continues to influence the UK child protection system. Klein (2000) indicates when encouraged to engage in prescriptive practices that are performance driven a social workers' judgement and decision-making risks being accomplished through a recognition-primed response. As highlighted in chapter 2, a recognition-primed response involves practitioners' sense-making in child protection by identifying a presenting scenario as 'typical' of a previous case. On formulating a response, practitioners are then able to interpret information in a patterned way and anticipate action courses.

However, as the preceding extracts highlight, this kind of recognition-primed response was not always considered desirable by practitioners. As demonstrated, this was particularly the case where participants, while under pressure to 'filter' referrals and manage 'workflow' efficiently, critically questioned the need to enact a standardised response to similarly presenting information. As I discussed in the literature review, Lipsky's (1980) concept of the 'street level bureaucrat' highlights the importance of a practitioners' discretion in child protection. Consequently, as demonstrated with the data, while some practitioners show a willingness to question prescriptive policy and practice frameworks, as Broadhurst et al. (2010c: 365) found, sense-making 'short-cuts' were used to categorise and/or filter referrals to manage workflow.

Filtering referrals and managing workflow

During periods of observation I was able to gather data on workflow management and consider how this cultural practice assisted the 'filtering out' of perceived inappropriate referrals. Based on information presented, the filtering out process took place where practitioners identified referrals as not meeting the threshold for intervention. I observed how the duty social worker's judgement that a referral or CCN did not meet the threshold and/or otherwise required NFA helped keep the number of IAs down. This practice of filtering referrals provided further data illustrating the implicit means by which practitioners' face-to-face contact with children and families in child protection is mediated as a second-order pursuit. Again, as Broadhurst et al. (2010c) found, my study highlights how a dominant performance culture encourages early categorisation and potentially premature filtering where information is interpreted as incomplete and/or requiring a lower-level response.

Although, through observation of workflow management, data on social workers' frustrations at having to operate within the constraints of a culture where direct work with children and families was seen as a second-order activity was captured. As the following observation field notes highlight, the main cause of practitioners' frustrations with workflow cultural rules and practices included: (1) being 'stuck' in the office and unable to engage face-to-face with children and families (2) having to prioritise new referrals and/or (3) having to complete IAs speedily to meet agency performance targets:

I feel like everything I do is half arsed, I just do it quickly because I have to, and it feels like a race against the clock all the time [SW: 6]

In my opinion...meeting families and [working on] open cases should be a priority, but they're not because it's all about graphs and targets...and I find it really frustrating having to be in the office writing up assessments all the time
[SW: 2]

Here insight into how sense-making in child protection is constrained by organisational priorities including the prioritisation of workflow management and the meeting of performance targets is offered. Throughout my study, where performance targets were identified as being prioritised, social workers' sense-making and judgement formulations were evidenced as compromised. Examples of this compromise included where practitioners acting as duty social workers were afforded limited time to discuss CCNs with children and families. These constraints in relation to strength of engagement with children and families were evidenced, for example, where cases were categorised as at a lower level due to presenting information. A limited strength of engagement with children and families was also identified where practitioners' sense-making, judgement and decision-making was accomplished following an IA completed having been based on a single 'home visit'.

Where referrals remained at a high level and/or were these were received from authoritative sources (e.g. the police or health professionals) some social workers were observed as becoming stressed and/or anxious. In relation to making sense of referrals from authoritative sources, while these were usually seen as a priority, several duty social workers' sense-making was observed as being reliant on dialogue with the manager. This was observed as encouraging a sense of certitude in cases categorised as 'more important' than others due to referral source. Among referral sources identified by participants as less authoritative were those received from

members of the public known as unreliable and/or from professionals known to be risk-anxious.

Although, whatever the source, where referrals remained ambiguous in nature due to a lack of information stress and anxiety continued to be expressed by some duty social workers. Data highlighting this finding on cause of stress and anxiety due to inherent uncertainty in child protection is exemplified within the following comment:

You have just got these referrals to get through, and sometimes it feels really scary and it's worrying because there is no time to do what needs to be done. I would work much different if I had the time instead of filling in boxes. I need to talk to people, get more information. Working like this makes me feel uncomfortable [Field note extract]

Evidenced here is how sense-making in child protection, where informed by organisational priorities, contrasted with the professional values, ethics and moral reasoning of some practitioners. Also evidenced is the practitioner's need for a communicative approach to sense-making and how this was compromised by a child protection system that discourages face-to-face contact with children and families. Again, as Broadhurst et al. (2010c) found, this data indicates how some social workers remain concerned about depersonalised practice that discourage reflexive dialogue with children and families. The data also indicates some social workers remain concerned about being required to make sense without information to inform reasoned judgement.

Where cases were deemed as not an immediate priority I observed a standardised practice where letters were forwarded to parents informing them of a referral or CCN.

These letters usually requested parents to contact children's services so CCN information received could be discussed. With this cultural practice an implicit workflow 'delay' and 'rationing' tactic was evidenced. Although, despite pressure to filter, delay and ration some referrals I observed how some cases were identified as in need of an immediate response. This was observed in several scenarios including where: (1) it had proven difficult for the practitioner to determine a reason to 'dispose' of a referral (2) the information gathered on a referral meant the nature of the concern remained ambiguous and/or incomplete and/or (3) regardless of available information the manager decided further inquiry remained necessary.

Notable was several practitioners' personal concerns in relation to what one participant described themselves as being a cause of '*disarray*' to children and families. This type of moral concern about unnecessary family intervention was observed as often more prevalent where the IRT manager was on leave. In such cases, a manager from another area team would be relocated to the IRT. Through observation of the different management styles the data I collected highlighted how acting team managers were identified as either risk-avoidant or risk-taking. The following extract highlights a study participant's concern for a families' right to privacy in one case where she was directed to undertake an IA by an acting manager:

Do you not think we take things too far, get involved with every Tom, Dick and Harry? I think we get too involved in far too many people's lives. I hate it when we have to act when we don't have to or when we have to because we do not have all the information [Field note extract]

Evidenced here is how sense-making in child protection can involve the utilising of the IA as a risk-avoidant bureaucratic 'tool' and risk assessment strategy.

Additionally, this extract presents data on how some practitioners demonstrate a capacity to critically and reflexively question the administrative use of prescriptive policy and practice frameworks. Also demonstrated is how a directive style of management can result in practitioners feeling disempowered and/or stigmatised through intervening into the lives of families reluctantly and/or in a coerced way. In several cases practitioners were observed as becoming frustrated with the acting manager's judgement and decision-making resulting in them having to either: (1) undertake family interventions and complete IAs when they did not agree with the decision or (2) agreeing to NFA when they felt an IA was necessary. On no occasion was the acting manager's decision observed as formally challenged by duty social workers. However, as the previous extract indicates, practitioners sometimes disputed the manager's decision surreptitiously with colleagues.

During the period I was situated within the IRT I was afforded the opportunity to observe several different styles of management utilised by the designated and acting managers. As indicated, where some managers were identified as risk-averse, corresponding with the literature on the influence of managerialism on the practice context (e.g. Lonne et al., 2009), their style of management was observed as monologic and directive. Although, where the designated IRT manager was concerned, the data I collected through observation, interview and personal experience of supervision identified how a more collaborative and/or dialogical approach was adopted. Other management styles identified included where acting managers were prepared to afford more senior practitioners the discretion to formulate judgement and make their own decisions on being presented with CCNs. Here, where sense-making in child protection was encouraged as an independent

accomplishment, some practitioners' responses to CCNs were observed as being informed by what Archer (2003: 210) describes as an 'autonomous reflexive' approach.

Taking referrals and processing CCNs

All CCNs and referrals to the IRT were taken by the ERAs who were required to input the information received into the children's services ICT (Information and Communication Technology) database. After being 'processed' via the ICT system referrals I observed how referrals were then passed by ERAs in written form to the duty social worker. Often when passing information to the duty social worker ERAs were observed as beginning a discussion with an opening statement including, for example, '*this one will need a home visit*' or '*this one looks really worrying*'.

This was a common scenario observed as leading to the duty social worker experiencing an initial sense of certitude or anxiety dependent on the scenario being presented by the ERA and/or what they felt might be the required response.²⁴ Having discussed the presenting information with the ERA I observed how some duty social workers then consulted with the manager. They did so prior to making sense of the information and formulating a judgement about what needed to happen. This was a cultural practice observed more often with cases that did not meet the criteria for a prescribed response and/or where information was interpreted as indicative of an uncertain or complex scenario.

²⁴ While the ERAs were not trained social workers, both had been situated within the IRT for a considerable length of time and therefore their experience and opinion was observed as valued and respected by most practitioners.

Regardless of the presenting information in study interviews, some practitioners offered insight into how they would always feel the need to consult with the manager before making sense, formulating judgement and making a decision:

I have always got the support of my manager and that makes my job so much easier because something will come in and you think it is a Section 47 and a strategy meeting is needed...and the manager will say 'right let's calm down' and she sees it from another perspective...and my managers got an open door policy and so well you know to be honest it is hard not to go in there every day...just to flag something up...because I feel you always need a second opinion [SW: 1]

With the above extract, what is presented is data on the inherent need for some practitioners to communicate with the manager and seek their opinion before they can make sense and formulate judgement. Here my data indicates, regardless of presenting scenarios and/or whether confirming or disconfirming of their sense-making and judgement formulation, some practitioners will always seek the manager's view. Another example of this communicative reflexive approach is highlighted in the following interview extract:

While there has never been a point where I have felt like I haven't got a clue what I am doing...neither has there been a point where I haven't been able to run something past my manager...sometimes it is like even if I just want to ask a question and it might be something trivial or something stupid...something that doesn't even need to be asked...I will ask it anyway [SW: 10]

With the above extract, what is presented is data highlighting how some practitioners need to engage with the team manager in a dialogical way to make sense in child protection. This phenomenon was identified in several cases across the data set where practitioners described aspects of their day-to-day sense-making practice in the context of study interviews. This approach to sense-making was also identified

during my observation of some duty social workers in their responses to cases not necessarily complex but where information received was interpreted as limited. For example, where referrals from the children's services out-of-hours emergency duty team (EDT) were presented by ERAs on some occasions I observed how these were described by duty social workers as lacking in information. This scenario was observed as frustrating as EDT workers were often unavailable to clarify information. This meant on occasion duty social workers were unable to decide if a referral had met the threshold for an IA and/or if a particular service or action was needed.

Determining thresholds and gatekeeping resources

I observed how the duty process involved social workers in the day-to-day practice of determining thresholds for intervention and gatekeeping resources. As Saltiel (2014) found, a key dilemma I observed as experienced by several social workers was how to interpret which cases were eligible for intervention and support while ensuring those that were potentially high-risk were not miscategorised. As noted, the main task of 'doing duty' required practitioners to make sense of information received then formulate a judgement as to whether there was a need for an IA, PIA, NFA or a different response. The following data extract highlights how due to lack of information often practitioners were unable to determine a threshold for intervention and/or decide what type of response was required until a home visit had been undertaken:

I work on a threshold and if I think it steps through and becomes child protection, well some things come in child protection or whatever...and it is difficult to determine and we go out...and assess the situation and it's not
[Field note extract]

At the point of deciding on the required action for some practitioners' sense-making was identified as formulated in a two-fold way. This two-fold approach was based on their: (1) identification of response to a previous similar presenting scenario and (2) capacity for understanding the longer-term resource implications of their judgement formulation. An example of this two-fold sense-making process is presented in the following interview extract. Here the data highlights where the practitioner was reflecting on her past response to CCNs as a NQSW and how this compared to her present approach:

When you first look at it [a referral or CCN] ...you think has the threshold been met...but at first [as a NQSW] you don't think about looking at the longer-term stuff...you cannot think longer-term at first...but you think what am I going to do...but now I would look at how I have dealt with similar things in the past and what this means in terms of a response and my involvement [SW: 6]

What is illustrated in the above extract is how the practitioner's approach to understanding thresholds and the longer-term implications of intervention had changed across time. This was an occurrence identified across the data set evidenced as allied to practitioners' changing interpretations and knowledge in respect of risk and child abuse. Changes to social workers' approaches to determining thresholds for intervention and managing risk across time were evidenced where they reflected on their practice in different ways. This is highlighted in the following extract where the practitioner describes her development in confidence to determine thresholds and manage risk:

I initially co-worked duty and child protection cases and complex child in need cases...I think if I had gone straight into child protection I would have had everyone on a Child Protection Plan...I would have thought of all the risks...but now I look at referrals and I think can we not work with a Child in Need Plan? [SW: 2]

This interview data indicates how practitioners' thresholds for intervention can change across time. However, what I also observed was how some more experienced practitioners had become adept at avoiding family interventions and gatekeeping the service by referring cases to other agencies. Among cases commonly referred to other agencies, for example, were those where children were demonstrating behavioural difficulties in school. With these types of referrals, where no risk to the child from parents was identified, some duty social workers were observed as encouraging referring agents to utilise the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).²⁵ Although, I observed in some cases how referring agencies remained reluctant to undertake CAFs due to considering the needs of the child to be too high. As Helm (2013) found, in some cases I observed duty social workers utilising threshold criteria as a bureaucratic tool to gatekeep services and/or avoid IAs.

Where referral numbers increased, and therefore the need to gatekeep the service became a greater priority, I noted how the manager became more proactive in helping to control the workflow. Workflow control by the manager included her being situated within the duty room while reviewing the CCNs and/or referrals sitting with the duty social worker. Here I observed how, based on presenting information, the manager prioritised which referrals needed an urgent response and which did not. For those NQSWs acting as duty social workers this cultural practice supporting their sense-making was observed as instilling a sense of certitude where a high level of referrals remained.

²⁵ At the time of undertaking the study the CAF (Common Assessment Framework) was a standardised framework used by a range of agencies to assess the needs of children in order to decide how those needs should be met. Prior to the Early Help Assessment (EHA) introduced following the Munro Report (2011), the CAF was used to facilitate support where a child did not meet the 'in need' threshold criteria for children's services.

I observed how during those times when she was situated in the duty room some referrals that may have been allocated for NFA by the duty social worker were allocated for an IA by the team manager or visa versa. Here the collaborative practice of gatekeeping resources illuminated how the 'latent conditions for error' (Broadhurst et al. 2010c) can occur where the pressure to process referrals remains present within a statutory setting. As both Broadhurst et al (2010c) and Helm (2013) found, a key observation made in my study was where, on supporting workflow management, the team manager used the tactic of 'strategic deferment'. An example of strategic deferment was based on my observation of an approach to practice where the manager directed the duty social worker to send ambiguous referrals back to the referrer and/or request more information. Here how the shared or conflicting views of the manager and duty social worker informed a response to a referral was captured in my study data. Based on my observation of the manager assisting with workflow, my data identified how the 'received ideas' (Rojek, Peacock and Collins, 1988) of one practitioner can influence the sense-making of another.

Within my data evidenced was how gatekeeping resources was a process continuing beyond workflow management, IA and case allocation. For example, in the following case study extract the social worker describes how a judgement to remove a child from her parent's care was (re)formulated due to a lack of resources:

I know one colleague some years ago went to see a family on duty...they were in crisis...lots of concerns and mum had learning disabilities...the child was presented with bruises and a decision was made that we would accommodate her because the risks were too high and the social worker advised the mum who was distressed and rightly so as it is not an easy experience to go through...but it came back and we had to change the plan because we couldn't find a [family] placement...and the child stayed at home...so we have got threshold documents in terms of what the department will say is a risk...but sometimes you end up having to use strategies to reduce the risk [SW: 13]

Presented here is data on the fluidity of thresholds for intervention and how these can rise due to management of priorities and/or limited resources. Also highlighted is how interpretations of risk as a discourse and socially constructed concept can be influenced by the requirements to gatekeep scarce resources. Here the study data illuminates how thresholds for intervention and gatekeeping contribute to the uncertain nature of sense-making in child protection and potential for error of judgement. Also highlighted is how potential for the erroneous categorising of children 'at risk' as 'in need' can be encouraged through a child protection system where thresholds for intervention and constructions of risk can be determined by resources.

Sense-making and the practice context

In this section I present data on the practice context(s) within which day-to-day sense-making in child protection was identified in my study as accomplished. Among the main practice contexts highlighted are the homes of children and families and inter-professional strategy meetings. Presented as themes drawn mainly from study interviews in this section I present data highlighting the nature of: (1) practitioners' family-based engagement with children and families (2) practitioners' management of hostility and complex parent-professional relationships and (3) inter-professional relationships in child protection.

Home visits

One of the main practice contexts within which sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection takes place is in the homes of children and families (Piper, 2013; Saltiel, 2014). Within my study interviews several practitioners

reflected on child protection cases where sense-making, judgement and decision-making had occurred during home visits across a range of scenarios. In one case study the practitioner described how a child disclosed to a teacher how she had been physically chastised by her mother. To make sense of the child's family situation, and to assist in formulating a judgement about the necessary action to be taken, the practitioner described how she needed to visit the parents at home. The following extract highlights how the practitioner used the home visit to make sense of the child's circumstances and formulate judgement about necessary action required following disclosure of abuse:

'I went [to the school] to see the child...I noticed her head was moving...an infestation...lice dropping off...her hair...and I thought this is awful and I knew I was faced with severe neglect...she [the child] was telling me her mother had hit her and pulled her hair...and I was thinking...no matter what this child's disclosing this is severe...she was worried about going home and I spoke to the manager and agreed the need for a medical in relation to suspected hitting...and there was old bruising and scaring...I had spoken to the parents [on the telephone] the parent...and there was lots of anger said...keep her we don't want her back...too much Tracey Beaker so I then had to go out...speak to the parents [face-to-face] and they were just mean...the brother was standing up getting in my face...I said right I need to see her bedroom...and it was an absolute tip there was one sheet on the bed...bedding was scruffy...clothes at the bottom in a black bin bag...the other side...well you had what could be described as a princesses' bedroom to her half-sister who was dad's full child...teddy bears, toys...from what I had witnessed...we decided on an emergency foster placement [SW: 3]

What the data illustrates is how insight into the nature of a child's home conditions can consolidate a practitioners' provisional sense-making and judgement formulation (Ferguson, 2004a). With this case scenario, following the child's disclosure, through the process of observing her home conditions and gaining further insight into the nature of the parent's attitudes and behaviour towards her, the practitioner could support her formulating 'severe child neglect' hypothesis. This approach to sense-making, where family-based interventions operated as a determinate factor in the

judgement formulation process, while evidenced across my data set was not confined to initial home visits. For example, home visits undertaken as part of practitioners' longer-term engagement with children and families was described on several occasions as the conduit for (re)formulating a judgement about a child's safety.

In one case sense-making and the formulation of judgement was identified as resulting in a change from a child in need plan to a safeguarding action. This sense-making and judgement (re)formulation process, where longer-term cases move from a child 'in need' to a child 'at risk' scenario, is illustrated in the following extract:

Mum came to our attention from school...every now and then school would report one of the children was unkempt...I became involved on a child in need basis...mum was so engaging willing to try anything...we agreed a plan of what she had to do...we had social work support assistants going in every other day to help her...she would just sit...space out...I visited and spent time with the children...and that was worrying because...they would say they had chicken nuggets for tea...uncooked straight out of the freezer...the house became really dirty...the little one started to show signs of failure to thrive...was incontinent and smearing and mum says she couldn't see the smearing on the walls...so following the [home] visit I went to the manager...expressed concerns and said now this case has reached the threshold for child protection [SW: 4]

Illustrated here is how the participant's reflections on family-based interventions involving doing things 'for' or 'to' a child and/or to their parents was perceived as less desirable than doing things 'with' them. Although, as the data illustrates for some practitioners engaging parents in a 'doing for' process that supports them in improving home conditions was seen by some social workers as a means of reducing risk to children. However, where parents were unable to sustain a level of domestic standard in keeping with some practitioner's expectations who took part in my study this was a concern.

Also, seen as a concern was where parents were considered unwilling to: (1) accept or agree their behaviour was unacceptable (2) consider changing their behaviour and/or (3) where they minimised the risks posed to their children. Data highlighting how one practitioner made sense of these types of case scenarios is presented in the following interview extract:

When it comes to the response to concerns ...whether they [parents] accept them or not...or deny them informs the decision...because if you are working with a family and you have a parent who is saying I have hit a brick wall and I'm not coping...whatever the case may be I can work...with those types of families because they [parents] want to change...they can see the need to...when you have got a parent who won't communicate with you when you talk to them...[or] who is denying the problem...I mean that just heightens the risk [SW: 13]

In the above data extract highlighted is how sense-making in child protection can be dependent on a parent's response to family-based intervention. Noteworthy, is how the practitioner views parental co-operation as the foundation for establishing child safety. Contrastingly, inferred in the data is how risk is viewed as increased where parental co-operation is not present. Here the data highlights the complexities of parent-practitioner relationships in child protection. Among these is how the active engagement of parents in the context of home visits and/or family-based interventions is considered essential to child safety processes in child protection.

Where parents are not 'on board' or are unable to keep a certain level of domestic standards as required by practitioners and/or where they are otherwise unwilling to accept concerns my study data indicated how this can contribute to sense-making in child protection and the (re)formulation of judgement in longer-term cases. However, an important contrast within the data set was how one social worker highlighted a reflexive awareness of how her own standards might influence her

sense-making and judgement formulation. The practitioner's critical awareness of how her own life experience and personal standards might influence her implicit expectations of parents is illustrated within the following interview extract:

I think in terms of what my standards are from my own life experience...that comes up a lot...I am conscious of it...I like to remind myself this goal isn't for me...what I would like for me and my family...but it is good enough for this family...and just because I have experienced something similar it doesn't mean it's the same experience [SW: 4]

Complexity of parent-practitioner relationships

Data drawn from case study samples highlighted how practitioners in child protection cases managed the complexities of parent-professional relationships. A key reoccurring theme identified within my data was the importance practitioners placed on developing and maintaining positive relationships with parents. This was seen by several of my study participants as essential to the ongoing sense-making, judgement and decisions-making process. Elements of this theme were described in a number of cases and my study findings highlighted how a positive relationship with parents was maintained where: (1) practitioners had described being clear with parents about their role and responsibilities towards children and families (2) where practitioners had undertaken child and family intervention without any preconceived ideas or judgement formulation and where (3) practitioners conveyed authenticity and empathy toward parents in response to anger and/or hostility. The following data extract highlights how some practitioners could make sense of parental hostility in a non-judgmental way while managing the complexity of relationships:

In lots of cases parents can be angry, hostile and I'm fine, I understand and accept it. I...help them understand what's going on, years and years of social workers getting the reputation that you have come to take the kids away. I put myself in their shoes and how they might be feeling, quite ashamed or

embarrassed...I explain the reason why I am here, to try and understand what has gone on and how...to get their views, their explanation so I can understand more about what needs to happen next, involve them in the process when it gets to child protection [SW: 13]

Here the data highlights how in the process of sense-making the participant values the opinion of parents, and while practising in a non-judgement and transparent way, utilises the parent's views to help her formulate judgement and decide on '*what needs to happen next*'. This finding demonstrates the practitioner's reflexive awareness of the stigma attached to social workers and how family intervention can have a negative impact on a parent's identity. With this data extract evidence of family-minded practice(s) as advocated by Featherstone, White and Morris (2014) is provided within my study. This is due to the participant being mindful after '*years and years of social workers getting... [a bad] reputation*' not to repeat the cycle of disempowering practice demonstrated by social workers who had been involved with the family on previous occasions.

As Featherstone, White and Morris (2014: 21) indicate, where social workers engage in contextually conditioned practice cycles this potentially 'imputes certain characteristics.... discrediting...the person [while] impinging on their whole identity'. How a parent's identity might be constructed based on the type of relationship parents and professionals develop was identified in my study as influenced in many cases by the practitioners' child welfare orientation. Dependent on their personal experience, professional values, concerns, beliefs and practice approaches within my study participants' child welfare orientation was identified as broadly indicative of a 'child-focused' or 'family-minded' approach.

Some social workers who practised a family-minded approach to sense-making were identified as doing so while describing parents as lacking in culpability. As Kedell (2012) found, within several of the case study samples, the practitioner's reluctance to confirm parental culpability in child protection cases without aspects of blame alleviation was identified. In one of my case study sample, for example, where there were concerns that children had been physically chastised by their mother, data on the process of constructing parental identities in child protection as lacking in culpability was captured. Demonstrated in the case study sample was where the practitioner valued the promotion of the rights of the children to be safe while remaining within their mother's care. As the following data extract illustrates the social worker's approach to practice characterises a family-minded child welfare orientation:

I had to interview the kids to make sure they were safe and they made no disclosure mam had hit them. With mum's background there was a massive history of domestic violence, and she had misused drugs. These kids had been through so much when you got to the bottom of it. But mam did a really big turnaround. Looked at her background, although it was really upsetting because dad had died of an overdose, ex-partner had died of an overdose and mum had tried to kill herself. However, she was able to understand the impact [SW: 6]

While indicative of a family-minded practitioner, the data extract illustrates how the study participant adopts an approach to sense-making that is critical and reflexive in nature. This is evidenced as the practitioner describes how she does not draw on taken-for-granted ideas about parenting practice to inform her judgement. With this data demonstrated is how biased knowledge about child safety and the consequences of poor parenting practice(s) resulting from a difficult background is mediated by the practitioner in the context of a family-minded approach. This is

illustrated in the data as the practitioner first chooses to interview the children alone to *'make sure they were safe and they made no disclosure'*.

Then, rather than assume history of domestic violence and substance misuse pose a risk of physical harm to the children, the practitioner encourages the parent to develop insight into how her past experience remained a potential causal influence on her present behaviour. Here my data offers some insight into how sense-making in child protection can be mediated through a practitioner's professional values, beliefs, concerns and child welfare orientation. Although, insight is also offered into some of the potential unsafe biases evidenced in my data. For example, in relation to sense-making in child protection where a 'rule of optimism' as identified by Dingwall, Eekelaar and Murray (1983) is potentially applied unreflexively.

Where participants demonstrated family-minded practices my study data illustrating practitioner's approach to assessing a parent's reduced culpability was often coalesced with their belief in a parent's capacity to provide safe care. Highlighted within the data was how this belief was often encouraged by evidence of a parent's difficult past and present perceived openness, honesty and willingness to work with practitioners to effect change. Here my data indicates how sense-making in child protection and judgement formulation might be influenced by a practitioners' commitment to family-minded practice. However, this was not a child welfare orientation identified as practised consistently. This was due to several case studies highlighting how some social workers believed in the importance of a child-focused approach to practice.

In cases where children become the sole focus for intervention, Featherstone, White and Morris (2014) argue, relationships with parents, siblings and wider family members becomes secondary. Highlighting a tendency to overlook family strengths in child protection Featherstone, White and Morris propose a common scenario where practitioners utilise the discourse of the 'paramountcy principle' to inform their judgement and decision-making. Where a paramountcy discourse is utilised a child's rights may be emphasised. However, in the process of enacting a child-focused discourse Featherstone, White and Morris argue a child's relational needs and their parent's right to negotiate safe care become marginalised.

This was a reoccurring theme identified within my study data where some participants equated the idea of being a 'good' social worker with a child-focused discourse. Data illustrating this finding was captured primarily in response to the interview question: '*What is it about you as a person and as a professional that makes you a really 'good' social worker?*' The following data extract highlights how a child-focused discourse informed the study participant's sense-making in child protection:

I'm very child-focused in everything I do. Children always come first that shines through I think in my work. I'll say to parents an awful lot, yes I'm here to work with you and I will support you. But my focus will always be your children. If supporting you is better for my outcome that is great. But if I have to make a choice it'll be your child I'm focusing on [SW: 5]

Evidenced in the data is how a child-focused welfare orientation had influenced the social workers' approach to child protection practice. Also evidenced is how 'the language of the child' as discussed by Featherstone, White and Morris (2014: 2-3) is being utilised by the practitioner. As Featherstone, White and Morris (ibid) indicate,

for some of my study participants among taken-for-granted practices were how an 'I'm only here for the child' discourse was utilised to justify intervention. In contrast to other practitioners who practice a family-minded approach, some case reflections highlighted how a child-focused discourse was used to support practitioners' decisions to intervene into family life while contributing to construction of a 'moral identity' Featherstone, White and Morris (2014: 2-3) in child protection.

A common theme identified within my study interviews was how sense-making in child protection informed by a child-focused discourse undervalued parents' strengths, perspectives and opinions. As Keddell (2012) found, some practitioners' undervaluing of parental views in the process of sense-making was informed by the supporting discourse of practising in the 'child's best interests'. Data captured in my study in relation to a child's best interests did not always identify family maintenance as an important outcome in child protection. The following interview extract offers an example of data highlighting how one practitioner's sense-making was influenced by a child's best interest discourse:

I think I'm a good social worker in the way...I keep the child central at all times. Even though the mum and dad or grandma or grandad they obviously have views you know. But I always bring them back to what's best for the child, the best pathway for the child. That's what I'm there for and obviously we give support to parents and things like that, but I think the child always remains central to me...[their] needs always remain central to me, and I go from there [SW: 10]

In relation to the complexities of parent-professional relationships this was illustrated in several case study reflections where practitioners identified a positive outcome being achieved for children and families. Among the complexities discussed were where parents were described as reluctant to engage with the practitioner or the

support plan and/or where they might present as hostile. To address these types of complexities one practitioner reflected on a case where she confronted a parent's disengagement with a CPP and hostile behaviour. The case study data highlights how the practitioner was able to build a positive relationship with the parent of a newborn child on a CPP after her hostile behaviour was challenged. This process is illustrated in the data extract below:

Mum didn't turn up at the court...hadn't engaged on the previous [home] visit so I went straight out with the health visitor and when we got there both of us thought we could hear a child crying...and found we weren't getting an answer at the door...and the health visitor was saying 'let's not antagonise her'... and I said 'but we can hear a child' and that helped...because I cannot just walk away because we cannot get an answer at the door...mum might be poorly or whatever...and actually she [mother opens the door and] is furious and was eventually arrested for breach of the peace...three weeks down the line we are sitting in a meeting and we are working it out...and there may be the odd person where you decided there is a need for a change of social worker...but that it is not a reason not to address things...because if you don't anxiety will build up and it will have a negative outcome for the child [SW: 5]

While the complexities of parent-professional relationships are evidenced also illustrated are several factors identified as influencing sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection. Among these is practitioners' child welfare orientation that in the data extract above is identified as child-focused. Other factors highlighted as influencing sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection were the attitudes of parents and their behaviour towards social workers.

Managing parental stress and hostility

In the final sections of part 1 of this chapter I present data on managing parental hostility and distress. I also present data on the complex nature of sense-making in child protection in the context of inter-professional relationships. As noted, the study

interview scheduled utilised the question: *'What do you think it is about you as a person and as a professional that makes you a really 'good' social worker?'* As the above section highlights this question assisted in the capture of data where being child-focused and/or practising in the child's best interests was one of the main qualities required of a social worker. However, this was not a consistent theme identified across the data set and other personal qualities were evidenced. One reoccurring theme, as indicated, was how some practitioners considered being a 'good' social worker was commensurate with ability to manage parental stress and hostility while building positive relationships. Data illustrating this theme is presented in the following extract:

To me I think what makes me a good social worker is I'm really good at building relationships with people...especially when it's a bit difficult and sometimes obviously when it gets confrontational...I think by dealing with parents and building a relationship...you get more from it [SW: 10]

Engaging parents in discussions regarding concerns about their capacity for safe care has been identified in the literature (e.g. Featherstone, White and Morris, 2014) as stressful and stigmatising for parents. In my study managing parental stress and hostility was identified in several case studies as a key social work skill and an essential part of the sense-making process. As noted, identified across my data set was how several participants viewed managing the stress and hostility demonstrated by some parents as part and parcel of being a competent practitioner. Practising a high level of capability in the context of adversarial parent-professional relationships, particularly where a child was considered at risk, was identified as central to several practitioners' idea of what it meant to be a good social worker. However, with data drawn from my study interviews the personal and professional foundations for being

able to make sense of and manage episodes of hostility and/or ongoing adversarial parent-professional relationships was identified as inconsistent.

For example, for most participants who were NQSWs managing parent-professional relationships was identified as difficult. This was especially so, while acting as duty social worker, where NQSWs were required to manage calls from parents and/or meet with them while they were presenting as hostile. However, for those practitioners who were identified as more experienced, where required to deal with parental hostility either face-to-face or via telephone, this was evidenced as commonly accomplished in a calm and confident way. In most cases, the capacity to understand parental stress and hostility was identified within interviews as based on a practitioner's professional values, beliefs, concerns and/or personal experience.

This frequently reoccurring theme is presented in the following data extracts:

I always view everything as a blank canvas...I always think this is my opportunity to make a difference...I am very able to engage with people as I genuinely want to help...I feel very privileged to be in that position...I have a lot of hope for the future for families...I find interacting [with parents] at any level quite easy...I can talk [with parents] ...and manage conflict very well because I want to reach out...whatever the situation may be [SW: 9]

Not to sound like I know it all but with my background...I'm from a one parent family and I've been in the care system...my mother had mental health issues and I'm not suggesting you have to have been unfortunate but with that type of start...your approach is a little bit more understanding...insightful into the difficulties some people have experienced...and why they might be angry and stressed and some of the scams...they try to pull because you have been there and have done that [SW: 13]

Demonstrated above is the respective practitioner's ability to make sense of a parent's stress and potential for hostile behaviour. In both cases, sense-making is based on the practitioner's capacity to empathise through drawing on professional experience and their value-commitments including being non-judgemental.

Additionally, demonstrated is a capacity for critical and reflexive practice due to implicit acknowledgment by the study participants of how their taken-for-granted assumptions can inform sense-making in child protection. As with the second data extract, several practitioners reflected on their personal experience of social work intervention. Consequently, how this helped them to make sense of the frustrating and anger provoking experiences of state intervention by social workers from a parent's perspective was evidenced.

Here the importance of a practitioner's personal biography and how this might inform their professional values, beliefs, concerns and practice approach to sense-making in child protection was further illustrated. This theme is evidenced in the data extract below were one practitioner, due to her personal experience of social work intervention, described how she had developed her capacity to empathise, make sense of and manage parental frustration, stress and hostility:

I've been on the outside...my experience in light of things happening with my [disabled] daughter...lots of professionals involved and sitting there as a parent and you can feel when someone approaches you in a negative way...and how they don't want to listen...how they make assumptions...not thinking you [as a parent] might have a different perspective...and that's really frustrating...[so] having the ability to empathise and communicate with parents...to make things clear from the start and be honest and say I may say something you don't like and you won't want to hear and it might make you angry but it is so you can make an informed decision [SW: 11]

Illustrated is a potential cause of hostility within the parent-practitioner relationship in child protection and how this can be encouraged by social workers. As indicated, this is especially so where a parent's opinion or perspective is overlooked and/or otherwise marginalised by social workers. An interesting finding presented within the data is how the social worker's sense-making in child protection, and consequently her capacity for a critical and reflexive approach to practice, has been

informed by her experience of inter-professional relationships. Discussed in the following section is how sense-making in child protection and the practice of reflexivity was identified in the study as often taking place in the context of the relationships social workers had with other professionals.

Inter-professional relationships

The *Working Together* (Department of Health, 2015) guidance defines child protection practice as an essentially inter-professional pursuit. However, as highlighted in chapter 2 the failures and complexities of inter-professional relationships including, for example, the potential for biased sense-making in child protection have been evidenced in the literature. In my study evidence of the nature of inter-professional relationships, and the influence of these on practitioners' sense-making in child protection, emerged as an important theme. This was encouraged by a process whereby the nature of inter-professional relationships, and how these were experienced by participants was communicated consistently in the context of study interviews without them being prompted.

Several participants referred to their awareness of a 'hierarchy' of inter-professional relationships that exists in child protection. This was illustrated in several case study samples where descriptions of medical opinion and/or the status and/or 'expertise' of other professionals was considered to be held in higher esteem than those of social workers. However, a frequently reoccurring theme was how opinions of other professionals and their approaches to practice were valued, challenged or otherwise viewed indifferently by participants. In several cases opinions and language used by

medical experts and other professionals was described as having been challenged or questioned by some study participants. This theme is exemplified in the following case study extract where medical professionals are described as utilising professional language, status and 'expert' opinion to support a potentially erroneous judgement:

The baby had come into hospital following a seizure...whilst in hospital he fell off dad's chest on to the floor...staff didn't feel the need for an X ray then the consultant came on the next day and had concerns about a possible fracture...I had to do a Section 47...there was fifteen professionals around the table all speaking jargon 'bi-lateral sub-lateral haematoma'...all sitting there with their concerns...the child had epilepsy and dad suffered blackouts and no history of drink or drugs...an MRI would have been able to tell us if the swelling was outer or inner brain...if it was under it would give cause for concern...so we have the most important pieces of information missing...so we are in a strategy [meeting]...and I am thinking we are forgetting an important piece of information missing...and all these professionals are saying...unanimous...parents no longer to have unsupervised contact...professionals had made their judgement and when it came to it we had conflict as we didn't have the most important piece of information...[but] it was deemed as if [the child's injury]...was non-accidental [SW: 3]

While the opinion of health professionals is identified as an essential part of the sense-making process the data highlights how the authoritative opinion of medical professionals can influence outcomes in child protection. Also highlighted is how the complex and uncertain nature of some cases means social workers are often required to challenge other professionals whose knowledge-base and/or 'expertise' remains largely dominant and/or uncontested. As a theme I will discuss in more detail, how sense-making in child protection might be influenced by professional knowledge, 'expertise' and risk anxiety is identified in the data extract. Common in study interviews was how participants viewed the knowledge of health professionals as essential yet in some cases unreliable. As I will illustrate further, the need to draw on professional knowledge to inform sense-making in child protection was

identified by several participants as being experienced as an uncertain, ambiguous and/or unreliable process.

Performing professional identity

In my observations of professional communication within multi-agency meeting and within case studies presented within study interviews inter-professional talk and how practitioners perform their professional identity was captured. In the extract above highlighting talk in the context of a hospital setting the findings demonstrates how risk was interpreted and how arguments for particular decisions were constructed by health professionals. White and Featherstone (2005) indicate how understanding formulation of risk, and how professional identities are acted out in the context of multi-agency communication processes, can contribute to how cases are interpreted categorised and disposed. Within case studies the cultural differences in child protection practice between health and social care professionals and the capacity for professional talk to construct different 'versions' of the same case was evidenced.

The importance of recognising this phenomenon as a critically-reflexive practitioner is highlighted by Taylor and White (2000). As Taylor and White describe, professional talk can maintain the cultural differentiation between agencies and act as the catalyst to development of the tacit knowledge that informs different professionals' different reasoning processes in child protection. The cultural differences in terms of inter-professional talk and working practices between multi-agency professionals was evidenced as examples of the performative nature of professional identity. As I will discuss, strategy meetings were observed as highlighting where professional talk

was often coalesced, polarised or disparate. In the case of polarised opinion, the problem of professional resistance to the cultural working practices of children's services where, for example, a social worker refused to score a case as high risk maintained a sense of decision-making hierarchy in child protection.

With several of the case studies presented by study participants additional aspects of the performative nature of professional identity were highlighted. Among these was where social workers described how professionals from other agencies might have lacked assertiveness to make or support a decision. Additionally, in child protection cases where statutory intervention was required, some social workers described how professionals from other agencies were concerned their joint action might negatively affect their relationship with a parent. Within the context of interview talk, several social workers were identified as performing a professional identity that was 'child rescuing' and/or 'moral careered' (Featherstone, White and Morris, 2014: 17). As highlighted, examples of a child rescuing professional identity included where practitioners described how they were child-centred in their approach and less concerned about other members of their family.

Drawing on Dingwall (1977), what White and Featherstone (2005) discuss as 'atrocious stories' were also described by participants. These were identified where social workers described shortcomings of other professionals. As I will discuss, examples included a paediatrician who misdiagnosed a child as having been sexually abused and a health visitor who was willing to leave a family where it was considered a child inside the family home may have been at risk. An interesting finding was where social workers revealed the positive aspects of their professional

identity on discussing the shortcomings of other professionals in the context of study interviews. In contrast, and again as I will discuss, some social workers described how the shortcomings of other professionals and/or their display of a more authoritative professional identity left them feeling undermined and/or stigmatised.

Multi-agency signs of safety strategy meetings

Where a CCN had been received and a course of action could not be decided, I observed now multi-agency signs of safety (SOS) strategy meetings were utilised to inform sense-making in child protection. My attendance at SOS meetings allowed me to observe inter-professional sense-making, judgement and decision-making and some of the associated processes identified within the literature as occurring in the context of inter-professional groups. As Kelly (2000) highlighted, these included group polarisation, groupthink and a tendency among some professionals to abdicate their responsibility to offer an opinion. As Stanley and Mills (2014) found, what also became visible in SOS meetings was how discourses of risk informed practitioners sense-making in child protection. In the following interview extract, the data highlights how some professionals are inclined to abdicate responsibility to offer an opinion and how language and risk discourse can influence inter-professional sense-making:

I was allocated a child and...had three [SOS strategy meetings] regarding the family but ultimately it was my decision that we went with the Child Protection Plan. I do find a lot of professionals will go along with you if you suggest a Child Protection Plan. There are not many who will sit back and say 'no'. You use the signs of safety margin, scaling questions and the manager always tends to ask the social worker first what they think, what the scores are and the others will say 'yes I agree, yes I agree'. That frustrates me because we are not getting a true picture of what professionals actually think. So ultimately it's my decision, and my anxieties at the forefront. It's a joint investigation but we do the decision-making [SW: 2]

As noted, evidenced here is the phenomenon where despite there being a potentially wide range of differing opinion these are not always communicated in the context of inter-professional relationships. As with the data on the expert opinion of medical professionals this finding supports the proposal of Kelly (2000: 49) who highlights, where the judgement of an inter-professional groups' 'most dominant' and/or 'best member' is viewed as authoritative, it is often assumed by other members to be reliable. Although, this was not the case in all circumstances as I observed where SOS was used to inform care planning how social workers' opinions were challenged by some parents.

Spratt (2001) suggests any inter-professional meeting will acquire a degree of sense-making democratisation through encouraging participation of parents. However, where utilised to decide on an action in suspected child abuse cases, I observed how SOS strategy meetings took place without parents being invited. It was in the context of observing 'professionals only' SOS meetings that the process of inter-subjective sense-making in child protection became most visible. My observation of SOS meetings highlighted the strengths and weakness of this standardised practice. These were identified by some practitioners in interviews as illustrated in the data presented below:

Whilst I do like signs of safety because it is proactive and positive...and you do look at the whole family and the signs of safety within it...you cannot then be fooled into becoming too optimistic with the language [SW: 9]

Here some important empirical insights into sense-making in child protection and the practice of a critical form of reflexivity are offered. For example, while SOS is seen as a positive and potentially family-minded practice the participant demonstrates an

awareness of how professional language can influence sense-making in child protection. What is interesting is how the potential for positive or overly '*optimistic*' sense-making in child protection using SOS is highlighted in the data as being critically-reflexively understood by the practitioner. Although, this approach was not identified as consistent as practitioners' understanding of the causal influence on sense-making of SOS was not always communicated in study interviews.

In my observations of practice, I noted how the format for SOS meetings entailed the 'lead professional' who had convened the meeting being requested by the manager to offer an overview of agency involvement and/or the nature of current concerns. I observed how most often the lead professional would be a social worker who would report on a diverse range of issues. These included, for example, a summary of: (1) past and present involvement with the family (2) a parent's (usually mothers') needs and attitude toward the child and/or social worker and (3) the parent's perceived ability to provide safe care. A common observation was where some professionals would disagree with the social worker's opinion the threshold had not been met for a child protection response. In contrast, where the social worker argued a child protection response was necessary most professionals were identified as following suit. As the following data excerpt highlights this process allied to the phenomenon of groupthink was a reoccurring theme:

'I think it [SOS] has been quite helpful...because...we are quite anxious child protection practitioners...we are [now] allowed much more to think about what it [risk] means, to explore area...but I think the group process as it exists allows for what I call laying eggs syndrome where that one serves this and that one serves that and so on [SW: 9]

Here again illustrated is the practitioner's critically-reflexive awareness of the groupthink process which can occur within the context of SOS meetings. Acknowledging how sense-making in child protection can be informed by risk anxiety the study participant states '*we were quite anxious child protection practitioners*'. On making this statement the participant is highlighting how SOS as an inter-professional sense-making process creates a potentially false sense of certitude. As Keddel (2012) identified, in the context of SOS meetings risk to children was often observed in my study as an expressed concern of the whole inter-professional group.

The chair's interpretation(s) of the group expressed concerns were observed as determined in respect of their relevance and/or impact on the child's welfare and the potentially known or perceived harm likely to be experienced. As I had noted in my reflective diary the gravity, frequency and impact of particular circumstances on a child's safety and/or future welfare was often determined by professionals within SOS strategy meetings. Consequently, parents' opinions of the causal influence of socio-economic factors on their existing capacity to provide safe care, for example, and how these might be addressed were identified as sometimes omitted from the SOS sense-making, judgement and decision-making process.

Here my observations highlight further how risk discourse was used by professionals in the context of SOS meetings and how the language of child protection influenced the sense-making, judgement and decision-making process. Also, evidenced further in my observation data was where emotional framing was used as statements by professionals such as '*i'm really worried for this little boy*' or '*this family worries me*' were identified as common practice. As Kelly (2000) highlights these kinds of

problem framing statements based on a practitioner's interpretation of risk can act as the precursor to the phenomenon of groupthink and/or other collective sense-making in child protection.

As discussed in chapter 2 complicating factors in SOS are, for example, those aspects of a child's circumstances where a concern is present but the available information does not indicate them to be at immediate risk. In cases where parental history and present behaviours were identified as a concern, again as Keddel (2012) found, I observed how evidenced culpability was minimised by some professionals in SOS meetings. As noted in my study, participants' case study reflections complicating factors were described in the context of SOS meetings as those occasions where parents did not accept child concerns and/or where they were deemed non-compliant with CPPs. Here, as D'Cruz (2004a) found, my study data offered insight into how some practitioners' had a tendency to construct parents' identities as 'dangerous'.

Reder et al. (1993: 99) describe how some parents feel they have limited control over the child protection process. Therefore, Reder et al. (ibid) argue, they will protect themselves by securing a 'boundary' and avoiding professionals. Whilst this is an important area of learning from research, the possibility a hostile and/or non-compliant parent may be fearful of social work intervention was observed as not always being acknowledged by professionals within SOS meetings. Where concern remained, for example, due to parents' hostility and/or perceived non-compliance a 'danger statement' was observed as being co-constructed by professionals.

The danger statement represented the collective view of those professionals who attended SOS meeting. Dependent upon a practitioner's threshold criteria and/or conceptualisation(s) of risk I observed how the SOS process held potential to construct parental identities and/or determine the level and nature of intervention to be taken by social workers. I observed how any taken-for-granted assumptions and/or alternative views, perceptions, behaviours, situations or potential courses of action which may have fallen outside of the stated concerns of professionals were not discussed by practitioners. Here data in relation to how sense-making in child protection is informed by a risk-oriented discourse (Lonne et al., 2009) was captured within my study.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this section illustrate how the study participants' sense-making in the context of their day-to-day experience of 'doing' child protection was dominated by complexity and uncertainty. The literature review highlighted how making sense and formulation of judgement, especially where the nature of referrals remain uncertain and ambiguous, raises issues for decision-making in child protection and the outcomes children and families experience. For example, while operating within the constraints of prescriptive policy and practice frameworks that can encourage hasty categorisation of referrals in many cases, within my study it was clear further time was required so practitioners could make reasoned judgement.

Although, as illustrated with the data highlighting one practitioner's reluctance to treat all similar presenting scenarios as requiring the same response, examples of how

some social workers demonstrate criticality and reflexivity in child protection was evidenced. However, as several other studies (Broadhurst et al., 2010c) have found, how some practitioners in my study might be inclined to utilise heuristics as a biased 'short-cut' for filtering out referrals whilst making sense of ambiguous information was identified in my study. Here, as Broadhurst et al. (2010b) caution, possibility of erroneous reasoning and judgement in child protection was evidenced in my study. Also evidenced was how potential for (mis)categorise of child 'at risk' cases as 'in need' cases in the context of a managerialist agenda is possible.

Where studies are concerned with sense-making, judgement and decision-making the complexity of the situated and subjective nature of day-to-day practice and the practice context needs to be examined (Saltiel, 2014). In my attempt at an exploration of these complexities, a conclusion to be drawn is how prescriptive policy and practice frameworks, whilst representative of a techno-rational paradigm, are identified as limited. This is especially the case where more judicious sense-making has been identified within my data as required in cases where the risk to a child remained uncertain. As with, for example, with the case of the parent with mental health difficulties who was offered family-based support.

Prior to the social worker's (re)formulation of judgement and decision to remove the children, an 'informal logic of risk management' (Broadhurst et al., 2010a) was evidenced. Consequently, where perhaps a more child-focused practitioner may have removed the child at an earlier stage, a conclusion to be drawn from my study findings is how practice discretion remains a key aspect in some social work team cultures. An added tentative conclusion to be drawn is how family-minded

approaches may be synonymous with: (1) a social worker's tendency to exercise practice discretion and/or to (2) operate outside of the 'iron cage' of a dominant organisational culture as a 'street level bureaucrat' (Lipsky, 1980).

The data highlighting the practice of determining thresholds for intervention and/or otherwise illustrating how social workers make sense of CCNs, demonstrates how some practitioners rely on managers and/or colleagues. This finding illustrates how sense-making in child protection for some practitioners is accomplished through what Archer (2003) identifies as a communicative reflexivity. On practising differing reflexivities a common theme demonstrated within the data was where sense-making in child protection involved short-cuts and a questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions. A conclusion to be drawn therefore is how sense-making in child protection is identified as involving a mix of single-loop and double-loop learning (Argyris and Schön, 1974). The potential for double-loop learning was evidenced where practitioners were reflexively inclined to check out their sense-making and judgement formulation with managers, colleagues and/or other practitioners.

On making sense of CCNs reoccurring themes included where practitioners would seek confirmation of their forming hypothesis and/or test out their assumptions with colleagues. As White (2013) highlights, a conclusion to be drawn from my study data is how confirmation bias is practiced where social workers as communicative reflexives are inclined to seek affirmation of their sense-making and judgement formulations. I have illustrated how some practitioners' emotional responses to the information presented on CCNs were observed as informing their sense-making. These emotional responses, as Helm (2013) found, were interpreted as evidence

within my study of framing biases' where ERAs and social workers used an emotive frame of reference on conveying information presented on referrals. As Kelly (2000) describes, findings on problem framing in my study also highlight how sense-making in child protection was influenced by the phenomenon of professional opinion polarisation.

As discussed, polarisation of professional opinion became visible in the context of SOS meetings. This finding informs a conclusion in relation to how what constitutes risk appears dependent upon language, discourse and the relationships of power which influence inter-professional sense-making in child protection. Having explored the day-to-day practice context and the complex nature of parent-professional and inter-professional relationships in part 2 I presented data on how social workers make sense in the context of supervision and peer relationships. Data on knowledge informing sense-making and reflexive practice is also presented.

Chapter 4: Findings – Part: 2

Supervision, knowledge informing sense-making and reflexive practice

Introduction

On reviewing the literature, a key aspect of practice I identified as influencing practitioners' sense-making in child protection was the formal process of supervision. The influence on practitioners' sense-making of the informal supervision process in the form of the professional talk taking place within the context of day-to-day peer relationships was also identified. Highlighted in the literature was the causal influence the relational-responsiveness of managers and other team members can have on practitioners' sense-making and reflexivity. Having reviewed the literature, I anticipated participants' experience of formal supervision and informal peer relationships would be a theme drawn from the data.

As outlined in part 1 of this chapter, whilst observing the duty system I gathered data on how practitioners interacted with each other as they sought to make sense of their day-to-day practice. I also presented data on different management styles highlighting how these influenced practitioners' sense-making, judgement and the decisions made in response to referrals received by the agency. However, it was during study interviews where many findings on the relationship between sense-making, supervision and the experience of peer relationships were evidenced. Part 2 of this chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section I draw on my interview data to highlight the nature of my study participants' experience of supervision and the informal peer support informing their sense-making. In section two I present data which illustrates how the different knowledge(s) informing practitioners' sense-making was produced, challenged and utilised. In section three I present findings on social workers' reflexive practice.

Sense-making and supervision

The variable outcomes for children and families of different quality and approaches to supervision have been identified in several recent publications (e.g. Munro, 2011). As Munro highlights, as part of the sense-making, judgement and decision-making process formal supervision is considered an essential practice imperative in child protection. In my study supervision was identified as an important area of inquiry as the data collection process evolved. As the importance of the formal and informal support practitioners received became more apparent during conducting study interviews questions on supervision and reflective practice were incorporated into my interview schedule. Consequently, participants' reflective accounts of different complexities of supervision, peer support and how these aspects of practice informed their sense-making contributed to some key themes.

As I have outlined, while many participants were situated as members of the IRT within the main study site other practitioners were recruited from long-term teams across the local authority. During study interviews most practitioners across the participant cohort indicated they experienced the formalised process of supervision as positive. However, some personal experiences of the bureaucratic constraints and/or inherent deficiencies of some managers' directive and/or administrative approach to supervision were identified. Although within the main study site I identified a positive practice culture where the manager was consistently described by study participants as accessible and relationally-responsive. Consequently, as illustrated within the following data extract taken from an interview with a NQSW, supervision with the IRT manager was experienced by most participants as a supportive and collaborative process:

I've had a really positive experience in terms of supervision over the last year...even where it's not been formalised...I think the support has always been there whether formalised or informal and I've never felt at any point that I haven't had adequate supervision...I never had that problem at all [SW: 10]

As I discussed in part 1 of this chapter the manager situated within the main study site had an open-door policy. Illustrated in the above extract is how a NQSW's experience of this policy, which encouraged an informal approach to supervision alongside a more formal process, was valued. Several NQSWs described how they appreciated being able to discuss duty referrals and/or aspects of their longer-term cases indiscriminately with the manager where issues were raised for them. Similarly, for practitioners who had been qualified for a longer period supervision was identified as serving the same purpose in cases that are more complex. However, as the following interview extract highlights with one longer-term qualified practitioner situated within a longer-term team their expectation of specific knowledge and skills managers should possess as a supervisor was communicated:

I think supervision is perhaps one of the most crucial points of any case work...and the supervisor who's providing that...must have a significant level of experience and skill and understanding...and must be able to work with you...not just guide you but help you unpick issues...not just about risk management...but work in tandem with the concerns...so you can reflect and develop your practice [SW: 12]

With the two extracts presented, the data highlights how the role and responsibilities of supervisors was viewed differently by different practitioners. For example, where some NQSWs seen supervisors as knowledgeable seniors who could offer advice and direction, others seen them as counterparts with whom they could collaborate with to enhance their judgement and decision-making. My literature review indicated for some formative experience(s) of the supervisor-supervisee relationship can have

a life-long impact on social workers. Here, I noted a common occurrence where practitioners reflected on their positive and negative experiences of different supervisors.

Where supervisors were identified as primarily concerned with administration of organisational system, meeting targets and/or performance indicators their approach was described by participants as experienced in a constraining way. However, the difficulty of being a collaborative supervisor, while having to operate within the constraints of a managerialist agenda, was recognised by some social workers. This theme is illustrated in the following data extracts:

Some supervisors are willing to spend the time to discuss cases and go through things...but most of my supervision has been pretty poor...maybe that is harsh to those who were involved because they've got one finger on the management of systems...I think there is always a dilemma...making sure we get recording done on time...and case closures and stuff like that [SW: 12]

Years back we had supervision and talked about cases...now it is more of a check list and 'has this been done?' 'Has that been done?' 'Blah, blah, blah'...and there is a bit of reflection but it's more like 'we need to do this and we need to do that'...in my experience there is too much pressure on people to meet performance indicators and key targets...that is what management seem to be interested in...not what you did...or what needs to be done...what really counts is that box ticked, that report done and that family de-planned...not 'so what has happened and why?' [SW: 13]

Here the data highlighted what was of most concern and value to most practitioners was an opportunity to discuss cases and reflect on the quality of their sense-making, judgement and decision-making. However, while a collaborative approach was communicated as desirable, supervision was described by several participants as often directive where the manager's main objective was to engage in a caseload review and pragmatic decision-making process. Opportunities to reflect on practice

and explore reasoning processes were described by some practitioners as a rare opportunity within some teams. Many encounters with supervisors were experienced as influenced by a dominant managerialist discourse and a caseload 'checklist' culture. This experience of supervision as a process dominated by a mandatory review of participants' caseloads is illustrated in the following data extract:

When I returned to childcare...this word 'reflective practice' kept coming up...and I was thinking 'what on earth is that?' But it is not something that is in my career at the moment...years back we had supervision and talked through cases...now it's more a task list, 'has this been done?'...Not 'so what's actually going on?' 'What are the next steps?' There is a bit of reflection...but it is more like 'well this is what needs to happen'...'we need to do this'...'we need to do that'...because there is no time to go back to what could have been done and what is possible...we don't have the luxury of sitting back and looking at reflective practice [SW: 13]

Sense-making and reflective practice

Despite contrasting evidence of formal supervision being experienced as a pragmatic process the idea informal reflection could be utilised by some social workers as a means of making sense in child protection and formulating judgement was demonstrated in my study. As illustrated within the data presented some practitioners described how they were not always afforded opportunities for critical reflection in the context of formal supervision. Nevertheless, where a more intuitive approach to sense-making, judgement and decision-making was considered necessary, some practitioners emphasised the importance of engaging in informal talk with team members. This importance of utilising formal and informal self-reflection as a means of making sense, formulating judgement and deciding on actions in particular case scenarios is illustrated in the following data extracts:

I think it [reflection] is really important...you have to take a step back from it and really look at the scenario...and think now what could I have done differently? [SW: 6]

I think reflection is vital so we can say hang on how has that happened? Or 'where am I with this?' What kind of tools did I use? What impact did I have on this family? Unless you can do that you are just going through the motions and being ineffective in your role [SW: 7]

Despite a managerialist agenda being identified as frequently influencing a directive approach to formal supervision the interview extracts above highlight what Morrison and Wonnacott (2010: 3) consider to be practitioners' commitment to a critical 'exploration of practice'. My literature review highlighted how a conveyor-belt culture influencing a directive approach to supervision will take place within an organisational context where a limited practice-depth, characterised by speedy casework resolution, targets and performance management, informs a supervisor's agenda. However, despite the impact of some managers' responsiveness to agency efficiency drivers on the supervision process, the data illustrates how a sub-culture of informal critical reflection remained an important some practitioners. This was despite limited time dedicated to critical reflection in the context of the formal supervision process. Although, as demonstrated within the following extract critical reflection in the context of formal supervision was not always viewed as an important:

While I have become more confident at making decisions I think I could make better decisions if I had more time to visit families and get feedback from them...we have got high caseloads and despite...best efforts we micro-manage and that's quite scary...and I think about that each day...although I can tell you...I can't always admit to that to my colleagues in the office or to the manager...so I go to bed stressed and worried and I wake up stressed and worried [SW: 4]

Highlighted here was how the formal reflective practice process can potentially become difficult experience for some social workers where they are suffering from stress and/or otherwise where they do not wish to be seen by team members as unable to cope. This data contradicts findings presented where practitioners were inclined to share their case management concerns while welcoming the manager's decision-making authority. As I will discuss, experience of the manager's decision-making authority involved a process whereby supervisors were inclined to challenge practitioners' sense-making, judgement and decision-making rationales. Returning to the issue of practitioners experiencing feelings of stress and worry, Laming (2009) has emphasised the importance of practitioners keeping supervisors informed where they are facing personal difficulties with case management.

Consequently, the data highlights how practitioners can accommodate feelings of stress and worry and/or their sense of team isolation that can create the conditions for erroneous sense-making and judgement in child protection (Morrison, 1993). As I will discuss in more detail in section three here the study findings evidence how a practitioner might demonstrate a fractured reflexivity as defined within Archer's (2003) theory. As Archer indicates, in the case of practitioners experiencing fractured reflexivity evidence will be presented of their internal conversation having an inadequate influence on their capacity to formulate judgement, make decisions and/or achieve a sense of agency to address their personal concerns.

As my study evolved the data I collected within interviews offered insight into practitioners' differing reflexive modes and how these were influenced by the existent, differing and changing dynamics of their relationships with supervisors. For

example, in cases where participants were identified as critical and reflexive some described how on interpreting information as duty social workers they were happy to present sense-making, judgement and decision-making rationales they knew would be challenged by supervisors. Additionally, in more complex longer-term cases where there might be resource implications and/or where they might propose an informal risk management plan (Broadhurst et al., 2010a), some practitioners described feeling able to justify their judgement and decision-making. This sense of willingness to be challenged and/or readiness to reformulate judgement and decision-making justifications is evidenced in the following extract:

I have gone to managers and said 'I think this should happen' and they go 'hmmm'...and the manager is going to ask me questions like...'legally how are you going to explain that?' And if the manager wants to pick out 'how have I come to that decision?' Or ask me to explain 'why maybe it wasn't such a good decision?' I am going to listen and take that on board [SW: 11]

With the type of supervisee-supervisor relationship illustrated in the data here some practitioners who were identified as willing to engage in a discursive-dialogical encounter with managers described how this assisted them in experiencing a greater sense of certitude in more complex cases. However, this was not always the case and evidenced within my data was where some social workers were prepared to stand by their judgement and decision-making and challenge the manager's perspective. This was the case with one practitioner where, while reflecting on a case study example, she felt the organisational culture was one where managers were risk averse. To promote a positive outcome for a family the practitioner's approach to challenging this defensive practice culture is illustrated in the following interview extract:

Some people when they are pressurised by managers find it easier to go the easy option, they would have gone for permanency to avoid the risk...rather

than look at home...within the family and then say 'hang on a minute' to the manager...'we need to manage the risk'...because that's our job too [SW: 7]

Here evidence is provided of how some social workers who practised a family-minded approach encouraged what Broadhurst et al. (2010a) describe as an 'informal logic of risk management'. With an informal approach to risk management demonstrated is how some practitioners challenged management decisions on the basis these were informed by a defensive approach to practice. However, where other examples of a practitioner's responsibility for managing complex cases was identified evidence was provided on how some social workers willing to align themselves to a dominant defensive practice culture. Discussing one case, while confident with her sense-making and judgement the practitioner described feeling frustrated at being undermined by the manager's contradicting decision-making. However, the same practitioner described how ultimately she valued the sense of safety and certitude her manager's finalising decision-making afforded. This incongruent and capricious approach to sense-making in child protection is exemplified in the following data extract:

We have a decision-making hierarchy so there have been times when I have made a decision and the managers come down and say 'no we are not doing this'...it frustrates me...because I am quite positive about my practice...but I do like hierarchal decision-making because it covers you and managers have got the responsible position of making the final decision [SW: 12]

The indication within the data presented in the extract previously is how some practitioners will take ownership and stand by their sense-making, judgement and decision-making. However, highlighted in the data is how for others their sense-making, judgement and decision-making will remain temporal and ultimately dependent on the manager's confirming or disconfirming position. Also highlighted

is how some practitioners view management judgement and decision-making in the context of the formal supervision process as a practice encounter where safety and a sense of certitude can be accomplished. Although, as demonstrated in the data sample earlier, the idea of communicating workload worries in the context of supervision and/or peer relationships also holds potential to raise stress and anxiety levels for some practitioners.

Sense-making and peer relationships

As outlined in part 1, during the observation stage of my study I identified how as part of their day-to-day practice experience informal talk took place between those social workers who were located within the main study. While observed as an informal form of supervision that functioned as an implicit facet of the team culture, the nature of peer relationships was not included as a question within my interview schedule. However, to help practitioners make sense in more complex cases, what was drawn as a theme from my study data was how some participants relied on the thoughts, ideas, experiences and perspectives of peers. The data illustrating the association between sense-making and peer relationships is highlighted in the following extract:

I think I have learnt, definitely go to colleagues and seek their ideas and sometimes you know I just sit back and listen to their perspectives...and it makes you analyse yourself, reflect on why you made that decision...[because] there's different perspectives around each case and I think what I need is to bounce off colleagues [SW: 7]

Commitment to 'exploration of practice' (Morrison and Wonnacott, 2010: 3) for some social workers is further emphasised in the data. Also evidenced is practitioners' openness to differing perspectives. However, whilst I observed the informal talk

taking place between some practitioners created an opportunity for a (re)formulation of judgement based on differing perspectives, demonstrated in the data extract above is how sense-making in child protection might come to be informed by the 'received ideas' (Rojek, Peacock and Collins, 1988) of colleagues. This finding, where some practitioners' sense-making is identified as influenced by a mode of reflexivity that is communicative in nature, is further illustrated in the following data extract:

We have reflective discussions...and...I do think it is really important also without doing it formally...It's a good thing because you have all the different practitioners' perspectives...about how they would do it...so you are constantly reflective throughout the process...just speaking to others in the office and learning [SW: 2]

In the first part of this section I presented data on how formal supervision can be experienced as a process where judgement and decision-making is based on the mandate of managers. Consequently, as Helm (2011) argues, while testing out assumptions and contemplating the ideas of other practitioners some social workers in my study demonstrated how the informal talk taking place in the context of peer relationships offered a more useful way of making sense in child protection. This finding, indicating peer relationships and the relational-responsiveness of colleagues can provide support associated with the supervisor, was also reflected across my data set. This finding is further illustrated in the following extract:

I feel quite aware that I have a good network around me...so I have reflective opportunities...and support and I have certain people I can go to and offload [SW: 9]

Knowledge informing sense-making

In this section I present data on the variety of knowledge(s) social workers drew upon to make sense, formulate judgement and decide on actions during the course of their day-to-day practice. The purpose of this section is to highlight: (1) some of the 'kinds' of knowledge social workers utilise to make sense in child protection (2) how the knowledge they use is produced and (3) how knowledge contributes to practitioners' judgement and decision-making processes. The data I present in this section is drawn from interviews where case study samples were presented by participants. The data presented was collected primarily in response to two interview questions. These included: *'How do you think you have come to understand what constitutes risk and child abuse in society?'* And: *'What 'kinds' of things influence your sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection?'*

On answering these questions practitioners described the diverse range of knowledge utilised to inform sense-making in child protection. Knowledge sources informing participants' sense-making included: (1) learning from professional training and education (2) post-qualifying knowledge of risk and child abuse and (3) practice wisdom and/or tacit knowledge acquired through experiential learning. The knowledge social workers used to inform sense-making was also identified as linked to 'expert' opinion of other professionals and their interpretation of information gathered on individual family case histories.

Knowledge of risk and child abuse

As noted, all participants who took part in my study were qualified social workers. Consequently, all participants held a professional qualification that allowed them to register and practice as a practitioner. As noted in the previous chapter, having utilised a personal profile sheet (Appendix 9) prior to undertaking study interviews I was able to establish how participants' qualifications varied and how these had been acquired at different social work education and training institutions. With my study interviews several participants described how they continued to draw on the education and training they had acquired at university. However, illustrated in the following data extracts is a reoccurring theme allied to how the knowledge practitioners utilised most was that acquired in practice:

It's the type of stuff you do at university...you go through the numerous modules about risk...but you know to me personally I don't think you know about risk until you've been out into the field and you've seen it...because you can read about it over and over again...but I it takes time to build up your knowledge of risk...because what is a risk to me now as a social worker might not have been a risk a year ago when I was fresh out of my degree [SW: 10]

I initially co-worked child protection cases or complex child in need cases...had a colleague who I discussed things with...whereas now I work with people and they so-work with me...I think if I had gone straight into child protection I would have thought of all the risks...had everyone on a Child Protection Plan...now I'm like...can we work with this on a Child in Need Plan [SW: 2]

Illustrated here is how practitioners' knowledge of risk is tentatively acquired through formal education then modified through experiential learning. Consequently, how risk can be understood as a discourse and as a fluid concept interpreted differently by different practitioners based on their different knowledge(s), interpretation(s) and experience(s) is evidenced in the data. Also evidenced is how what constitutes risk,

while based on taken-for-granted knowledge and experience of longer-term qualified practitioners, is passed down to NQSWs. The themes of knowledge transference and transmission of meanings to NQSWs are further illustrated in the following data extract:

In the team where I have come from you have a lot of newly qualified workers and they would sit next me and learn how to do court reports...I have done them for years and they become easier...and it is important to have the opportunity to talk to newly qualified workers...to talk and share ideas and show them how things are done or how else will they learn? It's the only way
[SW: 11]

As discussed NQSWs can often become passive recipients of what Rojek, Peacock and Collins (1998) describe as the 'received ideas' of social work. Here what is highlighted is the qualified practitioner's limited critical awareness of how practice norms and/or the taken-for-granted cultural rules and practices of statutory settings are encourage in child protection. As White (2006) argues, influential cultures that utilise standardised knowledge, language and practice approaches often means dominant practice remains implicit and/or under-interrogated by social workers. Here my data offers evidence of how aspects of formal knowledge can remain dominant in child protection where uncritically transferred to NQSWs. Also evidenced, as White (2006) discusses, is how apparently specific and objective knowledge can be validated by experienced social workers where they uncritically endorse professional roles and mandates prescribed by law to NQSWs.

Knowledge of family case histories

Stanley (2005) highlights how children previously known to statutory services due to child protection concerns are regarded as at an increased risk of experiencing re-

occurring maltreatment. In case study reflections, some social workers who took part in my study described how they accumulated knowledge of particular children and/or their parents through reviewing family case histories. Several practitioners communicated how the knowledge they acquired through a review of family case histories contributed to their sense-making in child protection. For one participant, the following case study extract identifies the important part family case histories play in relation to her sense-making in child protection:

Serious case reviews tell us we've got to think seriously about past involvement and not to do the whole let's start again syndrome. There's lots of research and all of it is saying 'we cannot not consider family histories'...so I go to other authorities and have a look because it's a starting point. The case history influences where we are. I think it's really important to have that information...insight into what happened. When you are looking at what's gone on before it helps with making a judgement about what needs to happen now [SW: 5]

Evidenced here is how the practitioner makes sense in child protection based on a review of family case history. While indicating how her sense-making has been informed by the evidence-base the data illustrates how the practitioner's judgement and decision-making is influenced by a child-focused discourse. This is evidenced within the extract where reference is made to an approach to sense-making where the practitioner is not influenced by a '*whole let's start again syndrome*'. While the potential for change in the family circumstances appears to be overlooked the practitioner's main concern seems to be thinking '*seriously about past involvement*' so '*when you are looking at what's gone on before it helps with making a judgement*'.

Additional to illustrating how a child-focused discourse and knowledge of family case history might be influencing the practitioner's reasoning, also evidenced is how an independent approach to judgement formulation in child protection might be accomplished. Further illustrated with the data extract is an approach to decision-making characteristic of an individual practising an autonomous mode of reflexivity as described within Archer's (2003) theory. As Archer highlights, autonomous reflexives do not necessarily feel they must engage in an external conversation to confirm their judgement and determine a course of action. Illustrated is how the practitioner is able to consider a course of action by '*looking at what's gone on before...[and] making a judgement about what needs to happen now* without feeling the need to consult with colleagues.

Stanley (2005) argues decisions to intervene into lives of children and families are considered more legitimate where there is a history of children's services involvement. In my study, I found information recorded on CCNs coupled with a recorded family history informed practitioners' sense-making, judgement and decision-making. As Stanley (2005) identified family case histories, and information provided by other team members familiar with cases, operated as risk indicators. These perceived risk indicators assisted social workers in making sense, formulating judgement and planning interventions. This is highlighted in the following extract:

One of the strengths of the team is the knowledge acquired in terms of family information from previous interventions. This family came in and a number of social workers were aware of the family, and there was a massive background. Mum had had a terrible upbringing herself, parents had been very neglecting. She was anti-children's services, had been violent and not engaged all her childhood. I think everybody was of the view this had to go immediately into a Section Forty-Seven. Because she was already five months pregnant, and her upbringing had been 'you don't trust social workers' and she'd already had her first child removed [SW: 5]

Evidenced here are some further findings into practitioners' approach to sense-making in child protection. As Kelly (2000) discusses, within the data sample how the practitioner's judgement formulation was influenced by 'problem frames' and the confirming views of colleagues is evidenced. The phenomenon of confirmation bias as discussed by White (2013) is evidenced in the statement "*I think everybody was of the view this had to go immediately into a Section Forty-Seven*". Here, as Broadhurst et al. (2010b) and White (2009) caution, the data highlights in some cases a professional group can make a psychological commitment to erroneous hypotheses based on presenting information.

As discussed in my literature review, as White (2013) indicates, where sense-making occurs based on a practitioner's interpretation of presenting information and/or the confirming views of other professionals, equally plausible interpretations of family case histories can be overlooked. The importance of family case histories for sense-making in child protection was identified as a common theme across my data set. However, where some practitioners were concerned importance of critically evaluating historical evidence was emphasised. An example of a more critically-reflexive approach to applying knowledge of family case histories is presented in the following extract:

Historical evidence is always important as we know the surest predictor of behaviour is what happened before...but this is where I tread a fine wire as most would stick with that and go with it because it is easier to take them [children] into care than actually argue for rehab and things like that because you have to put the family support in...but there are variables to consider and explore including things like maturation of parents...different circumstances...have they moved forward from substance misuse? Is this a different partner? Those kind of things need to be discussed...it's making sure you are not neglecting the fact that change can happen? [SW: 7]

Here insight into how different practitioners use knowledge of family case histories to inform their different approaches to sense-making in child protection is offered. With the former data extract, the family case history appears to be used as the primary knowledge form for encouraging a child protection response. In the latter extract family case history is used as the basis for a critical questioning of what positive changes might have occurred in a family previously known to services. As highlighted in part 1 of this chapter, here the data offers further insight into how different child-focused and family minded discourses influence sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection. Also offered is insight into how formal and informal management of risk will be encouraged dependent on practitioners' welfare orientation and/or their mode of reflexivity.

Tacit knowledge, practice wisdom and experiential learning

The value of participants' practice experience was a reoccurring theme drawn from my study data. As indicated previously duty social workers used the practice wisdom they had acquired to make sense of referral information and formulate judgement where they were presented with familiar scenarios. As I have also indicated, some practitioners were alert to dangers of a bias response to CCNs based on heuristics, taken-for-granted assumptions and/or risk anxiety. In some cases, practitioners who were more critically-reflexively alert were identified in my study as reluctant to engage in pattern recognition-primed responses where heuristics and biases remained unacknowledged. Consequently, where critically cautious the sense-making, judgement and decision-making advantages experiential learning and/or practice wisdom afforded some participants are summarised in the following extracts:

I think the longer I've been in the system the wiser perhaps I have become...although that can be a very dangerous thing to say...so what I mean by that is you're thoughtful about what you are doing and you value things...but you do begin to sort of develop a knowledge on how things work [SW: 12]

As you grow with the job you educate yourself...I think the job trains you and obviously you look at the referrals and the scenario...has the child suffered significant harm? Does the child just need services to keep them at home? And you consider what needs to happen...that's what I have learnt...most of my knowledge comes from being on the job [SW: 2]

While the value of practice-based knowledge acquisition was a reoccurring theme across my data set as the extracts illustrate a key aspect of intuitive reasoning was participants' interpretation of information based on their previous experience of similar scenarios. Even for some NQSWs evidence is provided within my data of how building experiential knowledge through practice-based learning to help inform management of risk was seen as more important than compliance with techno-rational approaches. As the following data extract highlights, for one more experienced social worker the benefit of practice wisdom and tacit knowledge was summed up when she described her existing understanding of risk and what constitutes child abuse:

I'm probably going to be shot down for this to be honest with you but...some of it is common sense you know...you have to look at things in a way in terms of how you know...then judge it on your own value basis [SW: 13]

Here what is described as 'common sense' by the participant is evidence of how practice wisdom is acquired through experience and sense-making based on intuitive reasoning which involves the implicit heuristics. How complex cases might be interpreted by some practitioners in a biased way, simplistic and based on the social workers' practice-based knowledge is evidenced. At first glance, the data presented

may raise concern due to the complex process of sense-making in child protection being seemingly based on practice wisdom and the taken-for-granted knowledge and values of some practitioners. However, what is not communicated by the practitioner within this extract is what formal knowledge might influence her sense-making. The idea implicit and/or intuitive sense-making, judgement and decision-making might be informed by unconscious processes is evidenced in the following extract:

I don't know what influences my judgement and decision-making...I think probably I do use theories on a day-to-day basis but more in an unconscious way...you just think like that anyway...I know attachment theory is important...that you want to make sure the children remain in the family where possible...but I don't kind of consciously recognise myself that that is the theory I am using [SW: 10]

I have demonstrated with some of my study findings how sense-making in child protection for some practitioners involved them practising a form of critical-reflexivity. However, the data presented so far highlights how this approach to practice was often compromised by the practitioner's: (1) child welfare orientation and/or (2) interpretation of family case history (3) minimal experience (4) uncertain stance towards a case and/or (5) feelings of stress and anxiety. My data illustrates how sense-making for some social workers, whether they are experienced or not, was influenced by a sense of 'not being sure'. Drawing on data samples, where practitioners offered implicit reflections on managing constraints and enablements to practising criticality and reflexivity, the following extract illustrates the influence of risk anxiety provoked through a sense of not knowing how to respond in some cases:

I know some cases make me anxious...and I am becoming more aware of it...but I don't know why particular cases make me more anxious than others...it's the cases when I don't know what I am supposed to be doing that I worry about...so I try and take a step back and not get so anxious [SW: 10]

As outlined, examples of tacit knowledge and practice wisdom and how this was interpreted and applied differently by different practitioners was found across my data set. With the above extract, what is evidenced similarly are practitioners' differing relationships with and stances towards uncertainty and risk anxiety. Across my data set practitioners' relationships with risk anxiety and stances towards uncertainty were identified as variable. Therefore, some insight was drawn into how a sense of uncertainty and/or risk anxiety might influence sense-making in child protection and reflexive practices. A further example exemplifying this theme is provided within the data extract below:

I think the very word 'child protection' raises anxiety... I think as a social worker you can become detached from knowing the meaning of the word...the impact it can have on...the mum, the child, you, your colleagues...it is something we need to engage with...child protection makes me feel anxious. 'Oh God were going into the nerve section, Section Forty-Seven' [participant describes self-talk]. It makes you feel like that...but I am very alert to it and I hope I engage with anxiety in helpful ways...because when you get anxious you can become hijacked and it clouds your vision...your judgement and your decision-making [SW:9]

Here what is evidenced is the practitioner's critically-reflexive awareness of the causal influence of risk anxiety on her sense-making. As with the previous extract demonstrated is how the practitioner uses her capacity for reflexive self-talk to critically engage with her anxiety. Also evidenced is the practitioner's understanding of the discourse and language of child protection and the causal influence this can have on her anxiety and that experienced by others. Here the findings of my study highlight an example of a critically-reflexive means of managing anxiety. Also highlighted is how, through development and critical application of tacit knowledge and practice wisdom, understanding of how this can be influenced by the discourse and language of child protection is demonstrated. This was a phenomenon

evidenced across the data set and findings on this theme are highlighted in the following extract:

I think we need to be totally aware the whole time of the language we use and that power can sway our decision...and also be aware of other people's power and how this influences our own testimonies [SW: 7]

With the descriptions of practice wisdom and tacit knowledge outlined in this section it seems for some sense-making in child protection becomes intuitive, routinised and 'common-sense' practice. The data indicates how some practitioners will have a wealth of experience and/or practice-based knowledge to draw on to assist them where expedient sense-making is required. However, where this knowledge might remain unquestioned by practitioners the judgement and decision-making influencing outcomes children and families experienced remain dubious. Although the critically-reflexive application of practice wisdom and social workers' understanding of how this might assist in challenging dominant 'expert' opinions of other professionals are demonstrated in the data to be presented in the next sub-section.

Professional knowledge and 'expertise'

As I noted in part 1 of this chapter the idea that professionals must 'work together' is intrinsic to child protection practice. Consequently, in many cases the knowledge and 'expert' opinion of other professionals is a key aspect influencing social workers' sense-making, judgement and decision-making processes. Some of the complexities of inter-professional working have been highlighted in the data I presented in part 1 of this chapter. However, here I outline additional data which illustrates some of the advantage and disadvantage of social workers' often

inextricable reliance on the knowledge and 'expert' opinion of other professionals. Illustrated in the data extract below is how, despite ambiguity about cause of harm remaining, weight and/or kudos can often be contributed to knowledge and opinion presented by professionals seen as 'experts':

I find it really important to have different professionals sat around the table...but a lot of the time professionals don't know the family...police have expert knowledge of [parents'] criminal offences but they have never met the children or the mum...but sometimes weight is put on what they say when really they don't have any knowledge about the family or the parents or their personalities...sometimes I find it difficult because a lot of weight is put behind what they say...and the family support worker knows the family better than the social worker or the health visitor but not a lot of weight is put behind what they have to say [SW: 10]

Illustrated is a theme evidenced across the data set where knowledge and 'expert' opinion of some professional was viewed as more important than others. Professional identity and status was identified as an important conduit in the sense-making process and judgement of social workers was often challenged and/or undermined by professionals seen as 'experts'. As outlined in part 1, several practitioners described how they had felt undermined by the expert opinion of medical professionals and how, for example, paediatricians had used their professional knowledge, discourse and language to influence decision-making. Further case study reflections highlighted how this was a phenomenon experienced across practice settings including strategy meetings, case conferences and courts. This theme is illustrated in the following data extracts:

I remember doing a report for the court and a solicitor said 'oh you cannot write that in your report'...I asked him 'why?' He replied 'because you are not qualified' to make a diagnosis of attachments...I explained I wasn't making a diagnosis of attachment I was sharing my observation of attachment...he said 'well you cannot you are not qualified and it will be challenged in the dock'... I asked him 'what made him think I wasn't qualified?'...that stopped him in his tracks...it's the assumptions people make about the job, the qualifications and

the expertise of social workers...they wouldn't actually do that to a doctor or a psychiatrist [SW: 9]

I think in terms of...expert assessments there are times when these are essential but...it frustrates me in court when they are asking for an expert assessment...I think as social workers we should have confidence in our own assessments...and if parties are saying 'no we are not relying on the social work report'...and saying 'we need a psychiatric assessment' and...'we need a psychological assessment'...that should be the court's decision...before we go down the route of expert assessments...because they only rely on self-reporting and the use of language can be ridiculous [SW: 5]

Evidenced in the extracts presented are a range of common themes found across the data set. These include how the status of some professionals was seen by other professionals as more robust and authoritative than that of social workers. Here, for example, illustrated with my data is how the professional 'expertise' of social workers is undermined where the knowledge they produce for the courts in respect of children and families is not viewed as valid to inform the judgement and decision-making process. Illustrated also is how the professional language or jargon utilised by professionals undermines the authority of social workers and perpetuates a power imbalance. Further evidence of how professional language can create a power imbalance is presented in the following data extract:

Professionals like the medical and legal professions...you have to train and...learn to speak the language...a really different language to what service users use...and we can go to the courts but the solicitor can have a conversation with the judge...use the jargon and that maintains the power imbalance [SW: 7]

With the data presented so far there is limited evidence of how professional knowledge and expert opinion was challenged by social workers. There is an indication that the sense-making, judgement and decision-making process in child protection is influenced by those professionals seen as most knowledgeable and

authoritative. This child and family outcome determining stance appears to be allied to the discourse and/or language used by some professionals in the context of inter-professional relationships. However, as illustrated, examples where participants who took part in my study challenged the knowledge, discourse and language of other professionals were identified across the data set. This being the case where more experienced practitioners had developed significant practice wisdom and tacit knowledge leading to a level of confidence that encouraged them to challenge others. However, interestingly this was not always the case with professionals from other disciplines. As the following data extract highlights one of my study participants described how as a NQSW she was willing to critically and reflexively challenge the unfamiliar language used by professionals in her own team:

I struggled because I didn't understand the language people were using. I wasn't worried about not knowing the language, and from a curious position was able to learn a lot more by acceptance of my not knowing. I was able to challenge people who perhaps in my view used language to disempower me. People would expect me to know. But perhaps they would use it to be clever, I felt disempowered by language. I said the most outrageous things to challenge people because I didn't know the language. I would be horrified by the look on peoples' faces. But I learned a lot about language and power and control [SW: 9]

Demonstrated here is how the practitioners adopted a critically-reflexive approach to sense-making through challenging the taken-for-granted knowledge and language used by professionals in her employing agency. Elder-Vass (2012: 27) indicates, as a member of a professional norm circle, to avoid reproach social workers will be compelled to respond to and utilise the 'normative' language of their employing agency. However, this data extract highlights through critical-reflexivity the practitioner was able to challenge this cultural expectation. In doing so the practitioner describes feeling able to sustain a sense of active personal agency and reflexivity while occupying a '*curious position*' of '*not knowing*'. Here the findings

support the claims of Archer (2003) in relation to identifying the characteristics of those who practice a meta-reflexivity. As Archer (2003: 296) indicates, practitioners who demonstrate a meta-reflexive mode will be inclined to maintain a sense of active agency while remaining unconstrained in their sense-making, sense of self and action(s) by the powerful influence of dominant knowledge, discourse, language and cultural practices of their employing agency. Following a summary of the findings presented in this section, while drawing on Archer's (2003) theory, in the final part of this chapter I present data on participants' modes of reflexivity.

Practitioners' reflexive modalities

As noted, categories from Archer's (2003) reflexivity theory were used as an a priori template to determine the codes used to inform my deductive (theory-driven) data analysis. Moving between deductive and inductive analysis participants' differing reflexive modalities were identified within my study data as falling into four broad categories. These four categories are identified by Archer (2003) within her theory as different modes of reflexivity that include: (1) communicative reflexivity (2) autonomous reflexivity (3) meta-reflexivity and (4) fractured reflexivity. In addition to these four modes an additional reflexive mode that did not 'fit' with Archer's theory was identified within my study data. This fifth mode was categorised in relation to one study participant who demonstrated a dominant 'hybrid' 'communicative-meta-reflexivity'. The different reflexive modes identified within my data and the numbers of participants who demonstrated each of these differing modalities are presented in Table 4:

Table 4: Practitioner mode of reflexivity

Reflexive mode:	Communicative-reflexive	Autonomous-reflexive	Meta-reflexive	Communicative-meta-reflexive	Fractured-reflexivity
Number of participants:	6	2	4	1	2

As noted, Archer's (2003) theory was used as a template for coding practitioners' dominant reflexive modes. On undertaking interviews and presenting case study samples practitioners' different reflexivity alongside the dominance of a particular mode were evidenced across my data set. This meant, for example, on describing aspects of their day-to-day practice and, for example, illustrating how they made sense through inner and/or external conversation my study participants were identified as communicative, autonomous or meta-reflexive and so on. This phenomenon of participants demonstrating a dominant mode of reflexivity was consistent with Archer's (2003) findings.

The boundaries of my study do not allow for a complete presentation and discussion of data demonstrating each participant's reflexive mode. Therefore, in this section I offer space to data that provides answers to my research questions and contributes to understanding of my study topic. As I engage with this process, I highlight where a participant's dominant mode of reflexivity was evidenced as being practised broadly consistent within the characteristics of Archer's (2003) theory. As I have discussed, data highlighting how one practitioner was identified as a communitive-

meta-reflexive and therefore categorised outside of Archer's theory of reflexivity is also presented in this section.

Communicative reflexivity

To identify those participants presenting as communicative reflexives the criteria presented by Archer (2003) as characteristic of this dominant mode was utilised to interpret my study data. Describing some of the key characteristics of a communicative reflexive Archer (ibid: 167) states these are individuals who have an internal-external pattern of 'thought and talk'. With this internal-external pattern of conversation, communicative reflexives will make sense of an event, experience or situation beginning with an inner conversation. However, following an internal conversation communicative reflexives are inclined to engage others in discursive dialogue to complete the sense-making process (Archer, 2003).

Archer (2007) suggests on minor matters communicative reflexives will be able to make sense and formulate judgement without engaging in dialogue with others. However, where required to make sense and formulate judgement under complex circumstances communicative reflexives will converse with others as part of the sense-making process. Therefore, a communicative reflexive social worker can be understood as inclined to externalise what may otherwise remain internal to other practitioners who are characteristically an autonomous or fractured reflexive. Communicative reflexive practitioners must have, as Archer (2003: 168) claims, other 'similar and familiar' individuals located within the settings they occupy with whom they trust and can share their sense-making and judgement formulations. As

members of a professional norm circle, Archer (ibid) indicates, trusted 'interlocutors' will be those colleagues who act as the discursive 'dialogical partners' to communicative reflexive social workers. Drawing on these criteria within my study Social Worker 12 was identified as a participant among those with a dominant communicative reflexive mode.

Practising a communicative reflexive modality

While identified as a communicative reflexive Social Worker 12 demonstrated this dominant mode from the outset of the study interview. The opening question of the interview was: *'Please tell me when, where and why did you undertake your social work training?'* In response to this question the participant answered by offering initial insight into her personal biography and some background to her decision to undertake professional education and training. With her response to the opening question the participant offered insight into her communicative reflexive mode through describing her avoidance of 'contextual discontinuity' (Archer, 2003: 201).

For example, while harbouring a desire to become a social worker, during the interview the participant described how up until recently being a mother had remained her ultimate concern. While seeing being a mother as her main concern, discontinuing this role and becoming a practitioner was not seen as a desirable option while the participant's children remained dependent. Archer (2003: 202) highlights how the 'ultimate concerns' and 'life project' of a communicative reflexive will be ideally dovetailed. Therefore, any kind of 'contextual discontinuity' or other

form of constraint that might interfere with a content way of life experienced as 'satisfying and sustainable' will be avoided.

In her study, Archer (ibid: 201) therefore highlights how all communicative reflexives will: (1) have a reasonable level of self-awareness (2) be self-monitoring of their personal aspirations and (3) be critical of their own self-interest. In terms of developing a career and/or achieving social mobility a willingness to curtail personal ambition to avoid contextual discontinuity will be evidenced with those individuals practicing a communicative reflexivity (Archer, 2007). As noted, my interview opening question was: '*When, where and why did you undertake your social work education and training?*' In response to this question Social Worker 12 stated:

I took it at Sunderland University and qualified in July 2011. I have always been interested in social work from an early age. But I decided to wait until I had my children because I didn't think I had the life experience, and I would have found it difficult when I was younger going into a home and not being a parent and not being able to gauge and understand a parent's point of view....and then I wanted my children to be older...so when I went to University I just thought it was the right time [SW: 12]

Despite being '*interested in social work from an early age*' what is illustrated in the data extract here, as noted, is how the main concern of the participant up until undertaking her training had remained gaining experience of being a parent and looking after her children. Due to this my data offers insight into how the participant was willing to curtail her ambition to become a social worker until she '*had the life experience*' and her '*children were older*'. Evidenced in my data are patterns of self-monitoring and the participant's level of self-awareness and self-knowledge in relation to understanding how being a social worker would encourage a form of contextual discontinuity due to her '*not being able to gauge or understand a parents*'

point of view'. Evidenced also is how the participant does not allow self-interests to drive her ambition to become a social worker ahead of what she considers her main priority which is to be a responsible parent.

In relation to sense-making, Archer (2003: 171) describes how communicative reflexives use their inner conversation to decide on minor matters. However, as Archer (ibid) found, when it came to more complex decisions communicative reflexives would go to someone who has 'been there, done that, got the T-shirt, [and] been through what the decision involves'. In my study data illustrating this phenomenon was captured where Social Worker 12 was asked the question: '*What informs your sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection?*' In her response to this question in the following extract I present data highlighting the participant's tendency to seek and/or accept critically unchallenged the views of her manager so sense-making in child protection can be accomplished:

My managers got an open-door policy where to be honest it's hard not to go in every day and something will just flag up and I just think that you always need a second opinion. On duty you hit the ground running and we make a decision but I think managers are there to second decision our decisions. I think you need the support of your manager because it makes the job easier. I will come in and think it's a Section Forty-Seven [child protection response] and the manager will say clam down and let's look at it from this point of view or another perspective...and we will discuss it at length and I value her experience and her opinion and at no time do I feel disempowered [SW: 12]

Illustrated here is how the participant is identified as having a trusting and supportive relationship with her manager. Also illustrated is how the participant practiced her day-to-day work in a way that was primarily consistent with her value-commitments, beliefs and concerns. This is despite communicating how her potential for independent sense-making, judgement and decision-making was constrained at

times by a decision-making hierarchy where '*managers are there to second decision our decisions*'. Here the data offers insight into how, despite potentially being confident in their own sense-making capabilities, while engaging in more complex judgement formulation and decision-making processes, communicative reflexives may tend to '*give in*' to the authoritative decision-making perspectives of managers.

This finding on the hierarchy of decision-making in child protection was noted in the first section of part 2 of this chapter. Also noted was how some social workers who took part in my study tended to seek the opinions and perspectives of other practitioners in the processes of sense and formulating judgement. This necessarily collaborative approach to sense-making in child protection identified across my data set highlights findings on those social workers identified as practicing a communicative reflexivity. In relation to some participants' positive ambivalence, as identified across my data set as allied to their sense-making in child protection, how this might be influenced by a manager's authoritative decision-making is demonstrated as characteristic of a communicative reflexive practitioner.

This was illustrated in the data extract presented in section one of part 2 of this chapter where a study participant communicated her juxtaposed sense of certitude and personal frustration due to experience of a hierarchal decision-making approach in child protection. These findings offer some support to Archer's (2003) theory of reflexivity. Archer (ibid: 184) theorising indicated some of my study participants who may practice a different mode of reflexivity may experience a manager's decision-making authority as a sense-making constraint. However, indicated is how a

communicative reflexive will demonstrate contentment with this approach to sense-making in child protection as an established cultural practice.

Among the claims of Archer (2003) is how communicative reflexives tend to present considerable doubt that a fully autonomous internal conversation might lead them to the right decision. This approach was evidenced in the case study reflections offered by Social Worker 12. In their mediation of social structures, as Archer (2003) argues, in order to maintain a sense of personal agency and contentment communicative reflexives will avoid the constraints of the settings within which they are situated. Again, this characteristic was evidenced in relation to Social Worker 12 who communicated her reliance of her supervisor to formulate judgement alongside a lack of willingness to challenge management decision-making.

As I have noted, in the data extract presented in the previous section Social Worker 12 communicates her frustration with what she considers to be her '*quite positive*' decision-making practice being dismissed by the manager. However, the participant does not challenge the manager's decision and therefore potentially encouraging a sense of uncertainty and/or contextual discontinuity. Consequently, the participant communicates an implicit desire for maintenance of a sense of personal agency as she engages in her everyday practice. How the participant's sense of personal agency and her need for certitude associated with her communicative reflexive modality is identified within my data is represented by her dependence on accepting the authoritative decision-making of senior staff. This is illustrated further in the following data extract where the participant describes her experience of SOS strategy meetings:

In a strategy meeting...you know the chair decides at the end of the day...the social worker can give their views...their concerns but at the end of the day it [the decision] comes down to whoever is chairing the meeting...you could totally disagree...but at the end of the day the chair decides...even if you don't agree a decision...the chair decides and that's the final decision basically
[SW: 12]

Autonomous reflexivity

As Archer (2003: 210) argues, among the characteristics of an autonomous reflexive is a tendency for a self-contained, independent approach to sense-making and an ongoing sense of personal agency. In contrast to communicative reflexives, as Archer (ibid) argues, those who have an autonomous reflexive mode are often seen as 'self-sufficient' in the process of sense-making. As such, Archer (ibid) states, autonomous reflexives can 'take responsibility for themselves and the conclusions drawn from their inner deliberations'. Whilst communicative reflexives are co-dependent on others to support their reasoning processes, as noted by Archer, autonomous reflexives are highly independent sense makers.

As indicated within my study data allied to Social Worker 12, communicative reflexives are identified as potentially having ultimate concerns and life projects located outside of their social work careers. However, the autonomous reflexives identified in Archer's (2003) study communicated how their concerns and life projects tended to 'dovetail' with their careers. In contrast to communicative reflexives, Archer (ibid) identified those who practice an autonomous reflexive mode will have ability to manage contextual discontinuity in pursuit of their concerns and life projects. Consequently, autonomous reflexives are willing to initiate change and confront the constraints of the settings they occupy. While sure about their social

obligations, autonomous reflexives are identified by Archer (2007) as individuals who believe others should take personal responsibility for themselves. Drawing on these criteria, and those highlighted in chapter 2, among other participants Social Worker 5 was categorised as practising a dominant autonomous reflexive mode.

Practising an autonomous reflexive modality

As with Social Worker 12 my study data highlighted how Social Worker 5 demonstrated a dominant reflexive modality from the outset of the study interview. This was due to the participant: (1) communicating her commitment to becoming a professional from an early point (2) being clear as to the reasons why, and (3) being morally content with the role and responsibilities of being a 'child protection' social worker. As noted, these findings were evidenced because of the participant's response to my interview opening question: '*When, where and why did you undertake your social work training and education?*' In response to this question, in the following data extract the participant illustrates characteristics consistent with an autonomous reflexivity:

I undertook it at Northumbria University. Well I started a lot earlier. I had always worked with children my background is in nursery nursing. I had done years of working in pre-school, then working at (names children's home) introduced me to looking after children, the looked after system and therapeutic intervention. I did a lot of training and suddenly having all this training, I wanting to know more. To be in child protection that was always the focus in terms of social work. I did my Diploma. I was never going to be an adult social worker. I was never going to be a mental health social worker. It was going to be in child protection and safeguard children [SW: 5]

Harmonious with the idea of autonomous reflexivity as proposed by Archer (2003) is the evidence in the above extract of the self-determination and independent sense of

personal agency of Social Worker 5. Archer (ibid: 210) states autonomous reflexives are individuals who 'subscribe to the view no one can know my own mind as well as I do'. This is an autonomous reflexivity demonstrated by the participant where she assertively states '*I was never going to be an adult social worker*'. What is of particular interest is how the participant communicates how she has been working toward becoming a child protection social worker as her ultimate concern and life project throughout her employment history. This is evidenced where the participant states '*to be in child protection that was always the focus*'. Archer (2003) states, more than any other individual with a different mode, autonomous reflexives will seek to promote what is of ultimate concern to them. This is an autonomous reflexive characteristic demonstrated by the participant where she describes striving for her career goal and evidenced where she states '*I did a lot of training and suddenly having all this training, I wanted to know more*'.

In contrast to Social Worker 12, who communicated a dependence on her manager, Social Worker 5 shared a confidence in her own sense-making throughout the study interview. Demonstrated in a previous statement presented in part 1 of this chapter, the participant described how she practised her day-to-day work in a '*child-focused*' way. Nevertheless, despite her autonomous modality, like Social Worker 12 the personal agency of Social Worker 5 was identified as constrained at times. This was due, for example, to finding herself not being seen as an 'expert' in her role as a social worker by other professionals. This was illustrated in a data extract I presented in the previous section. The data highlighted how the participant described what she felt was the sometimes unnecessary use of 'expert' assessment within the courts. On describing her confidence in her own abilities, the participant described

feeling frustrated where her assessment skills had been questioned by another professional she considered more powerful.

In relation to sense-making in child protection my data highlights how Social Worker 5 on viewing herself as an expert had confidence in her own ability to formulate judgement and make decisions. An example of this was how within my study interview the participant constantly communicated her frustration with the child protection process that she felt was too slow and indecisive at times. Identified in the data allied to Social Worker 5 were findings consistent with an autonomous reflexivity as demonstrated where her independence and self-efficacy as a social work practitioner were communicated. Although, the participant described respecting the authoritative decisions of some professionals she considered more informed. However, evidenced within my data was how, when confronted with organisational constraints including the length of time taken to come to judgement and make decisions about the removal of a child from the family home, the participant would circumvent these by arguing a need for change in the system.

Again, this finding is consistent with the characteristics of an autonomous reflexive proposed by Archer (2003). As Archer (ibid) states, autonomous reflexives are inclined to deliberate strategies for encouraging enablements which circumvent those constraints which deter them from achieving their objectives. Demonstrating an inclination to challenge organisational constraints in the previous section, Social Worker 5 stated *'we should have confidence in our own assessment and putting these before the court'*. Meanwhile, to achieve her objectives as an independent autonomous reflexive decision-maker as I have discussed in part 1, while influenced

by a child-focused discourse, the participant argues '*I think we need to be much better at promoting ourselves as experts*'.

These findings highlight how Social Worker 5 demonstrates an autonomous reflexivity as did her response to the interview question: '*Can you tell me what influences your sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection?*'

On answering this question, the participant highlights confidence in her authority as an autonomous reflexive practitioner by stating:

Case history, when I am doing an assessment I will go back and request the previous files. I will go back to the family and say 'I have got this information'. We have to make decisions very, very quickly. Decisions in child protection need to be made sooner. They're not doing that enough. There has been a culture of let's start again, let's give this family a fair crack of the whip. I think we need to make this intervention sooner rather than later. I think you're justified, as history is really important. It gives you an opportunity to make a difficult decision earlier [SW: 5]

Evidenced is how Social Worker 5 demonstrates her frustration at being disempowered to make decisions due to the structural constraints of the agency. Archer (2003) claims, while often mistaken for arrogance, the self-confidence of autonomous reflexives to make independent decisions means for them this does not present as a difficulty. However, what is demonstrated with my data is a sense-making tendency based on a lower habitual form of reflexivity where taken-for-granted knowledge is not critically questioned by the practitioner. This is evidenced in the practitioner's willingness to formulate judgement and make a decision based on family case history.

Despite a willingness to formulate judgement and make a decision based on family case history, as an autonomous reflexive, Social Worker 5 within my study demonstrated a willingness to challenge the dominant culture of her employing agency. Again, this tendency is characteristic of an autonomous reflexive identified within Archer's (2003) theory. This is evidenced where Archer (ibid: 350) states in their occupational contexts autonomous reflexives 'will seek to transform their...circumstances to realise their concerns'. In doing so, Archer (ibid) argues, autonomous reflexives tend to seek to change or adopt a strategic stance towards the structural constraints of their employing agency. Again, this was evidenced in the data allied to Social Worker 5 who presented ideas on the need to change aspects of the child protection system so the court decision-making process could be expedited.

Meta-reflexivity

Meta-reflexivity is a complex mental activity which Archer (2003: 255) claims all normal human beings will practice at some point in time. As discussed in chapter 2, meta-reflexivity involves a process of critical self-reflection and/or a turning back on oneself. As Archer (2003: 255) states, 'being reflexive about our own acts of reflexivity' is a characteristic of meta-reflexivity. With the practice of meta-reflexivity, as I discussed in chapter 2, inner conversation or the intra-subjective sense-making process will involve a double-loop. This 'double loop' approach, as Argyris and Schön (1984) highlight, takes the form of a self-critical challenge of taken-for-granted assumptions informing sense-making. For double-loop learning to take place through practising a meta-reflexivity, Archer (20003) indicates there is a need to ask

questions such as: (1) *'Why did I think that?'* (2) *'Why do I feel this way?'* and (3) *'Why did I do that?'*

On identifying the characteristics of meta-reflexives, Archer (2003) notes several defining features. These, as Archer (ibid: 258) indicates, include where individuals demonstrate a 'deep concern for the underdog and the oppressed'. According to Archer, meta-reflexives will experience a tension between their value-commitments, their ultimate concerns and the constraining structures of the settings they occupy. Meta-reflexives, as Archer (ibid: 259) states, are therefore always working to 'retain their fidelity to their ideal' and a 'fit between who they seek to be and a social environment which permits expression' of who they consider they are. Drawing on these criteria and those highlighted in part 2 of the literature review among other study participants Social Worker 9 was identified within my study data as a participant practising a meta-reflexivity. However, as I have described, in addition to aspects of her reflexive practice being consistent with a meta-reflexivity, the participant's dominant hybrid 'communicative-meta-reflexive' mode was identified as outside of Archer's (2003) theory.

Practising a communicative-meta-reflexive modality

Notable with the interview I held with Social Worker 9 was how this was longer and more self-reflective than those held with participants identified as having a different reflexive mode. This is a phenomenon noted by Archer (2003) as present in her study interviews with those identified as meta-reflexives. Like those with different modalities with Social Worker 9 her 'communicative-meta-reflexivity' was identified

as dominant from the outset of my study interview and was illustrated in her response to the opening question: *When, where and why did you undertake your social work training?* In response to this question the participant explained how she had arrived at the point currently in her career:

I trained in 2000. The journey is fascinating in itself because I started to do hairdressing, was very good at that, but decided I wanted to work with people. I got a job in a caring situation then decided I wanted to go and do a BTech. Then I got an opportunity to work with children...in the children's home. I think what I enjoyed the most was an ability to engage with people. It was hard and challenging, but every day was different, every person, every situation. It was fascinating really, feeling like I was making a difference. I had experience of working in different ways, in different residential settings. In (names the children's home) ...but I struggled because I didn't understand the language [SW: 9]

In contrast to Social Worker 12 this data extract highlights how the participant experienced some of those professionals she worked with daily as unfamiliar interlocutors. However, the idea that her colleagues were not of a similar kind or character did not cause the participant any prolonged stress or anxiety. Further, the participant as a member of a professional norm circle did not immediately see the issue of her colleagues' use of unfamiliar language as reflexively impeding. In contrast, as demonstrated in the data I presented in the previous section, by challenging her colleague's use of language the participant was able to encourage discontent while respecting an uncertain stance of *'not knowing'*. Here my data highlights how, while conflict with other professionals might be avoided by a communicative reflexive for example, the participant with a communicative-meta-reflexivity is identified as willing to challenge professional practice(s) where she feels this is warranted.

In seeking to practice their concerns and value-commitments in the social contexts they occupy, Archer (2003) suggests meta-reflexives will challenge the status quo if needed. In doing so, as Archer claims, meta-reflexives will seek to create social and cultural change through exercising their power of reflexivity and personal agency. As I have noted, this practice is identified as being demonstrated by Social Worker 9 in the previous section where she challenged the use of professional language by her colleague. However, what is additionally demonstrated in the data extract above is the participant's disenchantment with a practice setting where a change cycle proves difficult to effect. The idea meta-reflexives are inclined to move between social contexts to 'dovetail' their concerns, value-commitments and life project is a mode characteristic proposed by Archer (2003). In the above extract this meta-reflexive mode characteristic is demonstrated by Social Worker 9. This demonstration of meta-reflexivity is evidenced where the practitioner describes needing to change work environments after becoming disenchanted with the normative cultural rules and practice(s) of the setting.

This finding was supported in all cases of meta-reflexives identified within my study where they described career moves due to being frustrated with working within the cultural constraints and/or bureaucratic confines of their employing agency. A significant theme across my data set was in relation to three cases where those practitioners identified as meta-reflexive left the organisation during the period of my study. Two practitioners were observed as having left of their own choosing. However, one practitioner identified as Social Worker 7 was an agency worker who did not have her contract renewed. This she claimed was due to her approach to case management that was viewed by the senior manager as time-consuming and

therefore not in keeping with the cultural rules and expectations of a performance driven organisation. Here my data illustrates how social workers' behaviours and practices outside the boundaries of the dominant expectations of a professional norm circle can influence attitudes towards individual practitioners.

As noted, Archer (2003) describes how communicative reflexives are those who are inclined to seek out similar and familiar persons who are those individuals seen as trusted interlocutors. As I have discussed, this was identified in the case of Social Worker 12 who on making sense as a communicative reflexive was inclined to seek the confirming opinion of her manager. In contrast to this finding what was identified in my data in relation to Social Worker 9 was a willingness to seek out those individuals who would challenge her judgement and decision-making. This was interpreted as part and parcel of engaging in the communicative-meta-reflexive process of sense-making in child protection. This communicative-meta-reflexive process is demonstrated in the following interview extract:

Social work is about being confident about reflective practice. There are some people who just do what they have to do but I like to think I do what I do to make a difference. I don't mind reflecting on my own practice, and it's about how you invite other people to. You can be powerful in whom you select to give you feedback, and select the ones who are going to give you a good story. I don't have any hang ups about knowing the truth about who I am, so I willingly invite my manager to say how I did. I don't think I would not be able to be reflective because that would be egocentric and then you would be dangerous [SW: 9]

Evidenced in the above data extract is a high level of 'epistemic reflexivity' as described by Taylor and White (2000) where the practitioner encourages reflection on her taken-for-granted-assumptions and knowledge production. This is demonstrated where the participant describes being confident with whomever is

willing to challenge her practice. By being uncompromising about who she will 'invite' to help explore her practice the participant demonstrates how not all social workers will seek colleagues who confirm their judgement formulations. Here the defining characteristics of a [communicative]-meta-reflexive are evidenced as reflection-on-reflections being part of the everyday sense-making process for Social Worker 9.

Also evidenced is my interpretation of what constitutes a hybrid communicative-meta-reflexive modality. This is demonstrated where, rather than make-sense through inner conversation as meta-reflexives are often inclined to do, sense-making is considered a more robust (and safe) process where accomplished through external conversation with those willing to challenge the participant's taken-for-granted assumptions. What is most interesting about the data extract presented here is how the participant views critical reflection as an essential part of sense-making in child protection. This is evidenced where the participant states '*I don't think I would not be able to be reflective because that would be egocentric and then you would be dangerous*'. Here illustrated within the data is how a predisposition toward independent sense-making by those, for example, practising an autonomous or fractured reflexivity could be a potentially unsafe praxis for children and families where taken-for-granted assumptions are not acknowledged.

Fractured reflexivity

On discussing fractured reflexivity Archer (2003: 298) identifies this as the dominate mode of those individuals whose communicative, autonomous or meta-reflexive

'power of reflexivity' had been impeded. Archer (2007: 93) states, in extreme cases fractured reflexives possess a 'passively agential' modality where their internal conversation will 'intensify their distress and disorientation rather than lead to a purposeful course of action'. Fractured reflexivity is identified by Archer (ibid) as usually a temporal state. However, in most extreme cases, Archer (2003: 298) claims, individuals will be unable to deal either intra-subjectively or inter-subjectively with the social structures constraining their sense of personal agency.

Common among fractured reflexives, as Archer (2003) states, is an inability to make sense and exercise personal power in a productive way. According to Archer (ibid), fractured reflexives find it difficult to dovetail their ultimate concerns and life project due the influence of the contextual constraints present within the settings they occupy. Archer argues, what defines a fractured reflexive among other things is their felt and communicated feelings of being frustrated about the constraints which impede their ability to operate in a desired way. Having previously been able to function in a way conducive to their concerns and life projects, what fractured reflexives are inclined to do, Archer (2003: 30) states, is 'hark back nostalgically' to how things were in the past. However, on doing so, as Archer (ibid) argues, this usually intensifies a fractured reflexive's sense of loss in the present. Drawing on these characteristics and those highlighted in chapter 2 the findings of my study identify Social Worker 13 as a participant demonstrating characteristics of a fractured reflexivity.

Practising a fractured reflexive modality

Archer (2003: 298) suggests a fractured reflexive will be a social worker whose personal agency will have been impeded due to their experience of the structural constraints of their employing agency. The findings on the practice of a fractured reflexivity evidenced within my study data indicated alongside another participant this was the case with Social Worker 13. Despite dominant fractured reflexive attributes during my study interview Social Worker 13 described personal characteristics indicative of a communicative reflexive. These were evidenced within her reflections on her willingness, desire and on previous occasions the opportunities afforded where she had engaged in dialogue with managers in the process of sense-making in a collaborative way. This was evidenced in the data presented in the first section of this part of chapter 5 where the participant was discussing her understanding and experience of reflective practice.

Viewed as an impeded communicative reflexive, the participant was expressive of her current frustrations at having to work within the constraints of a managerialist agenda. Of concern to the participant was her experience of her supervisor's approach which was to prioritise the management of performance. On referring to the impact of performance management, in the following interview extract the participant describes how her mental health had been affected by the influence of this approach to practice:

When I first qualified I remember getting home at nine, ten o'clock. It got to a point where I was making myself ill. Like everyone else in my team I go the extra mile. I've done late visits to hospitals, to families at half past ten at night. It is part of your job, recognising risk and crisis happen at any time. But asking me to do a visit like that on a regular basis, every week it's started to affect my health. I can show what I have done in a reasonable timescale, and I can only

do what I can do but I push myself. But there is a culture where when things go wrong professionals are accountable. I mean it's your job, your reputation and it does create anxiety because sometimes you're vulnerable and you don't have the support that you need [SW: 13]

While located within a long-term team outside the main study site the data here further highlights how different supervision styles and the relational-responsiveness of managers varied across the local authority. What my data also highlights are the potential impact of performance indicators on a practitioner's sense of personal agency and practice of reflexivity. In the following extract additional data on the impeded communicative reflexivity of Social Worker 13 is presented:

I can remember sitting in supervision with one of my first managers and I had a case of neglect. The manager asked: 'What should we do?' I said what I thought we should do. He replied: 'You know the family, so I'll support you'. It appears now you're told what to do. It's not you coming up with solutions, you're told we need to do this, or we need to do that. The manager it seems has a script. I don't think it's control, maybe select dictatorship in a sense management tell you what to do, rather than the social worker coming to the manager and saying I think we should do this [SW: 13]

Evidenced within the data is how, due to a change in supervisor and shift in organisational culture, the participant experienced this as a constraint to her sense of personal agency and practice discretion. This response to change in experience of supervision is identified as influenced by a managerial style that is directive and monologic (Cunliffe, 2014) in nature. Archer (2003) indicates a fractured reflexivity can develop in most cases where practitioners have a dominant communicative reflexive mode. The impedance of a communicative reflexivity can occur where the practitioner experiences contextual discontinuity through cultural change and/or the loss of a supportive relationship with a trusted supervisor.

An example of this scenario is identified as experienced by the participant in the above data extract. Additionally, highlighted is the impact of a managerialist agenda on the practice of communitive reflexivity. This is evidenced where the participant states *'management tell you what to do, rather than the social worker coming to the manager and saying I think we should do this'*. With this statement the findings of my study offer insight into how a managerialist agenda encourages directive decision-making imperatives in child protection.

Throughout my study interview Social Worker 13 continued to reflect on her relationship with her manager. In doing so, findings on the causal influence of a manager's relational-responsiveness on the sense-making and sense of personal agency of the participant was highlighted. Cunliffe (2014: 71) describes how managers shape organisational cultures and realities in their everyday conversation with practitioners. Reflecting on conversations with a manager present in her earlier career in the data extract below the participant described how this had encouraged her to trust her own sense-making and judgement formulation:

When I had that conversation I hadn't been long qualified but my manager trusted my judgement. What I felt was right and he made it very clear he would support me. That's really important as that reduces your anxiety. That's something lost with some social workers, not communicating very well with their managers. Maybe that's a situation that needs to be addressed?
[SW: 13]

Evidenced in the data here is how the relational-responsiveness of managers has remained central to the participant's sense-making in child protection and practice of reflexivity. As they are not fixed psychological traits, Archer (2003: 319) indicates practitioners' modes of reflexivity will remain susceptible to change. This will be

dependent upon their social contexts and the relationship they have with colleagues and supervisors. As I have discussed, what was evidenced within my interview with Social Worker 13 was how her previous mode of communicative reflexivity had been impeded. As I have illustrated this was due to her personal agency and tendency for a communicative reflexivity being impeded by practice constraints of the agency.

For further illustration, how the participant's sense of personal agency was impeded by organisational constraints in the form of target-based priorities and the ICT based management of performance is evidenced in the data extract below:

To start with you have got your workload flashing as overdue and it's all the anxieties this creates and I think I am a bit anxious...a bit upset if that's the right word as we have been told they are going to create a data sheet...and 'name and shame' individual social workers...it's going to raise anxieties and make you feel incompetent and of what value is that? [SW: 13]

In the above data extract, the participant is referring to the red, amber and green (RAG) rating system introduced into the local authority so practitioners are alerted on their ICT workload targets and when, for example, an IA and/or other performance managed task needs to be completed. Here my data highlights how, where interpreted as a structural constraint, the participant's sense of personal agency is impeded through feelings of anxiety. Here my data highlights how Social Worker 13 experiences a tendency toward a fractured reflexivity where stating '*I think at the moment I am a bit anxious*'. The participant also describes feelings of being concerned about being viewed as '*incompetent*'. This data offers support to Archer's (2003) claims in relation to the characteristics of a fractured reflexivity. As Archer (ibid: 298) states individuals 'instead of orientating themselves towards a purposeful

course of action' will engage in self-talk that is primarily expressive of their fractured reflexivity.

However, what was also evidenced within my data was what Hung and Appleton (2014: 12) described as the 'green shoots' of a communicative reflexive's potential for a restored sense of personal agency. Again, allied to the level of relational-responsiveness experienced within the context of supervisory relationships, referring to this Social Worker 13 states, *'that's really important as that reduces your anxiety'*. With this statement, what is illustrated with my data is how the participant is able to contemplate a future where her communicative reflexivity might be restored. This is evidenced within the reflexive deliberations of the participant where she states *'something is lost with some social workers, not communicating very well with their managers. Maybe that's a situation that needs to be addressed?'*

Conclusion

In part 2 of this chapter I have presented findings on three key themes drawn from my study data. These include: (1) sense-making and supervision (2) knowledge informing sense-making and (3) participants' reflexive modalities. My data highlights how formal supervision was seen by most practitioners as an essential part of their sense-making, judgement and decision-making. While the supervision style of the manager within the main study site was described as collaborative and relationally-responsive, data on monologic and directive approaches has been presented.

Across the data set for NQSWs and experienced practitioners, formal supervision was identified as serving three main purposes. These included functioning as: (1) a bureaucratic process where agency targets, performance and the practice priorities of the organisation could be monitored by managers (2) a supportive milieu where practitioners could (re)formulate their sense-making, judgement and decision-making based on the manager's differing perspectives and/or their own reevaluated perspectives and (3) a protected space where practitioners could develop confidence as professionals alongside capacity for managing complex cases.

In relation to accomplishing sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection different supervision preferences were drawn from the data. For example, for some practitioners identified as communicative reflexives their preference for consulting with the manager on all occasions to complete the sense-making process was highlighted. In contrast, other practitioners were found to be more inclined to seek to have their sense-making and judgement formulation endorsed and/or challenged by managers. With these critically-reflexive practitioners the data highlighted how they think more intuitively while willing to analyse, alter and/or defend their sense-making. Where open to different interpretations of their sense-making some more experienced practitioners might challenge the judgement and decision-making rationales of their managers.

A conclusion to be drawn is how participants' reflections on formal supervision offer insight into importance, in terms of their sense-making and judgement, of a manager's decision-making knowledge, skill and status. Several practitioners who were more experienced communicated an awareness of the complexities of the

supervisory role in the context of a managerialist culture. However, having access to a knowledgeable and skilled supervisor was identified by many participants as an ideal scenario. Within this ideal scenario some practitioners described how this would allow them to critically reflect on cases and how and why they might draw on their taken-for-granted assumptions and biases to inform their sense-making. For some supervision was identified as constituting a complex social encounter where negotiating decision-making informing child and family outcomes took place with managers. However, some NQSWs appreciated a directive approach even where supervision was concerned with managing performance and practice priorities.

Within Archer's (2003, 2007) theory, all meta-reflexives are identified as sharing with autonomous reflexives a tendency to be intra-subjective in their sense-making. Therefore, a finding on communicative-meta-reflexivity, where the need for external conversation is prioritised by a practitioner, offers data to inform an adaption of Archers' theory. In my study, findings on different modes of reflexivity allied to Archer's theory highlight how participants are identified as sharing many homogenous characteristics. This was the case, for example, in terms of them being social workers who were collective members of a professional group or norm circle. Within the statutory setting occupied by participants the same kinds of constraints and enablements, and/or taken-for-granted dimensions of their day-to-day practice, were identified as collectively experienced. For example, the roles and responsibilities when acting as duty social worker were the same.

However, the findings highlight how the constraints and enablements of day-to-day practice were experienced differently by different practitioners. These experiential

differences and practitioners' capacity for sense-making, are identified as determined by their mode of reflexivity. Some of the theoretical and practice implications allied to social workers' reflexive practices will be discussed in the following chapter. Although, what can be concluded from the findings is how sense-making in child protection is accomplished differently by different practitioners. These different sense-making tendencies will be dependent on practitioners' mode of reflexivity. This is despite practitioners being members of a professional norm circle where, as Elder-Vass (2012) claims, practitioners will be encouraged to practice in a normatively-aligned way. The findings indicate sense-making in child protection will be influenced by social workers' mode and capacity for practising reflexivity. In the following chapter I discuss the study findings and consider how these provide answers to my research questions.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Making sense of sense-making in child protection

Introduction

In the previous chapter I presented the findings of my study. The main purpose of this chapter is to synthesise and further interpret the study findings. On conducting this process, I illustrate some of the theory and practice implications of the findings and demonstrate how these provide answers to my research questions. I begin this chapter by revisiting my research questions and utilising a table of contents to summarise the findings as the key themes and sub-themes recurring across the data. On discussing the findings, beginning with a critique of the techno-rational paradigm, throughout this chapter I highlight some of the empirical insight offered. I highlight the significance of the inter-relationship between the key themes and sub-themes and demonstrate how my study findings contribute to the development of the model of practice-depth in child protection as presented by Chapman and Field (2007) in chapter 2.

In the final section of this chapter I continue the process of developing a conceptual framework for informing a critically-reflexive approach to sense-making in child protection. I do so by discussing the relevance of my study findings for contributing to a four-stage model for enhancing sense-making through the supervision process. White (2013: 51) describes how professional supervision offers a unique opportunity to contribute to the development of an ethical and 'just culture' in social work organisations. It does so, White (ibid) indicates, where preferred ways of knowing and/or the dominant cultural rules and practices of an organisation are identified and 'shook up' in supervision. With the four-stage model proposed I highlighted how the taken-for-granted dimensions of practice can be explored in the context of

supervision as relationally-responsive supervisee-supervisor encounters. I conclude this chapter with a summary and evaluation of the study findings discussed.

Research questions revisited

My study research questions were concerned with examining sense-making in child protection and the practice of reflexivity. These are:

(1) 'How do social workers 'make sense' in child protection?'

(2) 'Is sense-making in child protection informed by reflexivity?'

The Study Findings

In chapter 4 I presented findings to answer my research questions. Due to the inter-related nature of study findings the key themes and sub-themes I discussed often overlapped. Nevertheless, as shown in Table 5, while there was overlap I identified three key themes as the most salient phenomena influencing social workers' sense-making in child protection and their reflexive practice(s). These included: (1) prescriptive policy and practice frameworks (2) practitioners' biography, knowledge, experience, values, beliefs, concerns and practice approaches and (3) practitioners' reflexive modes.

Table 5: Findings overarching themes and sub-themes

<p>Prescriptive policy and practice frameworks</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) The duty system, referral information and the uncertain, ambiguous and complex nature of the work (2) Workflow and resource management, threshold criteria and determination of practice priorities (3) Structure of strategy meetings, multi-agency judgement and decision-making practices and inter-professional relationships (4) Standardised child and family assessment, statutory home visits and other formal family-based interventions (5) Supervision and the conflicting and/or confirming perspectives of managers and/or colleagues (6) Timescales and demands of the ICT system and the emphasis placed on performance management and meeting of agency targets
<p>Practitioners' biography, knowledge, experience, values, beliefs, concerns and practice approaches</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Practitioners' life histories, personal and professional experience of statutory intervention, values, concerns and belief systems (2) Practitioners' family-minded, child-focused, child's best interest and/or residual child welfare discourses and practice approaches (3) Practitioners' perspectives and/or the 'expert' knowledge of managers, colleagues and/or other professionals (4) Practitioners' tacit and self-knowledge, experiential learning, practice wisdom, heuristics, biases and other reasoning processes (5) Practitioners' knowledge and interpretation of discourses of risk and child abuse and value placed on contested role of social work (6) Practitioners' interpretation of family case histories, parent and professional perspectives, family rights and the nature of parent-professional relationships
<p>Practitioners' reflexive modes</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Communicate reflexivity, (2) Autonomous reflexivity (3) Meta-reflexivity (4) Communicative-meta-reflexivity (5) Fractured reflexivity (6) Practitioners' low (habitual) or high (epistemic) reflexivity

Overview

On reviewing key themes and sub-themes as set out in Table 5 what emerges is a complex picture which reflects: (1) the situated and subjective nature of sense-making in child protection and therefore (2) the multi-faceted practice context where knowledge informing sense-making and reflexive practice(s) is developed, applied and (re)constructed. Additionally, highlighted is a scientifically unpredictable child protection system that the techno-rational paradigm does not contemplate. In chapter 1 I highlighted how a techno-rationality encourages approaches to sense-making, judgement and decision-making based on the view all presenting problems have calculable, predictable and logical solutions. However, the findings of my study highlight how a technocratic ethos overlooks the causal influence of a range of interacting phenomena influencing sense-making in child protection as highlighted in Table 5.

What is illustrated in Table 5 is how sense-making is inextricably linked to the range of indiscernible yet causally influential phenomena making up the child protection system. These multiple, complex and inter-related phenomena represent the day-to-day complexities of sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection. As insufficient attention has been paid to the casual influence of these phenomena within the existing literature, lack of insight into the complex relationship between sense-making in child protection and the practice of different reflexivity is highlighted. Consequently, while knowledge of sense-making in child protection and reflexive practice(s) remains underdeveloped, it is clear from a preliminary overview of my study findings further research into this important area of practice is required.

Summary and synthesis

On attempting to synthesise my study findings my preference would have been to do so as they relate sequentially to my research questions. However, on analysing the data it became apparent there was significant thematic overlap. Therefore, although I attempt to answer my research questions in a successive way, the findings discussed in this section will intermittently be identified as applicable to either research question. Here potential difficulties arise where, for example, discussing sense-making and how this is influenced by prescriptive policy and practice frameworks it may be necessary to make reference to the different mode of reflexivity social workers practice. However, this approach is requisite as frequently the findings discussed as noted will correspond with either research question.

Findings research question one: 'How do social workers 'make sense' in child protection?'

In the first section of part 1 of the findings chapter I presented data highlighting the complex practice context of the main study site. The purpose of this was to offer insight into the situated and subjective nature of sense-making in child protection. My data illustrated how social workers' sense-making and reflexive practice(s) were enmeshed within: (1) a standardised duty system (2) the nature of the practice context including the complexities of parent-practitioner relationships and (3) premised on collaborative inter-professional working. Consequently, child protection work is identified as standardised yet unpredictable and requiring practitioners to engage in sense-making, judgement and decision-making processes based on ambiguous, limited, competing knowledge and information.

Participants invariably described how they felt frustrated, anxious and/or uncomfortable with the controlling and limiting aspects of duty social work and their multi-faceted role of: (1) 'workflow manager' (2) 'practice prioritiser' (3) 'threshold (de)terminator' and (4) 'risk assessor'. As Broadhurst et al. (2010c) found it was within the constraints and complexities of the duty system that the 'latent conditions for error' were evidenced within my study. This was especially so where, for example, some practitioners felt pressurised to utilise heuristics and bias to help them make sense of and/or 'filter out' potentially appropriate referrals.

Broadhurst et al. (2010c) have argued statutory duty systems encourage a conveyor-belt culture where face-to-face contact with children and families is discouraged through hasty referral disposal. My study findings support those of Broadhurst et al. by highlighting the causal influence of a NPM agenda on sense-making in child protection. As discussed in chapter 2 a NPM agenda is characterised by the 'iron cage' (Wastell et al., 2011: 310) of performance management where expedient regulation of workflow in child protection is prioritised. Within this practice culture the prioritisation of workflow management and agency performance over engagement with children and families was experienced as constraining by some of my study participants.

This was evidenced, for example, where social workers felt: (1) their practice discretion (2) the rights of parents and/or (3) the potentially complex needs of children and families were being undermined by a NMP agenda and conveyor-belt culture. This finding highlights how conveyor-belt practice informing sense-making in

child protection is facilitated where: (1) face-to-face contact with children and families is discouraged through the 'disposal' of potentially appropriate referrals as low level and (2) the management of appropriate referrals via a standardised 'one-size-fits-all' approach to child and family assessment (CFA) is encouraged.

Among examples of practice 'short-cuts' discussed in the first section of the findings chapter were the encouragement of: (1) problem framing (2) heuristics and bias and (3) the inter-subjective discursive-dialogical dependency some practitioners had on their manager and colleagues. Consequently, the findings of my study offer insight into how some practitioners adopt a low habitual and communicative reflexive approach to sense-making in child protection which exacerbates hasty judgement and decision-making. Examples of hasty judgement formulation included disposal of referrals due to: (1) presenting information and/or previous interventions being viewed as low level, and/or (2) CCNs presenting as similar or familiar scenarios being warranting a standardised response.

Resultantly, my study findings identify how with some social workers a patterned or recognition-primed (Klein, 2000) approach to sense-making was encouraged by heuristics demonstrative of a low habitual reflexive practice. Here, as Broadhurst et al. (2010c) found, sense-making leading to the potential (mis)categorisation of CCNs was evidenced in my study. Observed examples of potential miscategorising of child protection cases included: (1) where several CCNs allied to the same child or children were received across a short-period and (2) where practitioners judged these repeat CCNs to have been initially responded to in an appropriate way.

Using a domestic violence (DV) case study sample, White (2013) emphasises the inherent danger in this type of conveyor-belt, heuristic and low habitual reflexive approach to sense-making. White demonstrates (re)receipt of CCNs where DV has been a feature is often an indication of an unsafe behaviour pattern (re)emerging within a family. However, in some instances in my study new referrals on closed cases were observed as having to be considered in relation to taken-for-granted case histories, presenting information and/or existent workflow priorities. Therefore, the pressure on duty social workers to potentially marginalise and/or dismiss 'revolving door' cases as lower level was evidenced.

Although, my study findings highlighted how not all social workers made sense of CCNs informed by heuristics, taken-for-granted information and therefore in a low habitual reflexive way. For example, the nature, quality and quantity of referrals received by duty social workers was observed as experienced as interpreted differently by different practitioners as either: (1) manageable (2) overwhelming (3) straightforward and/or (4) otherwise ambiguous and therefore needing further investigation. However, for some practitioners, where confirmation of developing interpretation of information on a CCN was sought from a manager and/or colleague, a dominant communicative reflexive modality was evidenced. Consequently, in order to make sense in suspected child abuse cases, several practitioners were observed as dialogically dependent on managers and colleagues. This communicative reflexive dependence assisted practitioners in interpreting, conceptualising and (re)evaluating information received as duty social workers.

Reoccurring examples of this finding highlighted how, where information remained uncertain, ambiguous and/or otherwise incomplete, an inter-subjective and discursive-dialogical dependent sense-making culture existed within the team. This culture was indicative of the 'knowledge making' that occurred through team 'inter-professional talk' (Taylor and White, 2000: 135). Resultantly, the ways in which some practitioners talked about referrals with managers and/or colleagues reflected a cultural norm that had a powerful influence on how sense-making in child protection was accomplished. This finding illustrates, when presented with uncertain and/or ambiguous referrals, official procedures, logic and/or analytical reasoning processes will be circumvented by some practitioners in favour of more unofficial, tacit and intuitive approaches to sense-making. However, where the perspective(s), ideas and/or taken-for-granted assumptions of managers and/or colleagues were not questioned, examples of a low habitual reflexivity were evidenced.

In the second section of part 1 of the findings chapter I presented data illustrating sense-making in different practice contexts. These included: (1) family-based settings and (2) inter-professional meetings. Empirical insights included how practitioners' engagement with parents was often characterised by encounters that were demanding and complex. In response to CCNs, for example, where risks to children remained uncertain and/or ambiguous, managing parental hostility during home visits while having to formulate moral judgement was identified as part of the day-to-day sense-making process. Here my study findings highlighted practitioners' sense-making within this context was informed by their personal experiences and/or professional knowledge, beliefs, values and practice approaches.

In the literature review I discussed how different child welfare discourses locate social work in a moral and legal context. Consequently, how practitioners assigned meaning to information presented on CCNs and/or parents' hostile behaviour was further evidenced in my study as influenced by 'family-minded' and 'child-focused' discourses. These discourses, which located child concerns and/or parental behaviour(s) within a legal and moral context, informed practitioners' approaches to sense-making in complex scenarios. The legal nature of statutory intervention into the lives of children and families is informed by what is in the child's best interests (Barter, 2008). The child's best interests were identified within my study as a dominant discourse informing some practitioners' sense-making. On describing what they felt was in a child's best interest's practitioners emphasised the need to reduce risk and ensure a child safety. As discussed in chapter 2 here my study findings highlight how sense-making in child protection was influenced by discourses of risk.

As Keddell (2012) found, the notion of what was in a child's best interests was cited by several study participants as a positive attachment and receipt of emotional warmth from parents. While working in the child's best interests several social workers in my study described how they had tried to encourage parent-child attachment. However, as highlighted in several case study samples, some children were removed from the family home after their parents failed to provide a warm and safe relationship. While their sense-making was informed by attachment theory several practitioners demonstrated being influenced by a child-focused discourse. Where influenced by a child-focused discourse practitioners demonstrated a commitment to 'be there for the child' and to a lesser extent to provide support to the wider family. As discussed in the literature review, here the findings of my study

highlight how sense-making in child protection is based on a range of taken-for-granted assumptions regarding what constitutes 'good' and/or 'safe' parenting.

In her system review, Munro (2011) emphasised the importance of a child focus in child protection. Since the Munro Report a move toward a child-centred approach to practice in the UK has been reflected in the *Working Together* (Department of Health, 2015) document. Kedell (2012) argues the increasing influence of a child-centred discourse encourages practitioners to construct children as active agents who have the right to express their own needs, interests, opinions and points of view. However, what the findings of my study indicate is what is overlooked within a child-centred approach is a child's vulnerability within a child-centred discourse. For example, where a child's views and wishes may have been manipulated and/or controlled by a family member, a child-centred orientation can obscure the potential for existing and/or future abuse (Kedell, 2012).

Featherstone, White and Morris (2014) indicate a child's vulnerability, and/or their parent's strengths and potential for safe care, can only be assessed within the context of a family-minded perspective. Featherstone, White and Morris therefore argue the need for the development of family-minded practice where an understanding of the causal influence of socio-cultural and economic structures on poor and/or unsafe parenting is reflexively understood. The authors additionally highlight how children need to be understood in the context of attachment theory as relational beings who need the proximity, love and care of their mothers, fathers and siblings. However, the findings of my study highlight how, even where a family-minded approach is practised, sense-making in child protection can be influenced by

a low habitual reflexive application of taken-for-granted psycho-social theories including, for example, attachment theory

My findings highlighted how family-minded social work was not always prioritised by some practitioners. Therefore, as Kedell (2012) points out, where child-focused practice was promoted the findings indicate children could become vulnerable through assumed control and responsibility for their own safety. As Featherstone, White and Morris (2014) argue where child-focused practice is prioritised strengths within the family remain marginalised. Nevertheless, the findings of my study illustrate where used as a 'moral lens' (Saltiel, 2014: 213) potential for bias sense-making can occur in the context of a family-minded perspective. It did so where family-minded practice was evidenced as applied as a rule of optimism (Dingwall, Eekelaar and Murray, 1983). This was evidenced in the case of a parent's unsafe behaviour towards her children being attributed to mental health difficulties and therefore her inactions being interpreted as lacking in culpability.

Of interest in relation to my study findings on child-focused and family-minded practices is how these are evidenced in relation to the reflexive modes identified as practised by different social workers. For example, within interviews practitioners were asked: *'What do you think it is about you as a person and as a professional that makes you a really good social worker?'* In response to this questions Social Worker 7, who was identified as a meta-reflexive, described the importance of *'treating everybody with humanity and dignity because regardless of the presenting problems they are people deserving of respect.* Social Worker 9 also identified as a meta-reflexive responded by stating *'I have a lot of hope for the future of children and*

families...I genuinely feel quite humanistic...that I reach out to that person within that situation whatever that may be. Identified as an autonomous reflexive, Social Worker 5 responded by stating *"I'm very child focused in everything that I do...children always come first that shines through in my work...I'll say to parents an awful lot yes I am here to work with you, but in whatever I do my focus will always be your children"* [Interview extract]. Although, a limited sample this finding tentatively indicates is a potential link between sense-making, reflexive practice(s) and practitioners' child welfare orientations.

In the second section of the findings chapter the 'public act of sense-making' and the consequences of 'inter-professional talk as reasoning' (Taylor and White, 2000: 121) in child protection was identified in the context of inter-professional meetings. As discussed in the literature review, Taylor and White (ibid: 122) describe how inter-professional meetings make 'fertile ground' for taken-for-granted 'knowledge making'. Taylor and White indicate how some practitioners will use talk to validate and account for their sense-making and professional judgements while performing a professional identity. The authors (ibid) describe the process of 'co-narration' within professional groups highlighting this as a phenomenon where members 'chip in' with supporting statements and/or agree with the 'expert' or 'lead' professional. While this phenomenon was highlighted in my study, as discussed, the performance of professional identity also entailed social workers disagreeing with colleagues in other agencies. As White and Featherstone (2005) found, examples of this in my study included were different thresholds for intervention and/or competing versions of what constituted a risk were evidenced within multi-agency meetings.

Consequently, claims by Taylor and White (2000) and Kelly (2000) in relation to professional talk and the influence this can have on collective sense-making, judgement and decision-making polarisation are evidenced in my study. With this finding how some professionals will collectively construct knowledge in a non-critically-reflexive way while their taken-for-granted 'expert' assumptions influence sense-making, judgement and decision-making is evidenced in my study. However, evidence of critically-reflexive approaches to inter-professional sense-making where professional opinion, 'expertise' and/or language was challenged by some practitioners was also identified. For example, as described, challenges to the use of professional language and the 'received ideas' (Rojek, Peacock and Collins, 1988) of her employing agency were made by Social Worker 9.

On challenging the 'expert' language used by another colleague Social Worker 9 communicated appreciating situating herself in a position of 'not knowing'. This contrasts with the claims of Elder-Vass (2012) who argues in organisational contexts individuals will practice within the boundaries of the existing cultural rules and practices. Demonstrated with this finding was how some social workers were inclined to challenge professional talk and the legitimacy of the language used by themselves and/or colleagues in the context of a professional norm circle. Although, this was not the case for all practitioners as the findings indicate challenging or complying with the perspectives of other professionals was dependent on a practitioners' mode of reflexivity. As noted, indicative of a communicative reflexivity, findings on some practitioners' reliance on the perspective(s) of managers, colleagues and/or other professionals in the context of multi-agency meetings was a common theme discussed in the findings chapter.

In the first section of part 2 of the findings chapter formal supervision and informal peer relationships were identified as a key influence on practitioners' sense-making. Consequently, my study findings highlighted how the supervisor-supervisee relationship was primarily experienced as a routine practice where complex cases, share ideas and differing perspectives were discussed. While supervision was experienced by most practitioners as a positive process where sense-making, judgement and decision-making could be accomplished, some experienced the activity as pragmatic and cursory. The literature (e.g. Noble and Irwin, 2009) highlights how among contemporary challenges to supervision in child protection is how it can be used to provide a context for challenging heuristic thinking and encouraging more analytical reasoning. While this was evidenced in some cases, findings highlighted how some managers lacked experience, skills and/or commitment to engage in collaborative supervision that encouraged critical and reflexive dialogue.

Consequently, while opportunities for critical reflection were valued by most practitioners, despite a managers' level of skill and experience, their relational-responsiveness was identified as more important for accomplishing sense-making in complex cases. This was evidenced in the case of Social Worker 12 who described how supervisors needed to have the experience, skill and understanding to *'help you unpick issues...and work in tandem with the concerns'*. While not all managers were identified as relationally-response and/or 'expert' in their role as supervisors, my study findings highlight how for some practitioners the peer relationships were important. Like formal supervision, the study findings highlight how the informal relationships practitioners had with peers encouraged either a reflexive deliberation

of taken-for-granted assumptions or culturally saturated exchange of 'received ideas' (Rojek, Peacock and Collins, 1988).

In the second section of part 2 of the findings chapter the data highlighted how the knowledge and 'expert' opinion of other professionals was a key aspect influencing sense-making in child protection. However, while the idea is professionals must work together, the findings highlighted several case scenarios where practitioners found this imperative frustrating, unnecessary and/or undermining. Participants described how other professionals often: (1) submitted inappropriate or ambiguous referrals (2) exerted 'expert' opinion that was inconclusive and/or risk-orientated (3) held an uncompromising stance toward a parent or family and/or (4) utilised professional language or 'jargon' that compromised their own position.

In the findings chapter several examples were offered around these themes. These included where: (1) medical and legal professionals had utilised their knowledge, language, power and/or status to influence judgement and decision-making in suspected child abuse cases (2) police had influenced professional opinion of a parent through disclosure of their historic criminal activity and (3) a health visitor had been seen to compromise a child's safety by not wishing to confront a parent's potentially neglectful behaviour. As White (2006) highlights, practitioners' experiences of uncompromising perspectives and/or 'expert' opinions in the context of inter-professional relationships can lead to ridicule of the other's view via rhetorical augmentation of the moral superiority of their own standpoint.

As Saltiel (2014) found, a key finding in my study was where some practitioners told what Dingwall (1977: 371) describes as 'atrocious stories' about other professionals to defend their own sense-making, actions and identity. Here the findings of my study highlight how some practitioners, while able to identify the practice shortcomings of other professionals, were not always reflexively alert to the inherent deficiencies of their own taken-for-granted practice. Rojek, Peacock and Collins (1988) and D'Cruz (2004a) argue within statutory agencies dominant cultural rules and practices will underpin social workers' meaning-making processes and the construction of professional and parent identities. As D'Cruz found, one of the ways in which social workers' approach to sense-making while performing professional identity became observable in my study was through the cultural practice of deliberating suspected child abuse cases inter-professionally.

As previous studies have identified (e.g. Dingwall et al., 1995), a significant number of practitioners' time was spent reviewing CCNs, discussing cases with managers or colleagues and/or seeking the differing perspectives of other professionals. As White (2009) highlighted I observed how, in respect of making sense in suspected child abuse cases, of primary importance for some social workers was the nature of their inter-professional relationships. In the findings chapter I discussed how these were utilised for ascertaining confirmation from others where practitioners were formulating judgement in uncertain cases. This finding supports claims by White (2013) who argues social workers are inclined to seek out professionals who will offer supporting evidence to confirm their sense-making and judgement formulations. However, as discussed in chapter 4 some practitioners were able to identify the

practice of seeking confirming opinions and/or being influenced by the power and/or language of other professionals as unreflexively accomplishing sense-making.

This was evidenced in the case of Social Worker 7 who demonstrated a reflexive awareness of the *'need to be...aware...of the language we use and [how our] power can sway our decision [and] other people's power and how this influences our own testimonies'*. The idea that the idiosyncratic routine of seeking confirming evidence should be reflexively understood was also demonstrated in the case of Social Worker 9 who emphasised the importance of knowing *'you can be powerful in whom you select to give you feedback'*. White (2013: 46) describes how individuals tend to have 'cognitive biases' which encourage sense-making based on a 'psychological commitment' to initial judgement formulations. However, the findings of my study highlight where social workers demonstrate a critically-reflexive approach to sense-making they will be aware of and/or engage in a search for evidence to disconfirm their formulating hypothesis.

As Saltiel (2014) found, the value of participants' practice experience in relation to sense-making processes was a consistent theme within my study. This was evidenced in the comment made by Social Worker 13 who stated her understanding of what constitutes a risk to children was based on *'common-sense'*. On several occasions participants described how their understanding of risk was based, for example, on: (1) experience of previous cases (2) personal experience of growing up (3) the media (4) research (5) findings of serious case reviews, and as described by Social Worker 1 and 9 (6) cultural, contextual and historically contingent discourses.

Here different sense-making tendencies and reflexive practice(s) were evidenced with those practitioners adopting a low habitual reflexivity identified as inclined to utilise heuristics and/or otherwise draw on experience of previous cases to make sense of CCNs.

Evidence of heuristics and bias sense-making was therefore further identified in my study. These processes were evidenced where practitioners were observed utilising an emotional response and/or predicting the outcome relative to information presented on CCNs. Here evidence of 'problem framing' (Kelly, 2000) and what Tversky and Kahneman (1974) term 'availability heuristics' was supported in my study. As discussed in the literature review availability heuristic is concerned with the practitioners' perception of the likelihood of an event outcome being based on information presented and/or how this compares to previous experience of a similar scenario. In my review, it was identified how this finding of sense-making being informed by a low habitual reflexivity is often described as 'practice wisdom' in the social work literature (Dybicz, 2004).

Several of my study participants described how as NQSWs they felt every referral needed a child protection response. However, as they gained experience practitioners described how they could manage stress and determine thresholds in a less risk-anxious way. This development of a less defensive, risk-oriented approach to sense-making was based on being mentored and/or developing practice wisdom through personal experience. Here evidence is presented of how sense-making in child protection and the development of a higher, more critical reflexivity is a potentially fluid process informed by understanding of discourses of risk and

dependent on the relational-responsiveness of colleagues. As practitioners described moving from interpreting risk as a certainty to understanding the phenomena as a more uncertain entity evidence of quasi-rationality as described by Hammond (1996) was identified in my study.

Although, evidenced also was how being mentored facilitates receipt of taken-for-granted ideas and what Rojek, Peacock and Collins (1988: 36) consider 'institutionalisation' of risk conceptualisations from one practitioner to another. The dangers of relying on colleagues while viewing what constitutes a risk to children as an act of 'common-sense' were identified by Saltiel (2014). As noted, this finding was supported in my study by Social Worker 13 who communicated her use of '*common-sense... [and how] you have to look at things in a way that you know*'. This finding highlights how sense-making in child protection had become a low habitual reflexive, taken-for-granted response for Social Worker 13. With this evidence of a non-critical-reflexivity the findings of my study highlight how sense-making in child protection and the practice of different modes of reflexive are not consciously acknowledged or understood by practitioners. This finding resonates with claims by Taylor and White (2000) who suggest without critical-reflexivity social workers will remain subconscious to the causal influence of the taken-for-granted knowledge(s) influencing their sense-making.

The findings of my study highlight how performance management was dominated by a range of prescriptive policies and practices. These included the production of weekly spreadsheets that promoted practitioner efficacy through the red, amber and green (RAG) rating of the timeframe and number of CFAs completed by each

practitioner. An observed effect of the influence on sense-making of performance management was social workers differing attitudes toward working within or outside of RAG rated timescales. Due to the influence of performance management my study findings highlighted a quasi-culture where, for example, some practitioners chose to work outside of their contractual working hours to complete CFAs on time. Meanwhile, some were found to be indifferent to the RAG system and others physically and emotionally stressed when workloads were identified as 'in the red'. Where practitioners' efficiency and 'expertise' was measured in relation to their RAG-rated performance, the findings of my study highlight how some manager's low habitual reflexivity encouraged reproduction of a child protection system influenced by a NPM agenda and a level of practice-depth indicative of a conveyer-belt culture.

As Chapman and Field (2007) highlight conveyer-belt practice, as the lowest level of practice-depth in child protection, is identified as determined by prescriptive policies and practice(s). As Chapman and Field indicate, a key characteristic of conveyer-belt practice is to secure practitioners' relative compliance with prescriptive policy and procedures as the taken-for-granted practice of the organisation. Illustrated with my study findings was how those practitioners whose performance was consistently observed as influenced most by prescriptive policy and practice frameworks where NQSWs. Here the findings indicate the development of practice-depth is a potentially linear process for some social workers. This was illustrated in several cases where the challenges of a conveyer-belt practice informed by the taken-for-granted cultural rules and practice of the setting became more visible as practitioners gained experience and/or developed their capacity for critical-reflexivity.

However, it cannot be claimed practice-depth and/or critical-reflexivity develops through experiential learning in the case of all practitioners. This is because, as highlighted in the findings chapter, as a meta-reflexive Social Worker 9 demonstrated a critically-reflexive approach to practice on entering the profession. Here the indication of my study findings is that the practice of an inherent critical-reflexivity may be linked to a social workers' dominant meta-reflexive mode as identified within Archer's (2003) theory. However, there is limited evidence to argue there is any 'real' reason why, for example, a practitioner identified as autonomous reflexive cannot practice critical-reflexivity. Although this indicative finding does suggest this might prove one of many useful 'lines of inquiry' for any future study examining how sense-making in child protection might be informed by different modes of reflexivity.

Findings research question two: 'Is sense-making in child protection informed by reflexivity?'

As discussed in chapter 3, Archer's (2003) approach to encouraging participants' outer expression of their inner conversation seemed useful for identifying their dominant mode of reflexivity. Consequently, to answer my research questions, the importance of extending the opportunity for participants in my study to discuss the complex nature of child protection work so I could discern the nature of their reflexive practice(s) was important. Prior to my study I had reviewed the work of Hung and Appleton (2014). Having applied Archer's (2003) method to inform a previous study Hung and Appleton felt patterns of reflexive modalities would emerge with an indirective interview strategy.

By offering participants in my study the opportunity to demonstrate their reflexive practice(s) excluded from the knowledge that the concept might inform their sense-

making differing modes of reflexivity were identified. My review of the literature identified how social work research is criticised for being seen as theory-driven (Longhofer and Floersch, 2012). Nevertheless, I felt my approach to utilising Archer's (2003) theory without informing participants of my interest in reflexive practice(s) would make the findings of my study more robust. In her study Archer (2003) found most participants' reflexive responses in relation to the constraints and enablements of their social contexts remained dominant. Conversely, the findings of my study highlighted how in one particular case mode of reflexivity practiced by the participant as a constant 'patterned response' (Archer, 2003: 343) to the structural constraints and enablements of the setting, while evidenced as dominant, was seen as a 'hybrid'. This was discussed in the findings chapter in the case of social worker 9 identified as a communicative-meta-reflexive. Thus, Archer's (2007: 92) suggestion modes of reflexivity may not be mutually exclusive and could overlap under different conditions is indicated with my study findings.

According to Archer (2003), the ability to adopt a 'stance' or develop an attitude toward the social structures that influence personal agency is a reflexive accomplishment. Although, Archer (ibid) claims that not everyone will operate as an active agent or develop a positive stance toward the structural constraints they experience. The reason for this, as Archer claims, is because their dominant mode of reflexivity has become impeded. Where a dominant mode of reflexivity becomes impeded to the point of fracture, as Archer (2003: 343) claims, individuals can become 'incapable of deliberating purposefully as subject to object about their social context'.

While discussing the passive agential characteristics of a fractured reflexive, Archer (ibid) does not fully address the issue of any form of active agency retention. However, evidence was found in my study of a continued sense of active agency where participants' communicative reflexive mode was interpreted as impeded. In relation to my study findings, of particular significance was how Social Worker 13 who while identified as a fractured reflexive utilised a communicative reflexive mode to reflect on her sense-making. Within her reflections, identified as most influential in relation to influencing her impeded communicative mode of reflexivity, was her relationship with her manager whom she described as dictatorial.

In her study, Archer (2003: 343) identified how the 'root cause' of a fractured reflexivity was primarily participants' sense of loss of identity. With their ultimate concerns as a human being and their life project having been derailed or 'deprived of traction' fractured reflexives are identified by Archer (ibid) as 'experiencing something akin to paralysis of their personal powers'. Resultantly, with the reflections of Social Worker 13 as presented in the findings chapter, for example, there is some evidence in my study to support Archer's theory of fractured reflexivity. For example, due to a service restructure, Social Worker 13 described how she had been redeployed from a senior post to her current position as a practitioner in a children and families team. Here the findings can be interpreted as Social Worker 13 demonstrating disenchantment at having to take up a post not of her choosing while also being supervised by a manager experienced as relationally-unresponsive.

Disenchantment as a practitioner was further reflected as Social Worker 13 where she described a scenario where a paediatrician had retracted a professional point of view after she (social worker) had informed the parent of the confirming result of her

child's examination. Having to subsequently tell the parent her child had not been sexually abused after she had already been informed she had, Social Worker 13 described feelings of embarrassment and shame. Reflecting on this practice episode, Social Worker 13 further described how she had been '*burnt a couple of times*' and how this had '*shook [her] confidence*'. Further, Social Worker 13 described how she felt some managers '*mistrusted*' her judgement and how she was not always allowed to offer solutions while managers practised a select '*dictatorship*'.

A comment was made by Social Worker 13 on how, having been asked about her experience of reflective practice, she felt '*lucky*' to get through the day and understanding '*what I am doing at this point in time not what I have done in the past*'. This statement is consistent with the findings of Hung and Appleton (2015: 16) who describe some participants in their study as having developed a 'survival-orientated reflexivity'. Utilising Archer's (2003) theory, Hung and Appleton identify survival-orientated reflexives as those persons who have limited confidence and/or autonomy in imagining, planning and dovetailing existing concerns and/or future-orientating life projects. This passive agential stance was identified by Hung and Appleton because of adverse life experiences where participants were compelled to be independent, resourceful and self-reliant.

As discussed in chapter 2, Archer (2012) argues an impeded or fractured reflexivity occurs where an individual's internal conversation does not assist them in deciding or determining a course of action. Archer (ibid: 250) suggests fractured reflexives can be identified by a mental process which, while communicatively expressive, remains negative and/or fatalistic about particular circumstances. As discussed in the findings chapter, this type of mental process was identified as characteristic of the

reflexive deliberations of Social Worker 13 and Social Worker 4. With Social Worker 4, due to experiencing fear of being seen as incompetent, as described was the accommodating feeling of not being able to consult with colleagues and/or her manager. Consequently, Social Worker 4 can be interpreted as a fractured reflexive who demonstrated a 'survival-orientated reflexivity' as described by Hung and Appleton (2014).

This mode of reflexivity was evidenced in the following statement where Social Worker 4 commented '*I wish we had time to visit families, I think about it on a day-to-day basis...I can say that to you...but you can't always admit to your office...to your manager that I go to bed stressed, worried and I wake up stressed and worried because I have got things to do*'. As discussed in the literature review, communication of these feelings of stress, anxiety and professional isolation offer findings to support evidence of what Morrison (1993) describes as professional accommodation syndrome (PAS). Where understood in relation to Archer's (2003) theory they also support evidence of Social Worker 4 experiencing a passive agency while practising a fractured reflexivity. Drawing on my interpretation of these findings my study highlights potential implications for sickness and/or burn-out where practitioners are experiencing fractured reflexivity.

As discussed, fractured reflexives are identified by Archer (2012: 250) as individuals who appear passive, and unable to assume governance over particular areas of their life. Archer (ibid: 249) states fractured reflexives cannot 'engage in anything more than day-to-day survivalist planning'. Identified as individuals unable to determine courses of action to ameliorate constraining situations, Archer (ibid: 251) states fractured reflexives will be regretful of past decisions while expressive of a sense of

loss and/or how badly they serve the things concerning them most. Resultantly, my study findings support Archer's (2003) theory of what constitutes a fractured reflexivity. This is evidenced due, for example, to Social Worker 13 communicating a stance towards her practice context of being one that was non-proactive in planning beyond each day. Although, there is some divergence as Social Worker 13 remained communicative and reflexively unimpeded in her response to questions posed within the study.

In their study Hung and Appleton (2014: 9) found where participants were identified as having a 'survival-oriented reflexivity' the 'green shoots' of a previous communicative reflexivity were presented. These green shoots were found in my study during interviews with Social Worker 4 and Social Worker 13. As highlighted in the findings chapter, among these green shoots were examples where previous managers were described by participants as collaborative and relationally-responsive. Archer's (2003) approach to identifying reflexive modes in the context of study interviews presupposes a level of reflexive reflection as a prerequisite. Therefore, while Social Worker 13 and Social Worker 4 were identified as having aspects of a survival-oriented reflexivity they could not be considered fully fractured reflexives. Here my study findings indicate modes of reflexivity may be multi-faceted and therefore undertheorised where, for example, individuals are situated in organisational contexts that inherently provoke stress and anxiety.

With Social Worker 13 this was particularly apparent within the study interview where she described how she endeavoured to continue to practice her values, beliefs, concerns and life project as a social worker. Evidence of Social Worker 13 being committed to her life project despite presenting as a fractured reflexive is presented

when she stated *'I want...to help people'*. Evidenced of the green shoots of a nascent communicative reflexivity was also evidenced with Social Worker 13 in her capacity for critical reflection and self-relational-responsiveness in the context of the study interview.

Archer (2003) argues those with a fractured reflexivity will be unlikely to communicate their concerns and their inner conversations or reflexive deliberations will be effectual. However, with both Social Worker 4 and Social Worker 13 this was evidenced as not the case. As discussed, notable was how Social Worker 13 engaged as an active agent in the context of the study interview. She did so primarily while communicating her ultimate concerns, beliefs and value-commitment which were to work for the benefit of children and families. Although, in my study findings key aspects of a fractured reflexivity as communicated by Social Worker 13 were evidenced in reflections on the cultural and structural constraints of the setting. These included monologic and directive management styles experienced as significantly constraining at times of her sense-making, actions and sense of active agency.

Within my review of literature, I highlighted how Broadhurst et al. (2010c) discuss the idea of the 'street level bureaucrat'. As described by Lipsky (1980), the metaphor of the street level bureaucrat emphasises the importance of sense-making and critical judgement in front-line practice. As highlighted in the findings chapter, idiosyncratic and critically-reflexive sense-making was identified in my study in several cases. For example, this was evidenced in the case of Social Worker 9 with her challenge of professional language, power and 'expertise'. Here the critically-reflexive practitioner as meta-reflexive 'trickster' (White, 2006) was evidenced in my study. Also

evidenced in the activity of Social Worker 9 was Archer's (1995) idea of a morphogenetic cycle taking place in the context of professional relationships.

Utilising Archers' theory of morphogenesis in the case of Social Worker 9 discussed in the findings chapter the contextually-conditioned practice of one professional was challenged by another. For Social Worker 9, during her engagement with another professional within a morphogenetic cycle her value-commitment, concerns and sense of active agency were transformed. In her willingness to challenge the use of normative language, encourage reproach and be content with a position of 'not knowing' Social Worker 9 supports Archer's (2003) theory of structural elaboration through the practice of meta-reflexivity. As Archer (ibid: 275) states, meta-reflexives will practice their ideals and 'discount objective 'costs'...in search for a[n]... environment suitable for the expression of their concerns'.

Elder-Vass (2012) argues while acting as a member of a professional norm circle practitioners will adhere to the dominant cultural rules and practices. Archer (2003) acknowledges the temptation proposed by Elder-Vass for meta-reflexives situated in organisational contexts to concede the cultural norms for fear of condemnation. However, while implicitly utilising the morphogenetic cycle to challenge the culturally-conditioned practices of her profession as a critically-reflexive 'trickster' Social Worker 9 remained subversive to the causal influence of dominant professional opinion as normative structures. Reflecting on confronting professional language in her early career, Social Worker 9 stated *'I was a bit of a handful...able to challenge the language...and say the most outrageous things...but still remain committed because I was doing well with people'*.

Drawing on Archer's (2003) theory with this statement Social Worker 9 demonstrates a value-commitment to practising her concerns, values and modus vivendi. In doing so, in line with Archer's (ibid: 274) theorising, my study findings highlight how Social Worker 9 can be seen to have 'the life of mind of a meta-reflexive'. This life of mind, as Archer (ibid) states, 'represents the conscience of society'. Further reflecting on her early career Social Worker 9 stated '*I was less worried...about the language and from a curious position was able to learn a lot more by acceptance of my own not knowing*'. With this statement the findings of my study highlight how Social Worker 9 demonstrates the capacity of a meta-reflexive within Archer's (2003) theorising by being willing to encourage contextual discontinuity and/or uncertainty.

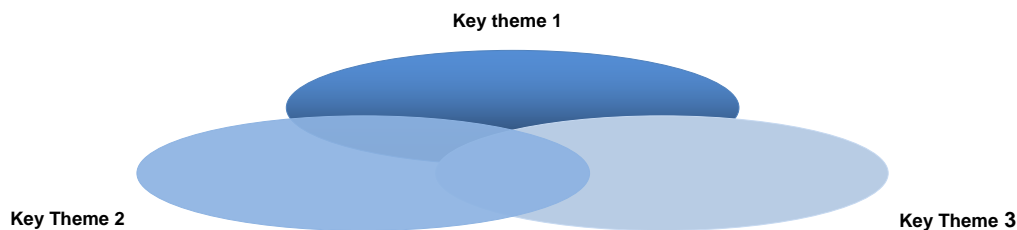
Within the literature (e.g. Ferguson, 2004a) it is argued practitioners will experience anxiety where faced with or having encouraged a lack of certainty. Here my study findings highlight how social workers who demonstrate a meta-reflexivity are better able to manage contextual discontinuity and practice where presented with uncertainty. Despite the pervasive nature of a NPM agenda, my study findings also evidence the critically-reflexive practitioner as 'trickster' (White, 2006) and 'street-level bureaucrat' (Lipsky, 1980) continue to operate in child protection. The street level bureaucrat was evidenced with the example of best practice in chapter 4 where Social Worker 7 was willing to challenge the risk-averse and defensive culture practices of senior managers. Although, as the following observation field note epitomises, the iron cage of performance management (Wastel et al., 2010) continues to constrain social workers' practice discretion, sense-making and professional creativity:

I feel like a caged hen popping out eggs in a battery farm. I want to be an organic hen [SW: 12]

Interpreting the study findings

The synthesis of findings in the previous section highlighted the complex inter-relationship between the key themes and sub-themes identified in my study. While it is evident some sub-themes do not fit exclusively into a specific findings group the key themes drawn from my study data can be arranged into three distinct categories. For illustration, in Figure 12 these three distinct categories as overarching and inter-related themes are presented as: (Key Theme One) prescriptive policy and practice frameworks (Key Theme Two) practitioners biography, knowledge, experience, values, beliefs, concerns and practice approaches and (Key Theme Three) practitioner's reflexive modes:

Figure 12: Inter-related key themes as overarching categories



By utilising the findings discussed in the previous section, and presented in Table 5 and Figure 12, in this section I undertake a further analysis of selected results. I do so to consider how these support existing understanding(s) of the studied phenomenon and/or contribute to knowledge development. Whilst influenced by the researcher's epistemology and/or taken-for-granted assumptions, May and Perry (2012: 125) highlight how knowledge reinforced and/or produced through the research process is 'mediated through different political, economic and institutional contexts'. Therefore, while my findings are furthermore limited to being representative of a small-scale study, any theoretical insight proposed in this section

is done tentatively and therefore not to offer the ultimate panacea to the studied phenomenon. Nevertheless, the purpose of this section is to contribute ideas to support elementary knowledge elaborate of theoretical insight developed through similar studies.

Enhancing knowledge of sense-making in child protection

My study offers empirical evidence to support the findings of several recent studies (e.g. Helm, 2013; Melrose and Kirkman, 2014; Saltiel, 2014) examining sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection. While identified in my study as a multi-faceted phenomenon, what my findings primarily contribute is knowledge to further understating how and why some social workers make sense and formulate judgement by utilising heuristics, tacit and/or intuitive reasoning. According to Saltiel (2014: 221), it is the 'task characteristics' of statutory social work which include, for example, performance management and the time constraints which preclude the enablement of formulating judgement in a more critical, analytical and timely way. As Helm (2013) found, while informal sense-making through peer relationships was welcomed by several practitioners in my study, more formal strategies for encouraging opportunities for critical reflection and/or analytical reasoning remained limited in the context of day-to-day practice.

Although, situations where described by some of my study participants where more analytical and/or quasi-rational (Hammond, 1996) sense-making was accomplished. As highlighted, these included the contexts of: (1) formal supervision (2) multi-agency meetings and/or (3) within the relationships some social workers had with peers

and/or other professionals. However, while these contexts were identified as possible circumstances where opportunities for critical case analysis might be created these were also viewed as practice milieus impeding practitioners' sense-making. Examples of inhibiting scenarios included where meetings with other professionals were experienced as undermining of social workers' sense-making, judgement and decision-making and therefore their professional role and 'expertise'.

Additionally, while informal and/or informal supervision was described by some study participants as a means of accomplishing sense-making, for others this was viewed as a constraining experience. This was especially the case where practitioners described hasty, directive and/or monologic approaches to supervision that were utilised as a means of monitoring their performance and/or ensuring agency targets were met. The importance of supervision as a triangulated function for (1) supporting social workers to make sense of complex situations and support families while (2) meeting statutory responsibilities and (3) continued professional development is well documented (e.g. Munro, 2008, 2011; Morrison, 2009). However, where managers used supervision as a means of staff surveillance, my study findings highlight how this 'hijacked' the ability and/or willingness of seniors to act in a relationally-responsive way and/or reflexivity through encouraging critical reflection.

Enhancing knowledge of supervision in child protection

In chapter 2 I discussed the supervisee-supervisor relationship as a functional social encounter which, dependent on the relational-responsiveness of the supervisor, can have a life-long impact on some practitioners. This finding was evidenced in my

study in the case of Social Worker 13 who described her lack of faith in managers. As illustrated in the findings chapter, this disenchantment communicated by Social Worker 13 was attributed to her experience of her existing manager's tendency to work directly from a rigid organisational '*script*'. This existent lack of faith was juxtaposed with a previous confidence where as a NQSW Social Worker 13 experienced a manager who offered her emotional support, encouraged her critical thinking and valued her judgement. It was in the context of her existing supervisory relationship that I presented findings to support the idea that the communicative reflexive mode practiced by Social Worker 13 had become fractured.

However, while supervision was found to perform a range of administrative functions, my study findings highlighted how some managers are reflexively aware of the need to critically question practitioners' sense-making and judgement formulations. This was identified as imperative in several cases including: (1) where practitioners' sense-making and judgement formulation was identified as influenced by risk anxiety and contrastingly (2) where managers' risk-adverse tendencies were challenged by practitioners' risk-orientated and/or family-minded practices. With these findings knowledge is enhanced in relation to understanding supervision as a complex social and cultural practice where social workers' differing reflexivity are practice and/or their sense-making is supported, challenged and/or potentially reconstructed. As indicated in chapter 2 the existing literature on supervision undertheorised the role of practitioners' differing reflexivity and how sense-making and/or an active sense of agency might be maintained, challenged and/or impeded.

Applying Archer's (1995) theory of social transformation supervision can therefore be seen in a way that highlights its function as a morphogenetic process. Understood

in this context supervision can be seen as a routine social and cultural practice where, for example, dependent on practitioners' contextual conditioning and/or mode of reflexivity it will be experienced as constraining or enabling. Viewing supervision in this way allows the process to be understood in different ways. For example, as either a stratified practice where there is a power imbalance between supervisor and supervisee or a collaborative practice where the hierarchy of power is mutual. Within this study an understanding of practice encounters, and the ways in which professional knowledge and power is produced and exercised within these has been developed. However, to understand supervision as a practice encounter that can reproduce or transform the structural properties of the organisational context and a practitioners' sense of active agency is important for the development of practice-depth child protection through critical-reflexivity.

Enhancing knowledge of practice-depth in child protection

As outlined in part 1 of chapter 2, Chapman and Field (2007) present a model of practice-depth in child protection arguing there are three levels potentially available to social workers. Utilising the model presented by Chapman and Field to inform my data analysis all levels of practice-depth were evidenced within my study findings. These included: (1) conveyor-belt practice (2) pragmatic practice and (3) reflective practice. These findings emerged primarily across the themes presented in chapter 4 and summarised in Table 5. For example, findings on prescriptive policy and practice frameworks highlight how the standardised 'duty system' encouraged a level of practice-depth where workflow management, threshold criteria and practice priorities fostered hasty filtering of referrals indicative of conveyor-belt culture.

As Chapman and Field (2007: 24) argue a conveyor-belt culture can seem unavoidable within settings where agency targets and/or a high volume of referrals create a pressurised system. Revealed in the findings of my study was how a NPM agenda encouraged a conveyer-belt culture. As demonstrated in the findings chapter the pervasive nature of a NPM agenda was a reoccurring theme where practitioners offered 'timescales' and 'high caseloads' in respond to the question: *'What do you think are the barriers to achieving positive outcomes for children and families in child protection?'*

These findings have important relevance as a performance culture means sense-making continues to be value-laden and imbued with erroneous judgement precursors which encourage sense-making shorts-cuts and/or habitual low reflexive responses to referrals in child protection. In the process of 'performing' techno-rationality, my study findings highlight how some managers are identified as devaluing reflective practice. Resultantly, as illustrated in the findings chapter, the disquiet of practitioners who shared a directive and/or monologic supervisory relationship meant this was experienced as encouraging a level of practice-depth indicative of a pragmatic approach. Discussed as indicative of a pragmatic practice, the use of heuristics and/or 'common-sense' to assist supervisees and supervisors with making sense of familiar presenting case scenarios was identified as an approach utilised by some practitioners.

While sense-making is taking place in a culture where conveyer-belt and pragmatic practice are encouraged, Chapman and Field (2007) highlight how it is important for

practitioners to take the time to critically reflect on cases. Where a family might be the subject of a series of CCNs with a continued result of erroneous judgement leading to NFA, my study findings highlighted the pitfalls of conveyor-belt and pragmatic practice. Also, illustrated within my study findings was how the implicit anxiety observed as experienced by some managers encouraged an approach to sense-making that was defensive and pragmatic. This approach was exemplified where 'acting' managers located within the main study site were observed as lowering thresholds for IAs.

In their analysis Chapman and Field (2007) argue the key component to achieving optimum practice-depth in child protection is through critically reflective supervision. Chapman and Field claim that it is within the context of critically reflective supervision anxiety can be reduced and/or opportunities to encourage reflexivity are encouraged. The findings of my study illustrate how supervision was pragmatic and/or task-oriented and therefore experienced by some practitioners as disempowering. However, also highlighted was how some managers adopted a critically-reflexive approach where alert to consequences of engaging in a process of inter-subjective sense-making based on their taken-for-granted assumptions.

Building on the work of Chapman and Field (2007) the findings of my study therefore identify a fourth-layer of practice-depth in child protection available to social workers. Evidence of this fourth-layer was characterised by those practitioners identified as meta-reflexive within my study. As illustrated in the findings chapter, on practicing a meta-reflexivity several practitioners demonstrated a critical awareness of the causal influences of the taken-for-granted dimensions of the setting. One example of this

was presented where the dominant language used by a member of their professional norm circle was challenged by Social Worker 9. On discussing case studies, several participants described engaging family members in the process of defining unsafe care and developing creative family-based practice conducive to child safety.

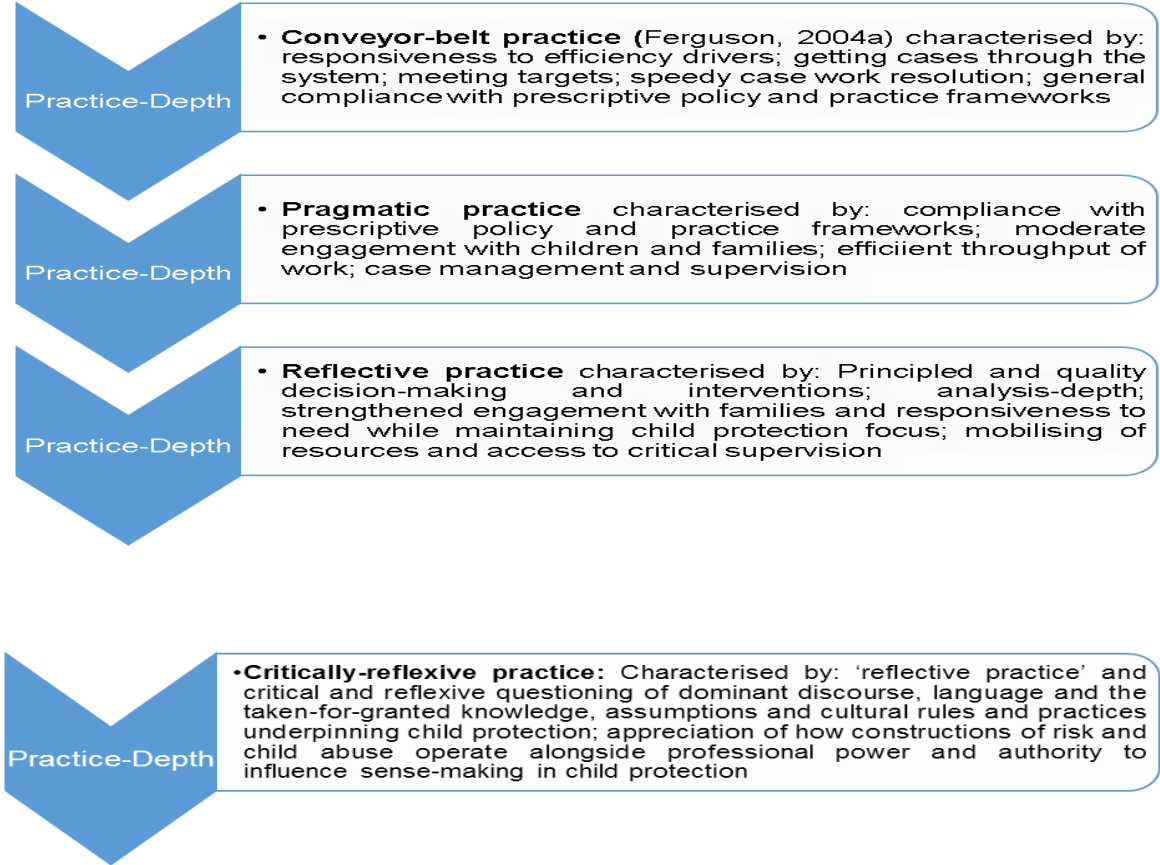
As Broadhurst et al. (2010a) highlight, informal risk management strategies are emergent, contextual, individualised and tailored to the individual needs of children and families. This finding was exemplified by Social Worker 7 who was identified as meta-reflexive.²⁶ Where the practice of meta-reflexivity by Social Worker 7 was identified in my study further evidence of a fourth-layer of practice-depth in child protection is provided. This fourth-layer is exemplified in the practitioner's reflexive approach to practice that was demonstrated in several ways. Among these was how she acknowledged the father in the case study had been described by a previous social worker as 'alcoholic'. By acknowledging this term as a totalising discourse constructing a negative identity a critical form of reflexivity was practised.

Within the case study challenged was the concept of risk informing the decision-making process and the taken-for-granted practice culture of the organisation dominated by a realist risk discourse. As the 'best practice' case study sample in Appendix 13 highlights by challenging the power and assumptions of senior managers a shift from a one-dimensional 'child protection orientation' to a 'family-minded' approach was achieved. Resultantly, as illustrated in Figure 13, these

²⁶ This finding was typified as an example of 'best practice' which due to limited word space I present in more detail in Appendix 13.

findings support development of the model of practice-depth presented by Chapman and Field (2007) to include a fourth-layer represented by critical-reflexivity:

Figure 13: Development of practice-depth in child protection



Relevance of findings for child protection practice

The findings of my study highlight how child and family social workers represent those practitioners who are required to negotiate the contextual constraints and enablements of their employing agency daily. My study identified the agential impact child protection practice can have on practitioners and how feelings of fear, anxiety and professional isolation can be experienced. These findings indicate how some practitioners risk accommodating experience of stress, anxiety and self-doubt which could lead to a fractured reflexivity. Archer’s (2003) notion of a fractured reflexivity

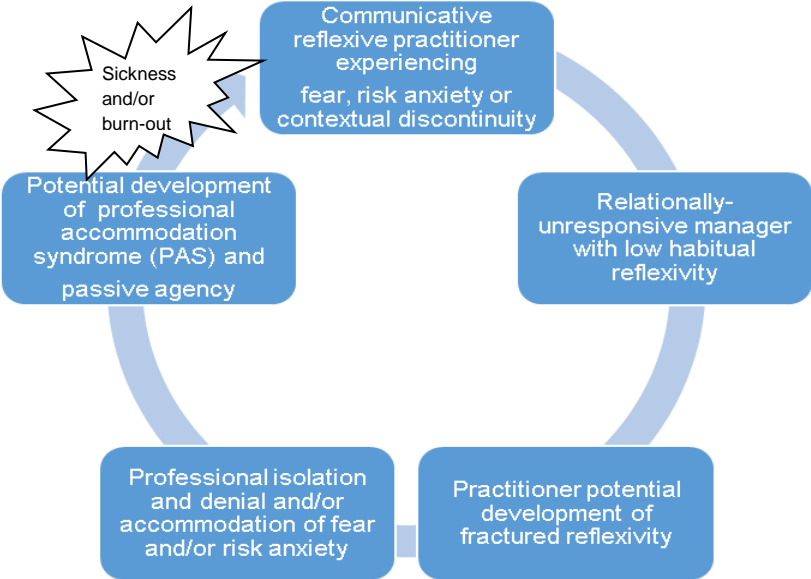
offered a useful theoretical framework for identifying the passive agency communicated by several participants who took part in my study. As highlighted in the findings chapter Social Worker 4 and Social Worker 13 communicated aspects of a passive agency indicative of a fractured reflexivity.

For Social Worker 13 a passive agency was identified as the result of contextual discontinuity in the form of a change of role and designation of new supervisor who was experienced as directive, monologic and relationally-unresponsive. Therefore, being situated within a performance management culture where organisational targets were prioritised over the needs of children and families identified within my study were findings of phenomena influencing a fractured reflexivity. As noted, in the findings chapter Social Worker 4 communicated characteristics of a passive agency and fractured reflexivity. She did so while reflecting on her concerns about her practice approach that was experienced as performance-led and therefore did not 'fit' with her value-commitments, beliefs, concerns or practice approach.

A self-imposed unresponsive relationship with her manager was identified within my study where Social Worker 4 reflected on her feelings of professional isolation and how she felt unable to share her fears and anxieties with colleagues. Here my study findings offer tentative evidence to support the idea of professional accommodation syndrome (PAS) in child protection as described by Morrison (2003) developing due a fractured reflexivity and in terms of contributing to potential sickness and/or 'burn-out'. As illustrated in Figure 14, relevance of these findings highlights the central importance of the level of relational-responsiveness demonstrated by a supervisor as

a potential constraint or enablement to a practitioners' sense-making, practice of reflexivity and sense of active agency:

Figure 14: Relationally-unresponsive supervision cycle



Drawing on Archer's (1995) idea of morphogenesis in the context of the supervisor-supervisee relationship, dependent on practitioners' reflexive mode, and where this is indicative of a high epistemic or low habitual reflexivity, reinforcement or transformation of dominant organisational cultural rules and practices will be facilitated. In the context of their day-to-day practice, my study findings highlight how social workers practising a meta-reflexive mode will be more inclined to achieve morphogenesis and a sense of active agency despite the contextual constraints of the agency. This was demonstrated where practitioners including Social Worker 9 and Social Worker 7 challenged dominant cultural rules and practice including the language used by colleagues.

An active sense of personal agency was evidenced as maintained by Social Worker 7 and Social Worker 9 while: (1) operating under conditions of uncertainty and/or contextual discontinuity (2) challenging dominant discourse and professional language and/or other normative practices, and (3) advocating the use of informal risk management strategies. The relevance of these findings indicates a social worker's need for a critically-reflexive self-awareness in child protection facilitating explicit recognition of: (1) their reflexive mode (2) sense-making tendencies, and (3) where communicative reflexive, for example, their need to engage others as part of the sense-making process.

On becoming aware of their reflexive modalities, the findings of my study highlight the dialogical needs of some practitioners and how these could be nurtured in the context of a relationally-responsive supervisory relationship. In the context of a relationally-responsive supervisory relationship reflexive dialogue addressing the need for an assisted active agency may help practitioners negotiate the structural constraints of the practice setting. Outside of formal supervision practitioners identified as communicative reflexives could be helped to maintain an assisted active agency by being encouraged to enter a 'mentoring' type relationship with a trusted colleague. Where they are required to interpret a CCN in their role as duty social worker, for example, a mentor can help them make sense in child protection through being designated to engaging them in a consciously critical and reflexive dialogue.

In a practice setting proving particularly challenging social workers experiencing a fractured reflexivity could be supported where the supervisory relationship explores practice examples where they demonstrate a facilitative sense of personal agency

and reflexivity. Consequently, where practitioners experience fractured reflexivity formal supervision may avoid routine case discussion. Instead supervisors could undertake a conscious exploration of any 'green shoots' (Hung and Appleton, 2014) practice examples where supervisee's have demonstrated evidence of a facilitative reflexivity. The relevance for child protection within my study findings of the importance of 'green shoots' highlights identification of these as practice incidents as potential sources of a restored reflexivity. Green shoots may be identified as linked, for example, to a fractured reflexive practitioner's capacity to critically reflect on their personal biographies, values, beliefs, concerns and practice approaches in a positive way.

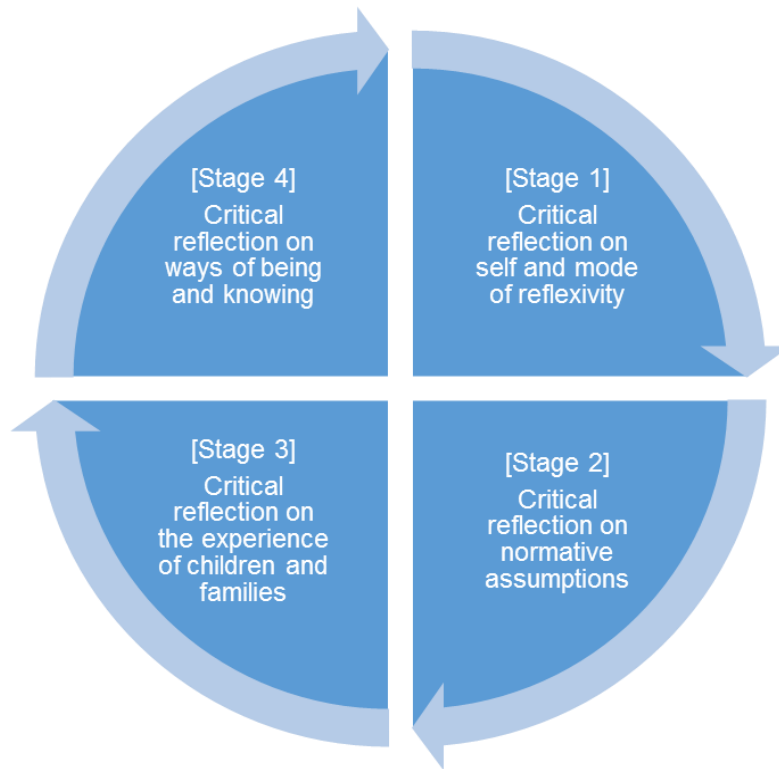
Social Worker 13 demonstrated this capacity where reflecting on how her personal biography as a looked-after child with experience of parental mental health difficulties influenced her practice approach with children and families. Within my study findings, how some practitioners mediated between the structural constraints and enablements of the setting and their personal agency was identified as allied to their mode of reflexivity. However, while all my study participants were identified as reflexive practitioners I was struck how none were explicitly aware of the particular mode they practised. Connolly and Morris (2012: 147) highlight importance of strengthening models of supervision in child protection so creativity as learning praxis can be nurtured and professional judgement can be enhanced. The relevance of my study findings for child protection practice supports this supervision process where sense-making in child protection and the development of a consciously critically-reflexive approach to practice can be developed.

Model for developing critical-reflexivity in child protection

Drawing on my study findings, in this section I propose how a critically-reflexive approach to sense-making in child protection can be enhanced within the context of a relationally-responsive supervisor-supervisee relationship. I further highlight how relational-responsiveness in child protection becomes central if practitioners are to safeguard against developing a fractured reflexivity. Based on the application of a contemporary social constructionist perspective that informs the ideas formulated through my study findings, I present a model for developing a critically-reflexive approach to sense-making in child protection. Here it is important to outline how I do not propose the model should replace approaches to supervision in child protection that are currently established. Rather, it is my intention to present a model that compliments existent methods of supervision while offering complimentary ideas to enhance sense-making in child protection informed by critical-reflexivity.

To engage with the model effectively I propose how several pre-practice conditions should be met. These include: (1) practitioners should have an awareness of their epistemological position (2) practitioners should be familiar with Archer's (2003) reflexivity and social transformation theory (Archer, 1995) (3) practitioners should have a mutually trusting and relationally-responsive supervisor-supervisee relationship and (4) the organisational setting should be committed to developing a critically-reflexive practice praxis or 'learning culture'. In order to assist practitioners in enhancing their approach to sense-making in child protection illustrated in Figure 15 is the four-stage model for developing a critically-reflexive supervision cycle:

Figure 15: Development of a critically-reflexive supervision cycle



Stage-One: Critical reflection on self and mode of reflexivity

As evidenced within my study findings different social workers make sense in child protection while practising different modes of reflexivity. Therefore, at stage-one of the critical-reflexive supervision cycle supervisee and supervisor are required to: (1) consider their approach to sense-making and (2) how they mediate reflexively between their objective circumstances and subjective practice realities. An important achievement for practitioners at stage-one is development of a critical awareness of how their reflexive ‘mode’ might influence their sense-making activity with: (1) their supervisor or supervisees and visa versa (2) other professionals and (3) children and families.

In the context of supervision, identification of a mutual communicative reflexive mode, for example, will inform supervisor and supervisee of their co-dependent need for relational-responsiveness and dialogue. Where a supervisee may be identified as a fractured reflexive the supervisor will need to understand how they may present as uncommunicative and with a sense of passive agency. Here stage-one should involve the supervisor engaging the supervisee in 'green shoots' dialogue to assist with restoring a sense of active agency and communicative reflexivity. Supervisees practicing as autonomous reflexives will need to have their tendency to make sense independently challenged through consideration of the supervisee's differing sense-making activity. A supervisee identified as a meta-reflexive will need to be understood as requiring a supervisory relationship where their internal-external dialogue is concerned with exploring their taken-for-granted assumptions.

A meta-reflexive's need to test hypothesis and/or seek disconfirming evidence through attracting the critical appraisal of the supervisor will also need be acknowledge. A supervisor's mode of reflexivity will influence the way they engage with and/or mentor supervisees. Supervisors who identify themselves as autonomous reflexives will therefore need to be mindful of developing and maintaining a discursive-dialogical rapport with supervisees. Supervisees who identify themselves as autonomous reflexives will need to be critically conscious of potentially discouraging a collaborative sense-making relationship where differing perspectives are encouraged. Where an autonomous reflexive supervisor is influenced by a NMP agenda a higher epistemic reflexive awareness will assist them in acknowledging a potential directive or monologic supervision style.

Stage-Two: Critical reflection on normative cultural rules and practices

At stage-two practitioners are required to jointly explore the taken-for-granted dimensions of the settings. These will include examining the dominant discourse, language, knowledge and cultural rules and practices operating within the organisation. The normative assumptions of a NPM agenda will need to be acknowledged as a structural mechanism potentially influencing the morphostatic reproduction of the dominant cultural rules and practices of the agency. By critically and reflexively reflecting on their everyday taken-for-granted practices, how these influence practitioner's sense-making in child protection will be identified. The influence on sense-making of cultural practices of the social work team as a professional norm circle should be clarified.

Where practitioners' normative assumptions and/or epistemological position are identified as having informed their sense-making in particular cases double-loop learning is encouraged. Where double-loop learning is encouraged practitioners' normative assumptions, tacit reasoning, practice wisdom and/or the propositional knowledge informing their sense-making and judgement will be challenged. A contemporary social constructionist perspective draws practitioners' attention to the fallibility of their knowledge-claims that despite maintaining legitimacy within the profession remain transitive and susceptible to discredit.

Within stage-two the critical reflection process will have potential to create opportunities for a re-evaluation of sense-making and judgement in some cases.

Morrison and Wonnacott (2010) highlight how supervision should prioritise critical reflection on judgement and decision-making as opposed to involving case prioritisation and/or a caseload audit. Another crucial achievement at stage-two therefore is to establish praxis where organisational imperatives are critically appraised. The wider organisational imperatives and bureaucratic practices which may enable or impose constraints on the supervisor-supervisor relationship should be discussed.

Stage-two can be used by practitioners to consider the balance between office-based administrative responsibilities and home-based engagement with children and families. By encouraging a critically-reflexive examination of this balance strength of engagement with children and families can be encouraged. An important critical reflection at stage-two is how supervisee's social capital including their status, power, age, gender and religious beliefs might constrain or enable strength of engagement with children and families. Stage-two therefore facilitates the need for anti-oppressive and emancipatory practice in child protection. It does so as the need to take critical account of taken-for granted assumptions and/or the supervisee's socio-cultural conditioning is emphasised prior to, during and after the assessment, planning and intervention process.

Stage-Three: Critical reflection on the experience of children and families

At stage-three a supervisee's critical reflection on the lived experience of children and families is encouraged. Here the practice imperative is to identify constraints

and enablements which may be influencing the emotional life and/or (in)actions of family members. These may include, for example, the meanings individual members assign to their experience and/or the safety constraints of any risks identified within the family. A mother, for example, may indicate how she makes sense of her experience of domestic violence within the discourse of a 'normal marriage' where the 'rights' of her husband's as a male involve his perceived 'legitimate' use of violence. To encourage a positive transformation in the context of parent-professional relationships, Archer's (1995) morphogenetic approach encourages practitioners to be concerned with identifying legitimising discourses and/or associated socio-cultural practices operating as constraints within a family.

By identifying constraints within the context of social work encounters practitioners can encourage the transformative power of a parent's reflexivity and/or personal agency. Critical reflection in these types of cases might be concerned with considering how a mother's reflexive mode and/or sense of personal agency might be transformed through consciousness raising and/or, for example, the legal sanctioning of her husband's use of violence. At stage-three reflexive questions used to guide supervision might include: *'How do parents make sense of their circumstances and how these are constraining of their concerns, practices and life projects?'* By exploring answers to these types of questions transitive theoretical conjectures routinely utilised by social workers to explain the (in)actions of parents can be challenged. Challenges can be made by way of a critical examination of structural and cultural constraints affecting a parent's mode of reflexivity and/or sense of agency that cannot be explained through transitive theories.

Identifying a parent's mode of reflexivity will assist in developing strength of engagement with children and families. It will do so as critical reflection identifies the different relational response(s) parents may require from a social worker dependent on their mode of reflexivity. While parents who are autonomous reflexives may prove difficult to engage due to an inherent relational independence, for example, those who are communicative reflexives may present as relationally-responsive. Critical reflection on a parents' presenting distress, helplessness and/or passive agency may help identify them as a fractured reflexivity. At this stage of the critically-reflexive cycle identifying a parent's reflexive mode may assist practitioners in making sense of why they adopt a particular stance toward the constraints and/or enablements influencing the functioning of their family.

Why parents may tend to engage in certain activities and/or choose courses of action as determined by their mode of reflexivity might also be identified. While seeking to assist in the amelioration of structural factors negatively influencing parental experiences and behaviours, critical reflection should consider strategies that enable parents to achieve a facilitative reflexivity and active sense of personal agency. As demonstrated with findings on 'best practice' (Jones, Cooper and Ferguson, 2008) this may simply be about becoming critically-reflexively alert to the causal influence professional power, status and language can have on children and families. As Houston (2001:855) highlights 'the professional discipline...become[s] ingrained into the very fabric of our consciousness acting at a [real] subliminal level to [empirically] affect the way we speak, move and act'.

Stage-Four: Critical reflection on ways of being and knowing

At the fourth-stage critical reflection is further concerned with the practitioners' mutual reflexive consideration of their ontology and epistemology or what it is they might take to be 'real' or 'knowable'. At this stage, the practitioners' willingness to critically reflect on how they know and the meanings they assign to their experience of working with children and families becomes imperative. How sense-making in child protection is influenced by their habitus and/or their contextual conditioning and how this might produce distorted and/or biased thinking needs to be identified (Longhofer and Floersch, 2012). The purpose of critical reflection is to encourage development of a critically-reflexive awareness of how the causal influence of practitioners' socio-cultural conditioning and/or their professional education and training might have shaped their sense-making tendencies.

An important aspect of critical reflection at this stage is not only the practitioner's critically-reflexive consideration of the epistemological position influencing their sense-making but also the validity of their professional viewpoint (Houston, 2011). Knowing the constraints imposed by a particular epistemic position is an important aspect of practising critical-reflexivity informed by a contemporary social constructionist perspective. By drawing on a particular epistemological position and offering consideration to how this might influence a practitioner to follow a particular theoretical rules and/or strategy is an explicit way of practising critical-reflexivity.²⁷ Critical reflection on how a practitioner's sense-making in relation to presenting information on a CCN and/or events which might occur during their longer-term

²⁷ Admittedly, here a kind of paradox emerges as practitioners are identified as more generally inclined to implicitly apply a contemporary social constructionist perspective to inform their approach to critical reflection while practising critical-reflexivity.

engagement with children and families, needs to be understood as a value-committed, personal belief and theory-laden activity.

Summary and conclusions

In my review of literature, I explored how sense-making in child protection was influenced by the situated and subjective nature of statutory social work. Drawing on the work of Lonne et al. (2009) and Trevithick (2014) I identified how child protection practice in the UK was informed by a techno-rational paradigm and NPM agenda. I discussed how a NPM agenda prescribed practice while skewing practice priorities and stifling social workers' professional judgement and discretion. In this chapter I have highlighted how a NPM agenda and the dominant techno-rational paradigm did not allow for the inherent uncertainty and/or day-to-day complexities of social work practice with children and families. The findings of my study offer empirical evidence to support a critique of the NMP agenda and techno-rational paradigm in child protection. The findings also identify the need for development of critical-reflexivity in child protection where sense-making is concerned with formulating judgement which can lead to decisions determining the life trajectories of children and families.

Through observation of multi-agency meetings, and data drawn from my study interviews, the sense-making of social workers and their reflexive practice(s) as members of what Elder-Vass (2012: 25) describes as a norm circle was illuminated. With my study findings evidence of: (1) the causal influence of practice norms (2) knowledge construction and (3) the phenomenon of groupthink as described by Janis

(1982) was identified. Similarly, where practitioners were observed as critically questioning of the knowledge informing their sense-making a meta-reflexive high, epistemic reflexivity was identified. These findings highlight how, in more complex cases, for some practitioners sense-making becomes a communicative reflexive accomplishment.

In this chapter I have explored key themes in relation to sense-making in child protection and reflexive practice as these relate to my study findings. I have discussed how the findings offer support to previous research (e.g., Helm, 2013; Saltiel, 2014) highlighting how social workers make sense in child protection and formulate judgement. Naturalistic or intuitive ways of sense-making including heuristics, bias and problem framing were discussed. Findings on child-focused and family-minded discourses and how these and/or other dominant cultural rules and practices informed sense-making in child protection were also discussed.

Among the additional areas of exploration in this chapter has been a focus on social workers' reflexive practices and how the constraints and enablements of the practice setting were mediated. In the thesis introduction, I highlighted how within the social work literature there has been a tendency for reflexivity to be presented as a homogeneous practice which is either demonstrated by practitioners or not. Consequently, within the literature where practitioners are identified as practising reflexivity this is mostly viewed as the same kind of practice utilised for the same kind of purpose(s). However, drawing on Archer's (2003) theory what my study findings highlight is how social workers practice different modes of reflexivity. Therefore,

identified within the findings are answers to my research questions including how sense-making is informed by different modes of reflexivity.

A significant finding was the different stances practitioners held in relation to the practice setting and how these were dependent upon their mode of reflexivity. For example, where autonomous reflexive practitioners were concerned, the findings highlighted how these tended to be those social workers who are: (1) task-orientated (2) career-minded and (3) most comfortable with their child protection role and responsibilities. Those who are meta-reflexive were identified as those social workers determined to practice in a self-satisfying way and who were promoting of and/or upholding of their value-commitments, beliefs and concerns. As they continue to be a 'good' social worker in a way that is congruent with their values, beliefs, concerns and practices, the study findings suggest meta-reflexives will remain capable practitioners with a positive professional identity.

However, for communicative reflexives, where situated in a practice setting where they have a relational-unresponsive supervisor, these practitioners are most vulnerable to developing a fractured reflexivity. A significant finding was the importance of relational-responsiveness in child protection for maintaining a communicative reflexive practitioner's assisted active agency and how this is essential for safeguarding against a fractured reflexivity. Considering this finding, it is important for managers to practice relational-responsiveness and understand they are working with practitioners' different reflexive modalities.

As White (2013) suggested, regardless of modality my study findings indicate some practitioners lack the required level of critical self-awareness required to practice a high epistemic reflexivity. Therefore, where practicing a low habitual reflexivity social workers remain unalert to and/or will overlook the dynamic morphostatic/morphogenetic process taking place in the contexts of supervision and their engagement with children and families. However, my study findings highlight where discourse, language, knowledge and cultural rules and practices become unsettled by critically-reflexive practitioners, space for a double morphogenesis and enhanced ethical practice repertoire in child protection is created.

Critiquing these taken-for-granted practices and their consequences Cunliffe (2008) argues for morally and socially responsible organisations. Within these types of organisational cultures sense-making based on the critically-reflexive way practitioners relate to peers, professionals and parents becomes praxis. Cunliffe (2000: 12) alludes to transformative potential of organisational cultures where critically-reflexive social workers engage in inter-subjective discursive-dialogical processes which create a 'new politics of practice'. In this chapter I have sought to contribute to the development of practice-depth in child protection and proposed a model for the development of critical-reflexivity through the process of supervision. By creating space for the development of critical-reflexivity, as White (2013) indicates, the rights of children and families to a 'just', 'humane' and transformative child protection practice will be developed. To support this development, in the final chapter of this thesis I outline some further ideas for social work research, practice and education.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Towards a critically-reflexive approach to child protection

Introduction

The starting point for developing this thesis was to demonstrate why sense-making in child protection informed by a critically-reflexive approach was an important practice accomplishment. In my introduction, I proposed how this was because the judgement and decision-making which follows sense-making can have life changing consequences for children and families. On conducting a review of the literature, I identified how empirical studies into sense-making and the practice of reflexivity remained underrepresented. Therefore, I designed and undertook a fieldwork inquiry to gather empirical data. The main aims and objectives of my study were to identify how social workers made sense in child protection and practised reflexivity. The research questions guiding my study are:

(1) 'How do social workers 'make sense' in child protection?'

(2) 'Is sense-making in child protection informed by reflexivity?'

Thesis summary

To find answers to these questions I combined a comprehensive literature review as presented in chapter 2 with a fieldwork inquiry as outlined in chapter 3. As discussed in chapter 3 my fieldwork design used methods common in ethnography. These methods included participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews which utilised a case study sample. Using a case study sample approach practitioners were requested to reflect on child protection cases where they felt pleased with the outcomes experienced by children and families. Practitioners were approached directly to participate and a total of fifteen agreed to be observed and/or

take part in in-depth interviews. Those practitioners who took part in the study were located within a statutory setting where I was employed as a social worker.

In chapter 5 I summarised and synthesised my study findings and discussed key themes drawn from my data analysis and the relevance of these for informing sense-making in child protection. Insights drawn from the literature, my study findings and the epistemological position informing my thesis were combined to present a model for developing critical-reflexivity in child protection. In this final chapter I conclude my thesis. I do so beginning with some further reflections on the limitations of my thesis. Drawing on my study findings I then outline how these contribute knowledge to sense-making, reflexivity and practice-depth in child protection. The findings of my study offer some 'lines of inquiry' for understanding sense-making in child protection and reflexive practice that may prove useful to future researchers. I consider this an exploratory study therefore after outlining my contribution to knowledge I offer some ideas for further areas of research. To support the on-going development of a critically-reflexive approach to sense-making in child protection I also offer some ideas for social work practice and education. I conclude my thesis with some final thoughts.

Study limitations

In pursuit of answers to my research questions I began development of this thesis with a comprehensive literature review as presented in chapter 2.²⁸ As outlined, in chapter 3 I then designed and undertook a fieldwork inquiry using a combination of

²⁸ My strategy for undertaking the literature review is outlined in Appendix 14.

methods. As with all empirical research the study design and implementation had strengths and weaknesses. In this section I further outline some of these including those related to my study scope and participant sampling. I also highlight some personal and practical constraints that limited my study.

Scale, sampling and case studies

The small-scale nature of my study and my approach to participant sampling were the most obvious limitations. In my recruitment of practitioners who undertook observation and/or study interviews I used a purposeful sampling approach. As practitioners were colleagues situated within my employing agency this raises issues of personal bias including, as I have discussed in chapter 3, the potential for demand characteristics. Compared to similar ethnographic-based inquiries (e.g. Broadhurst et al., 2010c) fifteen participants represent a small participant cohort. As my study participants were recruited purposefully a wider selection of practitioners may have produced different findings. Although, eligibility criteria relating to participants selected for my study did not place any onus or burden on them other than they were required to be qualified social workers.

As highlighted in Appendix 15 on collection of my study data I utilised a manual approach to compiling a dataset that proved extremely time-consuming. Although I personally found this to be a useful approach in terms of staying 'in touch' with my study data, to create a dataset with any future research using an inductive-deductive analysis I would consider utilising a Software package such as NVIVO. My inductive analysis of data drawn from transcribed interviews focused in-depth on participants'

practice reflections. Through this process the approaches to sense-making, practice of reflexivity and the 'voice' of participants in my study was highlighted. Nevertheless, a lack of scope and breath of findings remain. Thus, my study findings and their applicability to the wider development of child protection practice within the profession must be treated tentatively. This is due, for example, to the practice of different modes of reflexivity and sense-making processes identified remaining weak in overall representativeness compared to the diversity of professional practices that exist.

My study involved observation but relied heavily on participants' accounts of practice shared in the context of in-depth interviews. The study validity would have been strengthened if other professional stakeholders whom participants were referring to within interviews were formally questioned. Interviews to seek the perspectives of children and families who were the subject of practitioners' reflections would have also been useful for triangulating my study data. Although this would have raised ethical concerns, and would have been problematic in relation to the issue of ensuing confidentiality and/or securing informed consent.

While contributing to data triangulation interviewing other stakeholders may have addressed any issues of false accounting and/or demand characteristics. Data triangulation may also have been strengthened through interviews with participants' managers who had supervised the case studies presented within my study interviews. Further data triangulation may have been achieved where case notes pertaining to case study samples were reviewed. Here consistencies or

incongruences between case recordings, actual and/or espoused practice reflections could have been cross-referenced.

A greater longitudinal focus may have enabled the study to further identify contextual issues and/or what might otherwise influence sense-making and changes in and/or to the practice of reflexivity across the life of a child protection case. Drawing on Archer's (2003) theoretical ideas a longer-term study may have helped further identify and interpret practitioners' concerns, projects and practice of reflexivity under differing circumstances. How the practice of different modes of reflexivity and how social workers' concerns and practices were constrained and/or enabled within the study setting across time could have been further highlighted.

On analysing my data to find out how social workers' make sense and practice reflexivity I drew primarily on Archer's (2003) theory. Drawing on Archer's ideas to inform my analysis findings were produced as theory-driven data representative of practitioners' reflexive mode influencing their sense-making, actions and agency. Longhofer and Floersch (2012) highlight how all data is connected to theories that are transitory in nature. Therefore, what might be considered the 'realities' and/or 'facts' of my study are by no means objective or value-free. This is because data was interpreted in line with my epistemological position and in relation to what constitutes reflexivity as argued by Archer (2003).

During observation and within study interviews some practitioners were identified as having experienced significant stress and anxiety. This was described as due to a

range of causal influences including the relational-unresponsiveness of managers, colleagues and other professional. Consequently, as discussed in chapters 4 and 5 by drawing on Archer's (2003) theory several practitioners were identified as demonstrating a fractured reflexivity. While Archer's notion of a fractured reflexivity was utilised as an explanatory concept, which in effect contributed to the construction of some practitioners' identities, other theoretical perspectives could have been applied to interpret my study findings.

For example, attachment theory could have been applied to formulate hypotheses about practitioners' fear and anxiety through loss and separation from relationally-responsive supervisors as significant others. Based upon the need for warm and responsive human relationships, Howe (1995) highlights how a practitioner's stress and anxiety can be attributed to low warmth and/or a lack of positive inter-personal relationships in the practice context. While considering all 'normal' people to be heterogeneously reflexive, by her own admission Archer (2007: 92) highlights parallels in psychology where humans are seen to practice their individual personalities. Although, as discussed in chapter 2 in critical realist terms these alternate explanations may simply address what is observable or 'empirical' within a person's behaviour as opposed to what remains 'actual' or 'real'.

Methodological constraints

There were other methodological approaches that could have added depth, validity and reliability to my study. I utilised aspects of ethnography to inform a combined qualitative methods approach. Alternately, a complete 'case-study' approach could have been utilised. There are considerable similarities between ethnography and

case studies and it is primarily the data collection methods and overall purpose of the research that sets them apart (Silverman, 2014). However, Silverman highlights how ethnography is primarily concerned with the study of behaviour and causative phenomena including dominant cultural rules and practices. Case studies tend to be concerned with a single person, event or organisation. The strengths of case studies therefore include that they tend to be concerned with identifying why an event or incident takes place and can produce data generalisable to other contexts. However, the strength of ethnography is the method is more suited to gathering data on social and cultural phenomena primarily through the researcher's interactive and reactive relationships with participants (Silverman, 2014).

Choice of research design is identified by Silverman as informed by the researcher's epistemology, ontology and/or their values, concerns and philosophical beliefs. The application of a contemporary social constructionist perspective and Archer's (1995) theory of social transformation and theory of reflexivity (Archer, 2003) informed my study. I appreciate therefore how as a researcher I have produced data that others will consider biased and therefore my study findings are contestable. Although every effort has been made to ensure my account of the study process and the knowledge-claims made have been rigorous and transparent.

Practical and ethical boundaries

The practical boundaries of undertaking part-time PhD studies while employed full-time will have been experienced by many as a constraining experience. The responsibility of being a social work practitioner, a sole researcher, a husband and parent meant I was constantly constrained by time and the need to the balance my

professional role and personal commitments. This kind of limitation, as Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) argue, can occur in most studies. However, essentially as a sole researcher my method of data collection and analysis did not allow for the benefit of different 'expertise' other examiners could have brought to my study. Nevertheless, doing post-graduate research while learning how to 'be' a researcher and 'do' research has resulted in some important lessons. A key area of learning for me, for example, has been the difficult and complex nature of authentically acting as an 'insider' researcher-practitioner.

The role of acting as an insider has been described as disturbing by some post-graduate researchers (e.g. Hood, 2012a). This is due to the intrusion it is felt can be brought to participants' professional sphere including, for example, what can be interpreted as a wider system of practice surveillance (White, 1997a). While I maintained the stance, I was concerned primarily with reporting on positive practice, my experience of being an inherent threat to the integrity of some participants remained limited. What transpired from my experience of being accepted as a trusted interlocutor is how research participants and the organisations which employ them may be willing to place their faith in those considered 'experts'. In this sense, participants become vulnerable to the consequence of research where unethical and biased data reporting takes place. I have contemplated the ethical nature and practice relevance of my study and what remains important is the contribution to best practice and knowledge informing sense-making in child protection and reflexive practice made by my findings.

During the process of completing this thesis I experienced a tri-fold transition in professional identity from social work practitioner to → post-graduate researcher to → university lecturer. This tri-fold transition equated with me: (1) moving from acting as a member of the social work team where I conducted my study to (2) conducting my study as a researcher-practitioner to (3) leaving the team to take up the post of lecture. Managing this transition proved difficult at different points including most recently where my thesis needed to be completed and the time I had to finish became limited.

Thesis contribution to knowledge

Through developing this thesis, I have sought to contribute knowledge to sense-making in child protection and reflexive practice. As highlighted in the introduction outside the seminal work of White (1997a) qualitative inquiries examining sense-making in child protection and the practice of reflexivity have remained underrepresented. As discussed in chapter 2, within the social work literature reflexivity is identified as a concept with a range of interpretations and meanings. In relation to practising reflexivity, this is theorised within the literature primarily as a homogenous practice which social workers will either demonstrate or they will not. By addressing some of the theoretical limitations evidenced within the social work literature my thesis makes a modest yet important contribution to knowledge of sense-making in child protection and reflexive practice.

Sense-making in child protection and reflexive practice

The contribution made by my thesis is development of knowledge in relation to the different ways in social workers make sense in child protection and practice reflexivity. As my study findings illustrate sense-making is identified as an intra-subjective (internal) and/or inter-subjective (external) discursive-dialogical accomplishment which is influenced by a multi-faceted range of phenomena. These inter-related phenomena include: (1) prescriptive policy and practice frameworks (2) practitioners' biography, knowledge, experience, values, beliefs, concerns and practice approaches and (3) practitioners' reflexive modes.

As social workers are identified as making sense through practicing different modes of reflexivity the practice of reflexivity can be understood as a heterogeneous activity. My study highlights how modes of reflexivity practised by social workers are broadly in line with those outlined by Archer (2003). However, the findings indicate some social workers will practice a hybrid or overlapping reflexive mode. Social workers' mode of reflexivity influences their sense-making in child protection and also informs their action(s) and agency. Social workers' capacity for achieving a critically-reflexive approach and practice-depth in child protection will be dependent on their mode of reflexivity. Those who demonstrate a capacity for practice-depth characterised by critical-reflexivity are identified as practising a meta-reflexivity as defined within Archer's (2003) theory. Practice-depth is also identified as achieved by those practising a variant and/or overlapping mode of reflexivity as identified in my study as a hybrid communicative-meta-reflexivity.

Towards a critically-reflexive approach to practice

My study is among a small number I am aware of that apply a contemporary social constructionist perspective underpinned by a critical realist philosophy to inform social work practice. As demonstrated, a contemporary social constructionist perspective draws attention to the causal influence on social workers' sense-making, reflexivity and sense of personal agency of the taken-for-granted dimensions of their practice. To develop understanding of the causal influence discourse, knowledge, language and culture can have on sense-making in child protection is to move towards practising critical-reflexivity. I hope my study findings and their relevance for child protection as proposed in chapter 5 will prove useful for informing practice. Meanwhile, by offering some ideas for developing further questions and/or hypothesis I hope other researchers will be inspired to design and conduct further inquiries.

In relation to the training and education of social workers, I hope my study findings will inspire teachers to promote a critically-reflexive approach to learning. Through adding to and/or developing knowledge of reflexive practice as a topic within teaching programmes. I also hope my study findings can be utilised by managers and practitioners to enhance their approach to supervision and practice with children and families. To help with some of these developments in the next section I offer some ideas for social work research, education and practice.

Ideas for social work research

What has become more apparent during development of this thesis is how the situated and subjective nature of statutory social work constrains and enables sense-

making in child protection and the practice of reflexivity. Through professional talk members of social work teams are inclined to engage in the process of inter-subjective discursive-dialogical sense-making in child protection. However, where based on normative cultural rules and practices standardised and/or 'localised' sense-making and judgement formulations hold potential to determine the 'kinds' of outcomes experienced by children and families.

This raises several important questions including: '*Do normative cultural rules and practice influence inter-subjective sense-making in and across different social work teams and/or local authorities?*' And: '*Does uncritically-reflexive inter-subjective sense-making in child protection lead to particular outcomes for children and families?*' By generating these kinds of research questions my study can be understood as a small-scale mapping exercise. Consequently, utilising my study design further research, with a focus on examining implications for erroneous or reasoned judgement based on practice of different reflexive modalities, is needed.

Ideas for social work education

Social work education should be designed to equip students with the capacity to enhance safety and quality of life while promoting change and social justice through strength of engagement with service users. The most appreciated means by which a practitioner can achieve success in the often complex, multi-faceted act of 'doing' social work is understood to be through the practical application of his or her own self (Leung et al., 2011). Therefore, as social work educators it is essential the ability to critically self-reflect is promoted as an important learning experience. Teaching critical reflection has been primarily concerned with encouraging students to consider

their personal values, attitudes and beliefs and/or otherwise what it is they take-for-granted as they begin to question their own way(s) of knowing and being. Where informed by a social constructionist perspective teaching strategies designed to promote critical reflection have tended to encourage students to develop self-awareness and think critically about their life experiences. They are encouraged to do so through being supported to consider alternative viewpoints and perspectives and the influence on their way(s) of knowing of the social, historical and cultural contexts of their personal biographies and/or life experiences.

Theoretical frameworks to assist educators in the task of promoting critical reflection in students are identified within the literature (e.g. White, Fook and Gardner, 2006). However, publications outlining strategies for enhancing reflexivity through social work teaching programmes remain limited. Correspondingly, among those that are identified (e.g. Lay and McGuire, 2010; Leung et al., 2011; Chow et al., 2011) the emphasis remains on the conceptualisation of reflexivity as a homogenous practice development. Therefore, a teaching strategy for developing reflexivity in social work students informed by the findings of my study and based on a critical application of Archer's (2003) multi-faceted conceptualisation is proposed.

My study findings identified how some social workers fail to reflexively acknowledge their own approaches to sense-making, biases and taken-for-granted assumptions. Therefore, practitioners often formulate judgement without reflexively questioning how they have come to understand or make sense of a particular circumstance or scenario. With teaching strategies aimed at promoting understanding of reflexivity in social work the starting point should be to encourage students' willingness and capacity to understanding their own modality. Ideas to assist with this process

include presenting a critical overview of Archer's (2003) theory of reflexivity to students and designing research-oriented teaching programmes where students' different reflexive modes can be identified.

A strategy to achieve this could include drawing on Archer's (2007) Internal Conversation Indicator (ICONI) (Appendix 16) as a reflexive mode screening and identification tool. By utilising the ICON students' reflexive mode could be measured at the beginning and end of modules designed to enhance their capacity for critical reflection. Traditionally, social work education designed to enhance critical reflection have used a range of methods to encourage students to examine their past experiences, sense of self and the nature of their family relationships. However, methods of encouraging development of critical reflection through utilising Archer's (2003) ideas about reflexivity remain unidentified.

The implications for education and practice are students would develop self-knowledge and enter employment settings with an understanding of their mode of reflexivity and the causal influence this has on their sense-making activity. Within education the development of critical-reflexivity could be encouraged through group processes where students are facilitated to exchange and interrogate their views on social issues. Students could be presented with 'disorientating dilemmas' (Trevelyan, Crath and Chambon, 2014) which challenge their ways of knowing, existing mode of reflexivity and/or beliefs and values. Although, where introducing disorientating dilemmas, educators will need to understand students will have differing thresholds for managing anxiety, belief challenging and experiential learning from view disconfirming activities. Ethical considerations are therefore necessary and pre-course briefings, post-course debriefings, consent seeking and staff

professional qualifications and capability to support students will be required. Identifying students' mode of reflexivity may prove useful for designing learning pathways where, for example, different modalities determine the type of relationships they will benefit most from with teachers.

Ideas for social work practice

The findings of my study highlight importance of situating the development of a critically-reflexive approach to sense-making in child protection in the context of relationally-responsive practice relationships. This was demonstrated in my study in several instances including, for example, where practitioners described themselves as professionally isolated while accommodating feelings of fear and anxiety. My practice observations highlighted where some practitioners practising a low habitual reflexivity utilised heuristics and biases to inform their sense-making and professional judgement. In chapter 5 I presented a four-stage model for the development of a critically-reflexive approach to child protection through a relationally-responsive supervisee-supervisor relationship.

Here I propose this model can be extended across practice contexts and wherever practitioners wish to develop and/or are required to demonstrate critical-reflexivity. These practice contexts might include: (1) the supervisor-supervisee relationship (2) the senior practitioner-NQSW relationship where development of critical-reflexivity is encouraged through challenging normative practices and the received ideas of employing agencies and (3) within the student social worker-practice educator relationship where students on placement are required to demonstrate critical reflection as a professional capability.

Some final thoughts

I imagine my drawing of attention to the causal influence on their sense-making in child protection of the taken-for-granted dimensions of practice and practitioners' mode of reflexivity will unsettle some social workers. This is because I anticipate some practitioners will not welcome the invitation to consider enhancing their practice repertoire in a way which critically questions what is currently understood and valued by them. Although, where practitioners are being routinely encouraged to engage in reflexive dialogue with managers and colleagues who challenge their taken-for-granted views, I can understand how a further invitation to develop a depth of critical reflection may be appreciated. Contrastingly, to maintain a sense of certitude perhaps some practitioners may choose to remain reliant upon what Rojek, Peacock and Collins (1988) describe as the 'received ideas' and/or the dominant myths, legends and cultural rules and practices of their employing agencies.

Whatever their circumstances and/or preferences, if social workers wish to accomplish practice-depth in child protection they need to consider the importance of developing as critically-reflexive practitioners. As critically-reflexive practitioners, social workers will be compelled to adopt an analytical 'stance' toward the taken-for-granted dimensions of the settings they occupy. On practising critical-reflexivity practitioners will be alert to the causal influence their agency discourse, language, knowledge and cultural rules and practices can have on their sense-making in child protection. As these taken-for-granted dimensions of practice become increasingly identified, debated and shaken up by social workers, sense-making, judgement and the decision-making processes which influence the outcomes children and families experience will become increasingly informed by a healthy sense of uncertainty.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Thesis impetus

The impetus to develop this thesis emerged in February 2007. At that time, I had been seconded to undertake a study on behalf of one of the UK's largest children's charities. My role was to design a study which explored the nature of child sexual exploitation (CSE) across a UK regional area. Having begun to review the literature I was struck by an article by American sociologist Ronald Weitzer (2007). Weitzer identified how sex trafficking had emerged as a social problem in the United States of America (USA). In his analysis Weitzer (ibid: 447) describes how the rhetorical claims-making of religious campaigners, charities and other 'interested parties' had led to a 'politicisation' of sex trafficking in the USA. This politicisation resulted in action being taken by the government to introduce new legislation to tackle the problem. This policy development, Weitzer (2007) argues, occurred despite a limited empirically-base to support the arguments informing the core claims of anti-trafficking campaigners.

Providing evidence of the scale of any social problem will matter in terms of attracting the attention of media, funders and policy makers. However, what Weitzer (2007) highlighted was, even despite a lack of empirical evidence, the dominant 'expert' opinion of activists precluded that of potentially equally plausible counter views of the problem. My exploration of literature around this theme led me to the work of Joel Best (1990) and Ian Hacking (1999). Best and Hacking drew my attention to how the 'problem' of child abuse in western society had been '(re)discovered' through a process of rhetorical claims made by 'experts' in the aetiology (or signs and symptoms) of child abuse. As I began to develop my understanding of how the dominate discourse and language of 'experts' informs understanding of child abuse, in suspected child abuse cases I was led to consider how a social worker's sense-making might be informed by the dominant 'scientific' opinion of paediatricians.

Best (2001) describes how in the 1960s eminent American Paediatrician Dr Harry Kempe contributed to the social construction of child abuse across Anglophone societies. This was achieved through Kempe et al. (1962) adopting an authoritative position on the detection and diagnosis of child abuse after publishing findings on the discovery of Battered Child Syndrome (BCS). Identified through the use of X-ray, BCS as presented by Kempe et al. was subsequently constructed as an endemic social problem across Anglophone societies. Describing his work as a breakthrough, Crane (2015: 3) highlights how Kempe asked oversighting paediatricians to revisit their practice while drawing 'the attention of journalists, politicians and the public to the broader issues of child maltreatment'. However, Parton (1995) argues, prior to the claims made by Kemp et al. (1962) paediatricians occupied the lower ranks of the medical hierarchy. Subsequently, despite the significance of BCS, critics of Kemp et al. (e.g. Pfohl, 1977) argue how the '(re)discovery' of child abuse in the 1960s led to an enhanced occupational status for some paediatricians.

Spector and Kitsuse (2001) highlight how social problems have continued to be defined, responded to and maintained through a range of rhetorical claims made by

'experts'. Spector and Kitsuse (2001: 75) define the social construction of social problems as a phenomenon which occurs as a result of:

The activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions

Contemplating this definition, I was led to critically evaluate my position as a researcher and reflexively consider how my findings on CSE might contribute to what Loseke (2003: 31) terms the 'social problems industry'. According to Loseke (ibid), the social problems industry encompasses all individuals in society. However, 'experts' and/or those who have the potential power to communicate an authoritative opinion on a social problem are identified as those most likely to influence public opinion and/or a political response. Consequently, my concern around contributing to the social problems industry formed much of the critically-reflexive questioning I engage in during the formative stages of developing my thesis. Among key questions I contemplated was: *'What might motivate an individual, social group or organisation to make an authoritative claim about a particular social problem?'*

Guided by this question I began to develop a critical awareness of why some individuals or groups in society might make a claim about a social problem. In relation to the problem of child abuse I considered how some interested parties might argue for and/or otherwise pursue a particular response to a social problem in order to further their own personal and/or professional interests. Additionally, I considered how a claim about a particular social problem might be made because of a particular belief, value, experience and/or concern. Loseke (2003) suggests it is often difficult to separate these issues because they are often allied and therefore inextricably linked.

With this in mind, I began to develop a critical understanding of the causal influence on outcomes for children and families of the knowledge, discourse and language utilised by social workers. Subsequently, I have been able to reflexively acknowledge how it is important to understand why some professionals might make an authoritative claim about a particular situation, circumstance or event and how this might be based on their unique way of make sense of, knowing and/or speaking about a particular problem. Drawing on my developing understanding of contemporary social constructionist perspectives and as I progressed towards developing the research questions which inform my study I was led to consider: *'How and why might a social workers' sense-making in child protection be informed by a critically-reflexive approach to practice?'*

Here I was drawn to the work of Taylor and White (2000) who consider a range of issues justifying the need for social workers to develop a critical form of reflexivity. These include the need to: (1) understand the influence 'professional talk' can have on sense-making and knowledge production and (2) how a techno-rational paradigm cannot address the uncertainty and complexity inherent within child protection practice. To inform a reflexive approach to practice Taylor and White (2000)

highlight why it is important for social workers to avoid polarising realist and relativist epistemologies and/or applying uncritically conflated ideas derived from these to explain the lived experienced of children and families.

Consequently, discussing sense-making and professional judgement, Taylor and White alerted me to how the application of evidenced-based practice (EBP) in social work needs to be done so critically. Claiming there are different ways of knowing, thinking about and/or understanding practice, Taylor and White discuss how practicing reflexivity can avoid the biased sense-making the indiscriminate application of EBP can encourage. On exploring the social work literature, I identified how there was a limited range of texts exploring the practice of reflexivity in child protection. Therefore, I established a critically-reflexive approach to child protection was something which needed be further explored through empirical study.

In 2011 I was seconded into a statutory setting as a senior social worker. My role in the setting was concerned with developing a statutory response to children who go missing from home and care. My return to statutory social work within a children's social care team coincided with my registration with Northumbria University as a post-graduate researcher. Child protection practice within my employment setting was characterised by a small team of social workers required to respond to high level of agency referrals and CCNs daily. An early observation I made was how practitioners often struggled to make sense of the complex and uncertain nature of referrals and their role as child and family social workers.

As Broadhurst et al. (2010c) found I observed how many social workers experienced frustration at the limited contact they had with children and families. This was due to the constraints of prescriptive policy and practice frameworks which restrict informal and/or discretionary approaches to practice. I was reminded how as a newly qualified social worker (NQS) I had harboured deeply ambivalent feelings toward the nature of statutory social work and the limited time afforded to engagement with children and families. I was also reminded how trying to get to grips with the dominant taken-for-granted cultural rules and practices of an established child protection team had felt overwhelming.

To address my feelings of frustration and uncertainty I recalled being lured by the 'wisdoms' of my colleagues who introduced me to the cultural norms and 'received ideas' (Rojek, Peacock and Collins, 1988) of my employing agency. I have reflected on how, to maintain my value-commitment to support children and families and make a difference, I had been constrained by the standardised practices within my employing agency. These included, for example, the threshold criteria use to establish the need for a child and family assessment (CFA) and the regimented risk management format applied once the necessity for a family intervention was established.

As my thesis has developed I have reviewed the work of White (2006, 2013) who advocates development as a reflexive practitioner. In chapter 2 I discuss how White

(2013) argues practising reflexivity can help address the problem of biased sense-making in child protection and assist with working under conditions of uncertainty. Combining the ideas of White (ibid) with those of Elder-Vass (2012) and Archer (2003) I have been able to consider the influence the taken-for-granted dimensions of child protection practice can have on life trajectories of children and families. This has contributed to the impetus to develop this thesis where I contribute ideas to develop an approach to sense-making in child protection informed by critical-reflexivity.

Appendix 2: Example of practice as ‘trickster’

Drawing on my own experience one of my most notable achievements as reflexive practitioner as trickster was where I boldly requested a face-to-face meeting with the Director of Children’s Services and Chief Inspector of Police. As a designated social worker for missing children (SWMC) employed within a statutory agency I wished to highlight how there was a need for police and children’s services to further develop their existing joint strategic response to the problem of missing children. In my role as SWMC I had identified children who had been going missing from home and care in the local authority as potential victims of child sexual exploitation (CSE). To help minimise risk of CSE I suggested the problem needed to be acknowledged by all practitioners across the work force. Additionally, I supported an argument that a sub-group of senior managers and practitioners charged with tackling the problem of CSE needed to be established as a part of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) remit. The existing perceptions of the problem and the language and discourse used by some practitioners I suggested needed to be challenged.

During the meeting I introduced the idea that existing levels of risk of CSE to children in the local authority was likely to be underestimated. While remaining a clandestine problem, I argued the benefits in terms of the increased safety to children where senior managers acknowledging the problem of CSE as a ‘real’ issue for the local authority. Despite my argument being met with scepticism²⁹ my challenging of existing perceptions of the problem and cultural practices resulted in senior managers fully acknowledging the link between missing children and CSE. Consequently, a re-construction of CSE as an important child protection issue for the local authority was achieved. Professional talk about the problem as a child protection concern became part of the language and discourse of the local authority. This was achieved through professional training and through assessment of risk of CSE being written into the local authority child and family assessment (CFA) format and risk management strategy.

²⁹ Having visibly unsettled the Director and Chief Inspector at the time of the meeting this act of ‘trickery’ was not executed without me giving some quiet reflexive deliberation to the impact on my professional reputation, and the potential decline of my ‘up-until-then’ fairly successful social work career!

Appendix 3: Epistemic permeability

May and Perry (2011) highlight how epistemic permeability refers to the consequences which can arise when the interpretation of data collected meets with the epistemological expectations of the researcher. According to May and Perry, where researcher-participant viewpoints on a specific phenomenon are similar, epistemic permeability is increased with the result of an existing theory or philosophical position becoming grounded. However, where different 'kinds' of knowledge emerge within a study the researcher's worldview and/or the epistemic permeability of an existent theory is called into question. Where a participant's point of view may be equally valid in relation to the researcher's the power of the researcher to choose to act or ignore this emerges as an ethical consideration (Renold et al., 2008). May and Perry (2011) suggest here the integrity of the researcher becomes central to acceptance or rejection of the knowledge being generated (or degenerated) within the research process.

From an ethical perspective, May and Perry (2011) suggest the need for researchers to be critically-reflexively alert to the reasons why they might select findings to support their epistemological position. Where critical-reflexivity is not practiced May and Perry (2011: 100) suggest findings supporting a researcher's epistemological positioning may 'speak in the name of a false universalism'. This occurs where deductive (theory-driven) data is gathered in support of the researchers' allegiance to a particular theory, model and/or typology (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009: 191). Although, where 'newer' knowledge identified through the research process may disrupt (yet not fully refute) a particular viewpoint scope can emerge for an adaptation of an existing epistemological position.

As I outlined in my introduction the first step in the development of my study was acknowledgement of how this is informed by a contemporary social constructionist perspective. As highlighted throughout this thesis a contemporary social constructionist perspective draws attention to how our taken-for-granted understanding of reality informs our epistemology (or way of knowing) and ontology (way of being). Therefore, as a researcher adopting a contemporary social constructionist perspective a critically-reflexive appreciation of the causal influence my own epistemology position has on my choice of methodology is acknowledged. I also acknowledge how the findings presented within this thesis will represent a different 'knowledge-claim' to that of other researchers exploring the same phenomena from a different epistemological position.

Appendix 4: Letter to manager

(Name omitted)

Children's Services Manager

(Area omitted)



Dear (Name omitted)

RE: Research Study: Sense-Making in Child Protection

I am a post-qualified social work practitioner and Post-Graduate (Doctoral) Researcher with Northumbria University. The key question guiding my research is:

How do social workers 'make-sense' in child protection?

To explore the above question, I am writing to request your permission to undertake a 5-week period of formal practitioner observation within the Initial Response Team. Additionally, I am writing to request permission to undertake up to 12 interviews with social workers based within the IRT and across other area teams. The main aim of the study field work is to explore how social workers actually 'do' child protection work; and subsequently highlight those areas of 'best practice' leading to positive outcomes for children and families. Please find enclosed Participant Information Sheets and the interview schedule. As I would like practitioners to reflect on examples of child and family assessment, risk management, signs of safety, and other strengths-based models of child protection practice, I anticipate my study will contribute to positive outcomes for children and families. Subsequently, at the close of the field work I would wish to hold focus group feedback sessions with supervising staff such as yourself and those practitioners who took part. It is anticipated the feedback session will provide a further reflective learning opportunity for practitioners, and allow a formal reconfirmation of consent for the findings presented to be used to inform my study.

To ensure appropriate codes of ethical conduct are followed Northumbria University formally review all post-graduate social care research proposals. Subsequently, I can inform you the proposal for this study has received formal ethical approval from Northumbria University School Research Ethics Sub-Committee. In respect of ethical issues, I can reassure you interviews will focus only on areas of 'best practice' and no personal service user details will be gathered. Additionally, I will ensure all personal details of practitioners and those of the organisation remain suitably anonymous. In light of recommendations of the Munro Report (2011) I believe my study presents a unique opportunity for children's services to formally engage in a partnership with Northumbria University to reflectively explore best practice with children and families. In the meantime, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my study further and thank you in anticipation of your support.

Yours sincerely

John Cavener - DipSW/MA/Post-Graduate Researcher

Appendix 5: Letter to participants



Social worker (Name omitted)

Initial Response Team

Dear Colleague

RE: Sense-Making in Child Protection

I am a post-graduate doctoral researcher with Northumbria University currently undertaking a study to explore: Sense-making in child protection. The primary research question I am interested in is:

1: *How do social workers 'make sense' in child protection?*

As an experienced child care social worker I am writing to invite you to take part in the study exploring the above questions. Your participation would involve engaging in a one-to-one interview to discuss a child protection case you have felt most pleased with, and where you have felt a positive outcome was achieved. Your involvement in the study is voluntary. However, if you are interested in taking part before you agree it is important you fully understand what the study is about. To help with this I have attached to this letter a **Participant Information Sheet**.

Part 1 of the Participant Information Sheet tells you the purpose of the study and why it is important. **Part 2** gives you detailed information about how, when and where the interview will be conducted if you choose to become a participant. **Part 2** also includes a copy of a written **Consent Form**.

Please read the information sheet and consent form carefully, and please feel free to talk with your supervisor and/or other colleagues before taking any decision to consent to participate. I will contact you again directly in the near future to discuss the study further. In the meantime, if you are interested in taking part, it would be useful for you to begin to think about a child protection case you have been particularly pleased with, and where you feel a positive outcome for the child and family concerned was achieved.

Yours Sincerely

John Cavener - DipSW/MA

Post-Graduate Researcher - University of Northumbria

Appendix 6: Participant information sheet - Part 1

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to explore how social workers make-sense, formulate judgement and engage with vulnerable children and their families to develop positive relationships which lead to positive outcomes in child protection.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in the study because of your professional role and expertise as a child care social worker. It is believed that as a social worker, operating in a busy team with experience of child protection practice, you will make a valuable contribution to the study.

What will happen if I decide to participate?

If you decide to participate you will be asked to undertake an interview; and/or for those practitioners only based in the Initial Response Team a short period of observation. Within the interview you will be asked to discuss a child protection case you were particularly pleased with. For example, where you were satisfied with your professional judgement, confident with your decision-making, happy with your relationship with the family concerned and pleased with the outcomes experienced. Interviews will take up to 1 hour and will be digitally recorded. Interviews will be held at a time and venue agreed with you.

What are the advantages of participating?

The advantages of taking part include: an opportunity for you to reflect upon and share your case management experiences, and promote positive practice from which other social workers can learn. It is hoped you will find contributing to the study an enjoyable and rewarding experience; and that the opportunity to reflect on practice will contribute to your own learning about what constitutes best practice in child protection. The findings of the study will be presented within an academic paper to be submitted to the University of Northumbria. However, prior to submission you will be invited to attend a feedback session and comment on the findings, prior to these being published. At this session a final date of withdrawal of consent for the information you have provided to be used in the study will be agreed.

What are the disadvantages of participating?

It is acknowledged completing interviews may be time consuming for you as a social worker with a busy workload. Also, it is important to acknowledge reflecting on practice can lead to personal discomfort. To safeguard against this your line manager and/or supervisor will be made aware of your involvement in the study. Subsequently, they will provide any additional support or supervision you may feel is necessary as a result of taking part in the study interview.

What will happen if I agree to participate then decide to end your involvement in the study?

It is important to understand your involvement in this study will remain voluntary throughout the study process. Subsequently, you have a right to end your involvement at any point. As noted, I will be holding a feedback session at the end of the interviews and any decision you then make to withdraw your involvement in the study will be respected without prejudice.

How will information I provide be kept confidential?

The research study design has been approved by Northumbria University Research Ethics Sub-Committee. This requires that all studies involving the collection of personal information offered by study participants is held confidential following the ethical and legal practice requirements of the University. The information provided for the study will be transcribed on to a word document and coded using computer-based software to be accessed only by me as the researcher using a password. After being transcribed on to a word document the original digitally recordings of semi-structured interviews will be destroyed.

Who has reviewed the study?

The study fieldwork design has been reviewed by an independent team of academic research ethics experts and deemed worthwhile and credible. Subsequently, as mentioned above the study design has been approved by Northumbria University Research Ethics Sub-Committee (copy of approval letter enclosed).

This summary completes **Part 1** of the Participant Information Sheet. If the information provided has interested you, and you are considering taking part in the study, please read the additional information provided in **Part 2** before making a decision to participate.

Participant information sheet - Part 2

Who is responsible for conducting the study?

The study will be conducted by John Cavener. I qualified as a social worker in 1999, and was located in a children's services area team before moving to Barnardo's North East in 2002. I have experience of direct work with children, young people and their families, and have undertaken several funded and commissioned practice-based research studies into topics including youth homelessness, young men's health and child sexual exploitation. Presently, I am seconded as a senior social work practitioner within children's services, and responsible for supporting development of services for children who go missing from home, care and education.

Who is responsible for supervising the study?

The study is supervised by a team of senior academic research staff allied to Northumbria University School of Health, Community and Education. The principle supervisor is Professor Gordon Jack. Gordon has a career spanning fifteen years as a qualified social work practitioner and manager in three local authority Children's Services departments. After a lengthy period of time as a social work lecturer/senior lecturer at Exeter University, and reader in social work at Durham University, Gordon moved to Northumbria University in 2011. Gordon's involvement in social work education and training, at both qualifying and post-qualifying levels, led to a recent study investigating early career development of newly-qualified childcare social workers. The study was published as a book co-authored with Helen Donnellan titled: *The Survival Guide for Newly Qualified Child and Family Social Workers: Hitting the Ground Running*. The supervisory team is also represented by Dr Robbie Duschinsky. Robbie is reader and senior lecturer in social science for social work at Northumbria University. Robbie has himself undertaken research related to children and families within children's services.

What if there is a problem and/or you wish to make a complaint?

During or after your participation if you have a concern about any aspect of the study you can contact my Principle Supervisor Professor Gordon Jack at: Northumbria University, School of Health, Community and Education Studies, Room B009, Coach Lane Campus West, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE7 7XA. gordon.jack@northumbria.ac.uk. Tel: 01912156301

Any concerns relating to professional misconduct should be dealt with via the study setting organisational policy; and where necessary you should contact your supervising children's services manager in the first instance if you have any concerns or complaints you feel have not been satisfactorily resolved.

Appendix 7: Informed consent form

1: I confirm I have read the Participant Information Sheet above and fully understand the purpose of the study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information provided and ask questions about the study. Any questions I have had have been answered satisfactorily.

Yes **No** **(NB: Please circle)**

2: I understand my participation in the study is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving reason. I understand my decision to withdraw from the study will be accepted.

Yes **No**

3: I understand my personal details will be kept confidential and data protected, and I will not be named in any written report, conference or other means of presenting the study findings.

Yes **No**

4: I agree to undertake and interview, and understand that this will be digitally recorded, and quotes by me may be reproduced anonymously in the study report.

Yes **No**

5: I confirm I have read and understood this consent form, I am fully aware of the nature and purpose of my participation, and I agree to take part in the study.

Yes **No**

Signature of participant:

Signature of Researcher:

Print name:

Print name:

Post title:

Date:

Employing agency:

Venue:

Appendix 8: Example of interview schedule

1: [Please tell me when, where and why did you undertake your social work training?]

2: [What is it about you as a person, and as a professional that makes you a really good social worker?]

3: [How do you think you have come to know and understand what constitutes risk and child abuse in society?]

[Think of a child protection case where you have been particularly happy with your involvement with the family and pleased with the outcome achieved. Please consider specific details of the case from the point of receiving the child concern notification, the decisions you made, your subsequent actions for example your involvement in the family assessment and case management process]

4: [Can you describe those events that occurred during your involvement in this case that you feel were critical and/or particularly significant turning points which led or contributed to a positive outcome for the children and family concerned?]

5: [Please can you tell me about how you view the use of expert knowledge in social work, and your thoughts on the influence of professional power and language on decision-making in child protection?]

6: [What kinds of things influence your sense-making, judgement and decision-making in child protection? (For example models of practice, practice wisdom, case history, supervision, other professional opinions etc)]

7: [What do you think about Signs of Safety and other strengths-based approaches to child protection?]

8: [What is your understanding of practice-depth in child protection?]

9: [What do you feel are the barriers to achieving practice-depth and positive outcomes for children and families protection cases?]

10: [What is your understanding of reflective (reflexive) practice and is this an approach you adopt in your own approach to case management?]

11: [If you think about child protection and social work what's your understanding of ethical practice?]

12: [What is your understanding of risk anxiety in child protection?]

Appendix 9: Example of verbatim transcript

- **[When, where and why did you undertake your social work education and training?]**

I took it at Sunderland University and qualified in July 2011 and I've always been interested in social work from an early age however ...I decided to wait until I had had my children because I didn't think I had life experiences and I found it difficult when I was younger going into a home and not being a parent and not being able to gauge and understand some....understand some parents point of view so I just thought that was the right time...**[Where did your interest in social work spring from do you think?]**...I really don't know...it's...probably the media...do you know when you're listening to things in the media and understanding that you'd never change the world but you can participate in helping people and it's not about you removing children it's about making lives easier and signposting them to services that they wouldn't know about...that we can help...I've always been interested in it because my job prior to social worker I worked for the (?) unit in Wansbeck hospital and it was cancer...it was about...I wasn't on the helping end of it I was on the referral end it was so fascinating about where they would go after they had had seizures and things like that so it was always a....

- **[What is it about you as a person and a professional that makes you a really good social worker?]**

I just think that I don't judge before I go out... yes we look at history and always influences you a times how I think you've got to go out with a clean slate....never forgetting history again but go out and we give them the opportunity to express ...and you don't judge do you know because we all go through a time in our life where we find it really hard to cope and manage being a parent... or traumas and events happen in our life and it does knock us off the path ...I think I'm a good social worker in a way that you know...I listen... do you know what I mean and I keep the child to me is central at all times and ...even though the mum and dad or grandma or granddad they obviously have views you know...but I always bring that back to the child...the best views in the path for the childthat's what I'm there for and obviously we give support to parents and things like that but I think the child always remains central to me ...and his needs or her needs always remain central... to mine and I go from there and I do what's best for the child ...and I listen and I talk

- **[How do you think that you have come to understand what constitutes risk and child abuse in society?]**

You touch on it a lot in university however you don't start learning until you're practicing ...in my practice...I think I progressed and grew since starting this job because what...when I first came out on a referral I was like goodness do you know what the child's been abused this that and the other but as you grow with the job you educate yourself you learn that... you know...it doesn't always mean... negative outcomes ...I think the job trains you and obviously we look you know...is the child at risk of significant harm or does the child just need services to keep them within the home and that's what I've learnt...you know the threshold...I work on a threshold and if you think it steps that threshold that's when it becomes child protection however some things are coming in child protection we go out and assess the situation...do your assessment ...it's not... you know...but I think I've learnt... most of my practice...most of my training... comes from being on the job not university. **[A bit like kind of like practice wisdoms if you like?]**...definitely and you go from colleagues...I've always left my colleagues and their ideas and sometimes you know sit back and listen to their perspective of themes and it makes you analyse yourself...and I suppose within this job you're reflecting all the time...you reflect back ...you reflect on why you made that decision...would you make it again and ...I think it's reflective practice all the way through ...all the way through your work because one situation's totally different to the ...and it could be... a child's been hit or ...but totally different perspectives around each case and I think that's what it needs but I bounce off my colleagues and listen the them see what they have to say and ...

- **[Think of a child protection case that you were particularly happy with where you felt that you were pleased with the outcomes you felt there was strength of engagement with the family, please talk through the case?]**

What...I worked with a little family from Scotland...before I came a little boy was living with his mum grandma two uncles...said the child was totally socially isolated... never left...went home on a Friday put his PJ's pyjamas on never left the house again until he went to school every single evening you know...he never went out he had no friends and he was...his mum had learning disabilities...the whole family has got learning disabilities... so unkempt no clothes things like that so...went out and did the assessment and it was evident from walking in that the information was correct...the child was born due to mum being raped ...there was evidence straight away that this child was adored absolutely adored by every family member however...he wasn't allowed to engage with anyone I mean...he didn't know how to chew food he had no clothes he had no toys... he was just totally isolated this child was lacking

base need every in all your five outcomes he just wasn't enjoying achieving he just wasn't doing anything...wasn't eating healthy ...giving it favour you know to history and that the family...everywhere the family had lived... they'd been you know socially isolated and they'd been discriminated against they'd been bullied to the point where they thought right if we just don't engage with society... we keep ourselves to ourselves or this child was his needs were being neglected....we then found out uncle had sexual offences against him when he lived in Scotland so that blew it all out of the water as well so ...to lead on from there we removed uncle who's now really happy you know...he's living in sheltered accommodation support lodgings and he's progressed so much...the little boy we decided to take it to conference because we just thought mum...never been to the dentist didn't have a dentist we took it to conference and it went with the child plan and I believe now that there's lots of services in helping this little boy and also we got adult services in to help the family ...and I was really please because however ...even though it's not progressing to the stage we would like it to it's still progressing you know... this child's going out with tasks centred and he's enjoying he's achieving and enjoying ...things...with services being involved keeping an eye... do you know what I mean?

- **[What do you think were the critical incidents within that case that made the difference?]**

The critical was uncle you know that was one major aspect as you know the uncle also...he was totally socially isolated no social skills no self-care skills everything was done with him and that was a major because you know this...this little boy he's developing behind children of his own age however it could be because of what he's not getting in the family home and maybe If he wasn't within that family unit because it was difficult do we keep the child in do we move the child because we've got to give him the opportunities to progress into adulthood.. ...if we removed him we would be giving him that opportunity to maybe catch up with us because we don't think he's got a learning disability ...however removing him from the home could have major impacts on everyone not just on him but on everyone so that was a major one that he needed to beparents needed to understand grandma sorry grandma was the one that communicated that he needs to be within society he needs to be living the life of a ten year old he needs to be you know kept safe from harm and... just everything that was the major ... this uncle and he had no life just basically I mean he had no life whatsoever...he played computer games twenty four seven ...and mum didn't know how to interact with him you know...he had no toys so that meant nobody could play with him ...**[it sounds like a real good piece of work]** ...it was

- **[Can you tell me your view of 'expert' knowledge in social work and your thoughts on the influence of professional power and language on decision making?]**

Yes I do because obviously we have a decision power do you know what I mean the hierarchy and things like that ...within this case I don't think it interfered with my decision making because they were all understanding however you know there has been times when you make a decision and you think it's the right decision however hierarchy come down and say no we're not doing this ...it frustrates you in a way because you're quite you know...you should be quite positive about your practice but again I do like hierarchy decision power because it...it covers you **[When you say hierarchy what do you mean?]**...hierarchy like your position power like your senior practice you've got your team manager then...you know what I mean it's like they've got the position to make the final decision however when it comes to the language in social work with this family everything had to be stripped down to very, very basic to the point where we used no jargon because mum probably had the mentality of an eleven year old herself so when we came to do written agreements and plans everything was stripped to absolute basics so she could understand every word and I think all professionals you know even the chair of the conference spoke in such simple terms ...and not to dis-empower the family it was because we wanted them to be on board and wanted them to know we were there to support them to offer help do you know...it was not to degrade them or anything like that if we came in with all our jargon then they would never...we wouldn't be giving them a fair decision then we wouldn't feel the power over them...and I just think it's incorrect to do that...because it frightens people

- **[What kind of things influences your own judgement and decision making in child protection?]**

History do you know what I mean where we are looking at history...when we're speaking of child we're using signs of safety...I use a lot of attachments you know theories of attachment because I think that ...??....to a lot of problems within a family...I use signs of safety...I use the systemic theory you know because I think that we've got to look at...if you've got a family in a situation ...you've got to look at the stems around it and what influence they're having like finance you have domestic violence drug and alcohol you've got to look at everything family support...so I like using the systemic because then they look at everything, everything

that comes within the family unit so I look at that because there could be just one person influencing this family and if we get rid of that influence it might mean that children's services can step out or put less support in...signs of safety is the massive one for me do you know what I mean especially signs of safety when we have like...team around the child because I think instead of professionals sitting writing and parents and the child thinking what the hell's going on you know... they're saying everything on that board and they participate you know and then they're empowered to say ...well I don't agree with that know where we are...I think this is a concern that we might have missed...something that's a concern to them might not be a concern to us ...but it's how...it's their feelings and wishes...so I like that so everybody at the table can see what's written down and all having different notes and position power again over on to the family so I like that ...again as I say attachment as well I think that plays a massive part in mine...because I look and see has there been attachment issues in the past then you cannot forget that ... because it takes a lot to get the attachment back...but the history again as I say do you know what I mean...before I make a decision I look at everything that's gone on you know even if it's 2008 or 2009 it still happened and yet it might have been dealt with but who says it hasn't resurfaced again so all of that...

- **[If you think about what I call strategic decision making which is obviously a multi-agency kind of strategy meeting signs of safety, for example, and you mentioned hierarchy do you think that influence is present within those types of meetings in terms of decision-making?] ... Definitely... [Can you talk a bit about that?]**

Yes...for example strategy meeting you know...the chair decides at the end of it the social worker gives their views ...they give their concern but at the end of the day it comes down to whoever is chairing it and you could totally disagree with them as long as you record... your views...at the end of the day the chair is final...I think that within our team though before we take it to strategy or conference the team managerwe're always on the level where she understands where we're coming from she likes to know why we're taking it to strategy why we're taking it to conference and...she guides you, you don't just take it without her knowing we always have a case discussion about it so you're not going in blind and she's not going in blind or whoever but at the end of the day you know...the chair decides even if you don't agree with it you can fight your course but that's the final decision basically...and you just hope that nothing happens...

- **[If you think about practice-depth in child protection what do you think are the barriers to achieving practice-depth in child protection what gets in the way of**

you know this level deep level of practice, like being able to critically reflect on your work?]

Caseloads I mean...you were working on a case right... that's.....how can I put it ...you were working on a case that iss going absolutely fine right however they need support...but then...so you'll say right I'm going to put this support in that support in but then another case will come in which takes your attention that needs action straight away so by the time you've dealt with that your other case has hit crisis point so ...I think it's our work our case load...to be honest I'm just forever seeing it because we have so many... at the minute that start with one and finish at the other it takes absolutely weeks and weeks because you've got someone else come in and you're on duty...I think it's a good model but doesn't...unless it's a section forty seven straight away you go straight through it other cases you normally get your reflective practice you know because you've hung on to the case for so long and it's brought up...because if we had time to put support straight in and away to the family it probably would have just it probably would have...you've got to do your assess in pragmatic practice you've got to do your assessments put your services in support the family it would probably stay at that level but because we haven't got the time to do that ...most of them progress to the critical point...

- **[If you think about ethics in child protection if I said to you what is your understanding of ethical social work what would that be? - You talk about being non-judgemental but what is your understanding of ethical practice?]**

Ethical to me would be not dis-empowering you know...no discrimination not being judgemental no position power... ethical would be listening to them...child centred approach...do you know something it's all that's in the codes of practice and if you follow that ...I know it's changed now but the GSCC.... codes of practice you can't go wrong to be honest however it doesn't always happen doesn't it not because sometimes you have to put a bit power on to the family for to keep the child safe but that would be my ethic rules you know what I mean...and I think it's strong not easy doing that...and for all they say it doesn't happen but your personal values... [can we talk a bit about that?] ...personal values you know everybody uses them they're a liar if they say they their personal values don't come in because sometimes you identify things with one family that's happening with another family and however your judgement has to be professional and you know it's so human to have your personal values ...sometimes you come away from a home and you feel deflated... do you know what I mean because you just think...oh god ...do you know...and obviously because I work in the area I do know a lot of people who'll not always go to the home and say well here's a professional you know...I'll be making judgements and you can question

me at any time on my professional judgement and I'll know I haven't used my personal values but I think it's so hard I really do because I've got children myself and you do you reflect back and think ...god my little one's that age or this happened to me a few year back and ...I think you're a liar if people say your personal views never come into....it should never guide your judgement but they do come in...sometimes I think it's nice to have your personal judgement values because it makes you human you know....it's like reflective practice again isn't it [yes]...

- **[How would you describe your experience of supervision particularly around decision making in child protection and how the decisions that you make are influenced by your supervisory relationship?]**

Supervision we ...?...supervision yes we do and our manager's got an open door policy where you know...to be honest it's hard not to go in every day to see her because... you know something will just flag up and I just think that you always need a second opinion ...and yes we're on duty and we've hit the ground running and we make a decision but I think managers there and they get paid to second decision our decisions...what was the other part of the ...sorry...**[Basically how does your relationship with your supervisor actually influence your judgement and decision making in child protection?]**...oh...very much so because I think you need...got the support of manager it makes your job so much easier as I say something will come in you think it's a section forty seven strategy you'll go in and the manager will say right lets calm down...look at it from this point...I mean a few times I've thought oh no look at this and I've spoken to my manager and she's said it from another perspective and I've thought yes you're so right do you know...they, they've got experience and the knowledge that I don't feel my manager over powers me do you know....she will listen to me and if I say do you know...case the other day that I felt that something wasn't right and I discussed it at length with her and was annoyed... do you know what I mean but when I reckoned again which assessment she was right in what she had said ...so I value her experience and I value her decision as well and at no time do I feel disempowered by her I really don't

- **[If we could go back to the start and think about social work education and training, do you think it stands up to where you are now as a practitioner? Foer example, do you draw on it or do you feel as if you're a different type of practitioner?]**

From beginning...oh I'm a totally different one and do you know something I always learn...I'd rather be as that I'll never know everything do you know...in twenty years' time I'll still be learning and I think in social work that is...that is the key you educate yourself all the time I'm always looking at new theories I'm always reading my books do you know...I don't quote legislation I don't quote theories in my other assessments because there's always someone else to say well this you know ...while physiologists will say this that and the other but I'm always reading them...I'll always learn I'll never ever be at ease where I can say I know my job because I don't think anybody in social work...I think every day is a learning curve and every day we're educated and we learn something new ...but I think...yes... I'm getting there...

Appendix 10: Example of 'positive practice' story: Sophie³⁰

Sophie was 12 when she disclosed to her teacher she had been physically chastised by her mother and was worried about going home. The social worker went to see Sophie in School and describes her telling how her mother had hit her and pulled her hair that morning. Sitting close to Sophie the social worker observed her 'head moving' and how she was 'infested' by head lice dropping off strands of her hair'. Having consulted with the manager it was decided Sophie needed a medical examination and she was taken to hospital. On being informed Sophie's mother had stated 'keep her we don't want her back'. The medical examination identified both old and new bruising on Sophie's head and back, and 'the head lice had actually eaten into her scalp'. Sophie was underweight, her clothes were 'unkempt' and after the social worker had 'whip round' one of the nurses bought her some 'new pyjamas and toiletries from ASDA'.

The social worker described how Sophie 'just cried and cried because people were being nice to her', and how the ward sister decided she could remain in hospital. Visiting parents, the social worker described how she identified Sophie had two older brothers, and a younger half-sister who was daughter of her step-father. Mother is described as 'not 'fully understanding' the gravity of the situation by stating how she felt Sophie 'watched too much Tracy Beaker and that's why she wants to go into care'. On requesting to see Sophie's bedroom it was described as messy and a black bin liner was placed on the end of her bed with her clothes in it. Sophie's half-sister is described as having a 'pink princess bed, and a wardrobe with nice clothes'. Following further disclosure of sexual abuse, an emergency foster placement was sought. Sophie was referred to the child and adolescent mental health service with a request she be fast tracked rather than held on a long waiting list. Meanwhile, court proceeding seeking a Care Order led to the social worker being threatened by family members.

The social worker describes how the foster family were 'inexperienced' and Sophie was their first foster child, and despite her feeling suicidal how she wanted things to work and did not want her to go into residential care. From the outset of disclosure Sophie's family refused to have her back and described as having continued to 'hurt her psychologically by withdrawing totally'. The social worker described how it important to find the 'right people' who could care for Sophie, and how the plan needed to be 'tight around her' otherwise we could 'lose' her. Summarising the case, the social worker described the importance of 'supervision and my manager saying you'll have to pull yourself out of this one'. The social workers' commitment to Sophie was summarised when she stated 'I didn't go all the way [I passed the case on], I knew it was successful because she's alive, about to leave School and doing absolutely fantastic'.

³⁰ The child's name in this case has been changed to protect confidentiality.

Appendix 11: Participant profile

Age:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Qualification:

Qualified period:

Occupational status:

Occupational location:

Case Study Type:

At risk:

Neglect:

Sexual Abuse:

Physical Abuse:

Emotional Abuse:

Appendix 12: Participant characteristics

Practitioner Age:	20 – 30	30 – 40	40 – 50	50 – 60
Number =	3	7	4	1
Gender:	Female	Male	Other	
Number =	13	2	0	
Ethnicity:	White British	Other		
Number =	14	1		
Qualification:	Dip/SW	Dip/SW & BSc	CQSW	SW Degree MA
Number =	5	9	1	1
Qualified period:	1 – 5 years	6 -10 years	11 - 15 years	15 - 20 + years
Number =	5	3	3	4
Case study type of maltreatment:	Sexual	Physical	Neglect	At risk
Number =	6	1	4	4

Appendix 13: Evidencing 'best practice' in child protection

Based on criteria outlined by Jones, Cooper and Ferguson (2008) my analysis of the study data identified many examples of 'best practice'. Within in-depth interviews, several practitioners described their value-commitments, beliefs in and concerns for children and families. As highlighted, through demonstrating non-judgmental attitudes practitioners demonstrated a commitment to a 're-imagined child protection' (Featherstone, White and Morris, 2014) by working in a just, humane and family-minded way. On a day-to-day basis, best practice was observed as a reoccurring theme in the way practitioners engaged with parents respectfully and sensitively.

An example of this was where one practitioner, on making an initial telephone call, was observed as reassure parents they understood they may be feeling anxious. On each occasion the practitioner would call parents following receipt of a CCN and ask why they thought they were being contacted. Parents were always encouraged to challenge the information the social worker had received and offer their 'version' of what had happened. Prior to any face-to-face contact, the practitioner was observed following a series of steps including: (1) being clear about her role and responsibilities (2) explaining the assessment process, and (3) agreeing a mutually convenient time to meet with parents. On describing the measure of a competent childcare social worker, Cooper (2000) comments 'practitioners' understanding and responses that emphasise and entail...sincerity, trust, safety and hope' are all essential components.

In cases study samples where practitioners felt a positive outcome for a child and family had been achieved one distinct findings on best practice emerged. With the one selected finding, the practitioner described a case where she had been newly allocated as the social worker. In her description of the case the practitioner was identified as being critically-reflexive. As I will outline this was due to her willingness to challenge the opinion of her senior managers and their risk-averse approach to decision-making and the constructions of the identities of the parents as a risk. In her approach to intervention, as advocated by Broadhurst et al. (2010a), she was able promote a family-based risk management plan in an informal way. Reflecting on the case the practitioner explained how a mother described as alcoholic had returned home drunk and woke to find her new-born baby, whom she had been cuddling throughout the night, dead. The cause of death remained unsubstantiated.

After the child's death, and as a result of an older sibling disclosing physical chastisement by his father, three older children had been removed to the care of maternal grandparents. At the point the mother was due to have another baby, in the context of a pre-birth child protection conference, the social worker advocated for the child to remain with his mother after birth. Anxious about safety, the professional group and senior managers insisted the risk of a family-based support plan was too great. However, the social workers argued the child's father, also described as alcoholic but on a rehabilitation programme, could support the mother and contribute to the child's safe care. Outlining the case, the following excerpt exemplifies best practice in child protection. It does so in the way the practitioner demonstrates a critically-reflexive awareness of taken-for-granted assumptions in child protection:

The family had been under tremendous stress. Father had had significant alcohol problems, and the little boy disclosed at school his dad had smacked him. The family were very distressed. Parents were reticent to work with me,

as the social worker previously had been totally disrespectful...talked down to them. I promoted increased contact with dad as he had stopped drinking. We had mum on a reduction programme. I worked with the family for...sixteen months, and the dad was the main carer. I recommended that they be reunited as a family, and got a lot of flak from management. I had to meet with the head of services, our legal team and the manager. They said I argued the case really well. The family were reunited and...I got a letter afterwards thanking me. I was the only person who heard what they had to say, who actually listened and worked 'with' them [SW: 7].

Presented in the above extract is the voice of an experienced and competent social worker. As a confident practitioner Social Worker 7 describes how she was able to identify strengths within a family and promote safe care. Social Worker 7 understood the organisational culture she operated within was risk-orientated. Resultantly, Social worker 7 describes how she was able to utilise her power within professional relationships to challenge the dominant opinion of managers. Drawing on practice wisdom, Social Worker 7 describes how she was able to understand the parents' ambivalence towards her as *'the social worker previously had been totally disrespectful'*. Social Worker 7 demonstrates the principles of best practice by not *'talking down'* to the parents or assuming the position of 'expert'.

While still reflecting on the case above within the in-depth interview I asked Social Worker 7 the question: *If you think about expert knowledge and professional power in child protection, can you talk to me a little bit about that?* On answering this question Social Worker 7 demonstrated her capacity for critically-reflexive practice. This is highlighted in the following extract where she communicates her understanding on the influence on sense-making in child protection of professional power, language and discourse:

You can't be an expert on somebody else's' life they are...It was co-participation and re-writing of the story. That's the jargon of narrative, and that really opened my eyes to misuse of power, because professionals like medical professionals, legal professionals...those professionals speaking a particular language.... that maintains a power imbalance. I think we need to be careful about our language, even saying things like 'he's alcoholic'. You're labelling, it's a totalising discourse. [SW: 7]

Appendix 14: Literature review strategy

Prior to the design and commencement of the study fieldwork I undertook a comprehensive literature. As an evolving process the literature involved identifying textual material through a range of sources. To locate relevant articles, I used Northumbria and Durham Universities' electronic journal facilities, and internet-based World Wide Web search-engines including Google Scholar. The former facility provided direct access to a range of peer reviewed social work, social policy and social theory academic journals. The latter facility allowed access to a wider range of UK and international journals, articles, briefing and other published and unpublished material.

I identified academic articles relevant to the topic of my thesis by using key words and word combinations. These included 'child protection', 'child abuse', 'risk and child abuse', 'critical realism', 'contemporary social constructionism', 'social constructionist social work', 'constructing social problems', 'reflexivity', 'reflexive practice', 'practicing reflexivity', 'critically-reflexive practice', 'Margaret Archer', 'modes of reflexivity', 'reflective practice', 'critical best practice', 'best practice', 'sense-making and social work', 'sense-making in child protection' and 'judgement and decision-making in child protection'.

Through my approach to searching for and sourcing literature a range of key authors allied to the topic of my study were identified. Where deemed essential, I purchased a number of books written or edited by these authors via online publishers, e-book shops, EBay and other sources. In their publication titled *Critical Reading and Writing for Postgraduates* Wallace and Wray (2011: 41) outline a useful five-stage approach for undertaking critical reading of academic literature. To help structure my review and evaluation of the literature, I adopted a strategy based on the staged synopsis outlined by Wallace and Wray.

Appendix 15: Data set sample

Code-Name:	Definition:	Example:	Participant:
Factors influencing sense-making in child protection	Explicit statement about phenomena informing practitioner's sense-making, judgement and decision-making	Text Sample	[SW: 7] Reflexive mode and/or level
Historical factors	Sense-making influenced by case history	<i>'Historical evidence is always important as we know the surest predictor of behaviour is what happened before...but this is where I tread a fine wire as most would stick with that and go with it because it's easier...to take them [children] into care than actually argue for rehab and things like that because you have to put support in'</i>	M-R
Parent attributes	Sense-making informed by attributes of parents	<i>'Variables things like maturation of the parents...different circumstances now...have they moved forward from substance misuse...is this a different partner...all of those things so it's not neglecting the fact that change can happen'</i>	M-R
Statutory guidance	Sense-making informed by statutory guidance	<i>'Statutory papers that we follow...the law...things like working together to safeguard children and the...assessment framework'</i>	
Personal ethics, experience and 'gut feeling'	Sense-making informed by personal ethics, experience and 'gut feeling'	<i>'Another thing that is really important is ethics and knowing it about an ethical situation. Because you have like a circle over here which would be the ethics of the agency...then you have your personal ethics and there would be an overlap there...and whatever the legal team and there is an overlap there and with those three I think it is easy to make a decision as they all can influence you...but I think opinion and decision-making can fall outside of those three areas into areas where you make decision due to personal experience or a gut feeling...but that is not good enough'</i>	M-R

Motivation to avoid risk taking	Sense-making informed by risk-aversion	<i>'I think some people avoid taking risks to the detriment of families. Sadly...but as social workers we need to remember part of our job is...managing risks. Recognising them and putting things into place to manage them until that person is not a risk'</i>	M-R
Risk anxiety	Sense-making informed by risk anxiety	<i>'There has been some cases where there is incredible anxiety around the risk and I think that can have a terrible impact on you as a social worker if there is no way for you to de-stress and reflect on you practice'</i>	M-R
High Caseloads, targets and performance indicators	Sense-making informed by high caseloads, performance and management of workflow	<i>'I think the fact we have high caseloads we cannot provide the service we ought to...we have performance indicators it is about making sure you have ticked the box'</i>	
Timescales	Sense-making informed by timescales	<i>'Timescales in the job...courts do not want to prolong cases so there is no opportunity...I have a case where the parents have learning disabilities they need additional time to complete therapeutic work and the parenting work to what a normal family would need...but the judge will not go beyond twenty-six weeks in care proceedings so that seriously hampers positive outcomes'</i>	
Risk management and pressure to take the 'easy option'	Sense-making informed by managerial pressure to complete tasks	<i>'Some people when they are pressurised by managers find it easier to go the easy option...avoid the risk and go for permanency rather than look at home and say we can work 'with' the family so I am saying hang on a minute manager...we need to manage the risk.'</i>	M-R

<p>Reflection on practice</p>	<p>Sense-making informed by reflection on practice</p>	<p><i>'I think we don't always know we are reflecting and I think there is a conscious reflection that happens if we had more time in the day...I think reflection is vital so we can say 'hang on how did that happen?' where am I with this...and what impact did I have on this family?' Unless you can do that you are just going through the motions...being ineffective in your role'</i></p>	<p>M-R</p>
<p>Seeing things from the parent's perspective</p>	<p>Sense-making informed by the perspectives of parents</p>	<p><i>'Trying to understand things from parent's perspective...not siding with them but hearing what they have to say and acknowledging where they are coming from and the difficulties they are experiencing'</i></p>	<p>M-R</p>
<p>Understanding influence of power, language and discourse</p>	<p>Sense-making informed by power and language</p>	<p><i>'Because you learn to speak a particular language as a professional that maintains a power imbalance...and the language we use and the power that carries can sway decisions so we need to be aware of this and other people's power...when you read court statements and hear the opposing voice or whatever...if you hear where they are coming from it can reset your own testimony'</i></p>	<p>M-R</p>
<p>Understanding influence of power, language and discourse</p>	<p>Sense-making informed by power and language</p>	<p><i>'I think we need to be careful about the language we use...even saying someone is an alcoholic you are labelling the whole person and it's a totalising discourse whereas if you say that person is living with alcohol and alcohol has a huge impact on his life it kind of puts the problem out there...it gives them hope as they can start to say 'hang on the problem is not me'. 'I am living with the problem'. That creates a whole new dimension to your work'</i></p>	<p>M-R</p>

Appendix 16: Archer’s Internal Conversation Indicator (ICON)

Some of us are aware that we are having a conversation with ourselves, silently in our heads. We might just call this ‘thinking things over’. Is this the case for you?

YES **NO**

ON THE WHOLE (please tick) where on a scale of 1 to 7 you: 7 Strongly Agree or 1 Strongly Disagree

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

- 1. I do daydream about winning the lottery.
- 2. I think about work a great deal, even when I am away from it.
- 3. I dwell long and hard on moral questions.
- 4. I blot difficulties out of my mind, rather than trying to think them through.
- 5. My only reason for wanting to work is to be able to pay for the things that matter to me.
- 6. Being decisive does not come easily to me.
- 7. I try to live up to an ideal, even if it costs me a lot to do so.
- 8. When I consider problems, I get overwhelmed by emotion.
- 9. So long as I know those I care about are OK, nothing else really matters to me at all.
- 10. I just dither, because nothing I do can really make a difference to how things turn out.
- 11. I’m dissatisfied with myself and my way of life - both could be better than they are.
- 12. I know I should play an active role in reducing social injustice.
- 13. I feel helpless and powerless to deal with my problems however hard I try to sort them out.

Scoring participants on Archer's (2008) ICONI

N.B. Please note carefully that for Question 6 and Question 11, numerical scores should be INVERTED when calculating an individual's score.

1. The questions are divided into 4 categories, that is there are 3 questions indicative of

'Communicative reflexivity', 3 questions indicative of 'Autonomous reflexivity', 3 questions

indicative of 'Meta-reflexivity and 4 questions indicative of 'Fractured reflexivity'.

2. The scores for the four modes of reflexivity are calculated as follows:

Communicative reflexive score = $(Q1 + Q5 + Q9) / 3$

Autonomous reflexive score = $(Q2 + Q6^* + Q11^*) / 3$ (*= inverted)

Meta-reflexive score = $(Q3 + Q7 + Q12) / 3$

Fractured reflexive score = $(Q4 + Q8 + Q10 + Q13) / 4$

3. A score of 4 and above on any of the four categories of questions assigns a subject to the C, A, M and F category, as their dominant mode of reflexivity - whichever is their highest score over 4.

4. F scores of over 4 are held to 'trump' other scores. Such subjects are registered as 'F' regardless of their other scores - even if these are higher.

5. Regarding question 'X' – it is presented here as Archer (2008) used it, that is, as an open-ended question about subjects' ultimate concerns. However, this has created some difficulties in later collapsing their responses into manageable categories. Although a lot has been learned through this, Archer recommends that others take advantage of her experience and employ fixed choice categories.

Some suggestions which basically seek to tap 'C' concerns include inter-personal relationships with family and friends 'A' concerns include work, career, performative achievements, financial success and for 'M' their concerns and intrinsic interests, socio-ethical pre-occupations, spirituality and for 'F' concerns, resolving problems, establishing a better way of life, overcoming present difficulties.³¹

³¹ This template is adapted directly from: Archer, M. S. (2008) The Internal Conversation: Mediating between structure and agency: Full Research Report. ESRC End of Award Report, RES-000-23-0349. Swindon: ESRC.

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