

**A One-Way Ticket to Paradise?**  
**Transnational Social Workers' Lived Experience in Australian**  
**Child Protection Service Delivery**

**Submitted by**  
**Corina (Kornelisje) Modderman**  
**Bachelor of Social Work / Bachelor of Art Therapy**

**A thesis submitted for the total fulfilment of the degree**

**Doctor of Philosophy**  
**La Trobe Rural Health School**  
**College of Science, Health and Engineering**  
**La Trobe University**  
**Victoria, Australia**

**July 2020**

# Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	ii
Associated Publications and Conference Presentations .....	v
Abstract .....	vii
Statement of Authorship .....	ix
Glossary of Terminology .....	x
Acknowledgements .....	xiii
List of Tables .....	xv
List of Figures .....	xvi
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
1.1 Background to the Research .....	1
1.2 Rationale .....	4
1.2.1 The Context .....	5
1.3 Aim of the Thesis .....	8
1.4 Research Questions .....	9
1.5 The Research Process .....	11
1.5.1 Critical theory .....	13
1.5.2 Primary and secondary data collection .....	13
1.5.3 Ethical considerations .....	17
1.5.4 Data analysis .....	17
1.5.5 Trustworthiness .....	21
1.6 Outline of the Dissertation .....	22
Chapter 2: Transnational Social Workers in Statutory Child Welfare: A Scoping Review .....	25
2.1 Introduction .....	25
2.2 Article 1 .....	28
2.3 Conclusion .....	36
Chapter 3: Participant Vignettes .....	37
3.1 Introduction .....	37
3.2 Recruitment Strategies and Data Collection .....	37
3.3 Participant Vignettes .....	39
3.3.1 New Arrivals .....	39
3.3.2 The First Two Years Completed .....	41
3.3.3 Long-term Residents .....	45

3.4 Conclusion.....	47
Chapter 4: Transnational Social Workers' Lived Experience in Statutory Child Protection .....	48
4.1 Introduction .....	48
Article 2 .....	51
4.3 Conclusion.....	64
Chapter 5: The Role of Place for Transnational Social Workers in Statutory Child Protection .....	65
5.1 Introduction .....	65
5.2 Article 3 .....	68
5.3 Conclusion.....	87
Chapter 6: Transnational Social Workers' Understanding of First Nations Perspectives in Statutory Child Protection.....	88
6.1 Introduction .....	88
6.2 Article 4.....	91
6.3 Conclusion.....	104
Chapter 7: Integrated Discussion .....	105
7.1 Introduction .....	105
7.2 Summary of Findings .....	107
7.3 Discussion .....	117
7.3.1 Personal Narratives .....	120
7.3.2 The Context of Social Work .....	123
7.3.3. Colonial Practices .....	127
7.4 Strengths and Limitations of this Research.....	117
7.5 Conclusion.....	133
Chapter 8: Implications and Conclusions .....	134
8.1 Introduction .....	134
8.2 Reflections on the Research Process .....	134
8.3 Theoretical Implications.....	138
8.4 Implications for Practice in Child Protection Agencies .....	142
8.5 Implications for Policy .....	148
8.6 Future Research Directions .....	150
8.7 Concluding Remarks .....	153
Appendices.....	154
Appendix 1: University Ethics Approval .....	155
Appendix 2: Extension of the University Ethics Approval.....	157

Appendix 3: Consent Form .....	159
Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet.....	161
Appendix 5 Interview Schedule 1 .....	164
Appendix 6 Interview Schedule 2 .....	166
List of References .....	168



## Associated Publications and Conference Presentations

This thesis includes four original papers published in peer-reviewed journals forming the majority of the dissertation. During my candidature I have also presented at conferences in the field of social work. Details of the research dissemination are listed below.

### Publications

**Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2017).** Transnational social workers in statutory child welfare: A scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 81, 21-28.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.07.022>

**Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2018).** Transnational social workers' lived experience in statutory child protection. *European Journal of Social Work*, 23(4), 645-657. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2018.1517114>

**Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2019).** The role of place for transnational social workers in statutory child protection. *British Journal of Social Work*, 94(6), 1619-1637. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcz065>

**Modderman, C., McMahon, M., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2020).** Transnational social workers' understanding of Australian First Nations perspectives in statutory child protection, *Australian Social Work*. Advance online publication.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2020.1771389>

## Conference Presentations

**Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson L.** (2016). Transnational social workers, reskill, upskill or skilled? Paper presented at the World Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development. Seoul, Korea, June 2016.

**Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson L.** (2017). Christmas should be in the cold. Paper presented at the Australian & New Zealand Social Work, Welfare Education, and Research Symposium. Auckland, New Zealand, September 2017.

**Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L.** (2019). The role of place for transnational social workers. Paper presented at the La Trobe Rural Health School higher degree research symposium. Bendigo, Australia, November 2019.

**Modderman, C., McMahon, M., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L.** (2020). Transnational social workers' understanding of Australian First Nations perspectives in statutory child protection service delivery. Paper presented at the International Federation of Social Workers Conference. Calgary, Canada (online), July 2020.

## **Abstract**

Globalisation and chronic workforce shortages in statutory child protection systems offer professional opportunities for social workers to engage with practice in a new environment. Child protection employers in Australia actively recruit social workers from the United Kingdom and Ireland to fill frontline positions. What is relatively unknown is how these transnational social workers experience the unique context of Australian child protection. Social work in Australia is an unregistered profession shaped by the nation's demographic, historical and cultural context in which the impact of colonisation still reverberates.

This thesis explores these issues by asking: What are the personal, professional, and organisational dynamics that influence transnational social work in an Australian child protection system? A qualitative study design, drawing on primary and secondary data, was applied to deepen understanding of migrating social workers' experiences in Australian child protection service. A scoping review of the literature identified key concepts and knowledge gaps related to transnational social work, which guided the primary data collection. Informed by narrative methodology (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998), the primary data collection comprised research interviews capturing the experiences of 13 transnational social workers from the United Kingdom and Ireland practising in Australia across two points in time. Data were explored using three different lenses; attachment theory, place-identity theory and cultural humility theory. Collectively they provide a deeper understanding of how transnational social workers are personally and professionally affected when they enter the unique Australian context of statutory child protection service delivery.

This research has shown that professional migration had important implications for the translation of social work into an unknown practice environment. The ambiguous professional status of social work in Australian child protection service delivery may pose challenges for transnational social workers' professional identity. This research contributes the first in-depth insights into the impact of Eurocentric practice and theory when transnational social workers in child protection engage with Australian First Nations communities. The findings include the need to improve transnational social work practice to make a positive difference for the children involved with child protection services – for their families, their community, their Country, and themselves.

## **Statement of Authorship**

This thesis includes work by the author that has been published or accepted for publication as described in the text. Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no other material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

This work was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Corina (Kornelisje) Modderman

Date: 31 July 2020

## **Glossary of Terminology**

### *First Nations peoples*

An Indigenous Australian is a person of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage. Aboriginal Australians are the traditional owners of Australia. Torres Strait Islander Australians are the traditional owners of the Torres Strait Islands. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples belong to two separate and unique cultural backgrounds, with distinct customs and belief systems (Oates, 2018; Zubrzycki et al., 2014). In Australia there are many Countries and communities with different traditions, cultures, languages and lived experiences (Bennett & Gates, 2019). In this dissertation the terms First Nations, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous are used interchangeably. To acknowledge diversity, the plural expression peoples will be used.

### *Stolen Generations*

In Australian history an estimated 100,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were forcibly removed from their families in the period between 1910 and 1970, facilitated by explicit federal and state policies. Most Stolen Generations victims/survivors were denied any connection to their Country, worldviews, languages and cultures. It is important to acknowledge that all Australian First Nations peoples were impacted by these policies regardless of whether children were taken or not. They lived in fear of their children being abducted by welfare workers and police, often having to hide their children (Funston & Herring, 2016).

### *Country*

In an Australian First Nations worldview Country represents different entities, and includes the land, the seas, the waterways, the skies, animals, plants and the elements such as winds and stars (McMahon, 2017). For First Nations peoples there is a strong

spiritual nature to connection to land and caring for Country (Black et al., 2019). In this dissertation, Country is spelt with a capital C.

#### *Transnational social worker*

A transnational social worker is a professional who relocates to another country to practise social work. As such, they utilise their social work education and practice experience in an unknown context. This term includes overseas social workers and international recruited social workers (Hussein, 2014; Peter et al., 2019).

#### *Statutory child protection*

In Australia child protection services are administered under the legislation that governs child protection matters within individual states and territories (Oates, 2019a). There are six state and two territory governments, each with its own legislation and policies (Russ et al., 2009). In this dissertation the term ‘child protection’ refers to statutory child protection. In the United Kingdom and United States of America child protection is also referred to as child welfare or social care.

#### *Eurocentric*

Social work is a profession based on European concepts and problems. In this dissertation the term Eurocentric or Western perspectives refers to imposing Eurocentric social structures and belief systems onto First Nations peoples (Tamburro, 2013).

#### *Australian Association of Social Workers*

The Australian Association of Social Workers is the professional body of social workers in Australia. It was formed as a national association in 1946 and currently has nine branches and more than 12,000 members throughout the country. The purpose of the professional body is to promote social work, advance social justice, uphold standards and

build the capacity of members (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2020a).

Throughout this dissertation the abbreviation AASW will be used.

### *United Kingdom and Ireland*

The United Kingdom is a union of four countries: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Ireland refers to the Republic of Ireland. For readability, the term UK and Irish social workers will be used when relevant.



## Acknowledgements

The work presented in this thesis is indebted to many wonderful people. These people have pushed me to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to complete a PhD and have nudged me forward when the journey seemed endless.

I am indebted to the participants in this study for their generosity and the privilege of allowing me into their lives. Thank you for sharing your journey and commitment to child protection.

I have been incredibly lucky to study under the supervision of Dr Guinever Threlkeld and Associate Professor Lynne McPherson. Guin, I count myself as having been truly blessed to have had such a warm, wise and encouraging supervisor. Lynne, I am grateful for your kindness and your wisdom about child protection social work. You are my role models and I will take your profound influence with me everywhere. Thank you Professor Teresa Iacono, for overseeing the milestones in your role of academic chair and for providing valuable feedback. Dr Judith Gibbs, thank you for your encouragement and knowledge in your role as supervisor during the Master by Research.

I owe my sanity to many dear colleagues and friends: Dr Heather Downey, Associate Professor Fiona Gardner, Helen Sellar, Associate Professor Sue Hodgkin, Dr Lucinda Aberdeen, Dr Phuc Nguyen, Dr Claire Quilliam, Fiona Sawyer, Dr Jennifer Jones, Dr Samantha Clune, the La Trobe University RED team, and Tribe Mvmnt Wangaratta.

Thank you to all of those along the way who helped shape my thinking and numerous drafts, in particular: Iris Ambrose, Associate Professor Caroline Robinson, Jock Wiltshire, Dr Floor van Renssen, and Greg Chant.

Thank you Auntie Maureen and Mishel for letting me learn about First Nations worldviews, you have so generously shared your knowledge and time. Mishel, thank you for all the laughter we have at work.

To my parents, Korrie and Minne, thank you for raising me to believe in myself. Mem – your support for my pursuit of education and personal development gave me the courage to consider a PhD. Hait – your determined work ethic gave me a model to pursue it. Thank you swessie Anita, so close no matter how far, and Welmoed, Janette and Tamar for always being there and ‘seeing me’.

To my incredible partner and best friend, Werner – we could have taken the easier path, but I’m convinced we would have missed a lot of adventures. Thank you for helping me sound out ideas and for continuing to support me when it was no longer fun. This is yours as much as it is mine – it is ours.

I completed this PhD with, and for, my awesome children, Finn and Luna. Finn, keep your kind spirit and believe in yourself, you can do anything. Luna, may your curious ways take you to wonderful places. Please, both of you, never migrate to the other side of the world.

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Research sub-questions 1a and 1b.....	110
Table 2: Research sub-question 2.....	112
Table 3: Research sub-question 3.....	113
Table 4: Research sub-question 4.....	115

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Methodology.....	16
Figure 2: Overview of the study.....	119

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Background to the Research**

My experience as a social worker in child protection across continents has motivated this doctoral study. My final social work placement, which I completed in 1998 in the Dutch child protection system, paved the way for an international career spanning the Netherlands, Wales and Australia. Social work in child protection service delivery suited me both personally and professionally. I am privileged to have worked with many families who, despite their difficulties, showed great strength. Child protection is an intimate and raw field of social work practice. As a practitioner, I lived through cumulative exposure to children and families who experience abuse, tragedy and trauma. I have been frustrated by the oppressive and punitive nature of statutory practice, lengthy court procedures, fragmented service delivery, and the shame and blame by the media. There are no winners in child protection, but occasionally there are small victories: positive outcomes that generate change and a sense of belonging for children involved with child protection services.

Working in different countries, continents and jurisdictions raised my awareness of the influence of place on the construction of child protection practice. The provision of child protection programs varies considerably across the world. Service delivery systems are embedded in complex cultural, social and historical settings. Being born and educated in the Netherlands, my first experiences as a social worker were aligned with a ‘family service’-oriented child welfare system. This approach has a strong focus on the needs of the family and identifies the importance of a strong relationship between social worker and family. Family service systems are less risk-averse than the ‘child protection’-oriented systems that are common in English-speaking countries such as Australia and

the United Kingdom (Price-Robertson et al., 2014). In 2005 I relocated to Wales and learned about a child protection system that emphasises the need to protect the child from harm. Service delivery included more standardised procedures with rigid timelines. In daily practice, I experienced the relationship with parents as more adversarial and less focused on working in partnership (Price-Robertson et al., 2014).

In Wales, I learned that Australian child protection agencies actively recruit social workers from the United Kingdom. When I started searching for jobs there were many opportunities across the continent. In no time I was the successful candidate for a team leader role. My impression of Australia was optimistic and rather stereotypical: nice weather, barbeques, wildlife and plenty of space. I thought that child protection practice could not be that different from what I already knew. In hindsight, I knew little about the cultural, social, geographical, political, colonial and historical setting when I arrived on a very cold winter's day in rural Victoria in 2009. I entered a child protection department under significant pressure that had to resort to overseas recruitment to fill outstanding vacancies. All my team members were inexperienced child protection workers, and very few were qualified social workers. In addition to managing the team, I was responsible for a waiting list of 60 unallocated children who all required an initial child protection assessment. Given my overseas practice and leadership experience, it was assumed that I understood the nature of the job. There was no induction, or even an informal conversation, about the history, colonialism and contemporary challenges related to the Australian context of child protection. The AASW tested my English proficiency but not my understanding of Australian social work or First Nations peoples during the credentialling process of my overseas social work degree.

Australia is often portrayed as the ‘lucky country’, with its pristine beaches, red deserts and ‘laid-back’ people. Yet such images fail to reveal the challenges facing contemporary Australia and the persistent belief in the superiority of Western paradigms (Rowe et al., 2015). European settler colonialism brought devastating changes to the lives of First Nations peoples (Bennett & Gates, 2019). There continues to be large disparities between First Nations peoples and non-Indigenous populations in terms of life expectancy, health, suicide rates, infant mortality, household overcrowding, income support, unemployment and education (McNamara et al., 2018; Walter, 2008; Walter et al., 2011). There is also social separation – most non-Indigenous Australians do not have Aboriginal neighbours, colleagues, health providers, social workers or friends (Walter et al., 2011). When I engaged with First Nations peoples my worldviews, constructions of childrearing and child protection social work were solely informed by Western ways of knowing, being and doing.

Vulnerable individuals in Australian society include young people leaving state care, adults with mental health problems or substance misuse problems, women and their children fleeing domestic violence, and asylum seekers (including children) in detention centres (Briskman, 2020; Diemer et al., 2017; Fennig & Denov, 2019; Mendes & McCurdy, 2019). In Australia, people are living with long-term unemployment and chronic poverty (Davidson et al., 2018; Pawson et al., 2018). In the field of child protection, I witnessed this harsher side of Australian society. I observed transgenerational trauma and the impact of limited service provision in rural communities. I worked with children with bruises, who lived in poverty, who experienced multiple foster care placements and who continued to miss out on the benefits of living in the so-called lucky country.

My quest for lifelong learning motivated me to enrol in the Master of Social Work by Research in 2012. This allowed me to explore the topic of transnational social work in more depth and engage with my profession from a different point of view, stepping into the spectrum of social work research. I presented the first three chapters of this master's thesis to an independent academic assessor to assess their suitability for doctoral study. The assessor's recommendations included that the topic had strong potential to make a significant contribution to the development of new knowledge in a field that is lacking in constructive contemporary research. The opportunity to enrol in a part-time PhD in 2015 alongside taking an academic role as a social work lecturer was a chance to immerse myself in this project. The topic aligns with my interest, my lived experience and my search for new knowledge that will benefit transnational social work practice and theory and, most of all, the children, their families, and their communities involved with child protection service delivery.

## **1.2 Rationale**

The recruitment of overseas social workers into the Australian child protection workforce targets experienced social workers, in order to protect the most vulnerable in society, children at risk of abuse and neglect. Since the late 1970s, Australian child protection departments have tended to primarily recruit UK and Irish social workers to address the labour shortages in this field (Modderman et al., 2017). Despite the use of overseas recruitment across the states and territories of Australia, there is little empirical knowledge about the effectiveness of this strategy (Bartley, 2018; Zubrzycki et al., 2008).

The contemporary trend of global social work migration raises issues that are complex and currently under-researched, particularly when compared to research into the



transnational movement of teachers, doctors and nurses (O’Sullivan et al., & Scott, 2019; Peter et al., 2019). Little is known about how international recruitment affects individual social workers. The implications for practice, for the social work profession, for the stability of the workforce and for the quality of social work interventions have yet to be explored systematically (Bartley & Beddoe, 2018; Beddoe & Fouché, 2014; McArthur et al., 2012; Zubrzycki et al., 2008). The topics addressed in this doctoral dissertation are outlined in the next section and explored in depth via four published papers presented in later chapters. To introduce this research, I begin with a brief account of Australian child protection service delivery and contemporary emerging issues in the context of transnational social work. I draw on the literature to illustrate the challenges in the field of child protection and the implications for social work. These themes feature strongly throughout the dissertation and illustrate the complexity of the environment in which transnational social workers work.

### *1.2.1 The Context*

In Australia, each state and territory has individual responsibility for child protection legislation and intervention (Zuchowski, 2019). Responsible government agencies assist vulnerable children who have been, or are at risk of being, abused, neglected or otherwise harmed, or whose parents are unable to provide adequate care or protection for them (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020). Children and young people are those aged under 18. Similar to other English-speaking countries, the child protection mandate in Australia is a stand-alone authority with limited formal involvement of other service sectors or the broader community (Bromfield et al., 2014). In 2018–19, more than 30 per 1000 children received a child protection service, which can take the form of an investigation, a care and protection order, or an out-of-home-care placement. More than half of these children were subject to an investigation only, and

child maltreatment was not substantiated for 57% of these children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020). The current system results in child protection departments being inundated with child protection reports, which can make it difficult to identify children most at risk (Bromfield et al., 2014). In Australia, children from remote and very remote areas receive the highest rates of substantiations, three times more as those from major cities. In remote and very remote areas 88% of the children subject of a substantiation are Indigenous, in major cities 16% of the children subject to substantiation are Indigenous (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020). This study of transnational social work took place in an Australian major city.

Transnational social workers in Australia must join a workforce under ongoing pressure; system failures, tragedies, stress and difficulties in retaining staff are common in most Australian child protection agencies (Russ et al., 2019; Zuchowski, 2019). In this context, child protection agencies face large numbers of notifications, inadequate organisational resourcing, and children and their families experiencing increasingly complex and intersecting issues (Lewig & McLean, 2016; Russ et al., 2019). It is widely acknowledged that the field of child protection is an emotionally charged and complex area of practice, and that practitioners are exposed to primary, secondary and vicarious trauma (Lonne et al., 2012; Munro, 2011; Oates, 2019b). Australian child protection workforces are chronically under-resourced, resulting in long and unpredictable work hours with excessive caseloads. Staff experience high administrative workloads and are mostly unable to meet strategic objectives due to the ongoing instability of the workforce (Healy & Olstedal, 2010; Lonne et al., 2012; Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 2018). There is a lack of expertise in frontline practice, with workers not long enough in the role to develop the skills and expertise required for expert child protection practice (Healy et al., 2009; Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 2018). Management in statutory child

protection departments is at times unsupportive of the professional needs and wellbeing of staff, and the failure of individual workers to manage their own wellbeing in this high-stress environment is often seen as an indication of their unsuitability for child protection practice instead of systemic failure (Hunt et al., 2016; Oates, 2019b; Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 2018). Australian research identifies child protection service delivery as a system under pressure, often losing the battle to keep children safe from harm (Bromfield et al., 2014; Hansen & Ainsworth, 2013; Oates, 2019b; Sammut & O'Brien, 2009; Scott, 2010; Zuchowski, 2019).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly over-represented in the child protection system. These children receive eight times more child protection interventions than non-Indigenous children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020). The history of First Nations peoples is different from that of early settlers and migrants, as they were the custodians of Country until the colonisers took the continent (Muller, 2014). First Nations communities' experiences of social work and welfare programs in the context of colonialism have been harsh and are reflected in a range of health and social issues (Bennett & Green, 2019; Muller, 2014). The wider child protection system and the individual agencies within it play a role in the removal of children and continue to influence the relationship between social work and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Bennett, 2015; Davies, 2019; Menzies & Grace, 2020; Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, 2019). Historical events such as the Stolen Generations remain significant in shaping the thinking and behaviour of First Nations peoples and their communities (Bennett, 2019). In 2018–19, Indigenous children were admitted to out-of-home care at eleven times the rate for non-Indigenous children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020). The permanent removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families represents a harrowing

echo of the experiences of the Stolen Generations (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, 2019). The combination of a lack of cultural knowledge and Eurocentric practice has led to social workers being met with distrust and cynicism by Indigenous Australians, and social workers generally do not have a good reputation in Aboriginal communities (Bennett, 2019).

Social work has an ambiguous professional status in Australia and lacks formal legal recognition. For two decades the AASW has been advocating for inclusion of the profession in the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme that regulates the practice of other allied health professions in Australia (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2020b). In contrast with most other Anglophone nations of the world, social work is not the key profession in child protection service delivery. Australia stands alone in not requiring practitioners in child protection to be qualified social workers (Gillingham, 2016). The current human services sector uses generic roles in child protection, such as case manager, child safety officer or protective worker (Harrison & Healy, 2016; Papadopoulos, 2018). This may devalue the professional skills and knowledge of social work in the child protection workforce (Harrison & Healy, 2016; Long et al., 2018; Moorhead et al., 2016).

### **1.3 Aim of the Thesis**

This study aimed to explore the ways that transnational social workers from the United Kingdom and Ireland experience and navigate their profession in the Australian context of child protection service delivery. More specifically, the aims were threefold: (1) to examine the personal experience of being a professional migrant in Australian child protection service delivery, (2) to develop knowledge about how this may impact on the professional experience of being a social worker in an unfamiliar child protection

environment, and (3) to examine the role of the recruiting organisation as experienced by the participants.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

The diverse research aims were explored through addressing the overarching research question: *How do personal, professional and organisational dynamics influence the experiences of UK and Irish recruited social workers within an Australian child protection system?* It is expected that the trend in global workforce mobility will lead to an ongoing increase in the number of social workers practising in countries other than where they were professionally educated (Beddoe & Bartley, 2019). A small body of literature from New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Canada has explored the experience of transnational social work (Beddoe & Bartley, 2019; Fouché et al., 2015; Fulton et al., 2016; Hanna & Lyons, 2016; Hussein, 2018; Peter et al., 2019). More knowledge relating to social work mobility is important as professional migration impacts not only on the individual social worker but also on the existing child protection workforce, the organisational culture, community partnerships and, most importantly, on children and families who are allocated a transnational social worker. The voices of service users remain silent in contemporary research.

The research topic is of interest to the social work profession as this profession needs to respond to the issues and challenges arising from global workforce mobility and the diverse contexts in which practitioners must adjust to different community, professional and workforce cultures and the challenges this may pose (Beddoe & Bartley, 2019). It is anticipated that this study will contribute to positive change in the field as its purpose is to improve understanding of how transnational social workers are affected by practising in a context in which they were not professionally educated (Hussein, 2014).

As a result, it is anticipated that the findings of this study may provide important information that leads to improved practice, theory and policy concerning transnational social workers in child protection.

As the aims of the study are diverse, primary and secondary data were utilised to address the overarching research question. This study utilised three theoretical lenses to examine the topic from different perspectives. A value of this study is its application of these theoretical frameworks to the unique Australian context of contemporary child protection service delivery.

A scoping review of the literature analysed relevant secondary data and addressed the following sub-questions:

1. a. What are the personal and professional experiences of transnational social workers migrating between Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom?  
How can this knowledge be applied to the Australian child welfare workforce?
- b. In what ways are transnational social workers ready to practise with Indigenous communities?

The scoping study informed the focus of phase two of the research, which involved three papers that analysed the primary data set gathered from research interviews collected at two points in time. Three sub-questions guided this enquiry:

2. What is the lived experience of transnational social workers in the context of professional migration?
3. What is the role of place for transnational social workers in frontline statutory child protection?

4. What understanding, if any, do transnational social workers have about social work with First Nations communities when they migrate to Australia to practise in statutory child protection?

The primary and secondary data sets are addressed in a series of published papers that comprise this dissertation. Each paper addresses a discrete body of literature and responds in a different way to the research topic. In combination, the findings from each of these enquiries contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of transnational social work and to answering the overarching research question.

## **1.5 The Research Process**

Australia has a history of recruiting transnational social workers to respond quickly to ‘market’ pressures (Bartley, 2018; Modderman et al., 2017). Yet, little is known about how these social workers are faring, with a notable lack of scholarship examining the experience of professional migration. Qualitative research has not fully explored the dynamics that influence transnational social workers in the Australian context of practice. A few small-scale studies have utilised a mixed-method approach and an online survey (Bartley, 2018; Zubrzycki et al., 2008). These studies examined international recruitment processes and the preparedness of the social work profession to work internationally in a transnational space (Bartley, 2018; Zubrzycki et al., 2008).

This study was influenced by a constructivist-interpretivist ontology, which guided the epistemological principles and methodological framework adopted (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Sarantakos, 2012). The goal was to better understand the complexity of lived experience from the perspective of those who live it (Schwandt, 1994), relying on the participants’ views of their experiences as transnational social workers (Creswell, 2013). This type of social science requires the researcher to interpret meaning according

to the view that reality is subjective; influenced by situational context; and shaped by the experiences and perceptions of people, by the social environment and by the interaction between participant and researcher (Ponterotto, 2005). The participants in this study arrived as professional migrants in Australia and needed to make sense of their new environment as transnational social workers. They attributed subjective meanings to their experiences, which were personal and diverse. This study is not about the 'reality' of what transnational social workers report, whether their narratives are 'true', but rather investigated how the participants construct their stories and connect past, present and future (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). As such, it is important to maintain an open outlook to embrace the complexity of the views expressed by the participants, instead of narrowing meaning into a few ideas or categories (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This dissertation describes a qualitative study using primary and secondary data to deepen understanding of migrating social workers' experiences in Australian child protection service delivery. As little is known about this topic, a qualitative approach was taken to enable in-depth exploratory research that was in turn used to generate theory. A narrative-informed methodology was used to facilitate the investigation, involving the collection of the participants' stories about their professional and personal migration experiences (Creswell, 2005). Prolonged contact via two points of data collection captured the transnational social workers' experiences over time, providing for a deeper understanding of their personal and professional journeys. This approach allowed for the investigation of meaning and perception attached to behaviours and experience by collecting research data that was rich in personal detail, enabling the development of new ideas and theory about transnational social work (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).



### *1.5.1 Critical theory*

The research process was guided by critical theory, which emphasises social change (Fook, 2016). A critical theoretical stance was deemed suitable for this study, transnational social workers contribute to decision-making in child protection service delivery within a neoliberal environment. They are part of a legally driven deficit-based system that legitimises intervening in the private domain of family life. This is intrusive in the lives of vulnerable people who are marginalised and stigmatised by society. Transnational social workers are therefore powerful stakeholders, and their contribution is important in advocating for positive outcomes for children and their families. Critical research exposes the social, political and systemic forces that remove the opportunity for people to shape decisions that influence their lives and through this process identifies new approaches to achieving a more just world (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Critical theory brings into focus realities that are negotiated by socially and historically constituted power relations, which is particularly relevant for social work in Australia, a colonised country. Taking a critical stance requires us to engage with counter-colonial practices that address everyday ethical considerations (Lincoln & Cannella, 2019). This includes acknowledging that researchers have power and the privilege to design a study, carry out the research, and identify findings and implications according to their epistemological and theoretical standpoints (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011).

### *1.5.2 Primary and secondary data collection*

A scoping review was used to map the volume and nature of the literature relating to transnational social work. This approach was considered appropriate to survey the relevant evidence from Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom from 2006 to 2016. In comparison with systematic reviews, scoping reviews consider broader research questions using diverse designs, including qualitative approaches (Arksey & O'Malley,

2005), which is suited to this study. The review found that transnational social work had not been comprehensively researched, and of the 16 studies identified, only one was set in the Australian context. The narrative synthesis emphasised the importance of developing a critique based on the credibility, relevance and contribution of the papers reviewed (Davis et al., 2009). The greater conceptual clarity provided by the review informed the direction for further research within this doctoral study. The main strength of the scoping exercise was the ability to extract the essence of a wide range of research papers and to give meaning to transnational social work that is developmental and intellectually creative (Davis et al., 2009). This review is presented in Chapter 2 and discussed further in Chapter 7.

The process of primary data collection focused on the experiences of transnational social workers conveyed through their own stories. This type of methodology tends to rely on the participant's view of their experiences (Creswell, 2013), constructed through interactions between the researcher and the participant. The scoping review of the literature identified a gap in relation to capturing the experiences of migrating social workers via individual in-depth interviews at different stages of their professional migration journey (Modderman et al., 2017). Narrative and phenomenological methodologies was deemed suitable for an examination of lived experience, facilitating rich descriptions of transnational social workers' experiences within their social and professional contexts (Finlay, 2009; Morrow, 2005). This enabled attention to the depth of perception that the participants attached to their experience of transnational social work (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

A metropolitan area that had a history of international social work recruitment was chosen as the research site. Data were collected from in-depth semi-structured

interviews at two points in time.<sup>1</sup> Ten participants were interviewed face to face in late 2013. Most of these participants were beyond 18 months post-arrival; therefore, three additional participants were purposefully recruited in 2015, enabling comparison between newly arrived social workers and those who had arrived more than two years prior. Expanding the primary data set also supported the upgrade to doctoral study. In 2016, the second round of data collection, involving face to face and phone interviews, enabled 10 participants to be reinterviewed. This approach allowed rapport to be established through prolonged engagement and provided an opportunity to examine how the participants construct their experiences and change over time (Bamberg, 2012b).

In summary, the exploration of transnational social workers' experience of social work practice in an unknown child protection environment involved a process of theory development. Given the absence of a deep understanding of international recruitment in Australia from the perspective of transnational social workers within current scholarship, led towards a constructivist interpretive research paradigm. In this regard, a positivist paradigm is not appropriate for this type of research in which reality is constructed through interactions between the researcher and the participants. Critical theory helped to explain how the participants constructed their social structures, and their place within this as social workers practising in child protection (Fook, 2016). Three specific theoretical lenses – attachment theory (Bowley, 1969, 1973, 1980), place identity theory (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996) and cultural humility theory (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998) – were applied during the data analyses. Narrative and phenomenological approaches allowed for the exploration of the participants' thoughts, assumptions and experiences in relation to transnational social work via in-depth semi-structured interviews. An overview of the methodology used for this study is provided in Figure 1 below, using a

---

<sup>1</sup> Refer to Appendices 1 to 4 on ethics approval and Appendices 5 and 6 on interview schedules.

framework proposed by Crotty (1998). In the following sections, I will discuss in more detail the approaches utilised in this study.

*Figure 1: Methodology*

<b>Epistemology</b>	<b>Theoretical perspective</b>	<b>Research design</b>	<b>Method</b>
Constructivist/ interpretive	The research process was guided by critical theory (Fook, 2016). Attachment theory (Bowley, 1969, 1973, 1980), place identity theory (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996) and cultural humility theory (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998) provided the theoretical lenses through which the data were analysed.	Narrative and phenomenological enquiry.	Purposive sampling; qualitative data collection: individual in-depth semi-structured interviews across two points in time, journal writing, fieldnotes. Qualitative data analysis: thematic coding, interacting with transcripts, fieldnotes and theory.

Source: Crotty (1998)

### *1.5.3 Ethical considerations*

The focus on social workers in child protection sharing their personal and professional experiences raised some important ethical considerations. Several strategies were implemented to ensure the participants' emotional safety and the safety of the children and families with whom they worked. At the commencement of each interview, the participants were advised that if they became distressed, they could choose to discontinue the interview. Verbal and written information about the employee assistance counselling program was given to each participant. The participants were advised that if they disclosed any potentially harmful practice for either their clients or themselves, appropriate line management within their organisation would be informed. Privacy and confidentiality are important considerations and the participants were informed that their personal information would be de-identified, including details of the study site, and stored securely. All research procedures reported in this dissertation were approved by the La Trobe Human Ethics Committee in July 2013 (HEC13-019) and extended in 2016. Ethical approval was also granted by the organisation from which the participants were recruited.

### *1.5.4 Data analysis*

Following the phase of data collection, interviews were transcribed, read, and reread while simultaneously listening to the audio recording. Data were analysed thematically to interrogate participant experiences and facilitate meaning and reflection on events, before the theoretical lenses were applied (Mishler, 1995; Riessman, 2008). The theoretical lenses of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980), place identity theory (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996) and cultural humility theory (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998) were applied separately to explore the themes emerging from the data. Each lens was chosen following an iterative process of engagement with participants'

stories and reading existing theories. Immersion in the data, in-depth discussions and curious ponderings led to the identification of suitable theoretical frameworks (Bruce et al., 2016). The application of different theoretical frameworks shaped thematic coding and interpretive decisions during analyses. Careful attention was given to focussing on different themes in the narrative sequentially as reflected in the study's publications, and progressing over time to situate the analyses within the bigger picture of transnational social work.

Data were exposed to two different approaches to analysis: narrative and phenomenological, both socially constructed and concerned with the holistic nature of experience (Lindsay, 2006). A narrative approach shows how reality and knowledge are constructed through communication with others. Its focus is on the storied nature of human behaviour (Riessman & Quinney, 2005; Spector-Mersel, 2010). The narrative analysis enabled the 'big stories' and 'small stories' approach (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013; Bamberg, 2006). Attention was given to understanding how the participants' big and small stories operated together to shape two distinct yet intersecting identities that emerged from the data: being both a social work practitioner in child protection and a professional migrant (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2009). The participants' big stories compromised intersecting life-determining experiences that emerged from the thematic analysis (Bamberg, 2006). Their small stories provided the opportunity to explore the meaning of unfolding events that recurred across the interviews influenced by context and how the meaning of the experience was constructed (Andrews et al., 2013; Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). The exploration of the lived experience of transnational social workers and their understanding of First Nations perspectives was guided by narrative analysis. This approach investigated how transnational social workers experienced their profession in a different context. Narrative exploration sought to

understand the experience by investigating the continuity of social work, and the changes that may occur through engagement with transnational social work practice (Lindsay 2006). Findings of the narrative analysis are presented in Chapters 5 and 6 and are discussed further in Chapter 7.

The role of place for transnational social workers was explored via a two-step interpretive phenomenological approach (Patton, 2002). In the first phase, transcripts were read while simultaneously listening to the audio recordings. Data were analysed using an interpretative approach to identify the emerging themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the second phase, the analysis was deductive following an iterative process of interacting with transcripts, field notes, and the lens of place identity theory, to make sense of the participants' experiences (Winterton & Warburton, 2012). The analysis used a circular and fluid approach to identify common experiences through the interpretation of concealed meaning embedded in the words of participant narratives (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). Transcripts were read and re-read with Twigger- Ross and Uzell's (1996) place and identity processes as a theoretical lens to challenge, affirm and extend the theoretical framework (Lindsay, 2006, Winton & Warburton 2012). During analysis, the transcribed interviews were interpreted as fully as possible whilst pointing out where experiences were confirmed or negated by a participant's comments (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). The resultant paper is presented in Chapter 5 and discussed further in Chapter 7.

Using two qualitative methodologies together provided insights into the study phenomena by pointing out different understandings generated by transnational social work and addressed the multiple realities experienced by participants (Patterson, 2018). This study aimed to access multiple ways of knowing, drawing on two methodological lenses honoured and valued meaningful engagement with the context of the topic under investigation (Patterson, 2018). The narrative exploration was complemented by the

application of interpretive phenomenological analysis and deepened understanding of everyday child protection practices (Crotty, 1998, van Manen, 1997). In the interpretative phenomenological analysis, the interpretation of research interviews with shared themes, was followed by deductive analysis. In contrast, the narrative analysis was concerned with transnational social workers' construction of knowledge from the reconstruction of their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). The lens of narrative analysis offered exploring and interpreting the rich and unique trajectory of the transnational social workers who participated in this study (Patterson, 2018). The sense of temporality is different in narrative analysis in comparison with the interpretive phenomenological approach. Narrative analysis involved past, present and future in a continuous way, reflecting on professional practice and the reconstruction of experiences showed how transitional social work shapes identity and knowledge. This analysis focussed on the chain of experiences participants wove into their narratives. The central focus of the analysis is not per se the experience but the way transnational social workers made sense of their experiences. In phenomenological analysis, temporality is past-present-future combined in a present moment, aiming for understanding through the description of shared experiences (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, Lindsay 2006). This methodological lens enabled the focus to shift from the understanding of experience to interpret the phenomena of place (Patterson, 2018). The multidimensional approach taken in this study enriched interpretation through the support provided to each facet of data analysis. This enabled a better understanding of the interpretation of transnational social work, the position of myself as a doctoral researcher and the experiences of research participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, Maggs-Rapport, 2000).



### *1.5.5 Trustworthiness*

When using narrative enquiry, trustworthiness of findings depends on the establishment of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Creswell, 2013; Krefting, 1991; Liamputtong, 2013). In this study, the complexity of the research topic was addressed by utilising several theoretical lenses and methodological approaches. This permitted the exploration of transnational social work from different angles and contributed to theoretical and methodological rigour (Morse & Niehaus, 2009). In doing so, the potential bias of a single-method approach was avoided and the representation of diverse voices was enabled (Patton, 2002). To increase the credibility of the study, my PhD supervisors were asked to validate my interpretation of the narratives by reading the transcripts and discussing the emergent themes. Rigour was achieved via a comparative approach, ensuring that similarities and differences were presented in the findings (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). A ‘constant comparison’ method was used to relate the identified themes to the literature (Creswell, 2013). The findings from this research are highly context-specific so generalisation to other settings was not sought. To maintain transferability, a description of the historical and contemporary Australian context is offered, alongside contextual de-identified information about the participants in Chapter 3. To support dependability, the participants were quoted extensively and a detailed description of the study’s methodology was provided (Downey et al., 2017a; Krefting, 1991; Nolan et al., 2018). Brief notes were made immediately after each interview, summarising some of my initial impressions and key points relating to the interview. A reflective log was completed based on these fieldnotes at the end of each day of interviewing (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Reflexivity and interpretation of what had been addressed during the interview session were later referred to during the data

analysis and doctoral supervision to ensure confirmability. A reflective focus was maintained within the supervision process, which facilitated a critical examination of power, Eurocentric thinking, First Nations perspectives, and child protection social work, allowing for a plurality of interpretations (Morley, 2008). A personal reflection on the research process, focusing on the learning that contributed to my development as a transnational social worker towards becoming a novice researcher, is presented in Chapter 8.

## **1.6 Outline of the Dissertation**

This dissertation comprises eight chapters and is presented in the format of a Thesis with Publications. It is difficult to avoid repetition in a thesis that includes published work. Thus, there may be some overlap or duplication relating to the background and the research process, and some of the key ideas. Each published article includes relevant references. The reference list at the end of this dissertation only contains references that relate to the non-published sections.

This first chapter has introduced the context of this study, highlighting the complexity of contemporary transnational social work practice in Australia. It has also provided the rationale for the research topic, and the theoretical, methodological and analytic approaches used to investigate the research questions.

*Chapter 2: Transnational social workers in statutory child welfare: A scoping review* presents the first publication, an interpretive scoping review of the literature. This approach involved a review of the literature to identify the key concepts and gaps related to the research topic, via analysis of a range of peer-reviewed papers (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). This article responds to the first research sub-questions.

Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2017). Transnational social workers in statutory child welfare: A scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 81, 21-28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.07.022>

Chapter 3 introduces the reader to the recruitment strategies, data collection process, and the 13 transnational social workers who participated in this study. The short vignettes offer a snapshot of the participants to give readers a clearer sense of their personal and professional circumstances.

Chapters 4 to 6 present individual publications arising from the data collection phase, based on interviews conducted with 13 UK and Irish transnational social workers practising in Australia's child protection system. These publications present the findings based on the experiences of the participants of Australian child protection service delivery and professional migration at two different points in time. Chapter 4 details the lived experience of transnational social workers and explores how the loss of personal and professional belonging may be exacerbated by the emotionally challenging work of child protection practice. This publication responds directly to the second research sub-question.

Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2018). Transnational social workers' lived experience in statutory child protection. *European Journal of Social Work*, 23(4), 645-657. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2018.1517114>

Chapter 5 specifically sought to explore what happens to the role of 'place' in identity when social workers become globally mobile. Utilising Twigger-Ross and Uzzell's (1996) place identity lens helped to explain the relationship between place and identity for migrating social workers arriving in a high-stress environment of statutory child protection work. This paper responds to the third research sub-question.

Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2019). The role of place for transnational social workers in statutory child protection. *British Journal of Social Work*, 94(6), 1619-1637. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcz065>

Chapter 6 examines transnational social workers' understanding of Australian First Nations perspectives on statutory child protection. The chapter investigates the concept of cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998) through multi-layered reflexivity to address the final research sub-question.

Modderman, C., McMahon, M., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2020). Transnational social workers' understanding of Australian First Nations perspectives in statutory child protection. *Australian Journal of Social Work*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2020.1771389>

Chapter 7 begins with a summary of findings relating to each of the four sub-questions leading to an integrated discussion of the overarching research question, as well as a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the study.

Chapter 8 starts with a personal reflection on the research process and my learning as a social worker in child protection and novice social work researcher. The theoretical, practice, policy and research implications of this research are discussed. This thesis ends with some concluding remarks on the research findings.

## **Chapter 2: Transnational Social Workers in Statutory Child Welfare: A Scoping Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter introduced the rationale for the research and provided an overview of the dissertation. This chapter presents the first in a series of four publications chapters: a scoping review that mapped existing research on transnational social work in child protection service delivery. The paper addresses the first research sub-questions: What are the personal and professional experiences of transnational social workers migrating between Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom? How can this knowledge be applied to the Australian child welfare workforce? In what ways are transnational social workers ready to practise with Indigenous communities?

A scoping review based on the framework developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) guided the mapping of existing knowledge on issues relevant to transnational social work. The narrative synthesis involved a conceptual, iterative approach to develop a critique of the existing literature (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The available literature provided evidence of an exchange of social workers between Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (Fouché et al., 2014; Hanna & Lyons, 2016; Zubrzycki et al., 2008). Colonial history, language, cultural ties, and established migration patterns all influenced transnational labour mobility between these countries (Bartley et al., 2012; Hussein et al., 2010). The findings of the scoping review contribute to the body of knowledge, and specifically to filling the knowledge gaps in relation to transnational social work in child protection service delivery and its implications for the Australian context.

Attention was given to the reviewers' critical feedback in developing this paper. The discussion was refined to provide greater clarity about the Australian context of transnational social work. The journal reviewers noted: 'I enjoyed reading about the issue

of transnational social work with a specific focus on the area of child protective services. It is novel, interesting, and relevant to the field of child welfare. Workforce shortages, high rates of turnover, and lack of training remain challenges in the field of child welfare, and a global perspective on these issues has the potential to add to the knowledge base in the area’.

This publication addressed the first research sub-questions guiding this research and was published in the journal *Children and Youth Services Review*.

The paper was accepted for publication on 21 July 2017 and was published on Elsevier online on 26 July 2017. It is available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.07.022>

I am the first author of the article and responsible for 70 percent of the manuscript preparation. My contribution included a systematic search of the literature, mapping the selected articles, analysing the manuscripts against the inclusion criteria, as well as drafting the paper and manuscript revisions. The second and third authors are members of my supervisory team and together they contributed 30 percent of the manuscript preparation. Their contribution included guidance concerning the inclusion and exclusion criteria, analysis of themes arising from the literature presented in the paper, critical review, and editing.

*Children and Youth Services Review* is an international peer-reviewed journal, ranking in the first quartile of journals publishing research in the field of service programs for children and youth. The journal is listed in the SCImago Journal Ranking Reports and is recognised for the Higher Education Research Data Collection. The journal had an impact factor of 1.38 in 2017 and its current H index is 77. The paper is published in accordance with the *Children and Youth Services Review* author guidelines.

The copyright conditions of the publisher allow for the inclusion of the paper in this PhD dissertation.

The full citation for the paper is:

Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2017). Transnational social workers in statutory child welfare: A scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 81, 21-28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.07.022>

## 2.2 Article 1

Children and Youth Services Review 81 (2017) 21–28



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

### Children and Youth Services Review

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/childyouth](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/childyouth)



## Transnational social workers in statutory child welfare: A scoping review



Corina Modderman<sup>a,\*</sup>, Guinever Threlkeld<sup>b</sup>, Lynne McPherson<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Social Work & Social Policy, La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, 210 Fryers St. Shepparton, Victoria 3630, Australia

<sup>b</sup> Social Work & Social Policy, La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, University Drive, Wodonga, Victoria 3690, Australia

<sup>c</sup> School of Arts and Social Sciences, Southern Cross University, Locked Mail Bag 4, Coolangatta, Queensland 4225, Australia

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Transnational social work  
Child welfare  
International recruitment  
Statutory workforce

### ABSTRACT

Internationally, child welfare services experience chronic workforce shortages and high rates of staff turnover. One strategy adopted to fill critical workforce gaps is the international recruitment of social workers. Child welfare employers in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom have a shared tradition of recruiting transnational social workers to address ongoing labour shortages in the Northern and Southern Hemisphere. This raises questions about the impact of this practice for those migrating social workers and about practice with indigenous populations. This paper scoped publications to identify emerging themes about social work movement between these countries, with a focus on knowledge that can prepare transnational social workers for the unique Australian context, including working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The review found that international recruitment to statutory child welfare in Australia is not well researched, with limited evidence about the profile of recruits, the effectiveness of this strategy and retention rates. The demographics and experiences of overseas qualified social workers in child welfare over the past 40 years in the various Australian jurisdictions remain relatively unknown. There are major gaps in knowledge about the ways international recruitment affects outcomes for children, and their families, in Australia's statutory child welfare services delivery.

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Child welfare workforce challenges

For decades, research across continents has reported challenging workforce demands in child welfare. Some countries experience chronic difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified professionals in what is known to be a complex and emotionally demanding field of social work practice (Hunt, Goddard, Cooper, Littlechild, & Wild, 2016; Littlechild et al., 2016; Lizano & Mor Barak, 2012; Travis, Lizano, & Mor Barak, 2016). The literature suggests that high staff turnover has an impact on response to the needs of those children and families that depend on a competent and stable workforce (Burns & Christie, 2013; Dickinson & Painter, 2009; Gibbs, 2009; Gomez, Travis, Ayers-Lopez, & Schwab, 2010; LaFa Agbényiga, 2009; Madden, Scannapieco, & Painter, 2014; Mor Barak, Levin, Nissly, & Lane, 2006; Tham & Meagher, 2009). These issues in statutory child welfare are evident in Australia, where a career in child protection is not attractive to sufficient social workers. Australian research illustrates that child welfare departments across the nation face challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified staff, particularly in remote and regional areas

(Bromfield & Holzer, 2008; Hansen & Ainsworth, 2013; Healy & Lonne, 2010; Lonne, Harries, & Lantz, 2012; McArthur, Thomson, Barker, Winkworth, & Campus, 2012; Scott, 2010).

#### 1.2. The Australian context

Australia is a federation of states without a national approach to statutory child welfare. Each state and territory has its own child welfare legislation and service provision approach (Healy & Olstedal, 2010). Social work in Australia has no formal licensing arrangement and is currently a self-regulated profession, as such it is not subject to government regulation unlike the United Kingdom (UK) and New Zealand (Lonne & Duke, 2008; Martin & Healy, 2010; Tilbury, Hughes, Bigby, & Osmond, 2015). The community service sector, a key site for employment of social workers in Australia, is a large and growing sector. Despite its importance to the citizens, relatively little detail is known about the social work workforce and the challenges it is facing (Healy & Lonne, 2010). It is noted that for child welfare service delivery, the least experienced workers hold responsibility for the demanding and complex task to assess the risk of child abuse (Healy, Meagher, & Cullin, 2009).

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [C.Modderman@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:C.Modderman@latrobe.edu.au) (C. Modderman), [G.Threlkeld@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:G.Threlkeld@latrobe.edu.au) (G. Threlkeld), [Lynne.McPherson@scu.edu.au](mailto:Lynne.McPherson@scu.edu.au) (L. McPherson).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.07.022>

Received 29 March 2017; Received in revised form 21 July 2017; Accepted 21 July 2017

Available online 26 July 2017

0190-7409/ © 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.



In Australia's history, social workers were the executors and arbitrators of racist policies affecting the Indigenous people of Australia from the late 19th century to the 1970s. Social workers played a role in the implementation of government policies, such as assimilationist policies, which resulted in what are now referred to as the Stolen Generations. The Stolen Generations are the children of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were forcibly removed from their families and communities from the late 1800s to the 1970s (Briskman, 2007). This history has resulted in a deep sense of dislocation and loss of cultural connection with land and family for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and may result in social workers being mistrusted by them (Bennett, 2015; Bennett, Zubrzycki, & Bacon, 2011; Briskman, 2007). In Australia high rates of racial disparity continue, with indigenous children seven times more likely to receive a child welfare service than non-indigenous children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2017; Delfabbro, Hirte, Rogers, & Wilson, 2010).

### 1.3. Social work mobility

Social work mobility is a worldwide phenomenon reflecting demand from employer organisations experiencing workforce shortages. This mobility offers opportunities for working abroad, adventure and an international social work career (Lyons & Heugler, 2012). Professional social work migration appears to be common between the UK, New Zealand and Australia, relying on historic links of colonialization, a shared language, pre-existing social and familial networks (Evans, Huxley, & Munroe, 2006; Hanna & Lyons, 2016; Hussein, Manthorpe, & Stevens, 2010). A similar trend is evident in Europe (Hanna & Lyons, 2011; Simpson, 2009; Zanca & Misca, 2016) and Canada (Pullen-Sansfaçon, Brown, & Graham, 2012; Sansfaçon, Brown, Graham, & Michaud, 2014). Qualified and experienced staff are recruited across national borders by these countries to protect the most vulnerable in society; children who are at risk of abuse and neglect (Fouche, Beddoe, Bartley, & de Haan, 2013; Hanna & Lyons, 2014; Lyons, 2006; Welbourne, Harrison, & Ford, 2007; Zubrzycki, Thomson, & Trevithick, 2008).

The Australian Government Job Outlook forecasts a strong, above average growth in demand for social workers by 2020 (Australian Government, 2017). There exists an undersupply of professionally qualified social workers to meet current growth and the existing workforce is aging (Healy & Lonne, 2010). The Australian Association of Social Work (AASW) is experiencing a steady increase of overseas qualification assessments, most commonly for social workers trained in the UK and New Zealand. The increased number of social workers seeking AASW membership eligibility can be seen as a further indication that internationally qualified social workers are in demand in Australia (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010b). At least four of Australia's eight states and territories use the strategy of overseas recruitment to a greater or lesser extent (McArthur et al., 2012). Despite this use of overseas recruitment across Australia, there is little research investigating the effectiveness of this approach (Zubrzycki et al., 2008), including its impact on retention and quality benchmarks and the return on investment of this costly strategy (Cummins, Scott, & Scales, 2012; Healy et al., 2009; Martin & Healy, 2010; McArthur et al., 2012).

### 1.4. The western foundation of social work practice

Working in a new country requires sociocultural transitioning and an understanding of the social structure and welfare system of the host country, including the service network and organisational context (Fouché, Beddoe, Bartley, & Parkes, 2015). The AASW Code of Ethics states that social workers will participate in developing and implementing not only culturally competent but also culturally safe and sensitive practice (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010b, p. 8). Practice in the Australian child welfare context calls for social

workers to have awareness and understanding of Australian indigenous communities past and present. Applying for recognition of overseas qualifications or professional licensing, however, is not required for social work practice in Australia. In contrast, in New Zealand competence to practice with Maori people is part of the required assessment and registration process (Social Work Registration Board, 2016).

The impact of colonisation reverberates across generations of indigenous peoples worldwide. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to experience denial of their culture and identity as well as disproportionate level of child protection intervention in their communities (Bamblett, Harrison, & Lewis, 2010). In Australia, racism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is a reality, even if unintentional (Muller, 2016). Social work derives its knowledge from western philosophical traditions, valuing humanism, rationalism and objectivism as universal. With the spread of social work internationally, other ways of knowing may have been unrecognised, ignored or oppressed (Young & Zubrzycki, 2011). The dominant discourse within social work appears to take for granted western foundations and fails to acknowledge other philosophical traditions and indigenous knowledge (Wehbi, Parada, George, & Lessa, 2014; Young & Zubrzycki, 2011).

### 1.5. Current study

This paper reports a scoping study of the current literature on transnational social workers practicing in child welfare, defined as professionals who have been trained outside the country they work in and utilise their social work training across borders (Hussein, 2014). Social work mobility is evident across the globe and in Australia, New Zealand and the UK, recruitment of internationally qualified social workers has become a strategy to meet staffing demands in statutory services (Bartley, Beddoe, Fouché, & Harington, 2012; Hanna & Lyons, 2016; Hussein, Stevens, Manthorpe, & Moriarty, 2011; McArthur et al., 2012; Zubrzycki et al., 2008). Scoping studies are useful when considering a broad topic that has not been comprehensively researched by analysing a wide range of research. It is anticipated that this will lead to a greater conceptual clarity to inform practice and provide direction for future research in the emerging area of transnational social work practice (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Colquhoun et al., 2014; Davis, Drey, & Gould, 2009).

### 1.6. Research questions

In reporting on the results of the scoping review on transnational social work practice, we aim to increase knowledge about this phenomenon and apply this to the Australian context. The review focused on peer reviewed publications to address the following questions:

1. What are the personal and professional experiences of transnational social workers migrating between Australia, New Zealand and the UK? How can this knowledge be applied to the Australian child welfare workforce?
2. In what ways are transnational social workers ready to practice with indigenous communities?

## 2. Methods

The approach taken is a scoping review, mapping existing knowledge to issues relevant for transnational social work experience and the Australian context of child welfare practice. This scoping literature review is based on the framework proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), and consisted of five stages: (1) identifying the research question, (2) identifying relevant studies, (3) study selection, (4) charting the data and (5) collating, summarising and reporting results. The method of a narrative synthesis is suited to the appraisals of qualitative studies, utilising an iterative and conceptual approach that emphasises the importance of developing a critique based on credibility and

contribution of evidence (Davis et al., 2009).

### 2.1. Inclusion/exclusion criteria

The scope of the search was limited to the field of direct social work practice within Australian, New Zealand, and UK child welfare services. Three factors determined this focus: (a) the established migration patterns of social workers practicing in child welfare between these countries due to a shared colonial history, language and cultural ties (Bartley et al., 2012; Evans et al., 2006; Hussein et al., 2010; Lyons, 2006; Zubrzycki et al., 2008), (b) AASW annual reports from 2009 to 2016 in which social workers from the UK and New Zealand are amongst the largest groups of applicants for assessment of overseas qualifications for migration and employment purposes (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010a, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016), (c) literature in Australia identified an established pattern of migration between these countries (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017; Zubrzycki et al., 2008).

Exclusion criteria were: (a) international social work providing aid in disaster or conflict areas, (b) labour mobility from poor countries to rich countries, (c) pre-qualification education in relation to globalization and transnational knowledge and social work practice, (d) social work labour mobility across the European Economic Area and Northern America, (e) recruitment of non-professional care work staff, (f) finally, literature exploring international labour mobility through statistical modelling of workforce data reviewing demographic changes and policy imperatives was excluded when no link to direct social work practice is made.

### 2.2. Identifying and selecting relevant studies

A systematic search of literature published in English since the year 2006 was made following consultation with an expert librarian to identify relevant electronic data bases: Informit, Proquest, Ebsco, Science direct, PubMed and Scopus. Searches included a variety of combinations of keywords in either title or abstract of peer reviewed research literature including “transnational”, “social work”, “child protection”, “child welfare” and “international recruitment”. The terminology of statutory child welfare differs between countries. In the UK and Australia child welfare is also referred to as social care or child protection encompassing the profession of social work. Specific searches were undertaken in the Australian Journal of Social Work, Children Australia, British Journal of Social Work, Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work and European Journal of Social Work. To maximize search coverage Google Scholar and Google Scholar alerts were included in the search strategy. Three websites were searched based on their relevance to the topic. References cited in journal article bibliographies were also examined and individually searched for relevant studies not yet identified (see Fig. 1).

The time period for the search was 2006 to the end of 2016; this period was determined to provide comprehensive coverage of relevant publications and the current state of evidence. In total 74 references were identified. Papers were excluded if they were duplicates ( $n = 11$ ) or if the content did not appear relevant for social workers working in child welfare ( $n = 47$ ), leaving 16 papers for analysis.

## 3. Results

This study provides an overview of the studies undertaken in the UK, Australia and New Zealand. The scoping search identified 16 papers, 13 reported empirical data and three were exploratory review papers (see Table 1). Seven papers from New Zealand reported findings from a single mixed method study that included focus groups ( $n = 18$ ), individual interviews ( $n = 10$ ) and survey data ( $n = 294$ ) as part of the larger study Crossing Borders: An exploration of migrant professional workforce dynamics (Crossing Borders, 2009). Two studies from the UK

and one from Australia reported findings from mixed method studies. Three studies from the UK used semi-structured interviews. Limitations of the studies reviewed were the scant attention to the Australian context ( $n = 1$ ), that a relatively large group of studies were conducted at one site ( $n = 7$ ) and the lack of longitudinal studies that capture individual experiences of overseas recruited social workers at different stages of transitioning.

### 3.1. Research question 1: what are the personal and professional experiences of transnational social workers migrating between Australia, New Zealand and the UK? How can this knowledge be applied to the Australian child welfare workforce?

Four distinct themes relevant to the experiences of transnational child welfare practice emerged from this scoping: first, findings relating to personal and professional transitioning when crossing borders; second, induction processes for those arriving in unfamiliar child welfare service systems; third, sociocultural transitioning to an unfamiliar practice environment in the context of child welfare; and finally, the impact of being a transnational social worker on professional identity. There is a significant gap surrounding the Australian transnational recruitment to child welfare practice.

#### 3.1.1. Transitioning across borders

The findings suggested that transnational social workers shared a desire to explore new personal and professional horizons (Bartley et al., 2011; Bartley et al., 2012; Beddoe & Fouché, 2014; Hanna & Lyons, 2014, 2016; Hussein et al., 2011; Lyons, 2006). Nevertheless, relocating across the world was found to have unexpected implications. Research indicated that separation from social capital, in the form of family and wider social support systems, affected migratory experiences. As transnational recruits' familiar networks are far away, the recruiting organisation requires an appreciation of the psychosocial impact of migration (Bartley et al., 2011; Beddoe & Fouché, 2014; Hanna & Lyons, 2014, 2016; Hussein, 2014; Sims, 2011). Findings strongly suggested that a welcoming community offering collegial support to overseas recruits appeared significant for job satisfaction and may positively influence personal and professional acculturation (Beddoe & Fouché, 2014; Fouché et al., 2015; Hanna & Lyons, 2014; Sims, 2011).

Studies from the UK, Australia and New Zealand found that the challenge of cultural transitions between superficially comparable contexts is underestimated, even between Anglophone countries (Fouché et al., 2015; Hussein, Manthorpe, & Stevens, 2011; Hussein et al., 2010; Zubrzycki et al., 2008). Transnational social workers migrating to the UK experienced that child welfare system as hierarchical, formal and process driven (Beddoe & Fouché, 2014; Hanna & Lyons, 2016). Conversely, some UK recruits found child welfare services in New Zealand rather casual, involving less formalised decision making and accountability (Beddoe & Fouché, 2014; Fouché, Beddoe, Bartley, & Brenton, 2014; Fouché et al., 2013; Fouché et al., 2015).

Feelings of professional and personal dislocation were experienced by many migrating social workers (Bartley et al., 2011; Beddoe & Fouché, 2014; Fouché et al., 2013; Fouché et al., 2015; Hanna & Lyons, 2014, 2016; Hussein et al., 2010; Welbourne et al., 2007). Although a well-educated and relatively privileged group, the majority having the advantage of English as a first language (Beddoe & Fouché, 2014; Lyons, 2006; Zubrzycki et al., 2008), adjusting to an unfamiliar environment, a different workforce, gaining recognition of overseas qualifications and a new culture of social work practice were experienced as challenging by transnational social workers (Bartley et al., 2012; Fouché et al., 2013; Hanna & Lyons, 2011, 2016; Hussein et al., 2011; Sims, 2011). High quality social work supervision was found to be of critical importance for transnational social workers, although poor supervision was a common experience in the early stages of transitioning (Hanna & Lyons, 2016; Zubrzycki et al., 2008).



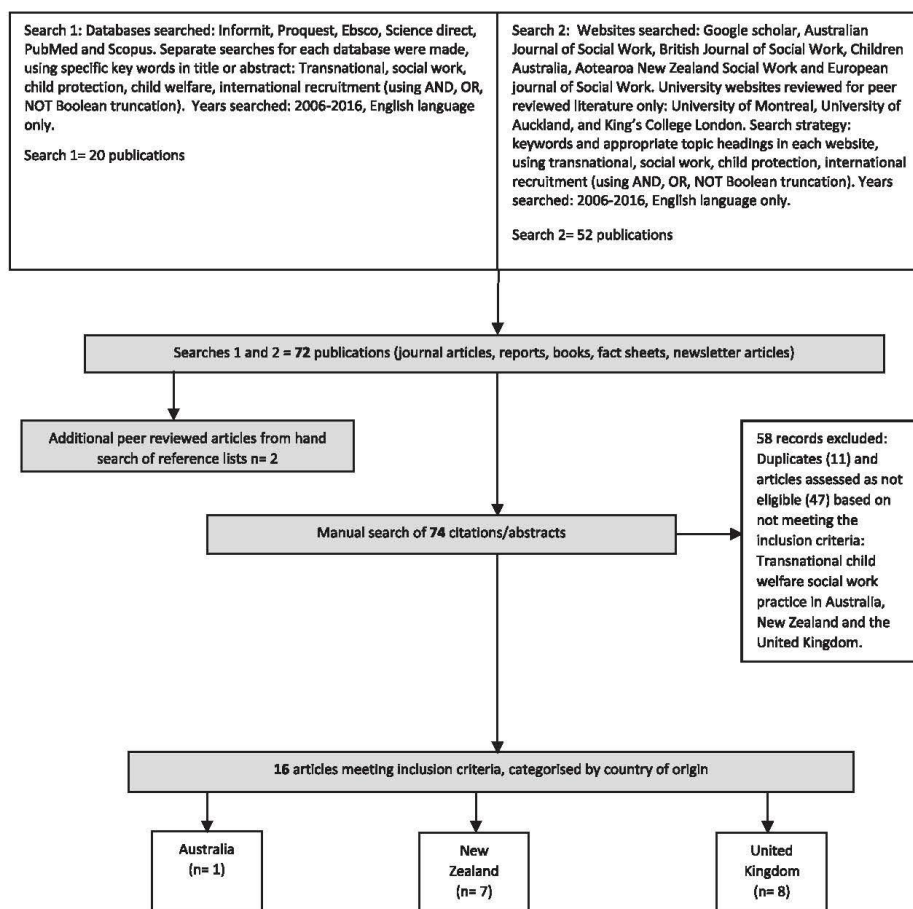


Fig. 1. The search strategy.

### 3.1.2. Induction processes

Research suggested that often there was inadequate validation of prior practice experience and the unique contributions and needs of transnational social workers during induction processes. A strategy of validation during induction may better support transnational recruits' transition into the new practice environment (Bartley et al., 2011; Beddoe, Fouché, Bartley, & Harington, 2012; Fouché et al., 2014; Fouché et al., 2015; Hanna & Lyons, 2014; Hussein et al., 2010; Sims, 2011). Frequently induction programs did not go beyond explaining the law, procedures and a brief introduction to cultural competence (Beddoe & Fouché, 2014; Beddoe et al., 2012; Fouché et al., 2013; Fouché et al., 2015; Hanna & Lyons, 2016; Hussein, 2014; Hussein et al., 2011). Locating transnational social workers as co-learners instead of learners, with individual development support packages, may better contribute to induction to the new professional context (Hanna & Lyons, 2014; Hussein et al., 2011).

### 3.1.3. Sociocultural transitioning

Studies suggested it may be unrealistic to expect transnational social workers to understand local context without adequate induction that

clearly signposts agency specific practice and local professional discourse (Fouché et al., 2013; Hussein et al., 2011; Lyons, 2006; Sims, 2011), even when speaking the same language (Hanna & Lyons, 2016; Welbourne et al., 2007). A number of studies found that recruiting organisations and social workers needed to better explain the way in which social work was constructed locally to transnational practitioners (Bartley et al., 2011; Fouché et al., 2015; Hanna & Lyons, 2014, 2016; Hussein, 2014; Welbourne et al., 2007; Zubrzycki et al., 2008), as workplace arrangements and professional cultures may be different to those at home, including supervision arrangements, key stakeholders, career advancement and the public standing of social work (Beddoe et al., 2012; Hanna & Lyons, 2016; Zubrzycki et al., 2008). The omission of such material from induction may lead to an office environment being a site of cultural dissonance, where miscommunication may generate unexpected stress for the transnational social worker, employers and other colleagues (Beddoe & Fouché, 2014; Fouché et al., 2015).

### 3.1.4. Professional social work identity

Transnational social workers in the UK reported that social work

**Table 1**  
Research literature included in the review (n = 16).

Author(s)-date	Location	Method and sample size	Recommendations/outcomes
Bartley et al. (2011)	New Zealand	Examination of key features of registered overseas professionals in New Zealand (n = 234). (Phase 1 of the study <i>Crossing Borders: An exploration of migrant professional workforce dynamics</i> )	There is a need to build a greater understanding of overseas social workers experiences, including their needs and strengths. Border crossers fill important vacancies in the New Zealand statutory sector. Those who design and implement training and induction programs for overseas social workers are facing challenges with the growing globalization of the professional social work workforce.
Bartley et al. (2012)	New Zealand	Mixed-methods design. Examination of key features of registered overseas professionals in New Zealand (n = 234), focus group (n = 18) and survey data (n = 294). (Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the study <i>Crossing Borders</i> )	Health and social service employers, the professional bodies and social work educators in New Zealand should engage in a comprehensive stock take of the cultural induction practices for, and needs of, overseas qualified social workers.
Beddoe et al. (2012)	New Zealand	Mixed-methods design. Focus group (n = 18) and survey data (n = 294) of migrant social workers in New Zealand. (Phases 2 and 3 of the study <i>Crossing Borders</i> )	Migrant social workers require a certain degree of acculturation into the norms and behaviors governing the practice of social work in a new context. There is a role for employers, supervisors and educators in contributing to their orientation and support.
Beddoe and Fouché (2014)	New Zealand	Exploratory study, semi-structured interviews with ten New Zealander social workers practicing in the UK. (Extension to the mixed methods study <i>Crossing Borders</i> )	When social work is practiced across borders, considerable cultural translation is needed. Practitioners are largely left to themselves to navigate their new social-cultural and political environment.
Fouché et al. (2015)	New Zealand	Mixed methods design: focus group (n = 18), survey (n = 294) with overseas qualified social workers practicing in New Zealand. (Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the study <i>Crossing Borders</i> )	Cultural training needs to be part of an ongoing, practice based learning process. Migrant social workers need access to competent people with whom they can discuss cultural issues that arise. Future research should focus on strategies to assist in the professional cultural transition of a global workforce.
Fouché et al. (2014)	New Zealand	Mixed methods design. Focus group interviews (n = 18) combined with a survey (n = 294). (Phases 2 and 3 of the study <i>Crossing Borders</i> )	There is a need for improved processes to introduce migrant social workers to the New Zealand social work environment. This need is driven by the awareness that social work is a contextually contingent profession that operates in a distinctive social, cultural and political environment.
Fouche et al. (2013)	New Zealand	Mixed methods design. Focus group interviews (n = 18) combined with a survey (n = 294) and examination of key features of registered overseas professionals in New Zealand (n=234). (Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the study <i>Crossing Borders</i> )	There is a need for strategies to facilitate migrant social workers' adjustment to a new setting, especially where local practice involves indigenous communities. Induction should entail more than agency-specific practice and policies, it should focus on the broader (local) professional discourse.
Hanna and Lyons (2014)	England	Semi-structured interviews with managers in social care services in England (n = 15).	International social workers require more than an examination of their qualification in order to work abroad. Managers need to be sufficiently prepared to enable overseas social workers to make the best use possible of the often considerable skills, knowledge and commitment they bring.
Hanna and Lyons (2016)	England	Semi-structured interviews with international social workers (n = 28).	The experience of professional adaptation, acculturation and professional dislocating as reported by Fouché et al., 2014 should not be seen independently from the social and emotional dimensions associated with the experience of immigration.
Hussein et al. (2010)	United Kingdom	Scoping literature review, semi-structured interviews with recruitment agencies (n = 20).	Social care migration is a multifaceted phenomenon and the position of intermediaries in the employment relationship is largely, but mistakenly, ignored.
Hussein et al. (2011)	United Kingdom	Mixed methods design. Online survey (n = 101) plus focus group (n = 7).	Overseas social workers are potentially highly competent practitioners if offered the right induction, understanding and training. Employers should take skills into consideration to maximize benefits and acknowledge their strengths as well as the challenges they face and present.
Hussein (2014)	United Kingdom	Mixed methods design with two data sources: A: Online survey (n = 27) B: Interviews (n = 11) online survey (n = 48) and two focus groups (n = 7)	Social workers qualified in the UK or New Zealand were more likely to have their qualification recognized than those who trained in other parts of Europe. Transnational social workers are required to have a higher ability to adapt and transfer their knowledge and skills. There is a need for employers to take active responsibility in this process through tailored induction.
Lyons (2006)	United Kingdom	Exploratory review and critique of existing empirical and theoretical knowledge.	Further research is needed to debate international dimensions of social work and globalization to determine the influence of local practice on cross-national and international practice. The globalized conditions that now exist means professional education has an important role to play in how social workers are prepared for their role.
Sims (2011)	England	Exploratory review of a post-qualifying consolidation module involving internationally qualified social workers (n = 15). Evaluation of the project took place with post qualifying students, service users, employer's representative, student' managers and the teaching team. Individual interviews were carried out with four students.	Employers need to recognize the impact of transcultural migration and provide support early in overseas social workers' English careers, including beyond induction. This way transnational social workers can adjust and consolidate their newfound cultural knowledge.
Welbourne et al. (2007)	United Kingdom	Exploratory review and critique of existing empirical and theoretical knowledge.	There is a need to provide ongoing support and training to overseas trained social workers. Practice and ethical issues are raised when international recruitment is used to address social work labour shortages in the UK. It is debatable whether social work is too culturally specific to be translated across borders.
Zubrzycki et al. (2008)	Australia	Mixed methods approach, brief questionnaire (n = 23), a world café group interview (n=23), individual and focus groups	The transition stage is sometimes characterized by the need to deal with issues such as challenges to professional identity and difference

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (continued)

Author(s)-date	Location	Method and sample size	Recommendations/outcomes
		interviews (n = unknown).	in social work qualifications between countries. Recruits also found that they needed to adapt to different organisational policies and develop an understanding of new cultural influences. Differences in context profoundly influence practice and requires targeted support during the phase of transitioning.

appeared to have a clearer identity in the UK, yet experienced the profession as a site of struggle with media scrutiny and public scapegoating of social workers involved in high-profile child deaths (Beddoe & Fouché, 2014; Hanna & Lyons, 2016). Staff burnout and high turnover were commonplace, suggesting concerns about the readiness of the receiving organisation in the UK for welcoming overseas social workers (Hanna & Lyons, 2014; Hussein, 2014; Hussein et al., 2011). Social work recruits were often employed in difficult contexts, entering a pressured workgroup with high vacancy levels and turnover and little opportunity to engage in broader social work debates outside of the day to day work (Hanna & Lyons, 2014, 2016). Transnational social workers were sometimes influenced by critical media negatively affecting public perceptions of social work (Hussein, 2014; Hussein et al., 2011). Studies suggested that transnational social workers may be challenged by the professional transition, renegotiation of their own professional authority and identity, and their place in the local discourse and practice context (Bartley et al., 2011; Fouché et al., 2013; Hanna & Lyons, 2016). For example, social workers migrating to New Zealand and Australia reported they were unable to use previously central aspects of their social work practice, such as clinical skills in specialist assessments or counselling. This contributed to transnational social workers not always experiencing a satisfactory match between their skill sets and the requirements of social work in the Southern Hemisphere, leading some to lose confidence in their professional capabilities (Bartley et al., 2012; Beddoe et al., 2012; Fouché et al., 2013; Fouché et al., 2014; Zubrzycki et al., 2008). Negotiating a diminished professional identity was found to be a common experience for UK trained social workers in Australia, symbolised by recruits' expressions of alarm at not being able to use the title "social worker" and not being supervised by qualified social workers (Zubrzycki et al., 2008). Social workers arriving in the Australian child protection system came to realise that the workforce has a variety of professional backgrounds and the term "social worker" is not widely used (Zubrzycki et al., 2008). Researchers suggested a need for transnational social workers to prepare and deepen their knowledge of the wider cultural and social-political context of the host country with support of the recruiting organisation (Fouché et al., 2013; Fouché et al., 2014; Hanna & Lyons, 2016; Lyons, 2006; Sims, 2011; Welbourne et al., 2007).

### 3.2. Research question 2: in what ways are transnational social workers ready to practice with indigenous communities?

This topic is only now beginning to emerge in the literature from New Zealand, with a disappointing gap on the topic in Australian literature. Social work assessments require understanding of diversity within the population and the capacity to respectfully accommodate local cultural norms, including those of indigenous populations (Bartley et al., 2011; Beddoe & Fouché, 2014; Beddoe et al., 2012; Fouché et al., 2013; Fouché et al., 2014; Hussein et al., 2010; Lyons, 2006). Multiple papers from one study in New Zealand reported that working with indigenous cultures is likely to require ongoing cultural training with context specific material adapted to the needs of the individual social worker. The introduction to Maori culture was experienced as superficial by transnational social workers (Fouché et al., 2013; Fouché et al., 2014; Fouché et al., 2015). Induction in relation to the cultural context of practice was inadequate for new arrivals, who specifically note that

competence in relation to biculturalism in New Zealand as a challenge for overseas recruits (Bartley et al., 2011; Bartley et al., 2012; Beddoe et al., 2012; Fouché et al., 2013; Fouché et al., 2014; Fouché et al., 2015). The model of cultural training focused on the needs of service users, disregards the acculturation difficulties experienced by migrant social workers who were unprepared for the necessary cultural transitioning (Fouché et al., 2015). The only Australian study to touch on practice with Indigenous Australians suggested that social workers from the UK in Australia needed to develop new practice knowledge. This included an understanding of the Australian cultural context, the history of indigenous Australia and the impact of colonisation and the Stolen Generations on contemporary experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Zubrzycki et al., 2008). It remains unclear what support is required for transnational social workers to gain knowledge of indigenous communities and cultures and how to integrate this in daily child welfare practice.

## 4. Discussion

This review reports studies of experiences of transnational social workers moving between the UK, Australia and New Zealand, the implications of this research for the Australian context of child welfare and the readiness of these migrating practitioners to work with indigenous communities. To practice effectively, transnational social workers in Australia and New Zealand need to develop knowledge of working with indigenous communities, including an understanding of the impact of colonialism on contemporary social work practice. This discussion draws out the implications for child welfare practice and research and will focus on the preparedness of overseas professionals for working in Australia, induction to practice, migration as a major life event and the influence that local practice arrangements and dynamics may have on established professional identity.

### 4.1. Implication for child welfare practice in relation to transnational social work recruitment

The main finding of this scoping review is that research about transnational social work targeted at the Australian context of statutory child welfare service delivery is very limited. The studies from New Zealand and the United Kingdom are informative, have some relevance and may contribute to developing further frameworks for policy and practice for the Australian context.

First, it is unclear how Australian child welfare systems prepare overseas recruits for working in Australia. The complexities of Australia's colonial past reverberate in society today, including in the field of statutory child welfare. Social work in this context may require knowledge extending beyond cultural awareness and competence to culturally safe practice; reflecting on the process of decolonisation as suggested by Indigenous scholars (Bamblett et al., 2010; Muller, 2016). Overseas social workers may have difficulties understanding how the historical context of indigenous communities impacts on practice in statutory child welfare (Fouché et al., 2015; Zubrzycki et al., 2008). Without careful mentoring, supervision and reflective practice, overseas recruitment may unwittingly perpetuate neocolonial relations and reinforce western practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.



Second, a tailored induction program is needed to build on the expertise of the transnational social worker, ensuring collection of detailed information to determine existing skills and experience prior to induction commencing. In addition to core, generic material covering legislation and procedure, a specifically tailored program could be developed in consultation with the individual social worker and, social work trained, supervisor. This approach is likely to have the dual benefit of ensuring that the newly recruited social workers feel valued and that their prior professional experience is respected, whilst their specific learning needs for local practice are addressed.

Third, stress associated with frontline work in child protection is well documented, overseas recruitment may be a last resort for organisations with hard-to-fill frontline positions that do not attract sufficient local practitioners. The implications of negotiating the major life event of migration to Australia while simultaneously juggling the complex work of statutory child welfare remains unexplored. Little is known about the implications of personal and professional unfamiliarity with the new social and professional arena whilst assessing alleged child neglect and abuse. For professional migrants not only is the Australian practice context new, there is also the challenge to build a life and new support networks far from home. This may cause friction between the organisational imperative to deliver services in a pressured environment and the psychosocial, professional and practical everyday needs of the transnational social worker.

Fourth, overseas social workers are not all aware that child welfare service delivery is not necessarily undertaken by social workers in Australia (Zubrzycki et al., 2008). This contrasts with the UK and New Zealand where child welfare appears to have a stronger social work identity. The loss of a social work identity upon arrival in Australia may become more significant when a supervisor is not a qualified social worker and colleagues have a variety of professional backgrounds (Zubrzycki et al., 2008). These factors may have a profound impact on an established social work identity and require a redefining of self in the unfamiliar culture.

#### 4.2. Implication for future research

Based on the evidence presented in this scoping review it is apparent that the research about transnational social workers is still in its infancy, particularly in the Australian context. There is insufficient demographic data beyond the evidence of social workers being in growing demand and an increased number of overseas social workers seeking AASW membership eligibility. The themes emerging in the small body of research are informative for the Australian context of child welfare. Nevertheless, the Australian dynamics of service delivery, the status of social work, working with indigenous communities and practice in remote areas remain underdeveloped. At present, there is little evidence about how social workers prepare for the transition and how Australian recruiting organisations welcome and support overseas practitioners. Further exploration of the stress associated with these circumstances is required. In addition, the voices of clients who are assigned a “foreign” social worker are silent in contemporary research. A longitudinal study focused on experiences of transnational social workers, the receiving organisation and clients would provide richer understanding of this response to workforce shortages, including the effectiveness of induction programs and factors that enable or hinder professional and personal transition.

#### 5. Conclusion

This scoping review examined the literature concerning transnational social work in child welfare in New Zealand, Australia and the UK. The findings informed implications for the Australian context of statutory child welfare and investigated in what ways transnational social workers are ready to practice with indigenous communities. The review identified one large study in New Zealand with results published

in seven papers, one Australian and a further seven studies from the UK. Out of these 16 studies, 13 studies reported empirical data.

Available research reports an unsatisfactory match between skills and expertise upon arrival in the new context. Recruiting organisations may need to develop a more sophisticated approach to welcoming and introducing transnational professionals to the local history, discourse and practice context of social work. This would include strategies to support transnational social workers in professional practice to retain their professional identity. At present it is relatively unknown how transnational social workers recruited to Australia child welfare service delivery systems prepare for their professional and personal transitioning, including engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Western orientated social work theory may be tested when adapting existing knowledge to the unfamiliar context of practice. There is a significant gap in knowledge about what is required to assist overseas qualified social workers to develop culturally safe practice and adapt to the local culture of professional practice during a time of possible professional and personal dislocation. Further Australian research which examines the role and responsibility of the recruiting organisation, the individual social worker and the professional body representing social work is necessary to improve outcomes for children and families involved with the statutory child welfare system.

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

#### References

- Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: Towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 8(1), 19–32.
- Australian Association of Social Workers (2010a). 2009 annual report of the Australian Association of Social Workers. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/2461>.
- Australian Association of Social Workers (2010b). Code of Ethics. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/practitioner-resources/related-documents>.
- Australian Association of Social Workers (2011). 2010 annual report of the Australian Association of Social Workers. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/2641>.
- Australian Association of Social Workers (2012). 2011 annual report of the Australian Association of Social Workers. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/about-aasw/financial-and-annual-reports?command=login>.
- Australian Association of Social Workers (2013). 2012 annual report of the Australian Association of Social Workers. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/5352>.
- Australian Association of Social Workers (2014). 2013 annual report of the Australian Association of Social Workers. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/6799>.
- Australian Association of Social Workers (2015). 2014 annual report of the Australian Association of Social Workers. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/8733>.
- Australian Association of Social Workers (2016). 2015 annual report of the Australian Association of Social Workers. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/9250>.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017). Migration Australia (3412.0). Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/mf/3412.0>.
- Australian Government (2017). Social workers (ANZSCO:2725). Retrieved from <http://joboutlook.gov.au/uploads/2725.pdf>.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2017). Child Protection Australia 2015–16. Retrieved from <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-abuse-and-neglect-statistics>.
- Bamblett, M., Harrison, J., & Lewis, P. (2010). Proving culture and voice works: Towards creating the evidence base for resilient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia. *International Journal of Child & Family Welfare*, 1(2), 98–113.
- Bartley, A., Beddoe, L., Duke, J., Fouché, C., Harrington, P., & Shah, R. (2011). Crossing borders: Key features of migrant social workers in New Zealand. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, 23(3), 16–30.
- Bartley, A., Beddoe, L., Fouché, C., & Harrington, P. (2012). Transnational social workers: Making the profession a transnational professional space. *International Journal of Population Research*, 11. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2012/527510>.
- Beddoe, L., Fouché, C., Bartley, A., & Harrington, P. (2012). Migrant social workers' experience in New Zealand: Education and supervision issues. *Social Work Education*, 31(8), 1012–1031.
- Beddoe, L., & Fouché, C. B. (2014). 'Kiwis on the move': New Zealand social workers' experience of practising abroad. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(1), 193–208.
- Bennett, B. (2015). "Stop deploying your white privilege on me!" Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement with the Australian Association of Social Workers. *Australian Social Work*, 68(1), 19–31.

- Bennett, B., Zubrzycki, J., & Bacon, V. (2011). What do we know? The experiences of social workers working alongside Aboriginal people. *Australian Social Work*, 64(1), 20–37.
- Briskman, L. (2007). *Social work with indigenous communities* (2 ed). Leichhardt, NSW: The Federation Press.
- Bromfield, L., & Holzer, P. (2008). *A national approach for child protection*. Melbourne, Australia: National Child Protection Clearinghouse, Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Burns, K., & Christie, A. (2013). Employment mobility or turnover? An analysis of child welfare and protection employee retention. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35(2), 340–346.
- Colquhoun, H., Levac, D., O'Brien, K., Straus, S., Tricco, A., Perrier, L., ... Moher, D. (2014). Scoping reviews: Time for clarity in definition, methods, and reporting. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, 67(12), 1291–1294.
- Crossing Borders. Crossing Borders: An exploration of migrant professional workforce dynamics. (2009). Retrieved from <http://www.education.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/schools-departments/chsswk/chsswk-research/crossing-borders-an-exploration-of-migrant-professional-workforce.html> (Accessed 16.11.2016).
- Cummins, P., Scott, D., & Scales, B. (2012). Report of the protecting Victoria's vulnerable children inquiry. Retrieved from <http://www.childprotectioninquiry.vic.gov.au/report-pvvc-inquiry.html>.
- Davis, K., Drey, N., & Gould, D. (2009). What are scoping studies? A review of the nursing literature. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 46(10), 1386–1400.
- DeLafabro, P., Hirte, C., Rogers, N., & Wilson, R. (2010). The over-representation of young Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in the South Australian child system: A longitudinal analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32(10), 1418–1425.
- Dickinson, N. S., & Painter, J. S. (2009). Predictors of undesired turnover for child welfare workers. *Child Welfare*, 88(5), 187–208.
- Evans, S., Huxley, P., & Munroe, M. (2006). International recruitment of social care workers and social workers: Illustrations from the UK. *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work*, 40(1), 93–110.
- Fouché, C., Beddoe, L., Bartley, A., & Brenton, N. (2014). Strengths and struggles: Overseas qualified social workers' experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Australian Social Work*, 67(4), 551–566.
- Fouché, C., Beddoe, L., Bartley, A., & de Haan, I. (2013). Enduring professional dislocation: Migrant social workers' perceptions of their professional roles. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(7), 2004–2022. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bct054>.
- Fouché, C., Beddoe, L., Bartley, A., & Parkes, E. (2015). Are we ready for them? Overseas-qualified social workers' professional cultural transition. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(1), 106–119.
- Gibbs, J. (2009). Changing the cultural story in child protection: Learning from the insider's experience. *Child & Family Social Work*, 14(3), 289–299.
- Gomez, R. J., Travis, D. J., Ayers-Lopez, S., & Schwab, A. J. (2010). In search of innovation: A national qualitative analysis of child welfare recruitment and retention efforts. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32(5), 664–671. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chldyouth.2010.01.001>.
- Hanna, S., & Lyons, K. (2011). European social workers in England: Exploring international labour mobility. *Revista de Asistență Socială*, 3, 185–196.
- Hanna, S., & Lyons, K. (2014). Challenges facing international social workers: English managers' perceptions. *International Social Work*, 59(6), 722–733.
- Hanna, S., & Lyons, K. (2016). 'London calling': The experiences of international social work recruits working in London. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(3), 719–736. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcw027>.
- Hansen, P., & Ainsworth, F. (2013). Australian child protection services: A game without end. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 22(1), 104–110.
- Healy, K., & Lonne, B. (2010). *The social work & human services workforce: Report from a national study of education, training and workforce needs*. Strawberry hills, NSW: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.
- Healy, K., Meagher, G., & Cullin, J. (2009). Retaining novices to become expert child protection practitioners: Creating career pathways in direct practice. *British Journal of Social Work*, 39(2), 299–317.
- Healy, K., & Oltedal, S. (2010). An institutional comparison of child protection systems in Australia and Norway focused on workforce retention. *Journal of Social Policy*, 39(2), 255–274.
- Hunt, S., Goddard, C., Cooper, J., Littlechild, B., & Wild, J. (2016). If I feel like this, how does the child feel? Child protection workers supervision, management and organisational response to parental violence. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 30(1), 5–24.
- Hussein, S. (2014). Hierarchical challenges to transnational social workers' mobility: The United Kingdom as a destination within an expanding European Union. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(4), 174–192. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcu050>.
- Hussein, S., Manthorpe, J., & Stevens, M. (2010). People in places: A qualitative exploration of recruitment agencies' perspectives on the employment of international social workers in the UK. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(3), 1000–1016.
- Hussein, S., Manthorpe, J., & Stevens, M. (2011). The experiences of migrant social work and social care practitioners in the UK: Findings from an online survey. *European Journal of Social Work*, 14(4), 479–496.
- Hussein, S., Stevens, M., Manthorpe, J., & Moriarty, J. (2011). Change and continuity: A quantitative investigation of trends and characteristics of international social workers in England. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(6), 1140–1157.
- LaFa Agbényiga, D. (2009). Child welfare employee recruitment and retention: An organizational culture perspective. *Child Welfare*, 88(6), 85–104.
- Littlechild, B., Hunt, S., Goddard, C., Cooper, J., Raynes, B., & Wild, J. (2016). The effects of violence and aggression from parents on child protection workers' personal, family, and professional lives. *SAGE Open*, 6(1), 1–12.
- Lizano, E. L., & Mor Barak, M. E. (2012). Workplace demands and resources as antecedents of job burnout among public child welfare workers: A longitudinal study. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34(9), 1769–1776. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chldyouth.2012.02.006>.
- Lonne, B., & Duke, J. (2008). The registration of social workers. In M. Connelly, & L. Harms (Eds.), *Social work: Contexts and practice*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Lonne, B., Harries, M., & Lantz, S. (2012). Workforce development: A pathway to reforming child protection systems in Australia. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43(8), 1630–1648. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcs064>.
- Lyons, K. (2006). Globalization and social work: International and local implications. *British Journal of Social Work*, 36(3), 365–380.
- Lyons, K., & Heugler, N. (2012). International labour mobility in social work. In L. Healy, & R. Links (Eds.), *Handbook on international social work*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Madden, E. E., Scannapieco, M., & Painter, K. (2014). An examination of retention and length of employment among public child welfare workers. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 41, 37–44.
- Martin, B., & Healy, J. (2010). *Who works in community services? A profile of Australian workforces in child protection, juvenile justice, disability services and general community services*. Adelaide: National Institute of Labour Studies, Flinders University.
- McArthur, M., Thomson, L., Barker, J., Winkworth, G., & Campus, C. (2012). National analysis of workforce trends in statutory child protection. Retrieved from <http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications/articles/national-analysis-of-workforce-trends-in-statutory-child-protection>.
- Mor Barak, M. E., Levin, A., Nissly, J. A., & Lane, C. J. (2006). Why do they leave? Modeling child welfare workers' turnover intentions. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 28(5), 548–577. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chldyouth.2005.06.003>.
- Müller, L. (2016). Preparing to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: Decolonisation for social work practice. In J. Malmgren, & R. Egan (Eds.), *Practice skills in social work & welfare* (pp. 84–100). (3 ed). Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.
- Pullen-Sansfacon, A., Brown, M., & Graham, J. R. (2012). International migration of professional social workers: Toward a theoretical framework for understanding professional adaptation processes. *Social Development Issues*, 34(2), 37–50.
- Sansfacon, A. P., Brown, M., Graham, J., & Michaud, A.-A. D. (2014). Adaptation and acculturation: Experiences of internationally educated social workers. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 15(2), 317–330.
- Scott, D. (2010). 'Here under the Southern Cross...': Reflections on child welfare reform in Australia. *Developing Practice: The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*, 26, 4–6.
- Simpson, G. (2009). Global and local issues in the training of 'overseas' social workers. *Social Work Education*, 28(6), 655–667. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02615470903027371>.
- Sims, D. (2011). Intercultural consolidation: Exploring the experiences of internationally qualified social workers and the English post-qualifying framework. *European Journal of Social Work*, 15(2), 241–255. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2010.543891>.
- Social Work Registration Board (2016). Overseas qualified social workers. Retrieved from <http://www.swrb.govt.nz/new-applicants/overseas-qualified-social-workers>.
- Tham, P., & Meagher, G. (2009). Working in human services: How do experiences and working conditions in child welfare social work compare? *British Journal of Social Work*, 39(5), 807–827. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcm170>.
- Tilbury, C., Hughes, M., Bigby, C., & Osmond, J. (2015). Social work research in the child protection field in Australia. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(1), 256–274. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcv123>.
- Travis, D. J., Lizano, E. L., & Mor Barak, M. E. (2016). 'I'm so stressed!': A longitudinal model of stress, burnout and engagement among social workers in child welfare settings. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 46(4), 1076–1095.
- Wehbi, S., Parada, H., George, P., & Lessa, I. (2014). Going home: Social work across and about borders. *International Social Work*, 59(2), 284–292. [doi:10.1080/0020872813519661](https://doi.org/10.1080/0020872813519661).
- Welbourne, P., Harrison, G., & Ford, D. (2007). Social work in the UK and the global labour market recruitment, practice and ethical considerations. *International Social Work*, 50(1), 27–40.
- Young, S., & Zubrzycki, J. (2011). Educating Australian social workers in the post-apology era: The potential offered by a 'whiteness' lens. *Journal of Social Work*, 11(2), 159–173. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1468017310386849>.
- Zanca, R., & Mica, G. (2016). Filling the gap? Romanian social workers' migration into the UK. *Revista de Asistență Socială*, 1, 41–47.
- Zubrzycki, J., Thomson, L., & Trevithick, P. (2008). International recruitment in child protection: The experiences of workers in the Australian Capital Territory. *Communities, Children and Families Australia*, 3(2), 30–38.



## **2.3 Conclusion**

The scoping review involved a comprehensive synthesis of relevant studies. The findings offer a contribution to knowledge and identify knowledge gaps, which informed the overall research design and the phase of narrative-informed primary data collection. The increased conceptual clarity provided by the review guided the investigation of relevant topics in the Australian context of transnational social work in frontline child protection. This scoping review showed that transnational social workers in Australia and New Zealand may experience an unsatisfactory match between skills and expertise required to work in a new context of child protection service delivery. Relatively little is known about how transnational social workers prepare for their professional and personal transition to Australia, including with regard to their understanding of First Nations communities, and to perform the role of social work in an unfamiliar environment. The narrative-informed research design enabled exploration of these gaps in the Australian context using first-hand accounts that facilitated a deeper understanding of transnational social work.

This chapter has presented the first of the publications comprising this dissertation and introduced some of the key themes and gaps emerging from the literature in relation to transnational social work that were pursued in the second phase of the research. The next three papers present the experiences of transnational social workers who participated in this study. Before presenting the second paper, in the next chapter I introduce the participants, offering an outline of their personal and professional circumstances.



## **Chapter 3: Participant Vignettes**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented a scoping review of the literature that identified existing knowledge and knowledge gaps in relation to transnational social work relevant to the Australian context. The analysis of the secondary data set provided the foundation and direction for the narrative-informed study presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. In this chapter, I introduce the 13 transnational social workers who participated in this study. Their lived experiences comprised the primary data set in this doctoral thesis. The short vignettes offer a snapshot of the participants to give readers a more holistic sense of their personal and professional circumstances, before presenting the three publication chapters drawing on their narratives. To ensure participant anonymity and confidentiality, careful de-identification of personal details was applied in the formulation of each vignette. This chapter will start with an outline of the recruitment strategies and the data collection process.

### **3.2 Recruitment Strategies and Data Collection**

The recruitment of study participants was supported by senior managers in a metropolitan child protection department. Purposive sampling was used to invite 11 potential participants via an email outlining the purpose and methods of the study, including the possible risks and benefits of participating. Snowball sampling led to the recruitment of two additional transnational social workers, who had not received the initial email but made contact and expressed their willingness to participate. The inclusion criteria required the participants to be qualified social workers from the United Kingdom or Ireland who had migrated to Australia to practise in frontline child protection. To enable reflection and comparison between the differing practice contexts,

the participants were required to have experience in child protection service delivery within the United Kingdom or Ireland before arriving in Australia. Ten transnational social workers who met the inclusion criteria participated in the study.

The first round of data collection in 2013 consisted of 10 in-depth semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. At the time of data collection, seven participants had been in Australia for two years and were approaching the end of their contract, whereas three participants had been residing in Australia for over four years. In 2015, another three participants who had just arrived in Australia were interviewed. This enabled some comparison between the experiences of newly arrived transnational social workers and those of transnational social workers who were two years post-arrival. During the second round of data collection in 2016, 10 participants were interviewed again, either via telephone or face to face. The interviews each lasted for 60 to 90 minutes. Appendices 5 and 6 outline the interview questions used. Descriptive, direct and abstract questions were used as narrative stimuli (Flick, 2018). As is typical for narrative exploration, the interviews started with a broad question (Riessman, 2008), such as: ‘Tell me your story about coming to Australia to work in child protection’ and ‘Tell me about your experience of being a newcomer to Australia’. The follow-up interviews provided opportunities to further explore the experience of professional migration and social work in Australian child protection.

The participant vignettes outlined below are divided into three groups. First, I present a snapshot of the participants who had been in Australia for three months at the time of the first interview. Second, I present the details of those participants who were approaching the end of their first 24 months in Australia. Contractual and visa arrangements were tied to this touchpoint and therefore the two-year mark was an

important moment in time. Finally, I present snapshots for those who had been residing in Australia for more than four years.

### **3.3 Participant Vignettes**

#### *3.3.1 New Arrivals*

Maria is an Irish social worker who was aged in her late 20s at the time of the first interview. She had always dreamed of coming to Australia, but the migration journey had not been easy. During her visa application process, Maria became a victim of a fake migration office scam. Maria had met her Australian partner during a holiday in Australia and she felt like she was coming home when she arrived many years later. At the beginning of the interview process, the couple were planning to live together in future. At work, everything felt different and the new experiences in child protection practice overwhelmed Maria. She did not receive induction training and felt she needed to relearn everything after leaving her employment in child protection in Ireland. By the time of her second interview nearly 18 months later, Maria had moved in with her partner and their two dogs. Maria reflected on the journey into Australian child protection as challenging, in particular commenting that she felt she needed to advocate for clients who did not receive a just service. She observed poor practice and became a whistleblower, which created considerable stress and impacted her mental and physical wellbeing. At the second interview, Maria observed that she felt she was just beginning to recover from these negative workplace experiences and had noticed a cultural shift at work. As a result, she felt valued as a team member and part of a place that supported her goal of becoming a leader in child protection practice. At the time of writing, her sister is planning to migrate soon to join her in Australia.

Loraine is an experienced social worker who was aged in her early 30s at the time of the first interview. Loraine had arrived in Australia with her partner three months prior and felt optimistic about the opportunity to work and live in Australia. She was in the process of gaining permanent residency. She experienced her role as different in some ways but similar in others to her role back home. Loraine was keen to learn all the procedures and different requirements and was consciously taking a step back to take it all in. Her approach was to have an open mind and to take it one day at a time. Loraine started to make some new friends and felt at ease at work. Loraine did not respond to the email invitation for the second round of interviews.

Cora was aged in her mid-30s at the time of her first interview. She came to Australia with her husband and their daughter via Spain, where she had been a stay-at-home parent. The family took the opportunity to migrate to Australia rather than returning to England when her husband's contract work in Spain ended. She was experienced in English child protection service delivery before migrating to Spain. After being a stay-at-home parent Cora was excited to be returning to her role as social worker in child protection; it felt like second nature. However, life in Australia felt somewhat different from life in Spain. The transition was not easy for the whole family, and Cora felt lost without her close friends nearby. When re-interviewed nearly two years later Cora was at home filing a work cover claim. She had experienced bullying and significant work pressure, leading to depression and anxiety. Cora reflected on how the migration to Australia had had a significant impact on her, with her work-life balance tipped the wrong way. Immense work pressure with little professional support came at the cost of her mental health. Nevertheless, Cora was keen to continue practising social work, but preferably perhaps not in frontline child protection.

### *3.3.2 The First Two Years Completed*

Steve is Scottish and was aged in his early 30s at the time of the first interview. He loves to travel and started backpacking when he turned 18. He came to Australia by himself, and his girlfriend arrived later because they had met just prior to his migration. Steve strongly identified as a social worker and prior to his migration had engaged with further studies and learning in the field. His first two years in Australian child protection service delivery were disappointing, and Steve felt very strongly that he had lost his social work voice and identity. When Steve was interviewed again two years later, the couple were married with a baby. They had relocated within Australia to be closer to Steve's English cousins. By this time, Steve had left child protection to work in the broader child and family sector but was continuing to struggle with the lack of professional recognition of social work in Australia. At the second interview, Steve shared that he felt more settled and he and his young family were enjoying the Australian lifestyle. However, with the arrival of their daughter, his wife had developed a strong desire to return to Scotland. For Steve, Australia was home now, although he had not yet landed his ideal social work job.

Janine, aged in her late 40s at the time of the first interview, migrated with her husband from England to Australia on an impulse. Their two adult children decided to stay in England. Janine had longstanding experience in leadership roles within child protection service delivery. Soon after arriving, Janine realised that the job she had accepted was far below her level of experience and expertise. When she tried to raise this with the organisation, she was told she had signed the contract and that was it. During the interview, Janine reflected that she should have done her homework better. As a result, she felt trapped in a job with limited opportunity to practise social work and stripped of her professional identity. She described her journey as one she would not recommend to

anyone; she would never do it again. Two years later, Janine still felt distressed when she looked back at these initial experiences, which harmed her emotional wellbeing and professional confidence. By this time, Janine had moved into a senior leadership role in adult mental health that suited her career path, but she still missed practising social work in child protection. Janine and her husband had moved into a property with space for their horses, and she was looking forward to her children visiting and perhaps migrating to Australia.

Peter, aged 54 at the time of the first interview, is an Irish social worker with a master's degree in care and protection and a postgraduate certificate in child development and trauma. He arrived in Australia with 16 years' experience in statutory child protection. In Ireland, he had been a manager overseeing a large team of social workers. Peter had arrived in Australia about 17 months prior to his participation in the research, and had viewed coming here as an opportunity for an adventure. He saw Australia as a place with more sun and space than his home country offered, and possibly as a good place to retire down the track. He migrated together with his wife and their three children. He anticipated that social work in child protection in Australia would be similar to the Irish context. Peter had accepted a frontline role as a case manager, and in hindsight called himself naïve, for he had not thoroughly investigated this role prior to accepting it. Peter felt distressed by the nature of the work he was directed to undertake, and experienced a limited ability to influence or make decisions that drew on his knowledge and expertise. The transnational experience thus emerged as a bleak period in Peter's professional career, and at the time of the interview he and his wife were contemplating returning home. Peter declined to be interviewed again.

Sandra, aged in her late 30s at the time of the first interview, arrived in Australia from England together with her husband and their two dogs. By this time, she had been

in Australia for 19 months, prior to which she had worked for 14 years in British child protection programs and had been a senior manager overseeing 40 social workers in a local authority. Sandra and her husband had undertaken online research into a church they wanted to join; and soon after landing in Australia on a Thursday, they attended the church on the following Sunday, where they were warmly welcomed by the community. Sandra experienced challenges at work and struggled to fit in, to the extent that she became ill. When re-interviewed two years later Sandra had moved into a policy role. Working in frontline child protection had been difficult for Sandra and she felt that policy was a better fit for her. The church remained important for the couple and during challenging times they received much support from their congregation.

William, aged in his early 40s at the time of the first interview, had migrated from Wales with his wife and three children two years prior; their migration was planned as a permanent one. William presented as pragmatic; he believed you must work hard to achieve things in life. William experienced Australia as a country with many more opportunities than Wales could offer, both for himself and his children. He felt he had ‘done’ his 18 months in frontline child protection, and at the time of the first interview William was on unpaid leave from the department, working as a carpenter. After his initial experiences in child protection, he needed some time to breathe and rethink what he wanted to do next. He felt the department had judged him for his gender and his tattoos, handing him one challenging client after another. By the time of the second interview, William had left the department to work in a non-government agency as a manager, a role that better suited his skills and expertise. He looked back on his experiences as challenging; however, the nature of the work was what he had expected and the overall outcomes for his family had been positive. William had not been back to Wales but was planning a trip there with his family. William had previously had a

difficult relationship with his family back in Wales. However, his father had visited William in Australia, providing the two with the opportunity to reconnect, and for William's father to be a grandfather to William's children. Therefore, William felt ready for a visit to his home country.

Nathalie migrated from Scotland to Australia to travel and for adventure. She was aged in her mid-20s and single at the time of the first interview. Following her graduation, she had worked for two years in child protection in a rural Scottish community. By the first interview, Nathalie had been practising in child protection in Australia for two years, having held three different roles in frontline child protection teams. Nathalie experienced the lack of qualified social workers on the floor as challenging; as a novice social worker, she was directed to undertake complex casework. In the month prior to the interview, she had removed four babies from their families, and she was feeling the emotional burden. Nevertheless, the opportunity to travel in the southern part of the world, combined with a role in child protection, meant that she felt the migration was a good decision. When Nathalie was re-interviewed two years later, she had moved interstate to take a team leader role in a child protection department. It had been tough, and she felt she was slowly becoming part of a toxic system that fails to nurture frontline staff. The pressure at work also heightened her sense of missing home and she had decided to return to Scotland and have a career break from child protection.

Kaleen is an English-trained social worker, who was single and aged in her mid-20s at the time of the first interview, and had arrived at the end of her first two-year contract. For Kaleen, Australia had been a great place to travel to but she felt her current location was not ideal. She was on the lookout for another social work position in another state or country. Kaleen was placed in the intake team but a shortage of staff in the investigation team meant she was constantly pulled back and forth and this doubled her



workload. Kaleen described her role as that of a case manager, and not in line with what she was recruited for as a qualified social worker. Kaleen experienced the morale at work as low, with everyone under pressure, resulting in high staff turnover. By the time she was invited for a second interview, Kaleen had gone home to England and was not planning to return to Australia, so did not participate in a follow-up interview.

### *3.3.3 Long-term Residents*

Michael is an Australian citizen who, at the time of the first interview, was aged in his early 40s. He had migrated with his family from Wales nearly 10 years prior. For Michael, international social work recruitment represented a golden ticket to Australia. He found his professional purpose as a team leader of an out-of-home-care program and emphasised the importance of separating work and private life to remain sane in child protection practice. Michael presented as firmly grounded in Australia and referred to his children as Australian with Welsh heritage. He had created a strong network of 'Australian' family and had not returned once to visit his homeland. At the time of the second interview, Michael was still enjoying the leadership role that he referred to as a job in public services more than a social work role. Michael's parents had moved to Australia to retire. However, the change in family dynamics resulting from the migration had not been easy, and Michael was raising his children as Australian and keeping his Welsh parents at a distance. His parents reminded him of the younger self he had left behind back home.

At the time of the first interview, Martina was aged in her late 30s and had migrated with her husband and two sons from Ireland four years prior. They had relocated with only four suitcases, which made Martina aware of what is most important in life – good health and family adventures. A third child was born in Australia, which caused her to feel rather isolated. Once she returned to work things were a bit more

balanced. Martina felt positive about the opportunities provided by her department and by her current role in case management. However, the first years had been tough, and Martina shared that she had been micromanaged by inexperienced team leaders. At the time of the second interview, Martina was still working in the case management team. Two of her children were about to leave the family home and Martina and her husband were dreaming about moving elsewhere in Australia. They had started looking at real estate, job openings and a new school for their youngest daughter. They fell in love with the lifestyle and are now Australian citizens.

Ellie is a Scottish social worker, aged in her late 30s at the time of the first interview. She had relocated to Australia eight years prior, together with her husband and their four children. They had migrated with the aim of providing more opportunities for their children, and had left behind a deprived village in Scotland. Nevertheless, the new life had not been easy. Ellie arrived with little practice experience and was promoted to the role of team leader within three weeks. Looking back, she felt that she had embarked on this leadership role without adequate support, and after four years she experienced a major burnout. After this, she never felt the same and needed to leave frontline child protection. At the time of the interview she was enjoying her current role in a community health service but missed child protection and being a social worker. By the time she was re-interviewed, Ellie had returned to social work and felt she was thriving in delivering school-based social work. The AASW does not recognise her British social work diploma, and this remained a sore point for Ellie. Besides that, she has never regretted coming to Australia and would do it all again, as she felt her family had become so much stronger for the experience.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter provided short vignettes of the 13 transnational social workers who participated in this study to provide context to their stories by offering a snapshot of their personal and professional backgrounds. The narrative study investigated the participants' experience of professional migration across two points in time to add their perspectives to the emerging body of research about transnational social work in the Australian context. In the next chapter, I present a second publication that examined the professional experience of child protection practice in an unfamiliar environment, as the first of three publications emerging from the narrative-informed research study.

## **Chapter 4: Transnational Social Workers' Lived Experience in Statutory Child Protection**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Chapter 3 provided brief vignettes introducing the reader to the 13 transnational social workers who participated in the study. This chapter presents the second in the series of four articles contained in this thesis, which and addresses the second research sub-question: What is the lived experience of transnational social workers in the context of professional migration? The article draws on rich qualitative data obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 13 transnational social workers across two points in time. The concurrent experience of migration and child protection practice is explored in this publication. This is of importance to the body of social work literature as it provides insight into the experience of professional social work migration as a significant life event. The findings demonstrate that the emotionally complex work of child protection intersects with the loss of personal and professional belonging that comes with an unfamiliar practice environment.

Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) attachment theory informed the data analysis that explored the loss of professional belonging, loss of a secure base, loss of professional identity, and loss of formal and informal networks. A narrative research design enabled the analysis of the big and small stories shared by the participants (Bamberg, 2006; Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Phoenix & Sparkes, 2009). This approach facilitated deep exploration of two specific yet intersecting identities: a social worker in child protection and a migrant professional. Attending to the reviewers' critical feedback strengthened this paper, which involved refining the theoretical framework and demonstrating in the discussion section how the concepts were utilised analytically. The journal reviewers acknowledged the contribution of the paper upon acceptance, noting that: 'Your study

makes a valuable contribution to social work practice and adds significant knowledge to the field of migration, particularly of transnational social workers.’

This article was accepted for publication in the *European Journal of Social Work* on 20 August 2018 and was published on Taylor & Francis online on 31 August 2018. It is this journal's practice to publish the title, keywords and abstract of the paper in a second language in addition to English, commonly the author's first language or a language of the country from which the paper is submitted. Therefore, this paper has a bilingual introduction, in English and in Dutch, my second language following my Frisian mother tongue. The paper is available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2018.1517114>

I am the first author of the article and responsible for 70 percent of the manuscript presentation, including the data collection. I completed the first draft and amendments based on feedback provided by the co-authors. I was responsible for the submission of the article and for the revisions following the blind peer-reviewed process. The second and third authors are members of my supervisory team and together contributed 30 percent of the manuscript preparation. Importantly, their facilitation of supervision guided my developing research expertise in applying a narrative-informed research design and critical exploration of the data. The iterative process of writing this paper led to discussions and insight in supervision, with the third and second authors contributing to the ideas expressed in and the editing of the paper. This enabled the meanings as expressed by the research participants to be translated as authentically as possible in the research findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

The *European Journal of Social Work* is an international peer-reviewed journal that analyses and promotes European and international developments in social work,

social policy, social service institutions, and strategies for social change. The SCImago journal ranking report shows that the *European Journal of Social Work* is ranked in the second quartile of journals publishing original research in the fields of social science, social work, sociology, and political science. The journal is recognised for the Higher Education Research Data Collection. The journal's 2018 Impact Factor was 0.5 and its H index is currently 17. The paper was published in accordance with the *European Journal of Social Work* author guidelines. The copyright conditions of the publisher allow for the inclusion of the paper in this PhD dissertation.

The full citation of the article is:

Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2018). Transnational social workers' lived experience in statutory child protection. *European Journal of Social Work*, 23(4), 645-657. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2018.1517114>

## Transnational social workers' lived experience in statutory child protection

### De ervaringen van geëmigreerde maatschappelijk werkers werkzaam in de jeugdhulpverlening binnen het gedwongen kader

Corina Modderman<sup>a</sup>, Guinever Threlkeld<sup>b</sup> and Lynne McPherson<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Social Work & Social Policy, La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, Shepparton, VIC, Australia; <sup>b</sup>Social Work & Social Policy, La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, University Drive, Wodonga, VIC, Australia; <sup>c</sup>School of Arts and Social Sciences, Southern Cross University, Coolangatta, QLD, Australia

#### ABSTRACT

The experience of loss and grief affects migrating social workers who enter an unfamiliar child protection environment. This paper highlights themes that emerged from the narratives of 13 transnational social workers, who were educated and practised in the United Kingdom or Ireland before being recruited to Australia's statutory child protection workforce. The recruitment of social workers from overseas is an approach used across Australia to backfill a continuous shortage of frontline child protection staff. The effectiveness of this strategy remains largely unexamined. This narrative-informed study investigated the process of professional experience as a child protection practitioner and the personal experience of migration. Two data collection points enabled exploration of the experience over time. Participants reported a loss of personal and professional belonging during the concurrent experiences of migration and adaptation to an unfamiliar practice environment. The findings suggest that in light of the complex and emotionally charged nature of child protection practice, raised awareness and better support are needed for transnational social workers who, as new migrants themselves, are experiencing a profound and life-changing event.

#### SAMENVATTING

Het komt veelvuldig voor dat maatschappelijk werkers emigreren voor een functie in de gedwongen jeugdhulpverlening binnen de landen van het Gemenebest: Australië, Ierland en het Verenigd Koninkrijk. Het internationaal werven van uitvoerende krachten is een aanpak die in heel Australië wordt toegepast om het aanhoudende personeelstekort op te lossen. Er is echter nog weinig bekend over de effectiviteit van deze aanpak. Maatschappelijk werkers die emigreren naar Australië komen terecht in een uitvoeringspraktijk die anders is dan de praktijk die zij gewend zijn vanuit hun opleiding en werkervaring, en dat kan gevoelens van gemis en verlies veroorzaken. Dit artikel belicht thema's die naar voren komen uit narratieve interviews met 13 geëmigreerde maatschappelijk werkers. Zij werden opgeleid en werkten in het Verenigd Koninkrijk of Ierland voordat ze naar Australië emigreerden. Door middel van narratieve analyse werd hun professionele ervaring als maatschappelijk werker en hun persoonlijke ervaring rondom emigratie onderzocht. Er werden

#### KEYWORDS

Transnational social workers; child protection; migration; loss

#### TREFWOORDEN

geëmigreerde maatschappelijk werkers; gedwongen jeugdhulpverlening; emigratie; gemis en verlies

**CONTACT** Corina Modderman ✉ c.modderman@latrobe.edu.au 📧 Department of Social Work & Social Policy, La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, 210 Fryers St., Shepparton, VIC 3630, Australia

© 2018 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



gegevens verzameld op twee peilmomenten, zodat het mogelijk werd om een ontwikkeling in deze processen door de tijd heen zichtbaar te maken. De deelnemers aan het onderzoek rapporteerden dat zij zowel persoonlijk als professioneel de ervaring hebben er 'niet bij te horen' als gevolg van hun emigratie en het moeten aanpassen aan de nieuwe context van het maatschappelijk werk. Het werken in de gedwongen jeugdhulpverlening is in zichzelf al complex en emotioneel beladen. De kwetsbaarheid van maatschappelijk werkers wordt nog vergroot als de heersende praktijk en het sociale veld voor hen onbekend is. De bevindingen wijzen erop dat er meer bewustwording en ondersteuning nodig is voor deze groep maatschappelijk werkers, die als emigranten een ingrijpende levensgebeurtenis meemaken.

## Introduction

Migrating social workers practising in the field of statutory child protection are examined in research from the United Kingdom (Hanna & Lyons, 2016; Hatzidimitriadou & Psinos, 2017; Hussein, 2014), New Zealand (Bartley et al., 2011; Beddoe, Fouché, Bartley, & Harington, 2012; Fouché, Beddoe, Bartley, & Brenton, 2014; Fouché, Beddoe, Bartley, & Parkes, 2015), Canada (Brown, Sansfacon, Ethier, & Fulton, 2014; Pullen Sansfacon, Brown, Graham, & Dumais Michaud, 2014) and to a lesser extent Australia (Bartley, 2018; Modderman, Threlkeld, & McPherson, 2017; Papadopoulos, 2017; Zubrzycki, Thomson, & Trevithick, 2008). These countries have a shared tradition of international recruitment to address labour shortages (Modderman et al., 2017). The precise number of overseas-trained social workers in Australia is difficult to determine due to a lack of published data on migration routes (Papadopoulos, 2017). Social work mobility offers an opportunity for an international career in a profession unified by a set of values and ethics. Guiding the profession globally, the International Federation of Social Workers' definition includes social justice and human rights together with a commitment to promoting social change and development, social cohesion and empowerment of people, whilst acknowledging the contextually driven nature of the profession (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014; Jones & Truell, 2012). Transnational social workers (TNSWs), who have been trained outside their country of practice and are utilising their social work training across borders (Hussein, 2014), may be challenged by the context and discourse that influence local social work practice. This raises questions concerning responsibility for facilitating TNSWs' transition to the new context and professional environment (Bartley & Beddoe, 2018; Payne & Askeland, 2008; Peter, Bartley, & Beddoe, 2017). At present, the profession lacks a coherent approach to offering programmes to support transition across jurisdictions (Bartley & Beddoe, 2018; Modderman et al., 2017).

TNSWs recruited to statutory child protection in Australia are required to develop an understanding of local history and the political and practice context whilst managing complex and stressful work (Lonne, Harries, & Lantz, 2013; Scott, 2006). Concurrently TNSWs are experiencing the significant life event of migration, which may involve multiple losses and reactions similar to the expression of grief (Arrendondo-Dowd, 1981; Schneller, 1981). This study examines the lived experiences of transnational social workers from Ireland and the United Kingdom (UK) migrating to Australia, drawing on Bowlby's (1961, 1969, 1973, 1980) theory of attachment and loss. Migration may expose individuals to different ways of life and social work practice. This paper argues that this professional migration also involves multiple and significant experiences of loss.

## The challenges of child protection service delivery in Australia

Social work is a profession in Australia with no formal registration arrangements and, unlike in the UK and Ireland, is not subject to government regulation (Lonne & Duke, 2008; Martin & Healy, 2010; Tilbury, Hughes, Bigby, & Osmond, 2015; Walsh, Wilson, & O'Connor, 2010). Australia does not



have a national child protection system; rather each state and territory has its own legislation and service approach (Healy & Olstedal, 2010). In this paper, 'child protection' is the term used to describe social work in statutory government services, in the UK or Northern America also referred to as 'social care' or 'child welfare' (Modderman et al., 2017). While international research is relevant to Australian child protection, the context for practice is different, with particular demographic, cultural and historical factors to be taken into account (Tilbury et al., 2015). For example, a high rate of racial disparity has endured, with Indigenous children seven times more likely to receive a child protection service than non-Indigenous children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2017; Delfabbro, Hirte, Rogers, & Wilson, 2010; Tilbury, 2004).

The protection of children from abuse and neglect is a complex social problem, with the quality of child protection services routinely subject to media and public criticism (Tilbury et al., 2015). Similarly to the UK, Europe and Northern America, research shows Australian child protection staff experience high levels of stress (Littlechild et al., 2016; Lonne et al., 2013; Tham, 2006; Travis, Lizano, & Mor Barak, 2016). UK and Northern American research reveal child protection as characterised by high job demands, high caseloads, high stress and need for quality supervision (McFadden, Mallett, & Leiter, 2016; Travis et al., 2016). Australian scholars critique Australian child protection service delivery as being rule-bound and risk-averse, with staff, managers and clients colliding in the midst of competing fears and demands (Hansen & Ainsworth, 2013; Lonne et al., 2013; Sammut, 2011; Scott, 2010). A career in child protection in Australia is known to be demanding, with high levels of staff turnover and concerning levels of inexperienced staff in frontline practice (Healy & Lonne, 2010; Healy, Meagher, & Cullin, 2009). Powerful emotions may be evoked by investigations of abuse and neglect, child removals and emotional visitations with parents and foster carers (Caringi, Lawson, & Devlin, 2012). The nature of the work poses challenges for practitioners and managers (Gibbs, 2001, 2009; Morrison, 2007, 2010), with tension emerging between the dual roles of 'mandated intervener' and 'helper' (Healy & Meagher, 2007). Child protection practitioners face a high risk of burnout, attributed to the emotional impact of their work and organisational factors (Ben Shlomo & Levin-Keini, 2014; McFadden et al., 2016; Morrison, 1990).

In Australia, a career in child protection is not attractive to sufficient local practitioners, so child protection departments face challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified staff (Bromfield & Holzer, 2008; Hansen & Ainsworth, 2013; Lonne et al., 2013). International social work recruitment is one strategy to backfill this shortage of social workers in the demanding field of child protection. However, little research has examined the effectiveness of this approach (Harrison, 2018; McArthur, Thomson, Barker, Winkworth, & Campus, 2012; Modderman et al., 2017). TNSWs in Australia fill critical staff shortages and are generally expected to practise immediately and without orientation to the network of everyday relationships (Bartley, 2018). There is a knowledge gap in relation to the tension between social workers' personal migration experience and professional experience in the emotionally charged and complex child protection practice environment (Modderman et al., 2017).

### **Migration, attachment, and loss**

A significant body of research reports on the loss and grief associated with migration (Arrendondo-Dowd, 1981; Fisher, 1989; Garza-Guerrero, 1974; Harrington, Casado, & Hong, 2010; Henry, Stiles, & Biran, 2005; Nelson, 2010; Schneller, 1981; Ward & Styles, 2005). Migration is not a single life event but an experience of multiple interrelated life changes, entailing various forms of loss of attachment (Arrendondo-Dowd, 1981; Garza-Guerrero, 1974; Lee, 2010; Schneller, 1981). People attach to other people and also to their values, community, profession, and organisation. Disruption to these connections requires emotional adjustment that can cause both exhilaration and pain (Akhtar, 1999; Arrendondo-Dowd, 1981; Garza-Guerrero, 1974). Attachments are the 'hub' around which a person's life revolves from cradle to grave, providing a secure base to which to return when exploring the world (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). By adulthood, most individuals have developed a range of attachments that contribute to their sense of a secure base - relationships that help to restore emotional

balance and provide comfort in times of need (Biggart, Ward, Cook, & Schofield, 2017; Howe, 2011). Migration may disrupt these affectional bonds and resistance to these changes may emerge (Doka, 1989; Parkes, 1971; Schneller, 1981). The perceived loss of the homeland may result in an expression of grief – similar to that of a person who has lost a loved one – that is commonly described as homesickness (Arrendondo-Dowd, 1981; Fisher, 1989; Garza-Guerrero, 1974; Lee, 2010). Migrants may experience stress due to a lack of support networks such as were available back home, which may impact on both physical and mental health (Fisher, 1989; van Tilburg, Vingerhoets, & van Heck, 1996). The experience of loss and separation may result in emotional reactions of shock, protest, despair, sadness and finally reorganisation of attachments (Bowlby, 1960, 1961). Loss is best understood as a process, unique for each person in which the bond with the homeland may continue to exist in some form (Field, Gao, & Paderna, 2005; Harrington et al., 2010; Howe, 2011). Garza-Guerrero (1974) suggests that to survive the impact of migration a person must generate a new identity to facilitate living in the new environment. This paper will explore TNSWs' lived experience of migration, attachment and loss in the emotionally charged field of child protection.

### Research methodology and method

This study investigated the question: 'what is the lived experience of transnational social workers in the context of professional migration?' As the answers to the research question were embedded within lived experience, a qualitative approach was required (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Silverman, 2013). A narrative-informed research design was used for data collection and analysis. TNSWs with relevant experience and knowledge were invited to tell their story (Elliott, 2005; Mishler, 1995). Informed consent was sought from and granted by participants. Particular care was taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, including de-identification of personal details. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling to target social workers from the UK and Ireland who migrated to Australia to practise in frontline child protection (Ezzy, 2010; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). The sample was restricted to these countries because they share a history of overseas social work recruitment (Bartley, Beddoe, Fouché, & Harrington, 2012; Evans, Huxley, & Munroe, 2006; Hussein, Manthorpe, & Stevens, 2010; Modderman et al., 2017; Zubrzycki et al., 2008). The inclusion criteria required participants to have at least six months experience in child protection practice within the UK or Ireland before arriving in Australia, to enable reflection on the differing practice context.

Recruitment was facilitated by senior staff in the child protection department, via email invitation to UK and Irish social workers. This strategy resulted in the recruitment of ten participants who were interviewed in late 2013. In 2015, purposive recruitment of three additional participants enabled comparison of newly arrived TNSWs and those two years post arrival (Table 1). The study site was a metropolitan area and is not disclosed to ensure confidentiality.

Semi-structured face to face and telephone interviews were used to collect data. The second round of data collection in 2016 enabled ten of the initial participants to be re-interviewed, in order to illuminate the construction of migration and change over time (Bamberg, 2012). The first phase of data analysis focussed on familiarisation with the data set through repeated reading of interview transcripts and listening to the audio-recordings. Subsequent phases of analysis were guided by thematic analysis to interrogate narratives for reflection on events and experiences (Mishler, 1995;

**Table 1.** Demographics of participants.

Gender		Age-group (in years)		Length of stay in Australia at interview 1 (in years)	
Female	9	20–30	2	Less than 1	3
Male	4	31–40	7	1–2	7
		41–50	3	2–3	1
		51 and older	1	More than 4	2



Riessman, 2008). Thematic analysis emphasised the 'big stories' comprised of intersecting life determining experiences, such as personal migration and being a child protection social worker in a new context (Bamberg, 2006). The second round of data analysis closely examined the content of the everyday snippets of talk that occurred between the researcher and participants. This process identified 'small stories' about unfolding and anticipated events that recurred across the interviews (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013). These small stories provided an opportunity to explore how the meaning of experience was constructed and influenced by context (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). Throughout this study, attention was given to the accounts of TNSWs in order to understand how big and small stories operate together to shape the two specific and intersecting identities present in the narratives: a social worker in child protection practice and a migrant (Freeman, 2006; Phoenix & Sparkes, 2009).

Ethical approval was granted by the La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee in July 2013 (HEC13-019) and extended in 2016. Ethical approval was also granted by the organisation in which participants were recruited.

Narrative researchers cannot claim to understand participants' meanings exactly, yet must endeavour to interpret meanings as authentically as possible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In this study, trustworthiness and authenticity of the data were assured through providing participants with a copy of their interview transcript for verification. Extensive discussion of the narratives by the research team provided rigour and credibility to research findings in which participants' voices were privileged (Finlay, 2003; Polkinghorne, 2007). A comparative approach explored the diversity of narratives, with similarities and differences reported in the findings (Downey, Threlkeld, & Warburton, 2016). Finally, a rich description of the context enables readers to consider the transferability of findings to other sites (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## Findings

The findings are presented in three sections that report the themes of the big stories that emerged from the analysis of the data. Three big stories of intersecting life-determining experiences (Bamberg, 2006) were constructed by the participants. (1) 'I am a social worker' presents the strong connection to their profession that participants emphasised during the interviews. (2) 'The migration journey' illustrates the personal migration experience. (3) 'Child protection practice' highlights the additional layer of the challenging environment in which TNSWs operate. The small stories were interlaced with these big stories and assisted interpretation of meaning. They revealed the participants' experience of lack of agency in both the professional and personal domains of life. Big and small stories provided a richer understanding of identity construction as a migrant social worker in unfamiliar territory (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2006).

### *I am a social worker*

Participants constructed their migration to Australia as an opportunity to travel, combined with an interesting social work role in statutory child protection. Success in recruitment based on social work expertise provided a sense of achievement. Initial contractual arrangements tied participants to the recruiting organisation through a two-year bond. Upon entering the workforce, however, participants quickly realised that they were ill-prepared and that information offered in the UK or Ireland was sometimes more appealing than the reality:

I'd long hankered to travel and thought it sounded like a wonderful social work opportunity. I think retrospectively it was perhaps naïve of me not to have looked closer at just exactly what a child protection worker post entails. I hadn't been insightful enough to think the service structure was going to be something very different. (Pete)

The migrating social workers' professional status was undermined on arrival when they were directed not to use their social work title. A strong theme across the interviews was the desire to remain attached to the professional status of social work. Participants felt deceived by the marketing and recruitment campaign:

We were employed as social workers, that's how it was told to us but when we got here, we were caseworkers and we have only recently been told that we are not allowed to use the title of social worker. (Fi)

The difference in child protection service delivery and the diverse qualifications of the Australian workforce conflicted with social work as constructed back home. This separated participants from what they valued as their core endeavour – social work with children and their families:

Everyone is a social worker back home, here you don't have that professional connectedness. (Anita)

Participants were confused by induction programmes that failed to acknowledge their experience. Those interviewed perceived a lack of social work driven supervision, reflective practice and training, and this challenged recruits to find their professional voice in the new environment. The approach taken by the recruiting organisation did not align with the participants' construction of social work theory and practice. The attachment to the profession, once felt as a secure base, was experienced as broken and irreparable. This challenged understanding of the organisation, local context of practice and position of self:

I was angry, felt that my profession has been torn to shreds and I have been disempowered in terms of what I originally I came here to do. This organisation is deskilling me from everything I learned and brought with me. (Michael)

Michael's anger centred on an unsuccessful application for a position away from frontline child protection within the host organisation. This event had the impact of fuelling further grief for not being recognised for his social work skills. The small stories in the interviews show the relationship between participants' experienced agency and their positioning in relation to these events (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). Participants felt trapped and under-valued and used metaphors such as being 'just a bum on a seat' or 'having a two-year prison sentence'. Participants experienced little agency to influence their new environment during their first two years post-migration. Reasons for this sense of inability included tangible implications for personal financial security, visa requirements and concern for the co-migrating family.

Analysis of small stories showed confusion around identity and position within the organisation. A sense of despair and feeling drained by both the organisational culture and the nature of child protection practice were reported frequently. Initially, most idealised social work back at home, with anger directed to the new mode of practice and bureaucracy. Despair was more than a phase of anger and apathy, as it also triggered participants to a phase of reorganisation, with response to loss and grief leading to forging connections. Not all participants followed this sequence. Some felt impatient when other transnational recruits expressed grief. Ken uses metaphorical language to separate himself from what he constructs as the 'British whingers':

Surely you must have known when you signed up to come over here it wasn't going to be Jingle Bells, I said to numerous people 'you need to focus on the big picture, i.e. 24 months – you do the time and then it's a gateway'. (Ken)

Participants initially bonded over reflections on local staff not being qualified social workers or new recruit fatigue. Over time some of these connections weakened and the intersection of professional and personal boundaries was recognised as impacting on work culture:

... then six months passed and they actually realised that I wouldn't actually be your friend in England. Two years is not a long time in child protection, but if it's somewhere you don't want to be, it's a considerably long time ... the stuff that then grows arms and legs with that is almost toxic, people get homesick, people get disgruntled, people go looking, and it spreads. Happiness doesn't spread as fast, but misery spreads like wildfire ... (Anita)

### ***The migration journey***

Along with the experience of disconnection from professional belonging, participants reflected on the experience of being a migrant. Participants anticipated that much would be similar to the UK or Ireland, given the ties between countries:

You think, well, it's an English speaking country. Traditionally and historically it's been supplanted by British natives, but it's a totally different humour here as well. It is very subtle, I miss English humour. (Jim)

Participants felt uprooted from their homeland and professional context and rebuilding connections was challenging. Personal experiences were shared through small stories about the impact of migration on intimate relationships. Participants did not mention the word homesickness a great deal, yet the small stories revealed the yearning for family, friends and familiar humour. Creating new connections required resilience and persistence. With time, new relationships were formed and life was reorganised around the new home:

I've got somebody that reminds me of my mum. I've got somebody that is like a sister, I've got somebody that's like – it's hard work. They never just fell in my lap overnight. You have to make the effort and you have to be really driven. (Anita)

Participants described adapting to everyday life and even then, unexpected triggers could cause a longing for home:

I was in a shop and I heard Christmas music. Now, I'm not a big fan of Christmas at home, but being in the heat and hearing Christmas music, I thought this was just not right, Christmas should be in the cold. (Sue)

Younger recruits reported their migration experience as more temporary and open-ended, with less strain on existing or new relationships. The freedom to work and travel suited their age and stage in life, and did not entail relocating family or selling property:

I didn't want to buy a car in England because I wanted to come to Australia, I didn't want to buy a house because I wanted to go to Australia, I didn't even have a plant or a pet because I was ready to go ... I want to follow my dream and go to Australia. (Kate)

Those participants with co-migrating family constructed the move to Australia as more permanent. They felt loss and the continuing bond with the homeland, yet understood the immediate future through their children:

It's always something that maybe crops up. We're human. You need that sense of belonging and sometimes you pine for certain things. Particularly family, friends or networks that I left to come over here. But when you weigh up the lifestyle and how my children are developing; it really is a no-brainer. At the end of the day, I'm not saying I would never go back. But my take on this is to provide the best for my children and my children will then be in a position to make decisions themselves. (Ken)

### ***Child protection practice***

Experience of the importance of identity as a social worker and the challenges of the migration journey coincided with the emotional complexity of frontline child protection practice. The demanding nature of the role is wrapped around the migration experience:

I think sometimes I find myself dreaming about clients ... we often forget how consuming it can be, the job. The area that we're in, it never stops; there is never a moment where we go 'right everybody, breathe'. (Sue)

Small stories emphasised the child protection work 'catching up' on participants. The accumulation of emotionally charged experiences was not easily shared with those not involved in the daily demands of child protection:

I think it either makes or breaks you, it is incredibly demanding and I think only other child protection workers can understand this ... The things that happen in child protection every day, there are big cases that fall to pieces, or



kids with serious injuries, or burns, and you just muddle through. And then one day that's going to catch up on you. (Anna)

The emotional impact of child protection was frequently discussed and re-lived during the interviews. The majority of participants experienced the office culture, management, and bureaucracy sometimes as more challenging than the interaction with clients. Migration, loss of support networks and work stress intersected:

The situation at work is what's causing a certain amount of stress which means it's hard for me to come home and be strong for my husband and strong for my daughter ... I'm socially isolated because I don't have family. And the fact that I'm now off work is causing me even more depression because I don't even have people at work to kind of get me through the day. (Helen)

Throughout the narratives of lost personal and professional belonging and the demands of child protection practice, participants expressed a strong commitment to child protection social work. The majority of participants changed roles after two years due to the pressure and emotional demands of frontline practice. The experience of separation from child protection practice triggered further feelings of loss.

## Discussion

Stress associated with child protection practice is well-documented (DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008; McFadden et al., 2016; Morrison, 1990; Travis et al., 2016), yet little is known about the additional stressors TNSWs in child protection experience in the context of migration. Arriving in a new environment may cause friction between the organisational imperative to deliver services and the everyday professional and personal needs of new arrivals as they negotiate a new home (Modderman et al., 2017). The findings indicate separation from the homeland triggers a grieving process in which participants need to reach the stage of reorganisation to re-invent themselves professionally as social workers and as newcomers in an unfamiliar environment (Akhtar, 1999). The loss of the secure base to return to when life is stressful affected participants' sense of agency during the period of transition (Bowlby, 1969).

Consistent with other reported findings, participants in this study underestimated the enormity of the transition through anticipating a comparable professional context in Anglophone countries (Fouché et al., 2015; Zubrzycki et al., 2008). Results from this study show that the majority of participants viewed themselves as experienced social workers, firmly anchored in child protection practice. Loss of professional belonging and experience of the new mode of practice as stressful impacted on the secure base previously grounded in the role of social worker in the UK or Ireland. Results from this study confirm that the framing of child protection practice with social work theory is important for TNSWs. The small stories indicated that participants tried to influence the new practice context but lacked a sense of agency and felt unable to exercise previously held professional authority. Participants strongly voiced their need for connection with the social work profession. Hence, it appears important for TNSWs to be able to use their social work title to remain attached to the profession, to feel valued and respected. The findings indicate that a strategy of validation of professional status and experience during induction and beyond may better support transition into the new practice environment (Beddoe et al., 2012; Fouché et al., 2014; Modderman et al., 2017).

Loss of a secure professional base was not the only challenge described by participants. Social workers in this study were also migrants in the process of building bridges between past and present lives, reinventing a personal sense of self (Akhtar, 1999; Garza-Guerrero, 1974; Schneller, 1981). The experienced loss of identity as a social worker in addition to the loss of support networks resulted in protest and despair. Findings suggest the loss of professional connections is mirrored privately in the loss of family and friends. Touchstones such as the timing of seasons, Christmas and the cultural use of humour reinforced feelings of being far from home. The findings indicate pressure on

the emotional well-being of the majority of participants, possibly exacerbated by the emotionally charged nature of child protection practice. It is noteworthy that the majority of social workers in this study exited frontline child protection after the initial two-year contractual agreement.

Reflecting findings from other studies of child protection practitioners (McFadden et al., 2016; Travis et al., 2016), staff burnout and turnover were commonplace amongst participants, suggesting the receiving organisation was under-prepared for welcoming, affirming, utilising, supporting and retaining TNSWs. Participants were challenged by the professional transition, including the renegotiation of their own professional authority and identity (Fouché et al., 2014; Hanna & Lyons, 2016). The analysis confirms the accumulation of additional emotional stressors associated with child protection practice, exacerbated by the loss of formal and informal support networks. Most participants had several negative experiences, with the majority perceiving their professional development as a social worker through a pessimistic lens. The more positive experiences were found in opportunities for adventure, co-migrating children, future professional opportunities and the lifestyle associated with Australia. Re-organising oneself as a social worker was an unexpected challenge for participants who anticipated their role to be similar. Bartley (2018) identifies this as naivety in the transnational professional space. Creating a learning culture between the organisation and the individual social worker requires a more targeted approach for transnational staff. This includes recognition and assessment of existing social work skill and knowledge and learning needs for local practice (Bartley & Beddoe, 2018; Modderman et al., 2017). In addition, supervision by experienced social workers and opportunities to connect with the wider social work profession may support the important task of reorganising a secure professional base.

Professional migration is not a time-limited experience that will end post arrival. Instead, the associated experience of loss is lasting, cumulative and profound for both the professional and personal lives of participating TNSWs. Further research on the impact of professional migration on the emotionally charged work of child protection is required, including strategies for enhancing staff coping and resilience when operating in an unfamiliar practice context and use of self as a social worker. Child protection services require motivated, skilled and experienced social workers who contribute to positive outcomes for children. Strategies to better welcome, acculturate and support transnational members of this workforce may serve to benefit clients, the organisational culture and the social work profession as a whole.

## Conclusion

Migration is a significant life event and affects TNSWs differently. This study showed that the experience of loss of personal and professional belonging was exacerbated by the emotionally complex work of child protection practice. Most participants in this study had practised extensively in the UK or Ireland; however, they were not adequately prepared for lack of recognition of their social work identity, the migrant experience or the new practice context. Implications arise for both the individual social worker and the recruiting organisation, for example, the ambiguous professional status of social work in Australia. TNSWs require recognition as social workers who, as migrants, experience a profound life-changing event. An important contribution of this study lies in highlighting that whilst professional social work migration may seem attractive, the loss of personal and professional belonging and the pressure of frontline child protection practice impact significantly on emotional well-being. Further research examining the phenomenon of transnational social work is necessary to enhance outcomes for children and their families involved with child protection.

## Acknowledgements

We wish to thank all transnational social workers participating in this study and pay our respect to their strong commitment to child protection social work.



## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes on contributors

**Corina Modderman** is a lecturer in social work and social policy at the La Trobe Rural Health School, Shepparton campus. Corina has over 18 years of international experience in child protection having worked in a variety of senior leadership roles in the Netherlands, Wales, and Australia. She is currently undertaking her PhD in the topic of transnational social work practice and experience.

**Dr. Guinever Threlkeld** is a senior lecturer in social work and social policy at La Trobe University's Albury-Wodonga Campus. Her research and teaching interests are in the translation of policy into service delivery arrangements, with a focus on rural and regional communities.

**Dr. Lynne McPherson** is a senior lecturer, social work and social welfare in the School of Arts and Social Sciences, Southern Cross University Australia. Her publication and teaching interests are in the areas of child protection supervision, child, youth and family issues, postgraduate learning and harm experienced by children in sport.

## References

- Akhtar, S. (1999). *Immigration and identity: Turmoil, treatment, and transformation*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.
- Andrews, M., Squire, C., & Tamboukou, M. (2013). *Doing narrative research*. London: Sage.
- Arrendondo-Dowd, P. M. (1981). Personal loss and grief as a result of immigration. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 59(6), 376–378.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2017). *Child Protection Australia 2015–16*. Retrieved from <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-abuse-and-neglect-statistics>
- Bamberg, M. (2006). Biographic-narrative research, *quo vadis?* A critical review of 'big stories' from the perspective of 'small stories'. In C. H. K. Milnes, B. Roberts, & D. Robinson (Eds.), *Narrative, memory & knowledge: Representations, aesthetics, contexts* (pp. 63–79). Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Press.
- Bamberg, M. (2012). Why narrative? *Narrative Inquiry*, 22(1), 202–210.
- Bamberg, M., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2008). Small stories as a new perspective in narrative and identity analysis. *Text & Talk*, 28(3), 377–396.
- Bartley, A. (2018). Transnational social workers in Australia: Naivety in the transnational professional space. In A. Bartley & L. Beddoe (Eds.), *Transnational social work: Opportunities and challenges of a global profession* (pp. 89–106). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Bartley, A., & Beddoe, L. (2018). *Transnational social work: Opportunities and challenges of a global profession*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Bartley, A., Beddoe, L., Duke, J., Fouché, C., Harington, P., & Shah, R. (2011). Crossing borders: Key features of migrant social workers in New Zealand. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, 23(3), 16–30.
- Bartley, A., Beddoe, L., Fouché, C., & Harington, P. (2012). Transnational social workers: Making the profession a transnational professional space. *International Journal of Population Research*, 11. doi:10.1155/2012/527510
- Beddoe, L., Fouché, C., Bartley, A., & Harington, P. (2012). Migrant social workers' experience in New Zealand: Education and supervision issues. *Social Work Education*, 31(8), 1012–1031.
- Ben Shlomo, S., & Levin-Keini, N. (2014). Who owns the trauma? A Kleinian perspective on the dialogue between child protection social workers and the media. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(1), 146–154.
- Biggart, L., Ward, E., Cook, L., & Schofield, G. (2017). The team as a secure base: Promoting resilience and competence in child and family social work. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 83, 119–130.
- Bowlby, J. (1960). Separation anxiety. *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 41, 89–113.
- Bowlby, J. (1961). Processes of mourning. *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 42, 317–340.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss* (Vol. 1). London: Hogarth Press.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss* (Vol. 2). New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1980). *Attachment and loss* (Vol. 3). New York: Basic Books.
- Bromfield, L., & Holzer, P. (2008). *A national approach for child protection*. Melbourne: National Child Protection Clearinghouse, Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Brown, M., Sansfacon, A. P., Ethier, S., & Fulton, A. (2014). A complicated welcome: Social workers navigate policy, organizational contexts and socio-cultural dynamics following migration to Canada. *International Journal of Social Science Studies*, 3(1), 58–68.
- Caringi, J. C., Lawson, H. A., & Devlin, M. (2012). Planning for emotional labor and secondary traumatic stress in child welfare organizations. *Journal of Family Strengths*, 12(1), 11.



- Delfabbro, P., Hirte, C., Rogers, N., & Wilson, R. (2010). The over-representation of young aboriginal or Torres Strait islander people in the South Australian child system: A longitudinal analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32(10), 1418–1425.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative enquiry* (3rd ed., pp. 1–43). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- DePanfilis, D., & Zlotnik, J. L. (2008). Retention of front-line staff in child welfare: A systematic review of research. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30(9), 995–1008. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.12.017
- Doka, K. J. (1989). *Disenfranchised grief: Recognizing hidden sorrow*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Downey, H., Threlkeld, G., & Warburton, J. (2016). How do older Australian farming couples construct generativity across the life course?: A narrative exploration. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 38, 57–69.
- Elliott, J. (2005). *Using narrative in social research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. London: Sage.
- Evans, S., Huxley, P., & Munroe, M. (2006). International recruitment of social care workers and social worker: Illustrations from the UK. *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work*, 40(01), 93–110.
- Ezzy, D. (2010). Qualitative interviewing as an embodied emotional performance. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(3), 163–170.
- Field, N. P., Gao, B., & Paderna, L. (2005). Continuing bonds in bereavement: An attachment theory based perspective. *Death Studies*, 29(4), 277–299.
- Finlay, L. (2003). The reflexive journey: Mapping multiple routes. In L. Finlay & B. Gough (Eds.), *Reflexivity: A practical guide for researchers in health and social sciences* (pp. 3–20). Oxford: Blackwell Science.
- Fisher, S. (1989). *Homesickness, cognition and health*. Hove: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Fouché, C., Beddoe, L., Bartley, A., & Brenton, N. (2014). Strengths and struggles: Overseas qualified social workers' experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Australian Social Work*, 67(4), 551–566.
- Fouché, C., Beddoe, L., Bartley, A., & Parkes, E. (2015). Are we ready for them? Overseas-qualified social workers' professional cultural transition. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(1), 106–119.
- Freeman, M. (2006). Narrative – state of the Art. *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 131–138.
- Garza-Guerrero, A. C. (1974). Culture shock: Its mourning and the vicissitudes of identity. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 22(2), 408–429.
- Georgakopoulou, A. (2006). Thinking big with small stories in narrative and identity analysis. *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 122–130.
- Gibbs, J. (2001). Maintaining front-line workers in child protection: A case for refocusing supervision. *Child Abuse Review*, 10(5), 323–335. doi:10.1002/car.707
- Gibbs, J. (2009). Changing the cultural story in child protection: Learning from the insider's experience. *Child & Family Social Work*, 14(3), 289–299.
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (1998). Narrative practice and the coherence of personal stories. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 39(1), 163–187.
- Hanna, S., & Lyons, K. (2016). 'London calling': The experiences of international social work recruits working in London. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(3), 719–736. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcw027
- Hansen, P., & Ainsworth, F. (2013). Australian child protection services: A game without end. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 22(1), 104–110.
- Harrington, D., Casado, B. L., & Hong, M. (2010). Measuring migratory grief and loss associated with the experience of immigration. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 20(6), 611–620. doi:10.1177/1049731509360840
- Harrison, G. (2018). Transnational social workers and the Australian labour market. In A. Bartley & L. Beddoe (Eds.), *Transnational social work: Opportunities and challenges of a global profession* (pp. 139–153). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Hatzidimitriadou, E., & Psorinos, M. (2017). A qualitative analysis of migrant social workers' work experiences and perceived prejudice from an empowering acculturative integration approach. *European Journal of Social Work*, 20, 1–13.
- Healy, K., & Lonne, B. (2010). *The social work and human services workforce: Report from a national study of education, training and workforce needs*. Strawberry Hills, NSW: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.
- Healy, K., & Meagher, G. (2007). Social workers' preparation for child protection: Revisiting the question of specialisation. *Australian Social Work*, 60(3), 321–335. doi:10.1080/03124070701519686
- Healy, K., Meagher, G., & Cullin, J. (2009). Retaining novices to become expert child protection practitioners: Creating career pathways in direct practice. *British Journal of Social Work*, 39(2), 299–317.
- Healy, K., & Olstedal, S. (2010). An institutional comparison of child protection systems in Australia and Norway focused on workforce retention. *Journal of Social Policy*, 39(02), 255–274.
- Henry, H. M., Stiles, W. B., & Biran, M. W. (2005). Loss and mourning in immigration: Using the assimilation model to assess continuing bonds with native culture. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 18(2), 109–119. doi:10.1080/09515070500136819
- Howe, D. (2011). *Attachment across the lifecourse: A brief introduction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hussein, S. (2014). Hierarchical challenges to transnational social workers' mobility: The United Kingdom as a destination within an expanding European Union. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(4), 174–192. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcu050
- Hussein, S., Manthorpe, J., & Stevens, M. (2010). People in places: A qualitative exploration of recruitment agencies' perspectives on the employment of international social workers in the UK. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(3), 1000–1016.

- International Federation of Social Workers. (2014). *Global definition of social work*. Retrieved from <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work/>
- Jones, D. N., & Truett, R. (2012). The global agenda for social work and social development: A place to link together and be effective in a globalized world. *International Social Work*, 55(4), 454–472. doi:10.1177/0020872812440587
- Lee, T. Y. (2010). The loss and grief in immigration: Pastoral care for immigrants. *Pastoral Psychology*, 59(2), 159–169. doi:10.1007/s11089-009-0261-3
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Littlechild, B., Hunt, S., Goddard, C., Cooper, J., Raynes, B., & Wild, J. (2016). The effects of violence and aggression from parents on child protection workers' personal, family, and professional lives. *Sage Open*, 6(1), 1–12.
- Lonne, B., & Duke, J. (2008). The registration of social workers. In M. Connelly & L. Harms (Eds.), *Social work: Contexts and practice*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Lonne, B., Harries, M., & Lantz, S. (2013). Workforce development: A pathway to reforming child protection systems in Australia. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43(8), 1630–1648. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcs064
- Martin, B., & Healy, J. (2010). *Who works in community services? A profile of Australian workforces in child protection, juvenile justice, disability services and general community services*. Adelaide: National Institute of Labour Studies, Flinders University.
- McArthur, M., Thomson, L., Barker, J., Winkworth, G., & Campus, C. (2012). *National analysis of workforce trends in statutory child protection*. Retrieved from <http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/national-analysis-of-workforce-trends-in-statutory-child-protection>.
- McFadden, P., Mallett, J., & Leiter, M. (2016). Extending the two-process model of burnout in child protection workers: The role of resilience in mediating burnout via organizational factors of control, values, fairness, reward, workload, and community relationships. *Stress and Health*, 1–12. doi:10.1002/smi.2763
- Mishler, E. G. (1995). Models of narrative analysis: A typology. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 5(2), 87–123.
- Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2017). Transnational social workers in statutory child welfare: A scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 81, 21–28.
- Morrison, T. (1990). The emotional effects of child protection work on the worker. *Social Work in Action*, 4(4), 253–271.
- Morrison, T. (2007). Emotional intelligence, emotion and social work: Context, characteristics, complications and contribution. *British Journal of Social Work*, 37(2), 245–263.
- Morrison, T. (2010). The strategic leadership of complex practice: Opportunities and challenges. *Child Abuse Review*, 19(5), 312–329.
- Nelson, J. K. (2010). Separation, loss, and grief in adults: An attachment perspective. In S. Bennett & J. K. Nelson (Eds.), *Adult attachment in clinical social work* (pp. 79–95). New York: Springer.
- Papadopoulos, A. (2017). Migrating qualifications: The ethics of recognition. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 47(1), 219–237.
- Parkes, C. (1971). Psycho-social transitions: A field for study. *Social Science & Medicine* (1967), 5(2), 101–115.
- Payne, M., & Askeland, G. A. (2008). *Globalization and international social work: Postmodern change and challenge*. London: Ashgate.
- Peter, S., Bartley, A., & Beddoe, L. (2017). Transnational social workers' transition into receiving countries: What lessons can be learned from nursing and teaching? *European Journal of Social Work*, 1–14. doi:10.1080/13691457.2017.1366430
- Phoenix, C., & Sparkes, A. C. (2009). Being Fred: Big stories, small stories and the accomplishment of a positive ageing identity. *Qualitative Research*, 9(2), 219–236.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2007). Validity issues in narrative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(4), 471–486.
- Pullen Sansfacon, A., Brown, M., Graham, J., & Dumais Michaud, A.-A. (2014). Adaptation and acculturation: Experiences of internationally educated social workers. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 15(2), 317–330. doi:10.1007/s12134-013-0288-2.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Sammut, J. (2011). *Do not damage and disturb: On child protection failures and the pressure on out-of-home care in Australia*. Sydney: Centre for Independent Studies.
- Schneller, D. P. (1981). The immigrants challenge: Mourning the loss of homeland and adapting to the new world. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, 51(2), 95–125.
- Scott, D. (2006). Towards a public health model of child protection in Australia. *Communities, Children and Families Australia*, 1(1), 9–16.
- Scott, D. (2010). 'Here under the southern cross ...': Reflections on child welfare reform in Australia. *Developing Practice: The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*, 26, 4–6.
- Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research* (4th ed.). London: Sage.
- Silverman, D., & Marvasti, A. (2008). *Qualitative research: A comprehensive guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tham, P. (2006). Why are they leaving? Factors affecting intention to leave among social workers in child welfare. *British Journal of Social Work*, 37(7), 1225–1246.
- Tilbury, C. (2004). The influence of performance measurement on child welfare policy and practice. *British Journal of Social Work*, 34(2), 225–241. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bch023

- Tilbury, C., Hughes, M., Bigby, C., & Osmond, J. (2015). Social work research in the child protection field in Australia. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(1), 256–274. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcv123
- Travis, D. J., Lizano, E. L., & Mor Barak, M. E. (2016). 'I'm so stressed!': A longitudinal model of stress, burnout and engagement among social workers in child welfare settings. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 46(4), 1076–1095.
- van Tilburg, M. A., Vingerhoets, A. J., & van Heck, G. L. (1996). Homesickness: A review of the literature. *Psychological Medicine*, 26(5), 899–912. doi:10.1017/s0033291700035248
- Walsh, T., Wilson, G., & O'Connor, E. (2010). Local, European and global: An exploration of migration patterns of social workers into Ireland. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 40(6), 1978–1995. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcp141
- Ward, C., & Styles, I. (2005). Culturing settlement using pre-and post-migration strategies. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 12(4), 423–430.
- Zubrzycki, J., Thomson, L., & Trevithick, P. (2008). International recruitment in child protection: The experiences of workers in the Australian Capital Territory. *Communities, Children and Families Australia*, 3(2), 30–38.

### 4.3 Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter directly address the second research sub-question: What is the lived experience of transnational social workers in the context of professional migration? Utilising Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) theory of attachment, the paper unpacked the emotional complexity involved in professional migration and social work practice in an unfamiliar environment. First, the findings show that migration is a significant life event that affects individual transnational social workers. Second, the emotionally complex work involved in child protection exacerbated the experience of loss of professional and personal belonging for the participants in this study. Finally, the ambiguous professional status of social work in Australia caused further complications for these transnational social workers' professional identity.

This article identified that strategies to better support transnational social workers need to be developed. The use of self as a child protection practitioner in an unfamiliar practice context may be challenging. Organisations that deliver child protection interventions need skilled and motivated social workers. Strategies that better welcome and support transnational social workers may benefit children and their families, child protection organisations, and the social work profession more broadly. In Chapter 5 I explore the role of place for transnational social workers in child protection. The concept of place is pertinent for practice given the commitment of the profession to a person-in-environment perspective. Social work is rooted in local conditions and community needs, and is dependent on jurisdiction-specific legislative competencies (Akesson et al., 2017; Hussein, 2018; Lyons, 2006).

## **Chapter 5: The Role of Place for Transnational Social Workers in Statutory Child Protection**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter examined the lived experience of transnational social workers practising in Australian child protection service systems. This chapter presents the third article and addresses the third research sub-question: What is the role of place for transnational social workers in frontline statutory child protection? This article draws on the place identity processes framework as developed by Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) to examine how place influenced professional distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem and self-efficacy. The concept of place is constructed as the development of meaning through an individual's interaction with geographical location (Speller, 2000). In this regard, places embody social symbols and social meaning (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996), which is particularly relevant for transnational social workers who enter an unfamiliar environment in which the local and national context of child protection practice is unknown.

For this article, the data analysis involved examining the role of place in shaping the lived experience of transnational social workers, utilising a two-step interpretive phenomenological approach (Patton, 2002). The article extended the original theoretical concepts to include a focus on the professional context of place for migrating social workers. The data interrogation followed an iterative process, interacting with transcripts, fieldnotes and theory to make sense of place and the experience of transnational social work (Huws & Jones, 2008). The approach permitted exploration of the way place affected professional identity. This article was accepted for publication in the *British Journal of Social Work* on 19 April 2019 in its current form and was published on Oxford University Press online on 18 May 2019. It is available at:



My role as the first author of this article included data collection, data analysis and decision-making concerning the theoretical lens applied. I drafted the manuscript in which writing up the results and ongoing analysis informed one another and were guided by feedback from the co-authors, ensuring authentic interpretation of the meaning as expressed by the participants. I prepared the manuscript for submission to the journal. My contribution equated to 70 percent while my co-authors, the members of my supervisory team, contributed 30 percent of the manuscript preparation. I was responsible for the initial draft and making amendments to the article based on feedback from my supervisors. The supervisors, the second and third author, contributed guidance on the theoretical framework, as well as discussion of the ideas expressed in the paper, critical review and editing. I took responsibility for the preparation and submission of the manuscript.

The *British Journal of Social Work* is the leading academic social work journal in the United Kingdom, published for the British Association of Social Workers, and covers every aspect of social work. The *British Journal of Social Work* is listed in SCImago and is recognised for the Higher Education Research Data Collection. The journal's 5-year Impact factor is 1.746 and its H Index is 71, ranking in the first quartile of publications in its field. The feedback from the reviewers noted: 'This was a very well written paper, reflecting a lot of quality work. In my view, an exemplary piece. Excellent.' The article was accepted in its original form with no revisions requested following a blind peer-review process. The copyright conditions of the publisher, Oxford Journals, allow for the inclusion of the paper in this PhD dissertation.


The full citation of the article is:

Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2019). The role of place for transnational social workers in statutory child protection. *British Journal of Social Work*, 94(6), 1619-1637. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcz065>

## 5.2 Article 3

*British Journal of Social Work* (2019) 0, 1–19  
doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcz065

# The Role of Place for Transnational Social Workers in Statutory Child Protection

Corina Modderman <sup>1,\*</sup>, Guinever Threlkeld<sup>2</sup> and Lynne McPherson<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Social Work and Social Policy, La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, 210 Fryers Street, Shepparton, Victoria 3630, Australia*

<sup>2</sup>*Social Work and Social Policy, La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, University Drive, Wodonga, Victoria 3690, Australia*

<sup>3</sup>*School of Arts and Social Sciences, Southern Cross University, Locked Mail Bag 4, Coolangatta, Queensland 4225, Australia*

\*Correspondence to Corina Modderman, Social Work and Social Policy, La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, 210 Fryers Street, Shepparton, Victoria 3630, Australia. E-mail: c.modderman@latrobe.edu.au

## Abstract

This article explores the experience and influence of place amongst transnational social workers. The concept of 'place' may be perceived as quietly existing in the background of everyday social work practice. Yet, transnational social workers in this study tell a different story about what happens to the role of place when social workers become globally mobile. The social work profession is embedded in place; qualifications and applications of social work are located within local and national context. Professional migration inevitably entails being separated from the construction of social work as it was known in the country of origin, which leads to an intersection between the context of social work, the role of place and redefining a professional home in an unfamiliar practice environment. This qualitative study explored the role of place for thirteen transnational social workers who relocated from the UK and Ireland to practice in Australia's child protection system. Participants were interviewed twice over a three-year period to allow a deep understanding of the role of place and experience of 'self' over time. Findings highlight place-related change as a multi-dimensional experience that has a profound impact on transnational social workers.

**Keywords:** transnational social workers, child protection, migration, place

*Accepted: April 2019*

**BASW**  
The professional association for  
social workers and social workers  
www.basw.co.uk

© The Author(s) 2019. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of The British Association of Social Workers. All rights reserved.



## Introduction

The social work profession is committed to a person-in-environment perspective; the discipline is essentially rooted in local conditions and community needs and is heavily dependent on jurisdiction-specific legislative competencies (Lyons, 2006; Akesson *et al.*, 2017; Hussein, 2018;). International movement of social workers involves a loss of place-specific professional knowledge and entry to a practice environment in a different geographical location. Transnational practice raises dilemmas around social work fitting local contexts and finding commonalities across different contexts in which Western worldviews are privileged over indigenous perspectives (Gray, 2005). The globalisation of social work is a worldwide phenomenon, reflecting demand from employer organisations experiencing workforce shortages, especially in statutory child protection. (Modderman *et al.*, 2017; Hussein, 2018). Research is now beginning to explore the dynamics between transnational social work and the local context of the profession (Hussein *et al.*, 2011; Fouche *et al.*, 2013; Beddoe and Fouché, 2014; Brown *et al.*, 2014; Fouché *et al.*, 2014; Hanna and Lyons, 2016; Modderman *et al.*, 2017, 2018; Bartley, 2018). This emerging research has not yet provided a solid understanding of place as a significant concept for transnational social workers (TNSWs) who need to invest in demographic, cultural, indigenous, linguistic and historical knowledge of the new context. Place may become a critical construct for TNSWs who, as migrants, experience the loss of a physical place that enables identification with others, as well as the loss of the sense of being professionally 'at home' (Cuba and Hummon, 1993; Dixon and Durrheim, 2000; Beddoe and Fouché, 2014; Modderman *et al.*, 2018). This study draws on Breakwell's (1986) framework on Identity Process Theory utilised by Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) with specific application to place. This theoretical lens will be used to explore how place and social work practice is navigated by TNSWs in Australia.

## The context of transnational social work in Australia

Australia does not have a national child protection system, as each state and territory operates within its own legislation and service delivery system (Healy and Olstedal, 2010). Nation-wide there is a shortage of child protection staff, with international recruitment a recurring approach to filling front-line positions (Modderman *et al.*, 2018). The lack of scholarship and data on migration routes make it difficult to present an accurate picture of TNSWs practising in Australia (Papadopoulos, 2017, 2018). This knowledge gap may relate to ambiguous professional status. In Australia, social work is not a registered profession, and job

titles are generally not social work-specific (Harrison and Healy, 2016; Papadopoulos, 2018). Unlike other countries to which social workers migrate, such as Canada, New Zealand or the UK (Bartley *et al.*, 2016; Brown *et al.*, 2014; Hussein, 2014; Papadopoulos, 2018), in Australia, the profession lacks formal legal recognition. The nature of social work, emphasising relationships and interpersonal skills, and the need for understanding local policy, legal, economic and cultural context, may present challenges for TNSWs (Bartley, 2018; Lyons, 2018). Statutory child protection practice is known as complex and demanding, with high levels of staff turnover (Mor Barak *et al.*, 2006; Lonne *et al.*, 2012; Cabiati *et al.*, 2018). Practice in child protection is ambiguous, negotiating between care and control and occupying a place between family and the State (Parton, 1998, 2014). This work calls for reflective practice and professional supervision to enable alignment of social work values with professional judgement and to support practitioners responding to the emotional impact of practice (Ruch, 2005; Adamson, 2012; Mathias, 2015; McPherson *et al.*, 2016). Contemporary child protection approaches underpin the value of relationship-based practice (Munro, 2011; Ruch, 2018). Nevertheless, service delivery in Australia may demand efficiency over effectiveness (McPherson, 2018). Hostility towards social workers in the human service context is not uncommon in the Australian context (Long *et al.*, 2018). Research suggests that TNSWs arriving in this environment are expected to start practising immediately, with little induction to the new practice context and the place of the social work profession (Simpson, 2009; Modderman *et al.*, 2017, 2018; Bartley, 2018). This raises questions about the onus for bridging foreign expertise and place-based competence (Zubrzycki *et al.*, 2008; Modderman *et al.*, 2017; Bartley, 2018; Peter *et al.*, 2019). As TNSWs navigate their profession from a known to an unknown context, consideration of the role of place is important for a better understanding of transnational mobility.

## Theoretical framework

Breakwell's Identity Process Theory (IPT) (1986) provides the theoretical framework together with its adaptation to place by Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) (Downey *et al.*, 2017; Winterton and Warburton, 2012). IPT was developed to explain what occurs when external changes threaten an individual's identity (Breakwell, 1986). Breakwell's (1986) theory conceptualises identity as a complex construct, unfolding temporally across the lifespan through processes of assimilation (maintaining self-consistency), accommodation (making changes in the self) and evaluation (maintaining a sense of self but changing when necessary). Within the field of social work, there is a growing interest in the



experience of professional identity. Researchers know relatively little about identity formation in social workers who carry out complex and challenging work in often ambiguous public sector roles (Baxter, 2011; Webb, 2016).

The concept of place refers here to the development of meaning through an individual's interaction with geographical location (Speller, 2000). This article takes a phenomenological approach to place, concerned less with studying specific places and more with the subjective meaning and essence of human experiences tied to place (Akesson *et al.*, 2017; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Place and social work are entwined in a dynamic and mutually influencing relationship. Social work mobility involves redefining the professional place, developing a sense of comfort with practice in the new place, and finding new professional belonging. Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) argue that all aspects of identity are affected by place, as places embody social symbols and are invested with social meanings and importance. This is particularly salient for TNSWs, who, as migrants, practise transnationally in an unfamiliar local and national context.

Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) adapted IPT's principles of identity to explain the relationship between place and identity. This article explores the professional context of social work by examining how place influences professional distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Professional distinctiveness is understood as the desire for a unique professional sense of self, as a professional group and as an individual social worker (Speller and Twigger-Ross, 2009). The principle of continuity includes professional place referent continuity where past social work practices informs the present experience of professional self and professional place congruent continuity where the professional self and the new environment is perceived as a fit (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996). The principle of professional self-esteem examines the way place may provide TNSWs with positive and negative feelings about self, whereas professional self-efficacy centres on the perception of being able to manage the environment of feeling in control (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996). This is particularly relevant for a high-stress environment such as statutory child protection (McFadden *et al.*, 2018). Examining ways in which TNSWs construct their professional self, defined through professional self-concepts based on values, motives and experience (Ibarra, 1999; Webb, 2016), may illuminate the role of place in social work practice.

## The study

This study aimed to explore the role of place for transnational social workers in front-line child protection, particularly focussing on the way

in which the phenomena of transnational social work and place were perceived in everyday practice (Crotty, 1998). In this article, 'child protection' is a term to describe statutory government services, which, in North America, the UK and Ireland, are also referred to as 'social care' or 'child welfare' (Modderman *et al.*, 2017). Participants were recruited using convenience sampling; sample members were UK and Irish social workers who had practice experience in child protection in their home country for at least six months before coming to Australia. Senior staff in a metropolitan child protection department facilitated recruitment via e-mail invitation. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with thirteen transnational social workers, nine women and four men aged between twenty-five and fifty-five years. Two data collection points within three years enabled the exploration of the temporal experiences of place. At the point of first interview, three participants were in their first year of migration, seven were within their first two years and three had resided in Australia for more than three years. In the second round of data collection in 2016, ten participants were reinterviewed.

Participants contributed voluntarily without compensation and were interviewed face to face and via phone. The first round of interviews commenced with a broad question: 'Tell me your story about coming to Australia to work in child protection' (Riessman, 2008). Guiding questions allowed exploration around similarities and differences in child protection systems and introduction to the new place of work. A narrative exploration was facilitated by keeping the interviews open, flexible and conversational (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Silverman and Marvasti, 2008). The second round of interviewing employed a more reflective approach, questions sought to understand ways in which professional migration influenced professional identity and if there was a point in time when the new environment felt like 'home'. These questions supported a phenomenological approach capturing the lived experience of place: the essence of how the environment was perceived, how it felt and made sense of (Patton, 2002; Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

All participants received written and oral information, with written consent given before the interview. The study was approved by La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee in July 2013 (HEC13-019) and extended in 2016. Ethical approval was also granted by the organisation from which participants were recruited. All participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, including not disclosing the study site. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using a qualitative approach.

To explore the subjective meaning of lived experiences of participants, data analysis entailed a two-step interpretive phenomenological approach (Patton, 2002). In the first phase, transcripts were reread while listening to audio recordings, and data were analysed inductively using an interpretive approach to identify emerging themes (Creswell and



Creswell, 2018). These themes were categorised in topics, including professional identity, social work practice, migration and place. In the second phase, analysis was deductive, employing Twigger-Ross and Uzzell's (1996) place and identity processes framework as a theoretical lens (Winterton and Warburton, 2012). The original theoretical concepts have been somewhat amended, enabling a focus on the professional context of place. Therefore, in this study, the data analysis focussed on place enabling or challenging professional distinctiveness, professional continuity (both place referent and place congruent), professional self-esteem and professional self-efficacy. Data analysis followed an iterative process of interacting with transcripts, field notes and theory to make sense of participants' lived experiences (Huws and Jones, 2008). Writing up the results and ongoing analysis informed one other, enabling a more nuanced interpretation of the meaning of the phenomenon of TNSW (Smith *et al.*, 1999).

Various strategies were employed to ensure the credibility of the analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Interpretation of meaning required a reflective and reflexive approach from the research team, ensuring valid interpretations of lived experience rather than reflection of the researchers' own thinking and understanding (Finlay, 2003; Huws and Jones, 2008; Karlsson *et al.*, 2012). Field notes were made after each interview to develop a reflective log summarising initial impressions and key observational points (Huws and Jones, 2008). A constant focus on applicability, neutrality, truth value and consistency strengthened rigour (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). Finally, interviews were held with a diverse group of participants (newly arrived and long-term migrating social workers), to broaden representation of the sample.

## Findings

Findings presented here examine the role of place in transnational social work. Twigger-Ross and Uzzell's (1996) principles of distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem and self-efficacy are applied to investigate participants' professional experience of place in the context of transnational social work. For ease of presentation, each place identity principle will be discussed separately; however, the principles operate concurrently, in varying order and iteratively rather than sequentially.

### Professional distinctiveness

The principle of professional distinctiveness assists in understanding how child protection practice in a different place influences participants' construction of social work (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996). Participants

recalled the recruitment process emphasised the need for experienced UK and Irish social workers. Given a shared language and historical ties between countries, participants anticipated a relatively similar practice environment. Most participants did not realise that Australian child protection agencies recruit staff from a range of disciplines and that only a minority may be social work qualified. Concerns were expressed that a variety of disciplines, including unqualified staff, were involved in child protection practice. Participants voiced a strong desire to maintain their professional uniqueness when they entered the new place of child protection practice. Education, experience and formal registration as a social worker back home were frequently linked to this desire. This distinctiveness summarised a set of values connected to more than professional identity:

.... as a social worker, it's not just a job you train for. For me, it's about values intrinsically. I believe I was brought up a social worker, that's what my values have taught me over the years...It's more of a way of life for me. A way of thinking, a way of practicing your everyday.  
(Rachel)

The majority of participants presented social work as a fundamental way of being that extended well beyond the workplace or job description. This ontological sense of self did not match with child protection practice in the new context. Participants constructed themselves as professionally distinct, whereas the new practice setting referred to all staff as generic case managers. This caused anger and was experienced as diminishing professional authority:

We worked hard to get that professional title, it takes a lot of work, sweat and tears to get there. I don't like the social work title to be just thrown away and just having the title given to anyone who has not done the degree...I think when we are all thrown in together and just seen as caseworkers we lose our social worker's view of integrity. (Georgie)

Both visa and contractual arrangements required participants to remain in child protection for two years post-migration. The majority of participants made reference to these years as challenging; accounts during this period reveal anger and disappointment. In the new environment, the non-recognition of social workers as distinct professionals was experienced as loss of a professional place and belonging and led to a diminished sense of professional self. The two-year cut-off point was frequently mentioned as a significant moment in time, a symbolic 'light at the end of the tunnel' (Georgie). Most participants mentioned the 18-month post-arrival point as taking stock and overthinking steps for the near future. Some felt the organisation treating them as 'just a bum on a seat' (Michael) or 'paper processors' (Joan), instead of skilled

social workers. The perceived mismatch between experience and lack of professional distinctiveness led to over half the participants leaving the field of child protection once their contracted twenty-four months were completed. This raises questions about the mismatch between expectations of experienced social workers and the transnational context.

## Professional continuity

### Professional place congruent continuity

The principle of professional place congruent continuity affects the experienced fit between participants and the environment (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996). Participants had underestimated the effect of geographical relocation; the challenge of making sense of a new place and the impact on their professional identity. The experience of the new practice environment was frequently described through comparison of examples of social work practice in the old place and practice in the new place:

I think they're very punitive here ...in the court system the kids don't have a voice. I had to check myself often to see whether I'm here for the children or for the adults because back home you had the hearing children's panel. (Joan)

Professional place congruent continuity did not emerge incidentally. Characteristics of child protection practice were not easily transferred. Many participants felt the continuity of professional self was immobilised by the child protection organisation (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996). This experience of discontinuity resulted in a delay of place-related satisfaction and of finding a professional home:

Here you're not working with fellow social workers, there is a different professional environment, there's lack of theory in practice. It's just completely foreign and different....You know when you're in a social work team when you talk in the social work language. You talk in a child protection language. (Georgie)

Further complicating the experience of professional discontinuity, of not working in a compatible workplace, were participants' challenges navigating a hierarchical work environment. Participants whose first interview took place at the eighteen to twenty-four month mark presented as stressed and with a strong desire to leave the organisation. When reinterviewed two years later, most had left the organisation and still expressed grief over having to let go of child protection practice; a professional place that once fitted but now felt uncomfortable. Participants



who did persist beyond their initial two years found some fit within their environment but avoided potential triggers:

I distanced myself from new recruits, I couldn't go through it all again. They put a buddy system in place, asked for volunteers, and I was like, oh hell no, no, no. Because I knew that I was just over that two year hump, we were just finally adjusting to life. It was no longer a holiday. We'd had a tough second year, I just couldn't go there. I didn't want to be friends with them, I didn't want to talk to them about how different it is. I didn't want to hear them whinging. (Rachel)

The perceived lack of professional place congruent continuity in the transnational context had further implications for professional place referent continuity. This was clearly evident when key features of social work that had emotional significance in the past, professional supervision, for example, came under threat in the new work environment.

### Professional place referent continuity

The principle of professional place referent continuity assists in understanding professional continuity related to self in past and present social work practice (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996). Participants described their previous professional supervision as a distinct space to unpack and reflect on complexity, to debrief, receive support and link theory to social work practice. Social work-driven supervision was constructed as an emotionally significant place, as the eye of the storm in the upheaval of front-line child protection. Participants were shocked to learn that, in the new context, supervision was not necessarily delivered by qualified or experienced social workers. These threats to professionalism challenged maintenance of professional place referent continuity:

I had no case direction,...I need to be challenged a lot, in my thinking and my decision making. I don't know how you're supposed to develop if you're not being challenged on what you're doing and the reasons why ...we're not making decisions about what coat the kid wears, we're making life-changing decisions...(Helen)

All but one participant experienced professional supervision as surveillance with little emphasis on professional accountability. This reinforced the discomfort of operating in a context in which child protection was not solely the domain of social workers. The environment was shaped as a place of procedures and standardised checklists, lacking recognition of the need for critical thinking and reflection. Interviews at various moments in time show little variation in the experience of supervision. However, the role of some participants had changed three years



after arrival, when they moved into leadership roles and took on the role of delivering supervision. Not only did they experience receiving infrequent supervision but they also realised that they had become part of 'the place':

I had three supervisions in eight months. I was really shocked about what I was seeing and then I almost got used to it and I stopped seeing it. And then, I don't know when, but there was a point where I thought, you've just adapted to that and you've picked up some of these behaviours that you shouldn't have, and at first you knew were wrong... (Alice)

Becoming 'part of the place' was also an important consideration for the few participants who had continued in child protection for more than five years by the second interview. They no longer referred to themselves as social workers, with their narrative now centred around being 'public servants' (Jim) instead. This title indicated a professional disjuncture that enabled coping and longevity in a complex and crisis-driven work environment. The term 'public servant' appeared to be used as a reminder to self that 'the whole place will not topple if you're not here' (Anita). Where social work was initially constructed as a holistic way of being, the role of public servant represented a clear distinction between work and private time. Nevertheless, these few participants felt part of the overall place: the organisation, the team and the wider community. This integration was further accelerated when participants' children were born in Australia. A marked degree of difference was found in these participants' constructions of place referent continuity at work and beyond:

...my kids look as if they've been dipped in the Irish Sea, they've got bright ginger hair, freckles, and there is no denying that they come from a Celtic background. But, this is their country, they follow the Australian team in the Olympics. (Anita)

Loss of professional continuity, of place-related construction of social work, and erosion of professional distinctiveness, influenced participants' professional self-esteem and self-efficacy at various points of transition.

## Professional self-esteem

The self-esteem principle facilitates exploration of positive and negative self-evaluation and the ways in which participants experience their feeling of professional worth (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996). Initially, place and self-esteem were shaped by participants' age and stage of career. Regressing from a leadership role to being a generic case manager had a negative impact on previously established professional self-esteem.

A few younger participants with less practice experience saw their professional migration as more temporary; an opportunity to travel and work. For them, the location of the new role was seen as a means to explore new places rather than continuing an already established career path. Regardless of age, during the first year, post-migration participants tried to make sense of the organisation and approach to child protection. The initial optimism and enhanced self-esteem that followed success in obtaining a job across the world had vanished for those re-interviewed at the end of year two. Some participants presented as disillusioned and run down; many cited specific places, 'level 2' or 'floor 7' (Maria/Petra), they associated with high stress and poor leadership. This environment threatened professional self-esteem:

I do feel as if the experience has been dramatic to the point where I'd get up in the morning, I'd be crying, I'd cry at work, I wasn't sleeping, I wasn't eating properly, that awful sinking feeling when you're driving into work because you don't want to be there and then you see the senior managers and your heart would race. (Helen)

The phrase 'I am a social worker' (Georgie) was repeated across interviews as an expression of professional self-esteem. No one mentioned being a transnational social worker, although some did refer to self as 'British social worker' (Anna). At the second round of interviews, some participants were on sick leave, leave of absence, had left the organisation or remigrated. They understood their well-being and professional self-esteem as negatively affected by the place of work and overall experience. Those who stayed in the recruiting organisation moved into other roles further removed from front-line practice. They spoke positively about the new work environment, which they experienced as more congruent with their values and enhancing their professional self-esteem. Nevertheless, finding professionally likeminded people and adapting to the place took time:

First two years to settle, probably took me another two years to get to know the systems and become familiar with them...The team has been very healthy, we can analyse our practice and be critical. (Jim)

## **Professional self-efficacy**

The principle of self-efficacy explores the individual belief in the professional capacity to meet situational demands (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996). This is particularly important, given the emotionally charged nature and high-stress environment of child protection. All but two participants had a long history of working in statutory child protection and felt equipped for the role. They had mastered the complexity of the work in

previous environments and arrived with a strong sense of professional agency. Participants considered the nature of child abuse in Australia to be relatively similar; they felt familiar with the painful and stressful situations families experience. Most reflected positively on their ability to engage with a wide range of clients. One difference was the experience of an organisational structure and culture perceived to be linked to a 'settler-colonial society':

Titles here are very militarized, 'director general', 'chief director general', 'delegation', what you can, what you can't do. I'm convinced that there's a residue from colonisation. ... I firmly believe that, because, "you are not complying" Well I'm not in prison. (Joan)

Limited ability to contribute and share previous expertise in the new environment was perceived as a threat to self-efficacy. All participants made reference to the bureaucracy and delegated system of authority that culminated in slow decision making in allocated caseloads. This was seen as a threat to their own professional self and as negatively affecting clients whose capacity to meet the daily demands of raising their children was undermined by delayed decision making. One participant described her manager calling her a '*risk assessor*' (Anna), whereas participants emphasised their role was to 'work together and get the best outcome for the families' (Tanya). Some felt the environment of managerialism threatened their ability to navigate the uncertainty and ambiguity of child protection (Parton, 1998) and diluted the importance of relationships in practice (Ruch, 2018). The hierarchical and risk-averse culture was seen to be undermining their ability to manage risk through social work assessments, planned intervention or by relying on practice wisdom:

I had to share my assessment. ... I had a meeting with the senior manager, the operational manager, the team leader...and the legal person was saying, "There's enough evidence to for an emergency removal", I said, 'No there isn't. That baby is not at immediate risk of danger and there's a parent willing and able so there's no need to do so'. (Ben)

There was also a variety of encouraging aspects in the environment that made daily tasks manageable for participants. For example, feeling safe by undertaking home visits with two workers and a wide range of accessible service providers. Participants were positive about the physical qualities of place like the weather and outdoor lifestyle in Australia. There was a high awareness of managing self to enable managing situational demands and high stress in front-line child protection. Engagement with sports and the community and being in nature were understood as contributing to professional self-care and self-efficacy.



## Discussion

This study set out with the aim of understanding the role of place for UK and Irish TNSWs practising in Australia's child protection workforce. A phenomenological analysis enabled exploration of the essence of experience tied to place in everyday child protection practice. This study provides a touchstone for further research in the context of international recruitment of social workers who practice in an unfamiliar country and professional environment. The results highlight the need to broaden an awareness of the significance of place in transnational social work mobility. The analysis shows that place-related change may result in TNSWs experiencing tension between the new practice environment and their construction of social work. Consistent with other reported findings, participants in this study initially imagined Australia as a place with a similar language and comparable professional context (Zubrzycki *et al.*, 2008; Modderman *et al.*, 2018). Results suggest participants underestimated the role of place in social work and anticipated continuation of practice characteristics familiar in their place of origin. The transnational experience unexpectedly required the repositioning of professional self and knowledge to inform complex placed-based decisions in order to navigate daily practice (Akeson *et al.*, 2017).

Participants in this study mostly experienced the approach to child protection in the new place as incongruent with their social work values. The unfamiliar environment had the effect of compromising participants' core beliefs. Most constructed being a social worker as key to their personal identity rather than 'just a job'. The experience of professional discontinuity and floundering social work distinctiveness emerged strongly during the second-year post-migration. TNSWs' professional authority, formed in a different place and context, felt threatened in the new environment. In addition, participants grappled with an organisational culture they perceived as emphasising compliance and delegated authority and experienced as peculiar and punitive. Similar findings are noted in the New Zealand context where TNSWs described management styles as 'old school' and with pressure to conform (Fouché *et al.*, 2014). Participants were challenged by maintaining their professional place and voice in the local discourse and organisational culture (Fouche *et al.*, 2013; Hanna and Lyons, 2016). The experience of professional delegitimisation and the absence of clearly delineated social work expectations led to diminished satisfaction from child protection service delivery (Cabiati *et al.*, 2018). Findings suggest that those few participants who remained in child protection adopted new ways of working that fitted within the new environment: they referred to themselves as 'public servants'. This title enabled them to retain a sense of agency and autonomy within a demanding work environment whilst serving the needs of clients

and the organisation. Additionally, the separation of professional and personal identity enabled a better work-life balance.

Consistent with other reported research, participants felt threatened by the lack of professional supervision as a space in which to make sense of their experiences in the new environment (Zubrzycki *et al.*, 2008; Hanna and Lyons, 2016). In this study, participants experienced supervision as focussed on organisational demands, which hindered finding a safe place to discuss complex client-related issues that may cause anxiety for individual workers (McPherson *et al.*, 2016; Ruch, 2018). TNSWs in the Australian context need to remain connected with their profession to discuss similarities and differences through the lens of social work theory and practice. Findings suggest that TNSWs may benefit from robust professional supervision delivered by experienced social workers. This may create a resilience buffer and increase access and contribution to wider organisational knowledge and recourses (Adamson, 2012). The loss of professional distinctiveness and inability to rely on continuity between the past and new place of practice threatened TNSWs' professional self-esteem. Findings reflect a loss of confidence and an inability to create a new professional 'home', with the organisational culture experienced as somewhat hostile towards social work (Long *et al.*, 2018). The analysis demonstrates that participants constructed critical thinking, reflective practice and professional supervision as important to their profession (Mathias, 2015). The procedural environment hindered professional judgement and decision making in the way participants saw as essential to their role as social workers (Ruch, 2018). The organisational approach to child protection practice immobilised TNSWs' perceived capacity to meet everyday demands, which led to impeded self-efficacy and stress, particularly during the first two-year post migration.

In stark contrast with the commitment participants voiced in relation to child protection social work, most did not sustain a career in child protection. The findings suggest that place-related change challenged TNSWs' professional self-esteem and self-efficacy. To regain professional distinctiveness, the majority of participants left front-line child protection after their initial two-year contract. The reported findings raise questions about expectations and preparation of individual TNSWs and the openness of organisations to engage in a dialogue around the knowledge and expertise TNSWs bring. Deprofessionalisation and impeded agency were evident in this study and resonate with the ambiguous professional place of social work in Australia (Papadopoulos, 2018). Continued staff turnover among local or TNSWs may affect vulnerable children and their families, as it undermines the development of stable and trusting relationships between families and their allocated worker (Mor Barak *et al.*, 2006; Cabiati *et al.*, 2018). A richer understanding of TNSW in the Australian context would include working with indigenous communities, rural and remote practice, distinctive supervision needs



and demographic data. This may support positive outcomes for vulnerable children and their families, individual social workers, the existing workforce and the recruiting organisation.

## Conclusion

Building on Breakwell (1986), the framework proposed by Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) to theorise place and identity processes, enabled exploration of the role of place and social work in every day child protection practice. This study found most TNSWs experienced professional place-related change as having a profound impact (Hanna and Lyons, 2016; Modderman *et al.*, 2018). Participants' construction of social work, including critical thinking, reflection and supervision did not match the culture and practice approach of the new environment. This challenged TNSWs professional self and resulted in a low return on investment: most participants left front-line child protection. This is concerning as retaining experienced social workers may contribute to better outcomes for vulnerable children and their families. Further research of the Australian context of TNSW is needed to indicate how organisations can better employ, empower and retain TNSWs.

## Acknowledgements

We wish to thank all transnational social workers participating in this study and pay our respect to their strong commitment to child protection social work.

*Conflict of interest statement.* None declared.

## References

- Adamson, C. (2012) 'Supervision is not politically innocent', *Australian Social Work*, **65**(2), pp. 185–96.
- Akesson, B., Burns, V. and Hordyk, S. R. (2017) 'The place of place in social work: Rethinking the person-in-environment model in social work education and practice', *Journal of Social Work Education*, **53**(3), pp. 372–83.
- Bartley, A. (2018) 'Transnational Social Workers in Australia: Naivety in the Transnational Professional Space', in Bartley, A. and Beddoe, L. (eds), *Transnational Social Work: Opportunities and Challenges of a Global Profession*, Bristol, Policy Press.
- Bartley, A., Beddoe, L., Duke, J., Fouché, C., Harington, P. and Shah, R. (2016) 'Crossing borders: Key features of migrant social workers in New Zealand', *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, **23**(3), pp. 16–30.
- Baxter, J. (2011) 'Public Sector Professional Identities: A Review of the Literature', available online at: <http://oro.open.ac.uk/29793/> (accessed January 30, 2019).

- Beddoe, L. and Fouché, C. B. (2014) 'Kiwis on the move: New Zealand social workers experience of practising abroad', *British Journal of Social Work*, **44**(1), pp. 93–208.
- Breakwell, G. M. (1986) *Coping with Threatened Identities*. London, Methuen.
- Brown, M., Sansfacon, A. P., Ethier, S. and Fulton, A. (2014) 'A complicated welcome: Social workers navigate policy, organizational contexts and socio-cultural dynamics following migration to Canada', *International Journal of Social Science Studies*, **3**(1), pp. 58–68.
- Cabiati, E., Raineri, M. L. and Folgheraiter, F. (2018) 'Risk and protective factors among child protection social workers: A quantitative study', *European Journal of Social Work Advance Access published November 1, 2018*, 10.1080/13691457.2018.1540972
- Creswell, J. W. and Creswell, J. D. (2018) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, Thousand Oaks, Sage.
- Crotty, M. (1998) *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*, St Leonards, Allen and Unwin.
- Cuba, L. and Hummon, D. M. (1993) 'A place to call home: Identification with dwelling, community, and region', *Sociological Quarterly*, **34**(1), pp. 111–31.
- Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (2000) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn, Thousand Oaks, Sage.
- Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (2008) *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*, vol. 1, Los Angeles, Sage.
- Dixon, J. and Durrheim, K. (2000) 'Displacing place-identity: a discursive approach to locating self and other', *British Journal of Social Psychology*, **39**(1), pp. 27–44.
- Downey, H., Threlkeld, G. and Warburton, J. (2017) 'What is the role of place identity in older farming couples' retirement considerations?', *Journal of Rural Studies*, **50**, 1–11.
- Finlay, L. (2003) 'The Reflexive Journey: Mapping Multiple Routes', in Finlay, L. and Gough, B. (eds), *Reflexivity: A Practical Guide for Researchers in Health and Social Sciences*, Oxford, Blackwell Science Ltd.
- Fouché, C., Beddoe, L., Bartley, A. and Brenton, N. (2014) 'Strengths and struggles: Overseas qualified social workers' experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand', *Australian Social Work*, **67**(4), pp. 551–66.
- Fouche, C., Beddoe, L., Bartley, A. and de Haan, I. (2013) 'Enduring professional dislocation: Migrant social workers' perceptions of their professional roles', *British Journal of Social Work*, **44**(7), pp. 2004–22.
- Gray, M. (2005) 'Dilemmas of international social work: Paradoxical processes in indigenisation, universalism and imperialism', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, **14**(3), pp. 231–8.
- Guba, E. G. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1981) *Effective Evaluation*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Hanna, S. and Lyons, K. (2016) 'London calling: The experiences of international social work recruits working in London', *British Journal of Social Work*, **47**(3), pp. 719–36.
- Harrison, G. and Healy, K. (2016) 'Forging an identity as a newly qualified worker in the non-government community services sector', *Australian Social Work*, **69**(1), pp. 80–91.

- Healy, K. and Oltedal, S. (2010) 'An institutional comparison of child protection systems in Australia and Norway focused on workforce retention', *Journal of Social Policy*, **39**(2), pp. 255–74.
- Hussein, S. (2014) 'Hierarchical challenges to transnational social workers' mobility: The United Kingdom as a destination within an expanding European Union', *British Journal of Social Work*, **44**(4), pp. 174–92.
- Hussein, S. (2018) 'Inter-European social workers' mobility within a dynamic social work and immigration policy context: A case study of England', *European Journal of Social Work*, Advance Access published October 29, 2018, doi: 10.1080/13691457.2018.1539836.
- Hussein, S., Manthorpe, J. and Stevens, M. (2011) 'The experiences of migrant social work and social care practitioners in the UK: Findings from an online survey', *European Journal of Social Work*, **14**(4), pp. 479–96.
- Huws, J. C. and Jones, R. S. P. (2008) 'Diagnosis, disclosure, and having autism: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the perceptions of young people with autism', *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability*, **33**(2), pp. 99–107.
- Ibarra, H. (1999) 'Provisional selves: Experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, **44**(4), pp. 764–91.
- Karlsson, V., Bergbom, I. and Forsberg, A. (2012) 'The lived experiences of adult intensive care patients who were conscious during mechanical ventilation: A phenomenological-hermeneutic study', *Intensive and Critical Care Nursing*, **28**(1), pp. 6–15.
- Long, N., Hodgkin, S., Gardner, F. and Lehman, J. (2018) 'The social work hat as a metaphor for social work professional identity', *Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education*, **20**(2), pp. 115–28.
- Lonne, B., Harries, M. and Lantz, S. (2012) 'Workforce development: A pathway to reforming child protection systems in Australia', *British Journal of Social Work*, **43**(8), pp. 1630–48.
- Lyons, K. (2006) 'Globalization and social work: International and local implications', *British Journal of Social Work*, **36**(3), pp. 365–80.
- Lyons, K. (2018) 'Opportunities and challenges of a global profession: An international perspective', in Bartley, A. and Beddoe, L. (eds), *Transnational Social Work: Opportunities and Challenges of a Global Profession*, Bristol, Policy Press.
- Mathias, J. (2015) 'Thinking like a social worker: Examining the meaning of critical thinking in social work', *Journal of Social Work Education*, **51**(3), pp. 457–74.
- McFadden, P., Mallett, J. and Leiter, M. (2018) 'Extending the two-process model of burnout in child protection workers: The role of resilience in mediating burnout via organizational factors of control, values, fairness, reward, workload, and community relationships', *Stress and Health*, **34**(1), pp. 72–83.
- McPherson, L. (2018) 'Leadership at team manager level', in Frederico, M., Long, M. and Cameron, N. (eds), *Leadership in Child and Family Practice*, New York, Routledge.
- McPherson, L., Frederico, M. and McNamara, P. (2016) 'Safety as a fifth dimension in supervision: Stories from the frontline', *Australian Social Work*, **69**(1), pp. 67–79.
- Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G. and McPherson, L. (2017) 'Transnational social workers in statutory child welfare: A scoping review', *Children and Youth Services Review*, **81**, 21–8.



- Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G. and McPherson, L. (2018) 'Transnational social workers' lived experience in statutory child protection', *European Journal of Social Work*, in press.
- Mor Barak, M. E., Levin, A., Nissly, J. A. and Lane, C. J. (2006) 'Why do they leave? Modeling child welfare workers' turnover intentions', *Children and Youth Services Review*, **28**(5), pp. 548–77.
- Munro, E. (2011) *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report, A Child-Centred System*, London, Department of Education.
- Papadopoulos, A. (2017) 'Migrating qualifications: The ethics of recognition', *British Journal of Social Work*, **47**(1), pp. 219–37.
- Papadopoulos, A. (2018) 'Recognising transnational social workers in Australia', in Bartley, A. and Beddoe, L. (eds), *Transnational Social Work: Opportunities and Challenges of a Global Profession*, Bristol, Policy Press.
- Parton, N. (1998) 'Risk, advanced liberalism and child welfare: The need to rediscover uncertainty and ambiguity', *British Journal of Social Work*, **28**(1), pp. 5–27.
- Parton, N. (2014) 'Social work, child protection and politics: Some critical and constructive reflections', *British Journal of Social Work*, **44**(7), pp. 2042–56.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002) *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, Thousand Oaks, Sage.
- Peter, S., Bartley, A. and Beddoe, L. (2019) 'Transnational social workers' transition into receiving countries: What lessons can be learned from nursing and teaching?', *European Journal of Social Work*, **22**(1), pp. 16–29.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008) *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, Los Angeles, Sage.
- Ruch, G. (2005) 'Relationship-based practice and reflective practice: Holistic approaches to contemporary child care social work', *Child and Family Social Work*, **10**(2), pp. 111–23.
- Ruch, G. (2018) 'The contemporary context of relationship-based practice', in Ruch, G., Turney, D. and Ward, A. (eds), *Relationship-Based Social Work*, London, Philadelphia, Kingsley Publishers.
- Silverman, D. and Marvasti, A. (2008) *Qualitative Research: A Comprehensive Guide*, Thousand Oaks, Sage.
- Simpson, G. (2009) 'Global and local issues in the training of "overseas" social workers', *Social Work Education*, **28**(6), pp. 655–67.
- Smith, J. A., Jarman, M., and Osborn, M. (1999) 'Qualitative Health Psychology: Theories and Methods', in Murray, M. and Chamberlain, K. (eds), *Doing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*, London, Sage.
- Speller, G. M. (2000) *A Community in transition: A longitudinal study of place attachment and identity processes in the context of an enforced relocation* (Doctoral dissertation), available online at <http://epubs.surrey.ac.uk/593/> (accessed January 30, 2019).
- Speller, G. M. and Twigger-Ross, C. L. (2009) 'Cultural and social disconnection in the context of a changed physical environment', *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, **91**(4), pp. 55–369.
- Twigger-Ross, C. and Uzzell, D. (1996) 'Place and identity processes', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, **16**(3), pp. 205–20.
- Webb, S. (2016) 'Professional identity and social work', in Dent, M., Bourgeault, I., Denis, L. J. L. and Kuhlmann, E. (eds), *The Routledge Companion to the Professions and Professionalism*, London, Routledge.

- Winterton, R. and Warburton, J. (2012) 'Ageing in the bush: The role of rural places in maintaining identity for long term rural residents and retirement migrants in north-east Victoria', *Australia, Journal of Rural Studies*, **28**(4), pp. 329–37.
- Zubrzycki, J., Thomson, L. and Trevithick, P. (2008) 'International recruitment in child protection: the experiences of workers in the Australian Capital Territory', *Communities, Children and Families Australia*, **3**(2), pp. 30–8.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the findings concerning the way transnational social workers and social work practice are influenced by place. The findings presented in this article reveal place-related change to be a multidimensional experience that may have a profound impact on child protection practice. Social work does not easily transfer across borders. The participants found the approach to critical thinking, reflection and professional supervision to be very different in the new environment, compared to their home countries. The findings confirm that social work identity is strongly rooted within the local and national context, and that transferring a context-specific professional identity to a new place creates tension. The transnational social workers in this study needed to identify new ways of reconciling previous and present approaches that supported their identity as a social worker in child protection. The next chapter is focused on the unique context of Australian social work that includes relationships with First Nations communities. This narrative-informed study investigated transnational social workers' understanding of First Nations perspectives in child protection service delivery.

## **Chapter 6: Transnational Social Workers' Understanding of First Nations Perspectives in Statutory Child Protection**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the fourth article and addresses the final research sub-question: What understanding, if any, do transnational social workers have about social work with First Nations communities when they migrate to Australia to practise in statutory child protection? The paper explored the concept of cultural humility through multi-layered reflexivity (Nicholls, 2009; Rix et al., 2014; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Developing cultural humility is a continuous learning process involving reflection and self-awareness, being supportive of others and redressing power imbalances (Danso, 2018). The ways in which the participants, and the environment they entered, engaged with cultural humility were investigated through an examination of self, relational and organisational reflexivity (Rix et al., 2014).

This paper explored transnational social workers' understanding of First Nations perspectives and the research presented within it was guided by a cultural consultant, Auntie Maureen Ervine, a descendant of the Gomeroi people. Dr Mishel McMahon, a Yorta Yorta woman from the Echuca Murray River area, is the second author of the paper. The process of supervision enabled reflective conversations in which the position of self, worldviews, Aboriginal childrearing, and child protection practice were discussed. This approach enabled investigation into relational accountability and provided new insights into child protection practices in the transnational context (Bennett et al., 2011; Steinhauer, 2002). The narrative approach to data analysis explored the participants' positioning in the Australian child protection context by drawing on their narratives, which allowed for deep exploration of their experiences (Bamberg, 2012a).

The reviewers of *Australian Social Work* engaged positively with the paper and requested minor amendments only. The paper's relevance to Australian social work and the child protection sector was acknowledged. The reviewers suggested a follow-up article moving beyond reflexivity, with their recommendations focused on organisational and individual responsibility, including decolonising solidarity and reconciliation (Land, 2015).

This article was accepted for publication in *Australian Social Work* on 22 April 2020. The paper was published on Taylor and Francis online on 13 July 2020. It is available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2020.1771389>

As the first author of this article, my contribution equated to 70 percent. I was responsible for data collection, data analysis and developing the theoretical lens applied. I drafted the manuscript and the development of the content was guided by conversations held with Auntie Maureen Ervine, Dr Mishel McMahon and the supervisory team. I prepared the article for submission and responded to the reviewers' feedback. The second, third and fourth authors contributed 30 percent of the manuscript preparation. Importantly, their supervision guided my developing research expertise through critical exploration of the data as well as the research process. The supervisory team advised on the data collection, contributed to the analysis process, and critically appraised the manuscript and subsequent revisions. Auntie Maureen Ervine's practice wisdom in child protection informed the investigation of the participants' experiences and generated new insights within the supervisory team.

*Australian Social Work* is an international peer-reviewed journal reflecting contemporary thinking and trends in social work. The journal has grown out of the

Australian context and continues to provide a vehicle for Australian and international authors. Given the study content and relevance to the Australian field of social work, the journal was deemed to be most suitable for this publication. *Australian Social Work* is listed in SCImago and is recognised for the Higher Education Research Data Collection. The journal's 5-year Impact factor is 1.608 and its H Index is 23, ranking in the first quartile of publications in its field. The feedback from reviewers noted: 'The study is valuable and raises good points of discussion on a topical practice issue. Its particular significance to developing culturally safe practice and practitioners in our child protection statutory departments is important, alongside a clear point about centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ways of knowing, being and doing.' The copyright conditions of the publisher Taylor and Francis allow for the inclusion of the paper in this PhD dissertation.

The full citation of the article is:

Modderman, C., McMahon, M., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2020). Transnational social workers' understanding of Australian First Nations perspectives in statutory child protection. *Australian Social Work*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2020.1771389>

## 6.2 Article 4

AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL WORK  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2020.1771389>

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group



### Transnational Social Workers' Understanding of Australian First Nations Perspectives in Statutory Child Protection

Corina Modderman<sup>a</sup>, Mishel McMahon<sup>a</sup>, Guinever Threlkeld<sup>b</sup>, and Lynne McPherson<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Social Work & Social Policy, La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, Shepparton, Victoria, Australia;

<sup>b</sup>Social Work & Social Policy, La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, Wodonga, Victoria, Australia;

<sup>c</sup>School of Arts and Social Sciences, Southern Cross University, Gold Coast, Australia

#### ABSTRACT

Chronic staff shortages and high rates of turnover in child protection programs create opportunities for social work mobility across the world. Australian child protection departments actively recruit social workers from the United Kingdom and Ireland. This strategy may cause tension relating to the application of known Western social work practice and theory and limited understanding of Australian First Nations worldviews. Australia continues to struggle with the ongoing impact of colonisation; First Nations children are overrepresented in child protection service delivery. The research explored the understanding held by overseas-born and -educated social workers from the UK and Ireland (transnational social workers or TNSWs) of Australian First Nations peoples, when they migrate to practice in frontline child protection. Interviews with 13 practitioners across two time points explored social work practice in the transnational context. The study found that the majority of TNSWs had limited understanding of social work in a colonised country. The results provide a foundation to rethink how TNSW practice is influenced by place-related change. This research identified a need to raise transnational social workers' awareness of Australian First Nations child rearing practices that may lie outside their experiential understanding.

#### IMPLICATIONS

- Transnational social workers may advance their understanding of First Nations peoples and their perspectives through increasing their awareness of differences in their personal lived experiences from that of Australian First Nations peoples.
- The practice of cultural humility may reduce harm in transnational child protection practice.
- Critical reflection may enable the emergence of counter-colonial thinking in child protection practice with Australian First Nations peoples.

#### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 30 October 2019  
Accepted 22 April 2020

#### KEYWORDS

Transnational Social Work;  
First Nations Peoples; Child  
Protection; Cultural Humility

This collaborative writing project took place on the land of the Yorta Yorta, Bpangerang, Dhudhuroa, Wiradjuri, Bunjalung, Gomeroi, and Durambal peoples and emerged from the need to improve outcomes for Australian First Nations children and their families involved with statutory child protection programs. In this paper the term “Aboriginal

**CONTACT** Corina Modderman  [c.modderman@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:c.modderman@latrobe.edu.au)

© 2020 Australian Association of Social Workers



and Torres Strait Islander peoples” will be used interchangeably with the term “First Nations peoples”. To address relational accountability the lead author will be introduced (Steinhauer, 2002). Corina Modderman identifies as a Dutch Frisian woman who grew up on flat country surrounded by lakes and meadow birds. Corina arrived as a transnational social worker (TNSW) in Australia to practice in child protection 10 years ago and lives in rural Victoria. Corina’s identity is informed by Western ways of knowing and from her social work background positions herself within a strong social justice, progressive standpoint.

European settlers’ colonisation and the ideas of social Darwinism had a devastating impact on the lives of First Nations peoples and continues to effect social, economic, and cultural marginalisation (Bennett & Gates, 2019). In Australia social workers practice within communities where First Nations peoples are still among the most disadvantaged (Zubrzycki et al., 2014). This is particularly evident in statutory child protection, an area of practice for which overseas social workers are recruited to fill critical workforce gaps (Modderman et al., 2017). TNSWs, born and educated in the United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland, may have little knowledge or understanding of First Nations communities (Bartley et al., 2011; Modderman et al., 2017, 2019). Practicing social work is closely aligned with cultural location (Bartley et al., 2011; Modderman et al., 2019; Simpson, 2009; Welbourne et al., 2007). Professional migration entails being separated from the construction of social work as it was known in the country of origin (Modderman et al., 2019). Relatively little is known about TNSW and preparation for a transition of practice that includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, and doing (Martin & Mirraboopu, 2003). This study draws on Tervalon and Murray-Garcia’s (1998) concepts of cultural humility and multilayered reflexivity to address the key research question: What understanding, if any, do transnational social workers have about social work with First Nations communities when they migrate to Australia to practice in statutory child protection?

## Background

First Nations peoples have a different history to non-Indigenous Australians; they were the custodians of Country until the colonisers took the Australian continent (Muller, 2016). Intergenerational trauma results from historic and continuing injustice and impacts the present generation (Fernando & Bennett, 2019). Social workers participated in racist policies by removing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children up to the twenty-first century (Fernando & Bennett, 2019; Modderman et al., 2017; Muller, 2016). The number of First Nations children receiving child protection services continues to increase. In the period 2017–2018, these children were seven times more likely to receive a child protection service than non-Indigenous children. In Australia’s major cities First Nations children were 17 times, in remote areas 9 times, more likely than non-Indigenous children to be in out-of-home care (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019). In the last two decades Australian First Nations academics and community organisations have been highlighting the need to foreground their own continuing concepts and principles for childrearing, which were previously ignored through the doctrine of *terra nullius*. First Nations communities have declared that lack of understanding of these perspectives has contributed to high rates of overrepresentation of their children in child



protection services (McMahon, 2017). Zubrzycki et al. (2014) argue that Australian social work education and practice is embedded in White Western epistemologies. White is understood as the norm and Western thought is central in all areas of social work theory and practice (Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Walter et al., 2011; Zubrzycki et al., 2014). Australian social work continues to be located within the wider cultural context of avoidance and discomfort concerning race and First Nations peoples (Walter et al., 2011). TNSWs may enter a child protection system that continues to operate in the context of colonialism and oppression of First Nations peoples (Baines, 2018; Bennett & Gates, 2019). They are placed within a predominantly non-Indigenous child protection workforce that may experience uncertainty about Aboriginal cultures and communities (McDermott, 2019; McMahon, 2017). Global social work mobility may reaffirm Western views as the prominent focal point of practice and replicate harms of colonisation (Coates et al., 2006; Kindle, 2018).

In Australia social work is not a registered profession and occupies an ambiguous place in the bureaucratic landscape. Some child protection departments struggle to recruit and retain staff, and international recruitment is one response to shortages of frontline employees (Lonne et al., 2012; McArthur et al., 2012; Modderman et al., 2017, 2018, 2019; Zubrzycki et al., 2008). Practice in the Australian context calls for social workers to have place-based knowledge including critical understanding of colonisation and understanding of First Nations peoples' cultural perspectives (Green, 2019; Land, 2015). Little is known about the ways in which TNSWs, and recruiting organisations, understand and prepare for Australian child protection practice that includes First Nations' perspectives (Fouché et al., 2015; McArthur et al., 2012; Modderman et al., 2017). This paper explores the experience of TNSWs recruited to child protection service delivery in Australia and their understanding of First Nations communities.

### Theoretical Framework

Tervalon and Murray-Garcia's (1998) concept of cultural humility is understood as a continuous process of self-awareness, reflection, being supportive with others, and making effort to redress power imbalances between social workers and clients (Danso, 2018; Fernando & Bennett, 2019; Foronda et al., 2016; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). This paper utilises multilayered reflexivity that focuses on self, relational, and organisational practice to explore cultural humility in transnational child protection practice (Nicholls, 2009; Rix et al., 2014). Statutory environments value instrumental accountability, reflexivity fulfils the need for approaches that respond to the emotional impact of child protection practice and seek to develop respectful working relationships with families (D'cruz et al., 2007; Fook, 1999a; Munro, 2011; Ortega & Coulborn, 2011; Ruch, 2005). TNSWs that enter an unfamiliar environment draw on personal and professional experience to understand and critique knowledge that is introduced, while concurrently they must appraise and make sense of their experiences using that knowledge in the new context of child protection (Chow et al., 2011). This reflexivity involves cognitive, affective, and experiential processes to recognise the influence of social and cultural contexts in child protection practice (Fook, 1999b; Zuchowski, 2019).

Self-reflexivity explores what TNSWs bring to the new context from previous social work practice and investigates biases and assumptions through reflection and continuous

learning (Rix et al., 2014; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). This dimension involves individual reflection on social problems, using personal experience to understand and critique new knowledge that is introduced (Chow et al., 2011; D’cruz et al., 2007). Relational reflexivity investigates TNSWs’ orientation toward client-focused and community-based practice (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). The focus of relational reflexivity is on TNSWs’ knowledge about clients and how they engage with First Nations peoples in their new environment. Organisational reflexivity explores policies, procedures, and behaviours in the child protection service environment (Rix et al., 2014; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). It involves examination of cultural awareness and communication styles employed by the wider organisational child protection system (Rix et al., 2014). Detailed examination of cultural humility through multilayered reflexivity will illuminate TNSWs’ perceptions and understanding of First Nations peoples when they enter the Australian context of child protection practice.

### Research Design

It is within the context of longstanding concerns about historical child protection practice with Australian First Nations peoples, along with contemporary challenges of ongoing disadvantage and overrepresentation in child protection systems, that this research topic emerged. The paper is part of a larger study that examines UK and Irish TNSWs in Australian child protection practice. Here we examine TSNWs’ readiness for practice with First Nations peoples. A purposive sample of 13 TNSWs from the UK and Ireland recruited to Australia’s child protection workforce was interviewed twice over a three-year period using semistructured interviews. Recruitment was facilitated by senior staff in a metropolitan area; for confidentiality reasons this location has not been identified. Participants granted permission to record and transcribe interviews. In the first interview there was no specific question focusing on First Nation peoples, and in the second interview two specific questions were posed: “Thinking back to practice in the UK/Ireland and your education, how do you see your work with the Indigenous peoples of Australia? What was your understanding and how did this influence practice?”

A qualitative approach, focused on lived experience, was adopted to answer the research question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Silverman, 2013). A narrative-informed research design was used during data collection and three phases of analysis. In the first phase, data analysis focused on familiarisation with the narratives through repeated reading of interview transcripts and listening to audio-recordings. In the next phase, Nvivo enabled a thematic analysis to interrogate experiences for meaning and reflection on events (Mishler, 1995; Riessman, 2008). The collaborative research process enabled deeper understanding of the data to enhance the quality of the research, critically examining the dominant narrative in social work practice and research relating to First Nations peoples (Downey et al., 2017a). The relationship between participants’ positioning concerning the transnational context in which their narratives were embedded, and their individual agency, enabled deeper exploration of their experiences (Bamberg, 2012). Ethical approval was granted by the organisation from which participants were recruited and by the La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee in July 2013 (HEC13-019) and extended in 2016.



Shared authorship and reflective conversations with Yorta Yorta woman Dr Mishel McMahon and Gomeroi woman Auntie Maureen Ervine, were integral during the research process and provided credibility to findings in which participants' voices were privileged (Finlay, 2003; Polkinghorne, 2007). During the research process time was spent to reflect on positioning of self, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worldviews, and child protection practice. Discussions acknowledged individual positions in relation to the research topic, enabling new insights and knowledge about transnational practice in the Australian context of social work, informed by meaningful and culturally respectful relationships (Bennett et al., 2011).

Trustworthiness and authenticity of the study are demonstrated through the inclusion of quotations that support authentic meaning as expressed by participants and theoretical claims (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Downey et al., 2017b). Validity of findings is supported by attending to the context, transnational social workers migrating from the UK and Ireland to the Australian continent, in which the narratives are embedded (Patton, 1999). Rich description of the study context allows researchers considering the application in other sites to assess transferability (Lincoln, 2007).

## Findings

The findings presented here examine experiences of participants and their understanding of social work practice with First Nations peoples when they enter the Australian child protection environment. Multilayered analysis using self, relational, and organisational reflexivity investigated how participants made sense of their new environment. Findings illuminated how personal and professional experiences influence participants and their construction of social work in an unfamiliar child protection practice context.

### Self-Reflexivity

The dimension of self-reflexivity explores biases, identifying what participants bring to the new practice context from past experience. Participants recalled the recruitment processes emphasising that Australian child protection systems were similar to those in the UK and Ireland, and so they had not thought much about social work in a colonised country.

I think what we thought we knew was very similar to what you see on the television in Europe, that Aboriginal people are hailed as at the highest point of the society. Well, that's certainly what I felt was going on until I came here and realised that that's not what is happening. (Maria)

First Nations peoples were constructed as belonging to one culture. Initially participants focused on becoming culturally competent. Decolonised social work was not introduced as a way of practicing ethically with First Nations communities.

That part was missing, "what do I need to know about this culture that will support me in my role as a child protection practitioner?" What I find here is that it's less about the culture and more about you must do this for these people because we've done this in the past. And I find that a lot of that is very tokenistic. (Lara)

Participants drew on personal and professional experience, for example anti-oppressive practice, to understand and critique child protection interventions in the new context.

Just ensure that you're reducing the power imbalance, ensuring that their voice is heard because of all the history, while still assessing the risk and the harm and making sure the child's safe ... At home, I think you touch on all cultures, but here you have a cultural plan only for Aboriginal children, whereas I was like why is it not for Chinese or for all the cultures? (John)

A few participants with over two years of experience in Australia reflected that their previous social work practice in a multicultural society had not adequately prepared them for the Australian context.

Well, I guess in London I worked with many families from Sudan, Afghanistan, Libya ... I got a lot of practice and training to work with these families, but that's – I wasn't prepared, really, for working with Indigenous families. I was somewhat oblivious to the history of Australia. (Kylie)

Participants who had been in Australia more than four years and engaged with experiential and continuous learning, had a better understanding of how their place of origin unwittingly may represent oppression and power.

I think the organisation thought because we were living in a multicultural environment that we'd be able to deal with that. But working with Aboriginal people can be so significantly different. We're talking about an extremely oppressed community, who face trauma after trauma after trauma from White people. And then we're there going, with an English accent. (Simon)

Some participants felt shame when they reflected on their position of being White social workers. They initially participated in mainstream practice as the unquestioned way of service delivery.

One of the first encounters I had in understanding the gravity of the situation was when I was asked to remove a child ... my manager was a teacher ... wasn't skilled in trauma, wasn't skilled in understanding past histories, cultures, contexts that would've affected the whole situation ... and sending me into that situation; White, female, English, it's just totally inappropriate. (Jenny)

### Relational Reflexivity

The dimension of relational reflexivity explored participants' ability, or inability, to embrace First Nations peoples as the experts regarding issues that affect them. Some participants were unaware how their own racial and cultural identity may reflect the dominance of Whiteness in the child protection workforce.

I feel that what's happened in the past has happened. It was wrong what happened but you have to move on, there's been an apology ... there are so many resources here for Aboriginal people. (Jan)

Some assumptions stereotyped First Nations cultures and identities, undermining clients as experts about their own lived realities.

I had a book at home, *Walkabout*, and that was the only thing I'd ever known about Indigenous Australia ... being really honest with you having worked here I've not come across a lot of Indigenous, because there's quite a lot of Indigenous people here that don't identify with being Indigenous, White Aboriginals. (Petra)

The findings reflect assumptions that generalise the experience and needs of First Nations children. Some participants diminished the impact of colonisation by advocating for generic practices and service responses.

I think every person in Australia who has children should be treated the same. Yes, take in the cultural values, but never compromise with the child's risk ... in the UK, it doesn't matter what culture you're from, if somebody's being abused you take them out, and here it's kind of, "they're Indigenous, you can't do that". (Missy)

Relationships with Aboriginal colleagues and friends in the wider organisation, were formed mainly by participants who were more than two years post-migration. These relationships were viewed as a safe place for learning and asking questions.

If we were dealing with an Aboriginal family we would tap into them because these guys are meant to have a nous (sic) and tap in and work with them ... but then it is how you present yourself and the people that I'd worked with at that unit, I got on well with them. (Peter)

Experiential learning reduced judgment and enabled deep understanding of First Nations values and principles, this type of learning occurred for most participants outside the wider organisation, and well beyond the point of transition.

We went out bush ... We went to a yarning pit ... [had] discussions ... watched videos about Aboriginal people and what happened and history ... It's just the ingrained discrimination, you can see the result of what Aboriginal peoples have been through and where they are now. The trauma of it all, it's just all so clear. (Janine)

### Organisational Reflexivity

Participants experienced confusion about the incongruence between organisational policy, messages delivered in training and direct practice and processes with First Nations communities. A couple of participants had no previous knowledge about the Stolen Generations, which continues to impact First Nation Australians. During general induction training they were shocked to find out that "children were stolen" (Elli) from their parents. Some participants suggested the organisation created a false sense of expertise following this one-day training.

I think any Aboriginal work that is done can be quite tokenistic. You do your one-day training on Aboriginal culture sensitivity and then you're supposed to be equipped to work 100% with Aboriginal families. It just isn't the case. (Tina)

Participants were puzzled by the language used when discussing Aboriginal peoples "in the child protection department but also within the wider Australian White society" (John). Some felt that racism and disregard for experiences of First Nations peoples were common in the workplace. This led to uncertainty about how to respond and engage with First Nations families.

This is an environment where there have been these instances of abuse of power from social workers and police. And we're going out to these homes and nobody's thought to tell us why there might be a problem ... I think primarily because it's about White Australia's lack of understanding of what's happened ... And people are quite scared of the truth, of making a mistake. (Lily)

Participants in their second year of professional migration frequently expressed anger and hopelessness. They described their practice environment as having high instrumental accountability that undermined developing trust and relationships with First Nations communities. Decisions were made quickly and with little consideration of the needs of



First Nations children involved, almost dehumanising them. Organisational procedures and policies, including professional supervision, were experienced as compliance driven rather than focused on how assumptions about cultures and childrearing influence decision making.

Because of the political environment, it is like don't remove ... and then it ends up you remove Aboriginal children and where are you going to put them? These children are removed and then there is nowhere to put them. There are no care facilities and they are placed with White families, in respite homes and this can go on for months and months where these children are away from their families ... .. It is like putting dogs in a kennel. (Jill)

With prolonged exposure to the Australian child protection system participants were able to see the negative trajectories for First Nations children in the care system. Participants felt they were not able to build trust with clients within a risk averse system that frequently had a "knee-jerk reaction" (Jordan), resulting in Aboriginal children placed in poorly executed state care.

It is taking trust ... child protection, they're in, they're out, they remove a child, they put a child back, and they remove a child. They don't see the value in long-term intervention ... more Aboriginal children coming to care and we need more money for these placements ... the placements break down and the child gets lost in the system. Then there are more children in juvenile, mental health, prison ... (Kim)

## Discussion

This study aimed to investigate UK and Irish TNSWs' understandings of First Nations peoples. A narrative analysis enabled investigating participants' construction of social work and how this informed practice when entering an unfamiliar place. The results provide a foundation to rethink how TNSW practice is influenced by place-related change. Without deliberate attention, TNSW will not fully understand the lifeworld of First Nations peoples. The change in practice location requires TNSWs to be reflexive and make sense of experiences, drawing on personal and professional knowledge. At times of uncertainty the preferred response may be to revert to known constructions of childrearing, and child protection social work. Understanding both First Nations perspectives of childrearing in addition to Western childhood development theories of child protection, is not something TNSWs are familiar with through previous experience or education. A key point emerging from this research is that the majority of TNSWs had limited understanding of social work in a colonised country. Assumptions developed while in the UK and Ireland were not an accurate reflection of contemporary Australia and its First Nations peoples. Recruiting organisations do not take a proactive approach in dismantling incorrect assumptions. Findings showed that the application of previous experience failed to recognise the history and realities of First Nations peoples.

Findings suggest that cultural competency training during induction was experienced as confusing and inadequate. As a singular approach it asserts cultural expertise without reflecting on First Nations worldviews, or the ways structural oppression and colonisation impact on contemporary child protection (Green, 2019; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Such training may undermine self-reflexivity by focusing solely on "the other". Culture influenced professional identities of TNSWs, it defined their



ways of doing social work and location of self in an unfamiliar social structure and professional environment (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). TNSW prompted a first realisation of being White and the need to learn about details of colonisation in Australia (Land, 2015). This emerging self-awareness manifested mostly two years post-arrival and involved engagement in continuous professional development. TNSWs need to shift from a colonialist mindset, which only includes Western social work practice, to include First Nations perspectives. Findings highlighted that this shift remained challenging.

Australian research reported that TNSWs were significantly impacted by place-related change and emotionally hampered by the personal and professional impact of migration (Modderman et al., 2018, 2019). Analysis in this study shows non-judgemental engagement with relational reflexivity towards First Nations communities was not demonstrated by all TNSWs. Findings suggest that employing cultural humility through active listening and entering the client's world with empathy may have been somewhat diminished in the transnational experience (Modderman et al., 2018; Ortega & Coulborn, 2011; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). The main objective of child protection practice was predominately constructed as the child being "safe", with no mention of cultural safety. This may limit opportunity to enter the client's world with humility to ensure culturally relevant child safety and wellbeing (Ortega & Coulborn, 2011; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). The principle of First Nations communities participating in decisions about their children was at risk of getting lost amidst everyday hasty decision making, and limited understanding of colonisation. Findings suggest that some TNSWs felt worried about how to develop meaningful relationships with First Nations peoples, especially in an oppressive practice environment (Rix et al., 2014; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Zubrzycki et al., 2014). Connections with First Nations colleagues and friends eased some of this uncertainty, allowing participants of this study to ask questions and engage in informal conversation within more personal relationships.

Australian child protection systems have been profoundly shaped by their roots in colonial assimilation of First Nations communities. Findings indicate that TNSWs arrived to a workforce that did not openly acknowledge, discuss, or take responsibility for the overrepresentation in statistics and contemporary challenges for First Nations communities. There remains limited understanding of the impact of colonisation at practitioner and organisational level. The crisis-driven nature and risk-averse practice of Australian child protection systems provided little opportunity for reflection on uncertainty and complexity in which procedures may become a substitute for interpersonal engagement strategies (Ruch, 2005). This study was set in an organisational environment favouring generic service delivery with assessments deriving from Western constructions of practice, overlooking the history of First Nations peoples and their childrearing perspectives. An understanding of First Nations viewpoints for kinship and childrearing would enable TNSWs to practice from a "both ways" approach, informed by Western and First Nations worldviews (McMahon, 2017). This highlights the need for organisational reflexivity that includes leadership that encourages an environment where practitioners are supported to reflect on their own values, experiences, and worldviews that impact on decision making in the child protection context. Continuous learning and turning the mirror to self, may lead to a better understanding of the history of the child protection agency within the surrounding community. This will facilitate child protection practitioners to take more

responsibility for issues of race, cultures, and worldviews (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

This study showed proactive engagement with experiential learning and external training programs enabled TNSWs to be more humble and to better reflect on self. These participants were able to identify power imbalances through conflicting cultural orientations and they demonstrated an openness towards First Nations worldviews through continuing education, effort, and time (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Not all TNSWs in this study reached a stage of actively engaging with decolonised social work practice; this way of working is not simply attending one-off training that is learned and subsequently applied. Decolonising practice involves time and willingness to continually unpack the position of self towards First Nations peoples. This study provides guidance for further research into TNSW, and local non-Indigenous practitioners and organisations, and urges the significance of preparation and humility in light of Australia's colonial history for professional social work. Social work in Australia needs to critically reflect upon the ongoing contribution of colonising practices, and the role of White privilege (Zubrzycki et al., 2014). Transnational practice may unwittingly perpetuate colonising practices if TNSWs, and local non-Indigenous social workers, are not offered a learning environment that extends beyond promoting generic service delivery. TNSW practices must go beyond simply acquiring knowledge about First Nations cultures. This study highlights the need to engage in critical and reflexive thinking in regard to self and Western-orientated social work that may embody bias and racist ideologies. Australian child protection workers need to actively listen and engage with First Nations communities, to construct a "both ways" approach for practice. The resulting approach will be informed by First Nations perspectives of childhood that are thousands of years old and Western childhood development concepts, while balancing the child's needs for safety.

### Limitations

This was a small study at a metropolitan child protection office. In order to fully understand the transition of TNSWs and decolonised social work practice, more extensive research is required. This study focused on the transition from the UK and Ireland to Australia and does not include a comparison with the perceptions of social workers educated in Australia. Voices of First Nations clients that are allocated a TNSW are absent in this study.

### Conclusion

This article discussed TNSWs' understandings of First Nations communities when they entered the Australian context of child protection service delivery. The analysis showed that employing cultural humility through multilayered reflexivity may contribute to courageous conversations about overrepresentation of First Nations children in Australia's child protection systems. There is a need for exploring how this field of practice can engage with and counter colonial thinking through critical reflection. Consequently, this research supports the further development of better pathways for TNSWs that extends beyond applying Western concepts of social work to First Nations peoples.



## Acknowledgement

The authors would like to gratefully acknowledge Auntie Maureen Ervine, descendant of the Gomeroi people, for her invaluable contributions to this paper. Thank you for sharing your more than thirty years of experience relating to children and their families involved with statutory child protection.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## References

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2019). *Child protection Australia 2017–2018*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/child-protection/reports>
- Baines, D. (2018). New public management, migrant professionals and labour mobility: Possibilities for social justice social work? In A. Bartley & L. Beddoe (Eds.), *Transnational social work: Opportunities and challenges of a global profession* (pp. 35–51). Policy Press.
- Bamberg, M. (2012). Narrative practice and identity navigation. In J. A. Holstein & J. F. Gubrium (Eds.), *Varieties of narrative analysis* (pp. 99–122). Sage.
- Bartley, A., Beddoe, L., Duke, J., Fouché, C., Harington, P., & Shah, R. (2011). Crossing borders: Key features of migrant social workers in New Zealand. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, 23(3), 16–30. <https://doi.org/10.11157/anzswj-vol23iss3id157>
- Bennett, B., & Gates, T. G. (2019). Teaching cultural humility for social workers serving LGBTQI Aboriginal communities in Australia. *Social Work Education*, 38(5), 604–617. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2019.1588872>
- Bennett, B., Zubrzycki, J., & Bacon, V. (2011). What do we know? The experiences of social workers working alongside Aboriginal people. *Australian Social Work*, 64(1), 20–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2010.511677>
- Chow, A. Y., Lam, D. O., Leung, G. S., Wong, D. F., & Chan, B. F. (2011). Promoting reflexivity among social work students: The development and evaluation of a programme. *Social Work Education*, 30(02), 141–156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2011.540377>
- Coates, J., Gray, M., & Hetherington, T. (2006). An “ecospiritual” perspective: Finally, a place for Indigenous approaches. *British Journal of Social Work*, 36(3), 381–399. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcl005>
- Danso, R. (2018). Cultural competence and cultural humility: A critical reflection on key cultural diversity concepts. *Journal of Social Work*, 18(4), 410–430. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017316654341>
- D’cruz, H., Gillingham, P., & Melendez, S. (2007). Reflexivity, its meanings and relevance for social work: A critical review of the literature. *British Journal of Social Work*, 37(1), 73–90. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcl001>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative enquiry* (3rd ed., pp. 1–43). Sage.
- Downey, H., Threlkeld, G., & Warburton, J. (2017a). What is the place of reflective learning in researching farming couples’ retirement decision making? *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice*, 16(6), 756–774. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325016643580>
- Downey, H., Threlkeld, G., & Warburton, J. (2017b). What is the role of place identity in older farming couples’ retirement considerations? *Journal of Rural Studies*, 50, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2016.12.006>
- Fernando, T., & Bennett, B. (2019). Creating a culturally safe space when teaching Aboriginal content in social work: A scoping review. *Australian Social Work*, 72(1), 47–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2018.1518467>
- Finlay, L. (2003). The reflexive journey: Mapping multiple routes. In L. Finlay & B. Gough (Eds.), *Reflexivity: A practical guide for researchers in health and social sciences* (pp. 3–20). Blackwell.

- Fook, J. (1999a). Critical reflectivity in education and practice. In B. Pease & J. Fook (Eds.), *Transforming social work practice: Postmodern critical perspectives* (pp. 195–208). Allen & Unwin.
- Fook, J. (1999b). Reflexivity as method. *Annual Review of Health Social Science*, 9(1), 11–20. <https://doi.org/10.5172/hesr.1999.9.1.11>
- Foronda, C., Baptiste, D.-L., Reinholdt, M. M., & Ousman, K. (2016). Cultural humility: A concept analysis. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 27(3), 210–217. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043659615592677>
- Fouché, C., Beddoe, L., Bartley, A., & Parkes, E. (2015). Are we ready for them? Overseas-qualified social workers' professional cultural transition. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(1), 106–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2015.1022858>
- Green, S. (2019). Social work and cultural support. In B. Bennett & S. Green (Eds.), *Our voices: Aboriginal social work* (2nd ed., pp. 175–189). Red Globe Press.
- Kindle, P. A. (2018). Transnational social work: Opportunities and challenges of a global profession. *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work*, 15(5), 596–598. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761407.2018.1494656>
- Land, C. (2015). *Decolonizing solidarity: Dilemmas and directions for supporters of Indigenous struggles*. Zed Books.
- Lincoln, Y. S. (2007). Naturalistic inquiry. In G. Ritzer (Ed.), *The Blackwell encyclopedia of sociology*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosn006>
- Lonne, B., Harries, M., & Lantz, S. (2012). Workforce development: A pathway to reforming child protection systems in Australia. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43(8), 1630–1648. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcs064>
- Martin, K., & Mirraboopa, B. (2003). Ways of knowing, being and doing: A theoretical framework and methods for Indigenous and Indigenist re-search. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 27(76), 203–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14443050309387838>
- McArthur, M., Thomson, L., Barker, J., Winkworth, G., & Campus, C. (2012). *National analysis of workforce trends in statutory child protection*. <http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/national-analysis-of-workforce-trends-in-statutory-child-protection>
- McDermott, D. (2019). “Big sister” wisdom: How might non-Indigenous speech-language pathologists genuinely, and effectively, engage with Indigenous Australia? *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 21(30), 252–262. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17549507.2019.1617896>
- McMahon, M. (2017). *Lotipa-nhanuk: Indigenous Australian child-rearing discourses* [Doctoral dissertation]. La Trobe University. <http://arrow.latrobe.edu.au:8080/vital/access/manager/Repository/latrobe:42829?queryType=vitalDismax&query=child-rearing+discourses>
- Mishler, E. G. (1995). Models of narrative analysis: A typology. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 5(2), 87–123. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jnlh.5.2.01mod>
- Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2017). Transnational social workers in statutory child welfare: A scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 81, 21–28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.07.022>
- Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2018). Transnational social workers' lived experience in statutory child protection. *European Journal of Social Work*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2018.1517114>
- Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2019). The role of place for transnational social workers in statutory child protection. *British Journal of Social Work*, 94(6), 1619–1637. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcz065>
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2015). *The white possessive: Property, power, and Indigenous sovereignty*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Muller, L. (2016). Preparing to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: Decolonisation for social work practice. In J. Maidment & R. Egan (Eds.), *Practice skills in social work & welfare* (3rd ed., pp. 84–100). Allen & Unwin.
- Munro, E. (2011). *The Munro review of child protection: Final report, a child-centred system* (Vol. 8062). The Stationery Office.



- Nicholls, R. (2009). Research and Indigenous participation: Critical reflexive methods. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 12(2), 117–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570902727698>
- Ortega, R. M., & Coulborn, K. (2011). Training child welfare workers from an intersectional cultural humility perspective: A paradigm shift. *Child Welfare*, 90(5), 27–49.
- Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Services Research*, 34(5, Part II), 1189–1208.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2007). Validity issues in narrative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(4), 471–486. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406297670>
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage.
- Rix, E. F., Barclay, L., & Wilson, S. (2014). Can a white nurse get it? “Reflexive practice” and the non-Indigenous clinician/researcher working with Aboriginal people. *Rural & Remote Health*, 14(2), 2679.
- Ruch, G. (2005). Relationship-based practice and reflective practice: Holistic approaches to contemporary child care social work. *Child & Family Social Work*, 10(2), 111–123. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2005.00359.x>
- Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. Sage.
- Simpson, G. (2009). Global and local issues in the training of ‘overseas’ social workers. *Social Work Education*, 28(6), 655–667. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615470903027371>
- Steinhauer, E. (2002). Thoughts on an Indigenous research methodology. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 26(2), 69–81.
- Tervalon, M., & Murray-Garcia, J. (1998). Cultural humility versus cultural competence: A critical distinction in defining physician training outcomes in multicultural education. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 9(2), 117–125. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hpu.2010.0233>
- Walter, M., Taylor, S., & Habibis, D. (2011). How white is social work in Australia? *Australian Social Work*, 64(1), 6–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2010.510892>
- Welbourne, P., Harrison, G., & Ford, D. (2007). Social work in the UK and the global labour market: Recruitment, practice and ethical considerations. *International Social Work*, 50(1), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872807071480>
- Zubrzycki, J., Green, S., Jones, V., Stratton, K., Young, S., & Bessarab, D. (2014). *Getting it right: Creating partnerships for change. Integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges in social work education and practice*. [https://staff.acu.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/655804/Getting\\_It\\_Right\\_June\\_2014.pdf](https://staff.acu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/655804/Getting_It_Right_June_2014.pdf)
- Zubrzycki, J., Thomson, L., & Trevithick, P. (2008). International recruitment in child protection: The experiences of workers in the Australian Capital Territory. *Communities, Children and Families Australia*, 3(2), 30–38.
- Zuchowski, I. (2019). Five years after Carmody: Practitioners’ views of changes, challenges and research in child protection. *Children Australia*, 44(3), 146–153. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cha.2019.14>

### 6.3 Conclusion

This chapter presented findings related to transnational social workers' understanding of social work with First Nations communities. Applying a lens of multi-layered reflexivity to investigate cultural humility in transnational practice highlighted the need for robust and courageous conversations about the over-representation of First Nations children in Australia's child protection system. The findings presented in this publication illustrate that practising social work in a multicultural society does not prepare transnational social workers for the unique Australian context of child protection. UK- and Irish-trained social workers may have little understanding of First Nations perspectives and are often not familiar with decolonising social work practices. The predominantly Eurocentric work environment in which assessments derive from Western standards of practice does not necessarily challenge blind spots and biases. Decolonising practices aim to move beyond competency through mastery of knowledge, of being an 'expert' about other cultures. There is a need to turn the mirror to self for the broader field of child protection, not just among transnational social workers, in order to engage with and counter colonial thinking through critical reflection.

In the next chapter I consider all of the findings from the four articles presented in this dissertation to address the overarching research question: How do personal, professional and organisational dynamics influence the experiences of UK and Irish recruited social workers within an Australian child protection system?



## **Chapter 7: Integrated Discussion**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This doctoral dissertation addresses key issues relating to the global trend towards professional migration and the dynamics associated with social work mobility. The transnational social workers participating in this study experienced a range of personal and professional challenges when they travelled over continents and transitioned into child protection service delivery in an unfamiliar environment. This study contributes knowledge about professional social work migration. It shows that the discipline may benefit from greater awareness of the influence of geographical location, socio-political issues, culture and history on place-based approaches and perspectives in child protection practice. In this context, this dissertation addresses the research question concerning how the personal, professional and organisational dynamics influenced the experiences of UK and Irish recruited social workers within an Australian child protection system. The Australian literature on transnational social work has to date been limited. Consequently, this dissertation makes a valuable contribution to knowledge by analysing the narratives of migrating social workers and capturing their experiences of transnational social work in Australian child protection service delivery. Further, this research has wider implications as not only does Australia recruit overseas social workers, but countries such as New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Canada also experience workforce pressures that motivate governments to modify migration and selection policies to target social workers with relevant qualifications and experience (Bartley, 2018). Other allied health disciplines may also benefit from this study by applying its findings to their transnational workforce.

The major research question, outlined above, led to the conceptualisation of four sub-questions, the first of which has two parts. Each sub-question was addressed

separately via the series of peer-reviewed articles presented in the previous chapters. The first research sub-questions, presented in Chapter 2, were answered by drawing on a secondary data set that scoped findings from the existing literature:

1. a. What are the personal and professional experiences of transnational social workers migrating between Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom?  
How can this knowledge be applied to the Australian child welfare workforce?
- b. In what ways are transnational social workers ready to practise with Indigenous communities?

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 presented a further three publications that sought to answer the sub-questions below and were informed by primary data collected during in-depth research interviews:

2. What is the lived experience of transnational social workers in the context of professional migration?
3. What is the role of place for transnational social workers in frontline statutory child protection?
4. What understanding, if any, do transnational social workers have about social work with First Nations communities when they migrate to Australia to practise in statutory child protection?

This chapter begins with a summary of the research findings from each published paper followed by a presentation of the key findings in four tables. These findings relate to the central research question and enhance understanding of transnational social work. This summary forms the basis of the integrated discussion, which is followed by a consideration of the strengths and limitations of the research. The chapter concludes with proposed directions for future research.

## 7.2 Summary of Findings

This small-scale study was concerned with exploring the personal, professional and organisational dynamics that influence the experiences of transnational social workers in frontline child protection in one of Australia's major cities. A range of theoretical perspectives were used to explore different aspects of the contextually driven nature of social work that influence transnational social work. The following section provides an overview that highlights the key findings of the research reported in the four articles presented in earlier chapters. The purpose of this is to demonstrate how these findings have contributed knowledge in answering the overarching research question.

A scoping review of the literature was presented in Chapter 2, via a publication titled 'Transnational social workers in statutory child welfare: A scoping review' (Modderman et al., 2017). This paper established a foundation for the present research by examining 16 studies, of which 13 reported empirical data, relevant to transnational social work in the Australian context. The narrative synthesis provided greater conceptual clarity and highlighted implications for child protection practice and research. The review found that contemporary research has given little attention to transnational social workers' understanding of Australian First Nations peoples, among other key findings (see Table 1). A gap in the knowledge was identified in relation to what support is required for transnational social workers when they transition into a new practice culture during a time of personal and professional dislocation. The findings of the scoping review guided the focus and design of the primary research presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this dissertation.

The three papers presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 (Modderman et al., 2020; Modderman et al., 2018, 2019) were drawn from the primary data set. The second publication, titled 'Transnational social workers' lived experience in statutory child

protection', explored the parallel process of the professional experience as a transnational social worker in child protection and the personal experience of migration (Modderman et al., 2018). Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) attachment theory guided the investigation of the experience of loss and grief that shape personal and professional migration journeys. The complex and emotionally challenging environment in which child protection takes place intensifies the experience of feeling personally and professionally dislocated and impacts on emotional health and wellbeing. This paper reported professional migration to be a life-changing event that significantly impacts on transnational social workers in both the professional context and within their personal life (see Table 2).

The third article, titled 'The role of place for transnational social workers in statutory child protection', explored the role of 'place' when social workers become globally mobile (Modderman et al., 2019). The separation from constructs of social work known in the country of origin may affect the positioning of self as a social work practitioner in an unknown environment. Adapting identity process theory to the context of place (Breakwell, 1986; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996) enabled an examination of how place-related changes can threaten professional identity in everyday child protection practice. This paper found that the transnational social workers experienced a misfit between their construction of social work and the Australian practice setting they entered, resulting in diminished professional self-esteem and self-efficacy. In turn, this impact of place-related change on professional identity may have a negative impact on staff retention (see Table 3).

The fourth article was titled 'Transnational social workers understanding of Australian First Nations perspectives in statutory child protection'. Multi-layered reflexivity, drawing on concepts of cultural humility, was adopted to investigate transnational child protection practices First Nations peoples in a colonial country

(Nicholls, 2009; Rix et al., 2014; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). This paper identified that transnational social workers know little about First Nations communities or decolonising practices, and that transnational social workers' personal experiences may differ greatly from the lifeworld of Australian First Nations peoples. Being humble and aware of self, rather than focusing on being competent about 'the other', remained challenging for most transnational social workers, who operate according to the dominant Western epistemologies in child protection service delivery (see Table 4).



Table 1: Research sub-questions 1a and 1b

<p><b>Research sub-questions 1a and 1b</b></p> <p><b>a. What are the personal and professional experiences of transnational social workers migrating between Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom? How can this knowledge be applied to the Australian child welfare workforce?</b></p> <p><b>b. In what ways are transnational social workers ready to practice with Indigenous communities?</b></p> <p><b>Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., &amp; McPherson, L. (2017). Transnational social workers in statutory child welfare: A scoping review. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i>, 81, 21-28. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.07.022">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.07.022</a></b></p>	<p><b>Key findings – Transnational social work (TNSW) in the Australian context</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is limited research available on TNSWs in the Australian context of child protection.</li> <li>• It is unclear how child protection organisations prepare a TNSW workforce for practice in Australia.</li> <li>• TNSWs may have difficulties understanding First Nations communities and limited awareness of decolonised social work.</li> <li>• TNSWs may unwittingly perpetuate neo-colonial relations and reinforce Western practice with First Nations communities.</li> <li>• TNSWs are mostly unaware that child protection service delivery is not the core domain of social work in Australia.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Key findings – Implications of transitioning across borders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TNSWs experience a loss of social capital, and the psychosocial impact of migration may be significant.</li> <li>• Anglophone countries are only superficially comparable, and the impact of cultural transition is underestimated.</li> <li>• Child protection systems have different organisational cultures, from hierarchical in the United Kingdom to casual in New Zealand.</li> <li>• Poor supervision is a common experience for TNSWs in the early stage of transitioning.</li> <li>• TNSWs may experience personal and professional dislocation.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Key findings – Induction processes for TNSWs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TNSWs may experience inadequate validation of their prior practice experience during induction processes.</li> <li>• Induction processes frequently stop after explaining law and procedures, and cultural competence orientations are brief.</li> <li>• Locating TNSWs as co-learners instead of new learners may enhance induction to the new context.</li> <li>• There is a need for individual support packages for individual TNSWs.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Key findings – Social-cultural transitioning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TNSWs need to be informed about the local context, agency-specific practice and professional discourses.</li> <li>• Workplace arrangements, career advancement and the status of social work may be different from those in the home country.</li> <li>• The construction of social work at the local level needs to be explained to TNSWs.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Induction that does not address the above can lead to miscommunication and cultural dissonance, generating stress for TNSWs.</li> </ul>
	<b>Key findings – Professional social work identity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TNSWs are employed in difficult contexts, entering a workforce under pressure with high turnover.</li> <li>• There is little opportunity for TNSWs to engage with the broader social work debate outside the day-to-day work.</li> <li>• TNSWs must renegotiate their professional authority and identity in the new context.</li> <li>• The skills and requirements for social work practice may not align across different national contexts, leading to a loss of confidence in professional capabilities.</li> <li>• TNSWs may experience a diminished professional identity in the Australian context of child protection.</li> </ul>
	<b>Key findings – Readiness for practice with Indigenous communities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural training may be superficial and inadequate for newly arrived TNSWs.</li> <li>• Ongoing cultural training using context-specific material is required that is adapted to the needs of individual TNSWs.</li> <li>• Cultural training currently focuses on the needs of service users rather than on the needs of unprepared TNSWs.</li> <li>• TNSWs need to develop an understanding of the history of Indigenous Australia, colonisation and the Stolen Generations, including the contemporary experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.</li> <li>• There is a lack of clarity about what support is required to prepare TNSWs.</li> </ul>

Table 2: Research sub-question 2

<p><b>Research sub-question 2</b></p> <p><b>What is the lived experience of transnational social workers in the context of professional migration?</b></p> <p><b>Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., &amp; McPherson, L. (2018). Transnational social workers' lived experience in statutory child protection. <i>European Journal of Social Work</i>, 23(4), 645-657.</b></p>	<p><b>Key findings – Loss of secure professional base</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experienced social workers firmly anchored in child protection practice found the new environment of practice in Australia to be stressful, and that their professional status and expertise were not recognised.</li> <li>• The previous secure base as a social worker in child protection was lost in the new practice environment, which caused stress.</li> <li>• Child protection practice grounded in social work practice and theory is important for TNSWs.</li> <li>• Previous professional authority was not easily transferred to the new practice environment.</li> <li>• TNSWs experienced a lack of agency in the new environment.</li> <li>• TNSWs have a strong need for connection with the social work profession.</li> <li>• Validation of professional status and experience is important, including supervision delivered by social workers.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Key findings – Loss of personal and professional identity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The experience of loss of social work identity and professional connection is mirrored by the loss of family and friends.</li> <li>• An accumulation of negative experiences in the professional domain impacts on personal wellbeing, exacerbated by a loss of networks.</li> <li>• Touchstones such as Christmas, a familiar sense of humour and the timing of the seasons reinforced the sense of being far from home.</li> <li>• The pressures impacting on emotional wellbeing can be exacerbated by the emotionally charged nature of child protection practice.</li> <li>• TNSWs found it difficult trying to find their professional voice and authority in the new environment.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Key findings – Staff burnout and turnover in the child protection environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Induction processes frequently only include explanations of the relevant law and procedures, and cultural competence orientations are brief.</li> <li>• TNSWs may experience inadequate validation of their prior practice experience during the phase of induction and beyond.</li> <li>• Organisations need to identify TNSWs as co-learners instead of new learners, who bring valuable skills and expertise to the new environment of child protection service delivery.</li> <li>• There is a need for tailored support packages for individual TNSWs.</li> </ul>

Table 3: Research sub-question 3

<p><b>Research sub-question 3</b></p> <p><b>What is the role of place for transnational social workers in frontline statutory child protection?</b></p> <p><b>Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., &amp; McPherson, L. (2019). The role of place for transnational social workers in statutory child protection. <i>British Journal of Social Work</i>, 94(6), 1619-1637.</b></p>	<p><b>Key findings – Place-related change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Place-related change may result in tension between the new practice environment and TNSWs' known construction of social work.</li> <li>• The role of place in social work practice is underestimated by TNSWs.</li> <li>• TNSWs expected the nature of social work practice in the new environment to be the same as that in the place of origin.</li> <li>• Daily social work practice necessitated a repositioning of one's professional self to inform complex place-based decisions appropriate to the new child protection environment.</li> <li>• Place-related change may challenge professional self-esteem and self-efficacy.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Key findings – Professional discontinuity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approaches to child protection in a new place may be experienced by TNSWs as incongruent with their social work values.</li> <li>• An unfamiliar environment may compromise TNSWs' core beliefs as a social work practitioner.</li> <li>• Established professional authority may flounder in a different place and context.</li> <li>• Management styles may be different and experienced as 'old school', emphasising compliance and delegated authority.</li> <li>• Professional de-legitimisation can lead to diminished satisfaction from practice in child protection service delivery.</li> <li>• The new environment may require new ways of working that fit framing one's practice and professional identity. For example, referring to oneself as a public servant instead of a social worker.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Key findings – Professional supervision</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TNSWs experienced supervision as focused on organisational demands rather than as a safe place for discussing complex client issues.</li> <li>• In the Australian context supervision delivered by experienced social workers may strengthen social work theory and practice.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Key findings – Professional distinctiveness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The inability to establish a sense of continuity between the previous and new places of practice challenged the professional self-esteem of TNSWs.</li> <li>• Hostility towards social workers in the new environment led to a loss of confidence and an inability to find a new professional 'home'.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The procedural approach to child protection in the new environment hindered TNSWs' professional judgement and decision-making, impeding their self-efficacy and exacerbating stress.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Key findings – Retention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most participants did not sustain a career in child protection and left the field after their initial two-year contract.</li> <li>• De-professionalisation and impeded agency contributed to TNSWs leaving frontline child protection.</li> <li>• A low return on investment is concerning as retaining experienced social workers may contribute to better outcomes for vulnerable children and their families.</li> </ul>

Table 4: Research sub-question 4

<p><b>Research sub-question 4</b></p> <p><b>What understanding, if any, do transnational social workers have about social work with First Nations communities when they migrate to Australia to practice in statutory child protection?</b></p> <p><b>Modderman, C., McMahon, M., Threlkeld, G., &amp; McPherson, L. (2020). Transnational social workers understanding of First Nations perspectives in statutory child protection. <i>Australian Social Work</i>. Advance online publication. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2020.1771389">https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2020.1771389</a></b></p>	<p><b>Key findings – Limited understanding of First Nations peoples</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The assumptions about Australian First Nations peoples developed in the United Kingdom and Ireland are not accurate.</li> <li>• Organisations do not take a proactive approach to dismantling the incorrect assumptions held by workers either prior to or post arrival.</li> <li>• Cultural competency training as part of induction is limited, confusing and undermines self-reflexivity.</li> <li>• Previous social work experience in a multicultural society may fail to include the history and reality of First Nations peoples.</li> <li>• Decolonised social work is not made possible by a one-off training event, it requires time and a willingness to unpack the position of self.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Key findings – Self-reflexivity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The experience of TNSW in a new environment may prompt emerging awareness of ‘whiteness’, Eurocentric thinking and Western practice approaches.</li> <li>• Seeking to engage with decolonised social work is challenging for TNSWs who arrive in an environment where both individual practitioners and the wider organisation remain silent about colonisation and First Nations communities.</li> <li>• Experiential learning and external training enable humility and reflection on self.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Key findings – Relational reflexivity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Place-related change may undermine relational reflexivity. The emotional turmoil of the transnational experience may somewhat diminish workers’ empathy.</li> <li>• The predominant focus on the child being ‘safe’ may limit opportunities to enter the client’s world and create a culturally safe environment in child protection practice.</li> <li>• The oppressive environment of child protection impacts on TNSWs’ ability to develop meaningful relationships with First Nations peoples.</li> <li>• Personal connections with First Nations colleagues and friends can ease some of the uncertainty.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Key findings – Organisational reflexivity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current child protection practice overlooks the history of First Nations peoples and their perspectives on childrearing.</li> <li>• Child protection organisations would benefit from fostering an environment in which practitioners are supported to reflect on their values and worldviews and to critically examine the over-representation of First Nations children in the child protection system.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offering continuous learning and training for TNSWs may improve understanding of the history of the child protection agency in the surrounding community.</li> </ul>
	<b>Key findings – Social work</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TNSWs may unwittingly perpetuate colonising practices if organisations fail to prepare incoming transnational staff.</li> <li>• TNSWs need to take ownership of their own learning and possible contribution to colonising practices.</li> <li>• There is a need to engage in critical and reflexive thinking in relation to Western-orientated social work practices, which may embody bias and racist ideologies.</li> <li>• There is a need for Australian child protection and social work to actively listen to and engage with First Nations communities to construct a ‘both ways’ approach to practice.</li> </ul>

### **7.3 Discussion**

To conceptualise transnational social work, this study began by investigating the existing literature and then explored the unique Australian context of international recruitment. This approach allowed for the refinement of the research sub-questions and the design of the study, which was narrative informed.

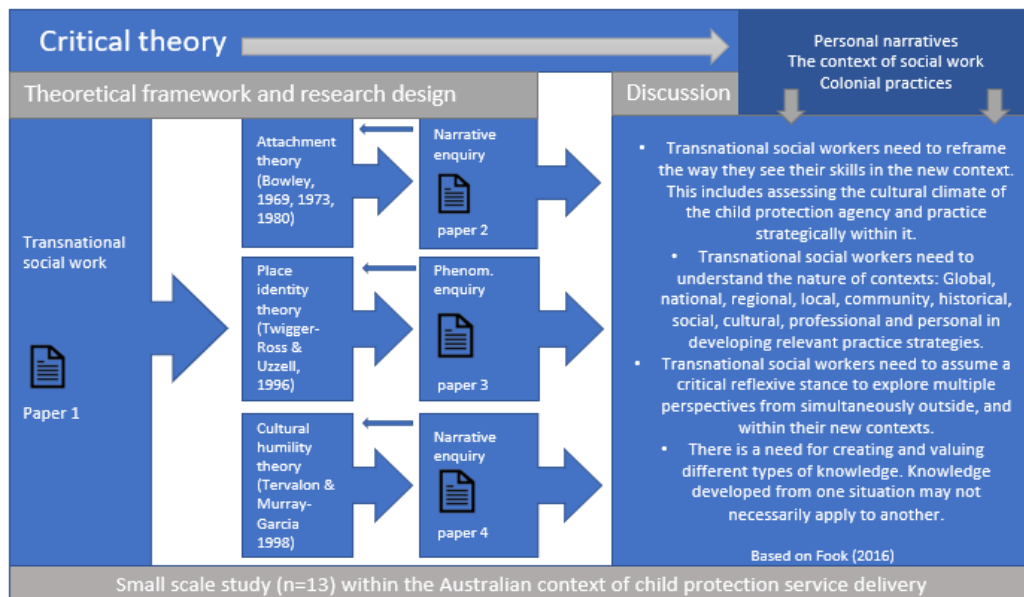
The study involved an exploration of the lived experiences of social workers who navigate the complexity of practice in an unknown child protection environment. The application of critical theory placed transnational social workers in context as they are working within environments and responsible for change in situations they do not necessarily control (Fook, 2016). Investigating transnational social work through the lenses of attachment theory, place identity theory and cultural humility theory was a valuable approach in terms of connecting, clarifying and conveying both the results and the theoretical propositions presented in this dissertation. Multi-layered reflexivity assisted in unpacking transnational social workers' self-awareness by moving beyond individual practice, and seeking to explain the impacts of the broader child protection system to examine experience and context (Archer, 2007; Watts, 2019). Managerialism, bureaucracy and proceduralism dominate in child protection practice, managers may control what social workers do and how (Rogowski, 2014). Social work grounded in critical theory embraces enhancing well-being for all families and creating environments where social justice is addressed at all levels of practice (Salas et. al., 2010). Critical theory is necessary for statutory service delivery, a critical-reflexive approach will challenge the dominant social structures, social relations and personal constructions that transnational social workers bring with them (Fook 2016, Rogowski, 2014).

Social workers who move between the United Kingdom, Ireland and Australia are privileged, as they are sought-after professionals who make an informed and voluntary decision to migrate. They migrate to secure employment with the assistance of the government agencies responsible for statutory child protection services. Nevertheless, this doctoral study highlights that crossing borders to practise social work in an unknown child protection system can be a fraught and challenging process. Personal, professional and organisational dynamics intersect in child protection service delivery, and for transnational social workers they become entwined with the impacts of migration and the complexity of practice in the contemporary Australian child protection system (Oates, 2019b; Zuchowski, 2019). Engaging with transnational social work in an unknown context emerged as life-changing for the participants in this study, resulting in diverse and often difficult professional and personal experiences, and varied migratory trajectories. The contexts in which transnational social workers practise range from national and global situations to the localised community. The context is the general background to practice and this study showed there are also many specific contexts transnational social workers carry within themselves (Fook, 2016).

This thesis presents analysis of primary and secondary data, to provide an in-depth understanding of how transnational social workers respond to personal, professional and organisational dynamics when they enter child protection practice in an unfamiliar environment. The secondary data informed the scoping review of the literature presented in Chapter 2, which highlighted what is currently known about transnational social work practice in the existing literature. The primary data were drawn from interviews with 13 transnational social workers from the United Kingdom and Ireland exploring how they constructed their professional migration and social work practice within the context of an Australian major city. The narrative analysis focused on

transnational social workers' lived experience, as well as on how they constructed child protection practices in an unknown environment and the role of place identity.

*Figure 2: Overview of the study*



The findings are integrated and presented here in line with three overarching themes that demonstrate the intersection of the personal, professional and organisational dynamics of transnational social work and how they may impact children and their families involved with child protection service delivery. First, I will reflect on the personal stories shared during the research interviews, which illuminate the construction of self and the ways in which social workers want to be seen as professionals within child protection service delivery (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). Second, I will discuss the relationship between social work, and the context and place of social work practice. Finally, I will discuss how the findings in this study demonstrate that transnational social work mobility may reinforce colonial practices if individual social workers and the practice environment fail to engage with decolonising practices that encourage cultural humility.

### *7.3.1 Personal Narratives*

Throughout the discussion of findings presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 I have allowed the participants' voices to emerge to describe their experiences of transnational social work. This narrative-informed study illustrated that professional migration can be an emotionally challenging journey. The findings reflect the participants' significant life-changing experiences that intersected with social work practice in a complex area of Australian human services practice – child protection (Oates, 2019b). Two distinct identities, those of social worker and of migrant professional, overlap when social workers engage with their practice across borders (Modderman et al., 2018). The complexity of transnational social work is intensified by known stressors associated with child protection service delivery in Australia. Two points of data collection brought greater depth to the research and allowed for the exploration of the temporal personal and professional experiences that influenced transnational social work practice (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Narrative research is relational. In this regard, during the research interviews my background as a transnational social worker in child protection practice encouraged the participants to share intimate details of their professional and personal migration experiences (Patton, 2002). As a result, the analysis of the small stories illuminated the ways in which professional migration affected their personal life and identity (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998).

Undertaking transnational practice transpired as an experience that disrupted everyday life and the construction of social work. The yearning for friends, family, colleagues and a professional 'fit' in the new environment emerged strongly when the lenses of Bowlby's attachment theory (1969, 1973, 1980) and Twigger-Ross and Uzzell's place identity theory (1996) were applied to the data. The emotional impact of relocation across the world was further highlighted by applying the lens of reflexivity to

explore how the participants considered response to the new context of practice (D’cruz et al., 2007; Fook, 1999).

The participants presented as critical thinkers open to practice improvements and reflection, most having significant practice experience in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Yet, they felt that their professional standing was diminished and disregarded in the Australian context of service delivery. For example, in their work they were required to engage with or witnessed interventions in the family life of clients that were informed by top-down delegated decision-making rather than by the transnational social workers’ expertise as experienced child protection practitioners. As a result, most participants expressed a strong feeling of entrapment, and of being lured into an environment that did not fulfil the promises made as part of recruitment drives for social workers in the Australian child protection system. The experience of professional loss and grief when allocated a role as a case manager instead of as a social worker emerged as a strong theme in this study.

The application of Bowlby’s (1969, 1973, 1980) attachment theory illuminated the experience of loss of belonging in the personal, professional and organisational dynamics of transnational social work. The transnational social workers in this narrative study arrived in Australia with a strong commitment to social work in child protection. They entered Australia keen to work in this field of practice and were dedicated to a career in child protection. The participants were prepared for a challenge, consistent with their commitment to working with children at risk and their families. Professional pride was evident in the interviews, revealed in the participants’ sense of belonging to a professionally trained child protection workforce willing and able to engage with the complexity of child abuse and neglect. In contrast, when the novelty of the migration and



new place of practice evaporated, the significant implications of professional relocation were felt.

The first two years post-migration necessitated an emotional investment in establishing a new home, with a focus on recreating a sense of personal and professional belonging in Australia. The loss of formal and informal support systems, of one's professional status, together with unanticipated career stagnation were mostly experienced as significant hurdles and caused emotional pain. Seeking a renewed professional fit with self and with social work practice emerged as an important aspect of professional identity and adapting to place-related changes (Long, 2018). The participants also voiced anger and disappointment, for feeling stuck in an organisational environment that failed to nurture experienced social workers. Mostly, the participants experienced their values as a professional social worker as incongruent with their new child protection service delivery environment. In the face of reduced professional autonomy and belonging, their commitment to child protection slowly eroded in the transnational experience.

Sharp differences in workplace culture, professional interactions and child protection social work practice impacted on personal wellbeing. Participants needed to reframe their skills in the new context, including assessing the cultural climate of the organisation to practice strategically within it (Fook, 2016). Importantly, place-related change influenced practice insofar as transnational social workers became less emotionally available as a result of the heightened stress they experienced. In this regard, transnational social workers under pressure may have less empathy for others and may be at risk of failing to connect with both their clients and their colleagues on an interpersonal level, as some of the findings of this study suggest. In child protection practice the relationships between worker, supervisor and client are important in ensuring

the safety of children (McFadden, 2018). Yet the findings in this study revealed these interactions to be suboptimal for the participants. As a result of these dynamics, most transnational social workers resigned from their positions in frontline child protection to move to professional positions that they felt better aligned with their values and construction of social work. The Australian child protection environment was experienced by them as incongruent with their personal values and the ability to be a social worker. Specialised professional skills were experienced as devalued and deprofessionalised with managers that seized control of the language of how child protection skills should be framed (Fook 2016). Similar to findings from New Zealand (Fouché et al., 2013), in the present study, the experience of transnational social work included a profound and lasting sense of unease about one's professional identity as a child protection worker, the construction and purpose of social work, and the new practice. Retaining highly qualified transnational social workers who are willing to invest effort in child protection practice with a sense of professional purpose may require alternative strategies that better support workers dealing with the impacts associated with a change in context and status of social work. The participants in this doctoral study were mostly experienced child protection social workers who did not work for long in this area of practice in the Australian context of human service delivery. Transnational social workers who remain energised, experience job satisfaction and are attracted to longer tenure periods would be a significant benefit for child protection organisations, children and their families.

### *7.3.2 The Context of Social Work*

Social work is a profession with a commitment to the person-in-environment, the environmental perspective that is considered to be the foundation of social work (Cornell, 2006). This doctoral study provided evidence that migrating social workers in

the Australian context are frequently challenged by place-related professional change. For the participants in this study, transferring social work theory and practice from the United Kingdom and Ireland to Australia was not experienced as a seamless process, as the two environments of practice were experienced as significantly different. The context of social work is influenced by socio-political ideologies, by agencies and by interactions with clients and colleagues in the wider setting of service delivery. In Australia, domain boundaries of professional groupings are less clear with a focus on skills for child protection programs rather than orientation of value bases and approaches (Fook, 2016). These factors all influence social work and the construction of social work practice in child protection, as the purpose and nature of the profession are shaped by place and context (Payne, 2007). Applying place identity theory to the primary research data (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996) illuminated how professional migration impacted on place attachment and place identity for transnational social workers and their construction of child protection practice. Investigating the experience of place provided a nuanced lens through which to consider the critical importance of the physical, social, cultural and political environment in which child protection practice takes place. This approach permitted an exploration of the ways in which child protection can be a contested concept, as the meanings and definitions of practice and interventions in child protection are place dependent (Righard, 2018).

Child protection service delivery and social work are embedded in history, place and certain understandings of the dynamics of everyday life in families, communities, organisations and the broader society. This small-scale study found transnational social workers to be largely unaware of the status and context of social work in Australia prior to their arrival. In this regard, the lack of registration for the social work profession, the use of generic job titles and the fact of working in child protection alongside colleagues

who are not professionally qualified (in social work or otherwise) all contrast starkly with the status of social work in the United Kingdom and Ireland (Harrison & Healy, 2016; Long et al., 2018). In Australia, the organisational approach to international recruitment was found to result in a mismatch of skills and expectations. Both individual workers and child protection agencies may have the unspoken expectation that social workers from the United Kingdom and Ireland are ready to practise in Australia with minimal preparation and support needs. Among the participants, there was an expectation that social work in Australia takes place in a similar Anglophone context to that found at home, with social work being the core professional domain of child protection. In relation to the above, this study found that the Australian context of child protection practice may undermine social work as a professional discipline. Establishing a secure professional base anchored in social work values thus emerged as important in everyday child protection practice.

In this study, the participants were required to make sense of their new environment without any personal support or professional training based on a social work–orientated lens. The participants’ known constructions of child protection social work drawn from the United Kingdom and Ireland did not necessarily fit the Australian context of service delivery. This highlighted important implications for the effective translation of child protection theory and practice between two different locations. The participants described their new environment as ‘de-professionalising child protection practice’, which disrupted their previous constructions of systemic social work. The findings also demonstrated that the lack of professional social work supervision further compounded the experience of loss of professional self-esteem in the new place of practice.

The Australian frontline child protection workforce is fundamental to keeping the most vulnerable children in society safe from harm. This doctoral study highlights the need for improved processes around professional supervision arrangements, managerial and client relationships, and a workplace culture that facilitates transnational workers' transition to the new context and that acknowledges social work as a professional discipline. Participants in this study needed additional support to deepen their understanding of various contexts; global, national, regional, local, community, historical, social, cultural, professional and personal in developing relevant practice strategies (Fook, 2016). The findings suggest that the place-related changes in the practice environment and in the professional standing of social work may impact negatively on transnational social workers' emotional and physical wellbeing (Modderman et al., 2019; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). In turn, this may affect these workers' ability to remain dedicated to child protection practice and to feel connected with their work.

A contribution of this doctoral study is its insight into what social work in the transnational context entails for Australian child protection service delivery. Place and social work are interwoven and influence professional standing and identity. The participants needed to re-orientate themselves to an unfamiliar practice environment and develop an understanding of the social problems facing families and communities in the Australian context (Modderman et al., 2018, 2019). This required understanding of the needs of First Nations communities, and skilled responses to their lived cultural experience and the social, geographical and political realities that surround them (McDermott, 2019). Procedurally led induction programs may not adequately support transnational professionals to orientate to their new context of practice. In turn, this may

compromise the ability of these workers to be culturally humble in their engagement with First Nations peoples (Modderman et al., 2020).

### *7.3.3. Colonial Practices*

Transnational mobility and terms such as ‘global’ and ‘international’ are often equated with Western or European locations and experiences (Polson, 2016).

Transnational social workers in Australia find themselves working in a field of practice in which the inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children are indicative of systemic and structural issues that disproportionately affect First Nations communities (Crofoot & Harris, 2012; Funston & Herring, 2016). This doctoral study found that UK and Irish transnational social workers migrated with limited awareness of First Nations peoples and the context of colonisation that forms the backdrop to Australia’s past and present child protection procedures (Baines, 2018). As a result, transnational social work may unwittingly replicate colonial practices that normalise the privilege of non-Indigenous social workers (Kennedy-Kish et al., 2017). The application of multi-layered reflexivity to the primary research data suggested a need to turn around the over-representation of Western viewpoints that drive child protection and the resultant disproportionate over-representation of First Nations children in these systems.

Importantly, during the research interviews it was evident that the practices undertaken by transnational social workers in the new environment reproduced the unquestioned and normalised dominant characteristics of the mainstream culture in Australia in everyday child protection (Baines, 2018; Simmons et al., 2014). Therefore, not only did place-related change impact professional identity and loss of belonging, but the findings also suggest that the emotional impact of professional migration, along with the dominant ‘white culture’ underpinning the child protection system in Australia, reduced workers’



cultural humility towards First Nations communities (Modderman et al., 2020; Modderman et al., 2018, 2019).

The transnational social workers in this research arrived with knowledge and skills from their previous child protection environment. On arrival, they were unaware of what they did not know about First Nations peoples and their position of self in this context as ‘white and Western social workers’. On reflection, some participants observed that their induction processes did not adequately address incorrect ideas about First Nations communities. For example, several participants reported that such induction training represented Aboriginal peoples as one culture and one group of people, rather than acknowledging their diversity. Generic one-day cultural competency training mostly focused on ‘what do I need to know about this culture’, instead of applying a critical lens to self. Transnational social workers thus adapted to organisational requirements without an awareness of the history and realities of First Nations communities. Understanding and fully engaging with the use of procedures and decision-making was limited due to everyday agency pressures. The participants frequently experienced emotional stressors during their first two years of practice in Australia, possibly diminishing their capacity to fully engage with different ways of doing, being and knowing. Place-related change and the emotional impact of the personal and professional experience of migration may reduce self-reflexivity (Modderman et al., 2020; Modderman et al., 2018, 2019). The findings also reveal that First Nations worldviews on parenting were discounted, not fully understood or even regarded as pathological, when viewed through the dominant white Western family models in mainstream child protection (Funston & Herring, 2016).

This doctoral study emphasises the need for multi-layered reflexivity for individual transnational social workers, child protection systems and existing staff as a better strategy than one-dimensional cultural competence training. Cultural competency

may unintentionally emphasise shared group characteristics or not value the unique differences between individual First Nations people. In focusing on competency this approach may privilege social workers as having expertise about the client's culture. In turn, this increases the power imbalance between worker and client in child protection practice (Ortega & Coulborn, 2011). Transnational social workers ought to take responsibility for improving their understanding of the place-based culture and community in Australia and for seeking local community-approved training to learn about culturally distinct awareness, respect and responsiveness (McDermott, 2019). Such learning may increase cultural humility towards First Nations peoples, by allowing (transnational) social workers to be guided by the client and their community (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). There are commonalities in cultural and colonisation-related impacts on First Nations communities, but at the same time it is important to consider the uniqueness of individual clients, their experiences and their community. For transnational social workers from the Northern hemisphere, engaging with transnational social work in Australia may involve encountering realities that lie outside their experiential knowledge and understanding (McDermott, 2019). In this regard, place-based learning may support greater reflection on the position of self in the new context of child protection service delivery and working with First Nations communities. As such, transnational social workers need to be alerted to the bias and assumptions they bring to their new practice environment and the importance of learning about history and context. Importantly, the findings in this study indicate that, given their lack of understanding of colonisation and transgenerational trauma, the transnational social workers in this research displayed a limited ability to develop self-awareness and a respectful attitude towards First Nations communities. Further, the personal and professional impact of migration somewhat diminished their ability to demonstrate cultural humility.

Child protection assessments and interventions are closely aligned with the interpretation of child protection practices as defined by the local context, values, experiences and worldviews. Knowledge developed from one situation does not necessarily apply to another setting (Fook, 2016). Transnational social workers may need to learn about decolonising practice as a new concept. Working with First Nations communities as a social worker from the United Kingdom or Ireland requires embracing critical reflection on contemporary child protection, self, and social work in Australia. Such a process may engender shame and a new awareness of one's whiteness and requires exploring multiple perspectives from outside and within the new context (Fook, 2016). Developing cultural humility is an ongoing learning process that involves acquiring new information and new perspectives. The results from this study highlight that transnational social workers, and the broader Australian child protection service delivery system, need to provide more culturally humble and sensitive services while promoting safety, stability and wellbeing for First Nations children, their communities and their Country.

## **7.4 Strengths and Limitations of this Research**

Having discussed the key outcomes of the research, I will now consider the strengths and limitations of this doctoral study. Unlike a traditional thesis, the design of this thesis as one containing publications has enabled timely dissemination of the findings as each stage of the research was completed. Throughout this process, the insights provided by the blind peer reviewers and journal editors contributed to the evolution of the study. This has provided invaluable feedback to inform the development of this dissertation and its associated publications.

A strength of this research is the multi-theoretical approach taken, which enabled new insights into how the context of practice in a new environment influences transnational social workers, both personally and professionally. The three theoretical lenses adopted contributed new insights about transnational social work in the Australian context of child protection service delivery, bringing relevant new perspectives to the overarching research question (Berge & Ingerman, 2017). Specifically, this approach unpacked the tensions that arise when applying place-based constructs of social work practice and theory to unfamiliar territory.

As a transnational social worker recruited to child protection practice in Australia, I drew on my professional experience to inform the creation of narratives and the data analysis (Riessman, 2008). As a researcher, I was thus positioned as both an insider, because I had been a migrating child protection social worker myself, and an outsider, as I was not a colleague of the participants in this study (Gair, 2012). This shared experience with the participants brought benefits in terms of gaining access to the participants and providing a common basis for the research interviews (Dew et al., 2019). In particular, the participants were more willing to share their experiences with a researcher who understood and had experienced transnational social work, and my position facilitated the development of rapport with the participants, which in turn enhanced the quality of the information they were willing to share. A limitation of this type of research is that the researcher's worldviews influence the way they construct the world, pose questions and choose a lens for filtering data and meaning-making, and shaping findings and conclusions (Berger, 2015). The reflexive character of social enquiry, therefore, requires critical reflection and supervision (Probst, 2015). In this regard, regular supervision and personal journaling enabled reflection on my own

experiences and were beneficial in separating my professional migration journey from the participants' narratives.

The homogenous characteristics of myself, the participants and my supervisors are a limitation of this study. Not all social workers from the United Kingdom and Ireland are white and informed by dominant Western worldviews. The guidance provided to me by my First Nations colleagues Auntie Maureen Ervine, Gomeroi woman, and Dr Mishel McMahon, Yorta Yorta woman, enabled reflection on self and on the assumptions that strengthened interpretation of the data. Social work and professional identity are rooted in a history of colonisation and in Eurocentric cultures and perspectives. It is important to note that professional social work identity is now an emerging area of research in non-Western countries, such as the Pacific region (Ravulo, 2019) and China (Wong & Pearson, 2007).

Overall, this study has contributed to the understanding of transnational social workers in an unfamiliar child protection practice environment. It is acknowledged that the participants in this study were volunteers, which may have impacted the findings as the study attracted motivated transnational social workers who were willing to share their stories. Given the nature of the study, there was a reliance on the participants who contacted the researcher. Although this study is based on a small sample, the in-depth interviewing technique across two points of data collection enabled a deeper and more nuanced exploration of transnational social workers' experiences. Indeed, many participants expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to speak openly about their experiences. Another limitation of this research is that the scope of this study was restricted to one metropolitan area. Opportunities to engage in research into other geographical areas and non-UK and non-Irish transnational social workers would contribute further to the knowledge on this subject. The experiences of transnational

social workers in statutory child protection have been little explored in the literature, yet this doctoral research shows that they are a rich source of data.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented the integrated findings from this doctoral research, which enhance understanding of how global mobility is affecting migrating social workers, both personally and professionally. I have investigated the multidimensional experience of social work migration in the context of statutory child protection service delivery via three theoretical lenses. This approach involved an examination of child protection service delivery in the unique Australian context by drawing on the existing literature and the personal narratives of transnational social workers from the United Kingdom and Ireland. I have also identified the strengths and limitations of this research. In the next and final chapter, I will begin the discussion with a reflection on my own journey as a transnational social worker and novice social work researcher. The implications of the research findings for social work theory, practice, policy and research will then be considered, before providing the concluding remarks of the study.



## **Chapter 8: Implications and Conclusions**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This thesis began with a reflection on the personal and professional experiences that motivated me to undertake this research. In this final chapter, I conclude the thesis with my reflections on how the research process influenced and shaped my identity as a transnational social worker and novice researcher. Chapter 7 showed the depth of findings generated by this study in response to the research question: how do personal, professional and organisational dynamics influence the experiences of UK and Irish social workers within an Australian child protection system? In this chapter I will demonstrate the implications of the findings for theory, practice, policy and research, and conclude with some final remarks on the study.

### **8.2 Reflections on the Research Process**

This doctoral research was inspired by my own experiences of working in child protection service delivery across three different countries. I had been a social worker in child protection in the Netherlands and Wales; however, entering Australian child protection service delivery marked a notable transition. As an experienced senior social worker and manager, I found child protection practice very different in the Australian context. I was also much further from home and the organisational culture felt significantly different to me. Most of my transnational social worker colleagues in Australia did not enjoy their role in frontline service delivery and did not remain in the role for long. I was curious about how my transnational colleagues constructed their new context of child protection service delivery. I saw the chance to undertake a Higher Degree by Research as an opportunity to rigorously explore the issues facing transnational social workers. I hoped this research would result in a contribution of

knowledge that would be useful to transnational social workers, child protection departments, recruitment agencies, policymakers, the professional body and, most of all, children and families involved with the child protection system. In the following section, I will detail some of the most significant and memorable learnings from my research journey. In doing so I consider both the marked differences and the similarities between the different contexts of practice and research.

First, the ethical considerations necessary for the doctoral research were far different from those required in the practice realm. During each interview, I was required to advise the participants on the purpose of the research, their rights concerning consent and withdrawal, how I would ensure their privacy, and how the findings would be disseminated. This process is similar to that used in child protection practice where every step in the process needs to be explained to ensure transparency and that a relationship can be established. However, what was different was my response to the participants. Frequently the research interviews became debriefing sessions for the participants, in which they could share the ethical dilemmas they faced in their work. I therefore had to be mindful not to respond to the participants as if they were members of my staff team and to avoid stepping into the familiar role of providing consultation, debriefing and case direction.

Second, my prior experience in interviewing in the context of child protection work was focused on conducting a structured risk assessment, and systematically working through a set list of questions. In contrast, the focus of research interviews based on a narrative approach is very different. Both roles require gathering data, and my capacity to build rapport and my sensitivity when discussing complex topics were valuable attributes. However, in my role as a novice researcher, I undertook the first interviews with a set agenda, working my way through a list of questions in a somewhat

directive manner. On reflection, while as a social worker I was accustomed to interviewing clients about complex and intimate issues, in the new role as a doctoral researcher, I felt somewhat self-conscious and nervous when conducting the first interviews in particular. In this context, supervision was a safe space in which I could discuss patterns in my behaviour and reflect on how to conduct interviews wearing a different hat. This meant that during the later interviews I was able to lean back more, enabling a more in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences as I was less fixated on obtaining answers to my questions. Once the data were collected, finding a suitable methodology for analysis was challenging. Reading about narrative study conducted by other researchers, including Riessman (2008) and Bamberg (2006), was valuable for my understanding. Receiving support from my supervisors in relation to the methodology also helped me to negotiate the complexity of this stage. Applying a narrative approach in social work practice in therapeutic work with children draws attention to storytelling. Within this doctoral research, this approach involved articulating a much broader range of ways in which narratives construct experiences and the social world around us.

Third, I grew up in a warm and loving family, and most of my childhood experiences were positive and in a safe environment. This is a very different reality from that facing most of the children and families involved with child protection service delivery. In contrast, in my role as novice researcher I had many similarities with the participants; I understood their practice language from the United Kingdom, the abbreviations they used, the roles they had held previously, and the systems in which they had worked. I also understood their frustrations about the nature of social work practice Australia, and many of their experiences were familiar to me. The hardest part of this journey was the three months of continuous data analysis, reading, reviewing and analysing the participants' experiences of grief and loss, and of being far away from

family and friends. This work triggered strong feelings of homesickness for me. My insider perspective needed careful guidance and unpacking in supervision, and self-care, to ensure that I took a neutral stance and produced an unbiased representation of the participants' experiences.

Fourth, I am a non-Indigenous researcher; I grew up in a flat country with lakes and meadow birds, on a small rural farm in the Netherlands. I have never been a target of racism and have had the privilege of being actively recruited to Australia by the Victorian State Government. My privileged experiences of the world are very different from the lives of the Australian First Nations peoples. I also acknowledge that Western research methodologies and social work practices have had a detrimental effect on the First Australians and their communities. When I arrived in Australia, I did not understand the impact of past child welfare laws on current child protection legislation and practices in this country. I am guilty of having held inaccurate beliefs, of being inadequately informed about the historical and social-political context of removing Indigenous children from their parents. I was not fully aware of the origins of the trauma First Australians continue to experience. As a non-Indigenous researcher, I belong to the mainstream group and am continuing to learn about First Nations knowledge, relational worldviews, the position of self, and openness towards accepting different realities (Battiste & Youngblood, 2000). I acknowledge that I can never truly shed my Eurocentric lens, having been born, raised and educated in the Netherlands.

Further, academic writing is a learned skill, and for me this entails learning to write in a new form in a second language. In reviewing my early writing, from the beginnings of my Master by Research, I can now see how my writing has improved over the years. Writing at the level required for a PhD demanded engaging with the iterative process of writing and re-writing. I often felt frustrated, at not being able to draw on the

richness of my own language while writing my way up through the layers. When writing a Dutch abstract for the third publication, I became aware that writing in Dutch at the level required would have been a journey as well, as this also did not come naturally to me. I learned to be patient, not apologising every time I sent in a new draft, and to have confidence in my capacity to develop new skills and grow over time. My supervisory team helped me to learn new writing skills and one-to-one mentoring with a tutor gave me more insight into the complexity of the English language and sentence construction.

Finally, a busy day in a research environment is very different from managing a crisis-driven investigation team in child protection. I had to adjust to sitting still behind a screen, to focus, to read, to allow myself the time to ponder, and to think. I had to accept that research is a slow process, that it takes time, and that there is little action that involves adrenaline. I had to ensure self-care and regular exercise throughout the week. This process of transition was enabled by my capacity for change. I knew that if I could adapt to three different child protection systems in three countries and migrate across the world, I could do this as well. The strong research culture at La Trobe University, in particular the discussions I shared with peers and supervisors with diverse perspectives on the application of theoretical lenses, research designs, methodologies and methods, has strengthened this thesis and my confidence and skills as a social work researcher.

### **8.3 Theoretical Implications**

This study was set in a postmodernist paradigm that acknowledges the continuously changing nature of experience. The narrative-informed research design embraced multiple personal and contextual realities, unique experiences and subjective interpretations (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016). The personal narratives of the participants reveal contemporary and place-based beliefs about child protection practice and

professional migration (Riessman, 2000). This research is a small-scale study that did not seek generalisation; nonetheless, by capturing the in-depth perspectives of the participants it yielded valuable insight and knowledge about the experience of transnational social work. The theories adopted helped to explain the participants' lived experiences and the ways in which professional migration intersects with the construction of self and being a social worker (Fay, 1987).

Four papers explored and discussed transnational social work from different perspectives, but with the same purpose: to contribute to a deeper understanding of the experience of international recruitment in child protection. Following a scoping review of the extant literature, three different theoretical lenses were used to analyse the dataset via a sequential process. The use of different lenses shed light on what constrains and what enables transnational social work. For example, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980) was chosen to examine the experience of loss and grief associated with migration that emerged as a theme from the interview transcripts. Utilising an attachment lens meant focusing on the intersection of loss and grief with the emotionally charged field of child protection service delivery. The analysis also highlighted the influence of 'place' and the construction of social work, which led to an exploration of the data set through a lens of place identity theory (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). Cultural humility theory (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998) was chosen as the third lens because the data analysis identified the participants' stories of working with First Nations peoples. This lens allowed for an exploration of the ways in which the participants were able to develop an interpersonal stance that was open to First Nations perspectives, placed outside their experiential understanding. There was a need to examine this topic and not shy away from the stark over-representation of First Nations children in the child protection system. Each of the three lenses contributed to new understandings, and together they



provide a detailed picture of the personal, professional and organisational dynamics that influenced the experiences of the participants (Berge & Ingerman, 2017). This multi-theoretical approach allowed the research to address the different aspects and the complexity of the topic and provided a rich description of the participants, their experiences, social work and the context of practice (Bikner-Ahsbahr & Clarke, 2015). This also allowed for a comparison and integration of the different perspectives embedded in the narratives concerning the lived experience of the participants (Allison, 1969; Cairney, 2013).

In this study, theory provided a foundation for investigating the complex phenomenon of transnational social work and a frame for the analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Reeves et al., 2008). The application of the three theoretical lenses allowed for an enhanced interpretation of the challenges faced by transnational social workers in their new practice environment (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998, 2009). This enabled a better understanding of their subjective reality and generated new knowledge about transnational social work in the context of Australian frontline child protection service delivery (Reeves et al., 2008). In this research, modern critical social work theory facilitated understanding of how colonialism may constrain relations between UK or Irish social workers and Australian First Nations peoples (Healy, 2014). The dominant discourse in current practices of transnational social work would thus benefit from dismantling the longstanding myth that Australia is a cultural extension of Britain (Ward, 2000). The guidance I received from and the reflective discussions I shared with Dr Mishel McMahon, Yorta Yorta woman, and Auntie Maureen Ervine, Gomeroi woman, allowed for deeper insights into how First Nations knowledge contributes to a relational worldview. Our discussions included considering the ways in which the social, historical

and political context shapes experiences, positions, lives and futures (Martin & Mirraaboo, 2003; Steinhauer, 2002).

The epistemological frameworks that underpin contemporary Australian social work practice and curriculum at universities are Western in origin (Walter et al., 2011; Zubrzycki et al., 2014). In this regard, this study was also influenced by theory and knowledge as overseen by institutions and scholars that are mostly embedded in Western epistemologies and ontologies (McMahon, 2017). There is therefore a need to be alert to contemporary discriminatory discourse relating to Aboriginal issues, stemming from the belief that First Nations peoples were inferior to European settlers (Bennett, 2013). Further, Eurocentric research ideologies and social work practices continue to be used as a tool of colonisation to devalue First Nations perspectives and knowledges (Oates, 2018). The development of this study as a series of four publications demonstrates how this dominant discourse was taken for granted. For example, the first paper explored what knowledge transnational social workers need to gain when working with First Nations peoples, this tends to focus on these peoples as ‘other’, or a ‘problem’ that needs solving (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005). There is a risk that only some aspects of First Nations knowledge will be selected and seen as merely another resource available for Western researchers. However, there is growing recognition of the inadequacy of hegemonic knowledge and of the logic of Western approaches (Nakata, 2002; Rowe et al., 2015). Decolonising theory, stemming from the tradition of critical theory, enables an examination of the power relations between those who have been colonised and those who have not (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This study has raised some important theoretical considerations. First, the narrative study extends previous research by utilising the theoretical lens of attachment theory in a qualitative study of professional migration, in the context of child protection

service delivery, thereby contributing to the literature on social work mobility. Second, while previous studies have shown the potential of Twigger-Ross and Uzzell's (1996) theoretical framework, for example, in research on the retirement decision-making of farming couples (Downey et al., 2017b), this research has applied this approach to the context of transnational social work. The findings here show that, for the participants in this research, place-related change created tension between their construction of social work and the new place of practice. Location is a defining characteristic in the social work profession, specifically the connection between person and environment (Balestrery, 2016). Cultural humility theory highlighted the need for decolonised social work practices in child protection service delivery and for reflexivity across all levels within this system. The purpose of child protection interventions is to ensure that children's care, protective and cultural needs are met. A better understanding of culturally responsive practice is critical for children and their communities, yet this area emerged in this study as underdeveloped in the recruitment of overseas social workers and possibly in the wider child protection system (Menzies & Grace, 2020). This research has shown that using multiple theories provided a theoretical sophistication that advanced knowledge about the contemporary context of social work migration in the field of child protection. Now that the theoretical implications have been discussed, the following section will highlight the implications for social work practice in child protection agencies.

## **8.4 Implications for Practice in Child Protection Agencies**

The narratives of transnational social workers in this study add to the knowledge base in relation to child protection practice in an unfamiliar context. This research contributes to the narrative tradition in social work literature, joining a small but growing

body of research that takes as its subject the experiences and professional practice of transnational social workers (Gordon, 2018). Narrative interviewing is mostly valued as an approach that seeks to get close to what is important for participants by allowing them to focus on their perspectives (Ziebland, 2013). In this study, the research interviews involved discussions and opportunities to reflect on the concepts of child protection social work practices in different environments across continents. The participants shared their professionally related challenges, as well as the emotional costs and affective losses of migration (Frykman et al., 2019). Heightened emotions came to life during the interviews. The experience of 'being a transnational social worker' emerged as life-changing, involving unexpected personal and professional disruptions that impacted on the participants' social work practice.

The reality of transitioning social work practice across borders is complex, and the construction of what social work entails varies among practitioners and is closely aligned with training, qualifications and activities within the local, national, cultural and geographical context. The current approach to the recruitment of transnational social workers in Australia is referred to by Bartley (2018) as 'naive'. Employers, professional bodies and individual transnational social workers alike do not seem to have a strategy in place to address the knowledge gaps between foreign expertise and local competence. This doctoral study showed that it may be unrealistic to expect transnational social workers to migrate across the world and seamlessly engage with a new context of child protection service delivery. It was evident throughout each stage of the research that the child protection agency had not fully considered the impact of employing experienced social workers in primarily entry-level case management roles. The participants experienced their new role in child protection practice as reducing their autonomous professional decision-making capacity. They also felt that the new organisational culture

and hierarchy undermined their previous expertise and role in child protection service provision with children and families. Furthermore, the participants signed a two-year employment contract tied to visa arrangements without enquiring about the precise nature of their prospective employment, their role within the agency or the status of social work in Australia. Most of them were anticipating stepping into a culturally similar Anglophone context and model of service delivery. This study demonstrates that the participants' social work identity came under threat, with the new practice culture experienced as clashing with their internalised knowledge, skills, values and mission of social work (Adams et al., 2006; Bogo et al., 1993). The unexpected loss of professional identity intersected with challenging personal migration experiences in the context of the emotionally loaded environment of child protection practice. This resulted in stress and impacted emotional and physical wellbeing as well as the effectiveness of the participants' social work practice (Guarnaccia et al., 2020).

The Australian context of child protection practice is impacted by neoliberal ideologies and managerialism. The lack of recognition of social workers may contribute to the dilution of professional identities (Beddoe, 2013; Harrison & Healy, 2016). The participants were surprised to find that in Australia, in contrast with the United Kingdom and Ireland, social work is not the key profession in child protection services. This created a significant disconnection between the new practice culture and the previously known environment of child protection. Further, organisational procedural processes emerged as constraining the participants' professional judgement as qualified social workers. Finding a 'professional fit' in the new environment of child protection practice was experienced as challenging, which is perhaps also an issue for Australian qualified social workers (Gillingham, 2016). All of the participants expressed their commitment to child protection as their preferred field of practice and career path. However, they

struggled to find a professional home as migrating social workers in this field of practice, and as a result most left child protection, adding to the sector's ongoing retention challenges. Therefore, Australian child protection agencies may benefit from a shift in practice that makes explicit use of the skills, knowledge and attributes of social workers (Gillingham, 2016). The experiences of the participants in this study showed that career longevity in child protection may come under threat when the organisational culture does not align well with the professional values and ethics that make the role attractive for social workers. Validation of contribution to service provision as a social worker in child protection may help to reduce the sense of powerlessness evident among the transnational social workers in this study. Failing to retain experienced staff impacts on the quality of practice, and as a result, vulnerable children and the community may suffer (Healy et al., 2009). Filling the workforce gap through the cost- and labour-intensive search for human capital overseas may need more careful consideration to ensure that this workforce of qualified, and mostly experienced, social workers can be retained.

In Australia, child protection service delivery is challenged by a lack of quality professional supervision and organisational support, as well as high staff turnover (Hunt et al., 2016; Lewig & McLean, 2016; Littlechild et al., 2016; Oates, 2019a). Most of the significant implications arising from this study relate to child protection organisations because they are largely responsible for supporting transnational social workers in their new practice setting. As such, they are best positioned to ensure that staff working in frontline service delivery are provided with suitable supports to undertake the complexity of child protection practice. One of the most significant implications for child protection organisations is that it may be problematic to expect transnational social workers anchored in their local context to transfer across the globe and seamlessly undertake unknown place-based practices. Organisational leadership may need to relinquish the

assumption that transnational social workers are immediately ready for practice when they arrive. Instead, agencies will need to consider tailor-made induction processes that enable transnational social workers to move between being ‘new learners’ and ‘experienced social workers’. Also emerging from this study is the need for flexible learning agreements and professional development in line with workers’ previous experience and credentials. Induction processes need to move beyond generic organisational orientation and explanation of tangible matters such as law and procedures. Transnational social workers need to develop a strong body of context-relevant knowledge and skills required for child protection practice at the local level. The process of learning new place-based knowledge and ‘practice wisdom’ that draws on prior experience elsewhere need to be brought together to ensure a holistic response to local needs. In this vein, organisational leadership may want to encourage staff to engage with the professional body and local networks that nurture their connection with the social work profession.

Practice in Australian child protection may benefit from organisational leadership that encourages social work–driven supervision delivered by experienced and qualified practitioners that helps transnational workers to make sense of the new context in a discipline-specific way. This approach would provide an opportunity to supplement professional knowledge with place-based information relevant to the context. It would also allow for transnational social workers to share their knowledge about child protection and service provision more broadly in a common professional language. Further, this approach would see transnational social workers actively involved in their role as social workers and as stakeholders who are critical thinkers managing child protection in discretionary ways. In an optimal setting, supervisors would possess an understanding of the different approaches to childrearing and apply theoretical



knowledge to inform social work practice, facilitating a broad perspective on child abuse and neglect (McPherson et al., 2015). The participants in this study reported a lack of exposure to advanced practice leadership. Some experienced their supervisors as not yet having developed the capacity to respond holistically to multiple viewpoints. This may be one of the results of a lack of stability in a child protection workforce that does not retain staff long enough to become expert practitioners (Healy et al., 2009). The participants perceived the supervision they received from relatively inexperienced practitioners as merely an administrative requirement, which undermined feelings of professional respect and the credibility of social work. This hindered the establishment of a safe supervisory relationship and the engagement with reflective practice that supports the wellbeing of child protection workers and their ability to fulfil their role of caring for and protecting children (Guarnaccia et al., 2020).

This research identified transnational social workers as embedded in Eurocentric theory and practice. Australian child protection service delivery and social work are located in similar dominant Western discourses (Walter et al., 2011). Child protection organisations are grappling with how to respond to First Nations communities in a just and fair way (Davies, 2019; Menzies & Grace, 2020). The dominance of Western worldviews in child protection continues in the application of mainstream theories and practices that may harm First Nations peoples. The over-representation of First Nations children in statutory systems is now an embedded characteristic of child protection service delivery (Davies, 2019; King et al., 2017; Maguire-Jack et al., 2019). Yet the education and practice experiences of transnational social workers in the United Kingdom and Ireland do not reference concepts of Aboriginal childrearing or First Nations worldviews. In most cases transnational social workers arrive in a practice environment in which non-Indigenous practitioners are ill-equipped and lack confidence

in their ability to work with First Nations communities (Bennett et al., 2018; Gair, 2017; Menzies & Grace, 2020). This dissertation has highlighted the need for courageous conversations about racism, the position of self, and the ‘colonialist mindset’ that currently pervades the broader child protection system in Australia. Transitioning to the context of practice in Australia requires an in-depth and prolonged orientation to the history and context of Australian social work, including what colonialism means for present-day practice (Papadopoulos, 2018). These findings may also be informative for other allied health professions that recruit staff from overseas to the Australian context of practice. To understand the enduring impact of colonisation it is essential that everyone in the wider human services engaged in assessment and decision-making about First Nations families is aware of and taking into account difference in childrearing practices (Featherstone, 2017; Harnett & Featherstone, 2020; Lohoar et al., 2014). Transnational social workers and the wider child protection workforce need high-quality ongoing training to support appropriate child protection practice with First Nations peoples. Such training should not be a single event, but be delivered in a way that improves knowledge, skills and understanding and thereby leads to improved practice (Menzies & Grace, 2020).

## **8.5 Implications for Policy**

This doctoral study contributes to knowledge about professional migration, and reveals how social workers are impacted by transnational practice. The main avenue for professional migration to Australia is the skilled migration program that includes social work as an occupation with workforce needs (Department of Home Affairs, 2020; Papadopoulos, 2018). The AASW is the professional body that sets the benchmarks for nationwide professional education and practice in social work. On behalf of the Australian Government, the AASW is responsible for assessing overseas academic social

work qualifications for the skilled migration program (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2020a). Another pathway is for child protection agencies to sponsor social workers from overseas when job vacancies are directly linked to a shortage in the labour market (Bartley, 2018). The participants in this study migrated via an employer-sponsored pathway and therefore did not engage with the AASW.

Most Australian statutory child protection agencies do not require social workers to be voluntarily registered with the AASW for practice in frontline child protection. South Australia was the first and remains the only state to implement a policy of formal registration. As a result, there is no nationwide policy addressing the recognition of the qualifications of transnational social workers who practise their profession in Australia. In comparison, Australian professional nursing and teaching bodies have support systems in place during the time of initial registration that facilitate mentoring and supervision for transnational workers (Bartley, 2018; McCluskey et al., 2011; Peter et al., 2019; Sharplin et al., 2011). The New Zealand context of transnational social work involves a rigorous and lengthy process of assessment before overseas applicants can gain full registration as a social worker. Transnational social workers in New Zealand initially receive provisional registration if deemed eligible, following assessment by the Social Workers Registration Board (Social Work Registration Board, 2020). To move from provisional registration to full registration, overseas social workers need to complete a variety of additional training. For example, they must complete 2000 hours of supervised social work and 10 hours of continuing professional development relating to competency to practise social work with Māori (Social Work Registration Board, 2020).

Transnational social workers arriving in Australia do not receive support from a professional body, nor do they have to register and engage with supervised practice and training to learn about the unique Australian context of practice, including working with

First Nations communities. They arrive in a country in which social work lacks formal status as a registered profession and there is no monopoly on who can use the title ‘social worker’ (Papadopoulos, 2018). A concerning observation arising from this study is the lack of a collective space where transnational social workers may receive support and find common ground during and beyond transition. Emerging from this research is an argument for professional registration and protection of title in Australia. Like New Zealand’s model, this would allow for better monitoring to ensure that transnational social workers are adequately equipped to fulfil their responsibilities. This would include better understanding of cultural humility and decolonising social work practices (Modderman et al., 2020). The current lack of policy has led to a gap in the area of professional introduction and connection to the Australian practice standards for social work.

First Nations scholarship in North America illustrates how the process through which migrants are invited to become part of a settler colony involves continuous settler colonialism (Calderon, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Consequently, it is timely to explore what policy is pertinent to transnational social workers in the child protection field in Australia in the current context as an ethical issue (Welbourne et al., 2007). The provision of adequate support for transnational social workers by professional bodies and child protection agencies during transition and beyond may be directly linked to developing and demonstrating practice that is safe for the children and families involved with child protection services.

## **8.6 Future Research Directions**

This study adds to a growing body of research focusing on transnational social work in the Australian context of child protection; however, there is a need for further research. The available data show evidence of growing demand and rising numbers of

overseas social workers seeking AASW membership (Papadopoulos, 2017, 2018). The contested space for social workers will continue to play a significant role in shaping the context in which transnational social workers practise. The following are some considerations and suggestions in relation to future research, which are based on the expectation that global workforce mobility in social work will continue to grow (Beddoe & Bartley, 2019).

The findings from this study add depth to a research topic that is in its infancy in the Australian context. This research identified that the practice of filling vacancies with overseas social workers may not be a sustainable solution to a complex problem. In fact, this approach may unintentionally reaffirm Western views as central to practice and replicate the harms of colonisation (Coates et al., 2006). Current approaches to recruitment may also jeopardise the potential for establishing a consistent and enduring relationship between a service user and practitioner that enhances the quality of the work (Trevithick, 2011). Little emphasis on and commitment to social work in the broader organisation, along with stress and a lack of social support, emerge in this study as likely factors driving transnational social workers' intentions to leave. Most of the participants in this study were experienced social workers who left child protection practice at the end of their first two-year contract in Australia. Future research may seek to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between successful retention and job satisfaction in the transnational social work context relevant to child protection service delivery. Such research could include examination of the perspectives of transnational social workers, local social workers and employers, as well as the role of the professional body. Research that captures the perspectives of clients would also provide important new insights in this area, as the voices of children and families allocated a transnational social worker are silent in contemporary research.

Important knowledge pertaining to areas that commonly experience workforce shortages may be gained through translation of the current study into the regional, rural and remote context to determine similarities and differences with a metropolitan location. At a practice level, it would be valuable to compare transnational and local social workers in child protection in terms of the quality of outcomes provided for clients. The understanding of social work practice provided by this study is limited by the fact that the findings are based on retrospective analyses of events that have already occurred, as opposed to gathering evidence about what happens in real time (Gordon, 2018). Research into encounters between transnational social workers, supervisors, children and their families is notable by its absence (Broadhurst & Mason, 2014).

The number of First Nations children involved with child protection and out-of-home care continues to increase (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020; Davies, 2019; Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, 2019). This indicates that current Eurocentric practices are not working. Viable alternatives to current practices must be examined, not only for transnational social workers but for child protection service delivery in general (Menzies & Grace, 2020). This thesis has demonstrated that social work practice rooted in Eurocentric understandings is being imposed upon First Nations peoples by transnational social workers, most of whom have little or no awareness of decolonising practices. In the broader context of child protection, a question remains about what continues to drive the child protection system to adopt a lower decision threshold when making decisions involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children compared to decisions involving non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Future research that engages with First Nations childrearing concepts will need to determine how these principles can be given greater recognition within legislation and be translated into practice (McMahon, 2017). Finally,

the findings of this thesis highlight the need for further Indigenous-led research into child protection service delivery (Rigney, 2001).

## **8.7 Concluding Remarks**

A key strength of this thesis is the application of multiple theoretical lenses that provided a methodological pluralism to overcome the challenge of having a singular focus on the broad topic of transnational social work. The narrative-informed research design allowed transnational social work to be understood within the broader context of the lived experience of professional migration. Transnational social workers entering the Australian context of child protection practice may experience a sense of uncertainty about the role of social work and the status of professional practice. Location-specific conditions and practices affected the participants and caused cultural dissonance that required them to renegotiate their social work practice and identity in unknown territory. The participants in this small scale study identified as social workers committed to their task to keep children safe from abuse and neglect, and yet they found it difficult to find a professional home in the Australian context of child protection. Transnational social workers make a valuable contribution to service provision and need to be part of a more inclusive organisational dialogue. An organisational culture is needed that encourages critical reflection, continuous learning, cultural humility and relational worldviews, and acknowledges the centrality of relationships in child protection practice (Ortega & Coulborn, 2011; Ruch, 2009; Russ et al., 2019; Terare & Rawsthorne, 2020). As social workers we need to stay engaged in the emotional labour that lies at the heart of what we do, to make a positive difference for children involved with child protection services – for their families, their Country, their community and for themselves.



## Appendices

## Appendix 1: University Ethics Approval



RESEARCH SERVICES

### MEMORANDUM

---

**To:** Dr Guinever Threlkeld, Department of Social Work and Social Policy, FHS

**From:** Secretary, La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee

**Subject:** Review of Human Ethics Committee Application No. 13-019

**Title:** The experience of British and Irish recruited Social Workers in the [REDACTED]; A single ticket to paradise?

**Date:** 1 July 2013

---

Thank you for your recent correspondence in relation to the research project referred to above. The project has been assessed as complying with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. I am pleased to advise that your project has been granted ethics approval and you may commence the study now.

**The project has been approved from the date of this letter until 31 August 2016**

*Please note that your application has been reviewed by a sub-committee of the University Human Ethics Committee (UHEC) to facilitate a decision before the next Committee meeting. This decision will require ratification by the UHEC and it reserves the right to alter conditions of approval or withdraw approval at that time. You will be notified if the approval status of your project changes. The UHEC is a fully constituted Ethics Committee in accordance with the National Statement under Section 5.1.29.*

The following standard conditions apply to your project:

- **Limit of Approval.** Approval is limited strictly to the research proposal as submitted in your application while taking into account any additional conditions advised by the UHEC.
- **Variation to Project.** Any subsequent variations or modifications you wish to make to your project must be formally notified to the UHEC for approval in advance of these modifications being introduced into the project. This can be done using the appropriate form: *Ethics - Application for Modification to Project* which is available on the Research Services website at [http://www.latrobe.edu.au/research-services/ethics/HEC\\_human.htm](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/research-services/ethics/HEC_human.htm). If the UHEC considers that the proposed changes are significant, you may be required to submit a new application form for approval of the

revised project.

- **Adverse Events.** If any unforeseen or adverse events occur, including adverse effects on participants, during the course of the project which may affect the ethical acceptability of the project, the Chief Investigator must immediately notify the UHEC Secretary on telephone (03) 9479 1443. Any complaints about the project received by the researchers must also be referred immediately to the UHEC Secretary.
- **Withdrawal of Project.** If you decide to discontinue your research before its planned completion, you must advise the UHEC and clarify the circumstances.
- **Monitoring.** All projects are subject to monitoring at any time by the University Human Ethics Committee.
- **Annual Progress Reports.** If your project continues for more than 12 months, you are required to submit an *Ethics - Progress/Final Report Form* annually, **on or just prior to 12 February**. The form is available on the Research Services website (see above address). Failure to submit a Progress Report will mean approval for this project will lapse.
- **Auditing.** An audit of the project may be conducted by members of the UHEC.
- **Final Report.** A Final Report (see above address) is required within six months of the completion of the project or by **28 February 2017**.

If you have any queries on the information above or require further clarification please contact me through Research Services on telephone (03) 9479-1443, or email at: [humanethics@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@latrobe.edu.au).

On behalf of the University Human Ethics Committee, best wishes with your research!

Ms Barbara Doherty  
Administrative Officer (Research Ethics)  
University Human Ethics Committee  
Research Compliance Unit / Research Services  
La Trobe University Bundoora, Victoria 3086  
P: (03) 9479 – 1443 / F: (03) 9479 - 1464  
[http://www.latrobe.edu.au/research-services/ethics/HEC\\_human.htm](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/research-services/ethics/HEC_human.htm)

## Appendix 2: Extension of the University Ethics Approval



University Human Ethics Committee

RESEARCH OFFICE

### MEMORANDUM

---

**To:** Dr Guinever Threlkeld, La Trobe Rural Health School, College of SHE

**From:** Senior Human Ethics Officer, La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee

**Subject:** Review of Human Ethics Committee Application No. 13-019 Mod 1

**Title:** The experience of British and Irish recruited Social Workers in the [REDACTED]; A single ticket to paradise?

**Date:** 29 June 2016

---

Thank you for submitting your modification request for ethics approval to the La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee (UHEC) for the project referred to above. The UHEC has reviewed and approved the following modification/s which may commence now:

- **Extension of ethics approval until 31 July 2020**
- **Addition of Lynne McPherson as a co-investigator**
- **Additional round of data collection**

*Please note that your request has been reviewed by a sub-committee of the UHEC to facilitate a decision before the next Committee meeting. This decision will require ratification by the UHEC and it reserves the right to alter conditions of approval or withdraw approval at that time. However, you may commence prior to ratification and you will be notified if the approval status of your project changes.*

The following standard conditions apply to your project:

- **Limit of Approval.** Approval is limited strictly to the research proposal as submitted in your application while taking into account any additional conditions advised by the UHEC.
- **Variation to Project.** Any subsequent variations or modifications you wish to make to your project must be formally notified to the UHEC for approval in advance of these modifications being introduced into the project. This can be done using the appropriate form: *Modification to Project – Human Ethics* which is available on the Research Office website at <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human-ethics>. If the UHEC considers that the proposed changes are significant, you may be required to submit a new application form for approval of the revised project.

- **Adverse Events.** If any unforeseen or adverse events occur, including adverse effects on participants, during the course of the project which may affect the ethical acceptability of the project, the Chief Investigator must immediately notify the UHEC Executive Officer on telephone (03) 9479 1443. Any complaints about the project received by the researchers must also be referred immediately to the UHEC Executive Officer.
- **Withdrawal of Project.** If you decide to discontinue your research before its planned completion, you must advise the UHEC and clarify the circumstances.
- **Monitoring.** All projects are subject to monitoring at any time by the UHEC.
- **Annual Progress Reports.** If your project continues for more than 12 months, you are required to submit a *Progress Report Form - Human Ethics* annually, **on or just prior to 12 February**. The form is available on the Research Office website (see above address). Failure to submit a Progress Report will mean approval for this project will lapse.
- **Auditing.** An audit of the project may be conducted by members of the UHEC.
- **Final Report.** A Final Report (see above address) is required within six months of the completion of the project or by **31 January 2021**.

If you have any queries on the information above please e-mail: [humanethics@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@latrobe.edu.au) or contact me by phone.

Kind regards

Ms Sara Paradowski  
 Senior Human Ethics Officer  
 Executive Officer – University Human Ethics Committee  
 Ethics and Integrity / Research Office  
 La Trobe University Bundoora, Victoria 3086  
 P: (03) 9479 – 1443 F: (03) 9479 - 1464  
<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human-ethics>

## Appendix 3: Consent Form



La Trobe Rural Health School  
Faculty of Health Sciences

PO BOX 821, Wodonga  
Victoria 3689 Australia  
T 02 6024 9730  
F 02 6024 9737  
E healthsciences.aw@latrobe.edu.au  
latrobe.edu.au

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

Full project title:

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE EXPERIENCE OF BRITISH AND IRISH  
RECRUITED SOCIAL WORKERS WITHIN THE [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] A SINGLE TICKET TO  
PARADISE?

I (the participant) have read and understood the participant information statement and consent form, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in the project, realising that I may withdraw up to four weeks after the interview has been conducted. I agree that research data provided by me or with my permission during the project may be included in a thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals on the condition that neither my name nor any other identifying information is used.

Please circle Yes or No to each of the questions below:

I understand that the interview by Skype/Video Conference will be audio-recorded:

Yes	No
-----	----

I give consent for my responses during the interview to be audio-recorded:

Yes	No
-----	----

I give consent for my responses during the interview to be recorded in writing:

Yes	No
-----	----

I give consent for the investigator to contact me regarding a follow-up study conducted in a later phase of the research:

Yes	No
-----	----

Consent form, February 2013

Melbourne | Bendigo | Albury-Wodonga | Franklin St City | Shepparton | Mildura

ABN 64 804 735 113  
CRICOS Provider 00115M

I realise that I may withdraw from the interview at any time.

Name of Participant:	
Signature:	
Date:	
Corina Modderman (Investigator) Signature: Date:	
Dr Guinever Threlkeld (Supervisor) Signature: Date:	

Consent form, February 2013



## Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet



La Trobe Rural Health School  
Faculty of Health Sciences

PO BOX 821, Wodonga  
Victoria 3689 Australia  
T 02 6024 9730  
F 02 6024 9737  
E healthsciences.aw@latrobe.edu.au  
latrobe.edu.au

### Participant Information Statement

Full project title:

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE EXPERIENCE OF BRITISH AND IRISH  
RECRUITED SOCIAL WORKERS WITHIN [REDACTED]; A SINGLE TICKET TO  
PARADISE?

Investigator: Ms Corina Modderman, Post Graduate Social Work student at the Department  
of Social Work and Social Policy, La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University.  
(Please see the last page of this form for this Post Graduate Student contact details)

Supervisor: Dr Guinever Threlkeld, Associate Head of School, La Trobe Rural Health  
School, Albury-Wodonga Campus, La Trobe University.

### Introduction:

Australia has a history of recruiting overseas Social Workers across child protection  
programs. There is an ongoing demand for Social Workers and to date overseas professionals  
are still needed to fill frontline positions. There is limited published research available about  
overseas recruitment and factors influencing this group of Social Workers. The study  
presented here aims to gather detailed information about the experiences of British and Irish  
recruited Social Workers during their time of transition; as they enter a "new" workforce in  
the [REDACTED] within [REDACTED]. Participants  
will be native English speaking Social Workers who came to [REDACTED] to work within  
frontline child protection and have worked for at least six months in child protection in the  
United Kingdom or Ireland. Participating in this research will provide you with an  
opportunity to share your individual experience of migration and transition into working in  
the [REDACTED] child protection workforce. The research is interested in factors that influenced your  
experience and aims to capture lessons that can be used for future planning.

What does participation in this research project involve?

You have been identified as a possible participant because you are either British or Irish and a  
qualified Social Worker in the [REDACTED].  
I am inviting you to take part in individual interviews to provide your views on how you  
experienced the transition from the United Kingdom/Ireland to working in child protection in  
the [REDACTED]. Initially participating will involve one interview and will take approximately 90  
minutes. After the interview you will be asked to complete a questionnaire to collect basic  
demographics (age, gender, tenure, level of education). I would like to hear about your  
positive and less positive experiences and gather your ideas about improving recruitment and  
staff retention. I wish to discuss a range of issues around your migration and working within

1

child protection. The interviews will be audio-recorded so that I can transcribe your information verbatim. The information gathered will be confidential and recorded anonymously. All data will be kept in a secure, locked cabinet and all computer files will be encrypted and protected with a secure password.

Data and information gathered during the course of this project may be used in scholarly publications and in a future PhD study. You may be contacted to participate in a follow-up interview for this study, during which you subsequent experiences in Australia will be discussed.

What are the possible risks?

There is a slight risk of emotional discomfort and you may choose not to continue to participate in various stages of the interview if you wish. Your interview will be transcribed verbatim and your opinion recorded anonymously, which will not have any foreseeable impact on your relationship with the [REDACTED] within [REDACTED] now or in the future. A copy of the transcribed interview will be provided to you on request. If you do feel that you need additional support following the interview, an information folder can be found in this package regarding services available to you.

What are the possible benefits?

Retaining experienced staff will facilitate a more successful working relationship between worker and client. Research suggests that retention leads to better outcomes for the vulnerable children and their families within the child protection system. Also, an increased knowledge of factors that influence overseas Social Workers may result in a better understanding of what education and training is needed to retain recruited Social Workers from Great Britain and Ireland and consequently enable prevention of future recruitment shortfall. Moreover, reducing high turnover of staff will mitigate the detrimental effect on service provision in general. Individual benefits are the opportunity to share your story reflecting your experience.

Do I have to take part in this research project?

Please note that your participation to this project is voluntary. If you consent to participate and then change your mind before the start or during of the interview, simply complete and return the Withdrawal of Consent form contained in this package. You also may wish to notify the investigator by e-mail or telephone that you like to withdraw your consent for your data to be used during this research project. You can do this up to four week after completion of the interview.

Is this research project approved?

Ethical approval for this research project has been obtained from the La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee.

If you would like any more information about the project or have any questions about participating, please contact Corina Modderman via e-mail at [c.modderman@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:c.modderman@latrobe.edu.au) or by phone at 04-32269179.

If you have any concerns or complaints that the investigator has not been able to answer to your satisfaction, you may contact the Secretary, Human Ethics Committee, Research Services, La Trobe University, Victoria, 3086, please quote UHEC application reference number HEC13-019.

Phone number: 03-94791443 or e-mail: [humanethics@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@latrobe.edu.au)

## Appendix 5 Interview Schedule 1

<p>Introduction Key Components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank you</li> <li>• My name</li> <li>• Purpose</li> <li>• Confidentiality</li> <li>• Duration</li> <li>• How the interview will be conducted</li> <li>• Opportunity for questions</li> <li>• Signature of consent</li> </ul>	<p>I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today.</p> <p>My name is Corina Modderman and I would like to talk to you about your experience of being an overseas social worker practising in child protection in Australia. Specifically, around how this has influenced you in order to capture lessons that can be used for future directions.</p> <p>The interview should take about 1.5 hours. I will be recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Although I will be taking some notes during the session, I can't possibly write fast enough to get it all down. This is the first time we meet, and it is anticipated that we will schedule a second interview so we can have a more in-depth conversation and are not rushed.</p> <p>All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview response will only be shared with my supervisors and we will ensure that any information we include in my thesis and anticipated publications does not identify you as the respondent. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to, and you may end the interview at any time.</p> <p>Are there any questions about what I have just explained?</p> <p>Are you willing to participate in this interview?</p>
<p>Questions</p> <p>One broad question to open the interview and to invite the participant to share the narrative of their journey.</p> <p>Ask factual before opinion.</p> <p>Use probes as needed to assess what stands out and where the gaps are.</p>	<p>'Tell me your story about you coming to Australia to work in child protection'</p> <p>Important probes to consider during the interview:</p> <p>Tell me about your thinking when you first considered moving to Australia and what were the factors that influenced your decision?</p> <p>What steps did you take to get to the point of leaving the UK/Ireland and coming to Australia?</p> <p>Tell me about your experience of being a newcomer to Australia?</p> <p>What sort of things are as you had expected and what is different?</p> <p>Please tell me about a practice example to highlight what would be the same and what would be different within the two child protection systems?</p> <p>How were you introduced to the new system?</p>

	<p>How did the existing workforce react to you and other international recruits?</p> <p>What has assisted you in making this transition?</p> <p>Tell me about any ideas you have about what might have made your experience easier or more positive in any areas you have found difficult?</p>
<p>Closing key components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional comment</li> <li>• Next steps</li> <li>• Thank you</li> </ul>	<p>Is there anything more you would like to add?</p> <p>I'll be analysing the information you and others gave me and will submit a thesis and anticipate publishing an article. I'll be happy to send you a copy to review at that time, if you are interested.</p> <p>Thank you for your time.</p>

## Appendix 6 Interview Schedule 2

<p>Introduction Key Components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank you</li> <li>• My name</li> <li>• Purpose</li> <li>• Confidentiality</li> <li>• Duration</li> <li>• How the interview will be conducted</li> <li>• Opportunity for questions</li> <li>• Signature of consent</li> </ul>	<p>I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today.</p> <p>My name is Corina Modderman and we met before in .... to talk about your experience of being an overseas social worker practising in child protection in Australia. The aim of this research is to ensure better outcomes for the children and families within the child protection system. This research explores what enables and what challenges social workers who work in an unfamiliar practice environment.</p> <p>The interview should take about one hour. I will be recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Although I will be taking some notes during the session, I can't possibly write fast enough to get it all down.</p> <p>All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview response will only be shared with my supervisors and we will ensure that any information we include in my thesis and anticipated publications does not identify you as the respondent. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to, and you may end the interview at any time. I will provide you with a copy of our transcribed interview if you would wish so.</p> <p>Are there any questions about what I have just explained?</p> <p>Are you willing to participate in this interview?</p> <p>Introduce here some small talk specifically relating to the person who is being interviewed; 'What do you recall of our initial conversations? What were your thoughts at the time?'</p>
<p>Questions</p> <p>One broad question to open the interview and to invite the participant to share the narrative of their journey.</p> <p>Use probes as needed to assess what stands out and where the gaps are.</p>	<p>'Tell me what has been happening in your life since we last met. I am interested to hear about your professional experiences'</p> <p>Important probes to consider during the interview:</p> <p><i>General: Can you tell a story, an illustration or an example to highlight what you just shared with me?</i></p> <p>How do you look back now on those first years of being new to Australian child protection practice?</p> <p>What has assisted you in making this transition?</p> <p>What are important skills and knowledge for transnational social workers?</p>

	<p>What are gaps that you experiencing today that require further professional development?</p> <p>Have you adapted to Australian child protection practice? What has assisted you?</p> <p>At what point did your ‘Australian experience’ come together? Was there a time that you can recall where it ‘clicked’, a point of transitioning i.e. when Australia became ‘home’?</p> <p>What advice would you give to new recruits? And to your supervisor and the wider organisation?</p> <p>Have your clients ever made comments about you being from overseas?</p> <p>If you think about your social work values, ethics and principles, how would you describe these?</p> <p>If you think about practising now in Australia, how would you describe your professional social work identity? Has it changed since your migration? Do you belong to a professional group?</p> <p>Thinking back to practice in the UK and your education, how do you see your work with the Indigenous peoples of Australia? What was your understanding and how did this influence your practice?</p> <p>What do you think can be improved when it comes to international recruitment of social workers?</p>
<p>Closing key components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional comment</li> <li>• Next steps</li> <li>• Thank you</li> </ul>	<p>Is there anything more you would like to add?</p> <p>I’ll be transcribing this interview with you. I’ll be happy to send you a copy to review at that time, if you are interested. I will send you an email to follow up.</p> <p>Thank you for your time.</p>



## List of References

- Adams, K., Hean, S., Sturgis, P., & Clark, J. M. (2006). Investigating the factors influencing professional identity of first-year health and social care students. *Learning in Health and Social Care*, 5(2), 55-68.
- Akesson, B., Burns, V., & Hordyk, S. R. (2017). The place of place in social work: Rethinking the person-in-environment model in social work education and practice. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 53(3), 372-383.
- Allison, G. T. (1969). Conceptual models and the Cuban missile crisis. *American Political Science Review*, 63(3), 689-718.
- Andrews, M., Squire, C., & Tamboukou, M. (2013). *Doing narrative research*. Sage.
- Archer, M. (2007). *Making our way through the world: Human reflexivity and social mobility*. Cambridge University Press.
- Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: Towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 8(1), 19-32.
- Australian Association of Social Workers. (2020a). *About AASW*.  
<https://www.aasw.asn.au/about-aasw/about-aasw>
- Australian Association of Social Workers. (2020b). *Formal registration campaign*.  
<https://www.aasw.asn.au/social-policy-advocacy/registration/national-registration-and-accreditation-scheme>
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2020). *Child protection*.  
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/child-protection>
- Azzopardi, C., & McNeill, T. (2016). From cultural competence to cultural consciousness: Transitioning to a critical approach to working across differences in social work. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 25(4), 282-299.
- Baines, D. (2018). New public management, migrant professionals and labour mobility: Possibilities for social justice social work? In A. Bartley & L. Beddoe (Eds.), *Transnational social work: Opportunities and challenges of a global profession* (pp. 35-51). Policy Press.
- Balestrery, J. E. (2016). Social work education without walls: Ethnography as a lens for transformative learning. *Social Work Education*, 35(6), 615-631.
- Bamberg, M. (2006). Bio-graphical narrative research, qua vadis? A critical review of 'big stories' from the perspective of 'small stories'. In K. Milnes, B. Roberts, &

- D. Robinson (Eds.), *Narrative, memory & knowledge: Representations, aesthetics, contexts* (pp. 63-79). University of Huddersfield Press.
- Bamberg, M. (2012a). Narrative practice and identity navigation. In J. A. Holstein & J. F. Gubrium (Eds.), *Varieties of narrative analysis* (pp. 99-122). Sage.
- Bamberg, M. (2012b). Why narrative? *Narrative Inquiry*, 22(1), 202-210.
- Bartley, A. (2018). Transnational social workers in Australia: Naivety in the transnational professional space. In A. Bartley & L. Beddoe (Eds.), *Transnational social work: Opportunities and challenges of a global profession* (pp. 223-240). Policy Press.
- Bartley, A., & Beddoe, L. (2018). *Transnational social work: Opportunities and challenges of a global profession*. Policy Press.
- Bartley, A., Beddoe, L., Fouché, C., & Harington, P. (2012). Transnational social workers: Making the profession a transnational professional space. *International Journal of Population Research*, 2012. doi:10.1155/2012/527510
- Battiste, M., & Youngblood, J. (2000). *Protecting Indigenous knowledge and heritage: A global challenge*. Purich Publishing.
- Beddoe, L. (2013). Health social work: Professional identity and knowledge. *Qualitative Social Work*, 12(1), 24-40.
- Beddoe, L., & Bartley, A. (2019). Reviewing the benefits and challenges of overseas practice: Reflections upon coming home. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, 31(1), 72-88.
- Beddoe, L., & Fouché, C. B. (2014). 'Kiwis on the move': New Zealand social workers' experience of practising abroad. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(1), 193-208.
- Bennett, B. (2013). The importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history for social work students and graduates. In B. Bennett, S. Green, Gilbert S, & D. Bessarab (Eds.), *Our voices: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social work* (pp. 1-25). Palgrave MacMillan.
- Bennett, B. (2015). 'Stop deploying your white privilege on me!': Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement with the Australian Association of Social Workers. *Australian Social Work*, 68(1), 19-31.
- Bennett, B. (2019). The importance of Aboriginal history for practitioners. In B. Bennett & S. Green (Eds.), *Our voices: Aboriginal social work* (2nd ed.). Red Globe Press.

- Bennett, B., & Gates, T. G. (2019). Teaching cultural humility for social workers serving LGBTQI Aboriginal communities in Australia. *Social Work Education*, 38(5), 604-617.
- Bennett, B., & Green, S. (2019). *Our voices: Aboriginal social work* (2nd ed.). Red Globe Press.
- Bennett, B., Redfern, H., & Zubrzycki, J. (2018). Cultural responsiveness in action: Co-constructing social work curriculum resources with Aboriginal communities. *British Journal of Social Work*, 48(3), 808-825.
- Bennett, B., Zubrzycki, J., & Bacon, V. (2011). What do we know? The experiences of social workers working alongside Aboriginal people. *Australian Social Work*, 64(1), 20-37.
- Berge, M., & Ingerman, Å. (2017). Multiple theoretical lenses as an analytical strategy in researching group discussions. *Research in Science & Technological Education*, 35(1), 42-57.
- Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative research*, 15(2), 219-234.
- Bikner-Ahsbahr, A., & Clarke, D. (2015). Theoretical issues in mathematics education: An introduction to the presentations. In *Proceedings of the 12th International Congress on Mathematical Education*. Springer.
- Black, C., Frederico, M., & Bamblett, M. (2019). Healing through connection: An Aboriginal community designed, developed and delivered cultural healing program for Aboriginal survivors of institutional child sexual abuse. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 49(4), 1059-1080. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcz059
- Bogo, M., Raphael, D., & Roberts, R. (1993). Interests, activities, and self-identification among social work students: Toward a definition of social work identity. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 29(3), 279-292.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss* (Vol. 1). Hogarth House.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss* (Vol. 2). Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1980). *Attachment and loss* (Vol. 3). Basic Books.
- Breakwell, G. (1986). *Coping with threatened identities*. Methuen.
- Briskman, L. (2020). The people's inquiry into detention: Social work activism for asylum seeker rights. *Journal of Sociology*, 56(1), 100-114.

- Broadhurst, K., & Mason, C. (2014). Social work beyond the VDU: Foregrounding co-presence in situated practice—Why face-to-face practice matters. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(3), 578-595.
- Bromfield, L., Arney, F., & Higgins, D. (2014). *Contemporary issues in child protection intake, referral and family support*.  
[https://researchbank.acu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=9144&context=fhs\\_public](https://researchbank.acu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=9144&context=fhs_public)
- Bruce, A., Beuthin, R., Sheilds, L., Molzahn, A., & Schick-Makaroff, K. (2016). Narrative research evolving: Evolving through narrative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 15. doi:10.1177/1609406916659292
- Cairney, P. (2013). Standing on the shoulders of giants: How do we combine the insights of multiple theories in public policy studies? *Policy Studies Journal*, 41(1), 1-21.
- Calderon, D. (2014). Uncovering settler grammars in curriculum. *Educational Studies*, 50(4), 313-338.
- Cannella, G. S., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). Ethics, research regulations, and critical social science. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (Vol. 4, pp. 81-90). Sage.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry*. Sage.
- Coates, J., Gray, M., & Hetherington, T. (2006). An ‘ecospiritual’ perspective: Finally, a place for Indigenous approaches. *British Journal of Social Work*, 36(3), 381-399.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14.
- Cornell, K. L. (2006). Person-in-situation: History, theory, and new directions for social work practice. *Praxis*, 6(4), 50-57.
- Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Merrill.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage
- Crofoot, T. L., & Harris, M. S. (2012). An Indian child welfare perspective on disproportionality in child welfare. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34(9), 1667-1674.

- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Allen & Unwin.
- Danso, R. (2018). Cultural competence and cultural humility: A critical reflection on key cultural diversity concepts. *Journal of Social Work, 18*(4), 410-430.
- Davidson, P., Saunders, P., Bradbury, B., & Wong, M. (2018). *Poverty in Australia, 2018*. [https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Methodology-Paper\\_Poverty-in-Australia-2018.pdf](https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Methodology-Paper_Poverty-in-Australia-2018.pdf)
- Davies, M. (2019). *Family is culture: Independent review of Aboriginal children and young people in OOHHC*. <https://www.familyisculture.nsw.gov.au/>
- Davis, K., Drey, N., & Gould, D. (2009). What are scoping studies? A review of the nursing literature. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 46*(10), 1386-1400.
- D'cruz, H., Gillingham, P., & Melendez, S. (2007). Reflexivity, its meanings and relevance for social work: A critical review of the literature. *The British Journal of Social Work, 37*(1), 73-90.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative enquiry* (3rd ed., pp. 1-43). Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (Vol. 4, pp. 1-28). Sage.
- Department of Home Affairs. (2020). *Immigration and citizenship*. <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/>
- Dew, A., McEntyre, E., & Vaughan, P. (2019). Taking the research journey together: The insider and outsider experiences of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 20*(1). doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-20.1.3156>
- Diemer, K., Humphreys, C., & Crinall, K. (2017). Safe at home? Housing decisions for women leaving family violence. *Australian Journal of Social Issues, 52*(1), 32-47.
- Downey, H., Threlkeld, G., & Warburton, J. (2017a). What is the place of reflective learning in researching farming couples' retirement decision making? *Qualitative Social Work, 16*(6), 756-774.

- Downey, H., Threlkeld, G., & Warburton, J. (2017b). What is the role of place identity in older farming couples' retirement considerations? *Journal of Rural Studies*, 50, 1-11. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2016.12.006>
- Fay, B. (1987). *Critical social science: Liberation and its limits*. Polity.
- Featherstone, G. (2017). Because I'm black: What makes for well-functioning Aboriginal families in Brisbane (Doctoral dissertation, University of Queensland).  
<https://espace.library.uq.edu.au>
- Fennig, M., & Denov, M. (2019). Regime of truth: Rethinking the dominance of the biomedical model in mental health social work with refugee youth. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 49(2), 300-317.
- Finlay, L. (2009). Exploring lived experience: Principles and practice of phenomenological research. *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation*, 16(9), 474-481.
- Flick, U. (2018). *An introduction to qualitative research* (6th ed.). Sage.
- Fook, J. (1999). Reflexivity as method. *Annual Review of Health Social Science*, 9(1), 11-20.
- Fook, J. (2016). *Social work: A critical approach to practice* (3th ed.). Sage.
- Fouché, C., Beddoe, L., Bartley, A., & Brenton, N. (2014). Strengths and struggles: Overseas qualified social workers' experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Australian Social Work*, 67(4), 551-566.
- Fouché, C., Beddoe, L., Bartley, A., & de Haan, I. (2013). Enduring professional dislocation: Migrant social workers' perceptions of their professional roles. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(7), 2004-2022.
- Fouché, C., Beddoe, L., Bartley, A., & Parkes, E. (2015). Are we ready for them? Overseas-qualified social workers' professional cultural transition. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(1), 106-119.
- Frykman, M. P., Guribye, E., Hidle, K., & Mozetič, K. (2019). How does place matter to highly skilled migrants?: Work/non-work experiences of international physicians in Norway and Sweden. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 10(1), 51.
- Fulton, A., Pullen-Sansfaçon, A., Brown, M., Éthier, S., & Graham, J. (2016). Migrant social workers, foreign credential recognition and securing employment in Canada: A qualitative analysis of pre-employment experiences. *Canadian Social Work Review/Revue Canadienne de Service Social*, 33(1), 65-86.

- Funston, L., & Herring, S. (2016). When will the stolen generations end?: A qualitative critical exploration of contemporary 'child protection' practices in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. *Sexual Abuse in Australia and New Zealand*, 7(1), 51-58.
- Gair, S. (2012). Feeling their stories: Contemplating empathy, insider/outsider positionings, and enriching qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 22(1), 134-143.
- Gair, S. (2017). Pondering the colour of empathy: Social work students' reasoning on activism, empathy and racism. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 47(1), 162-180.
- Gillingham, P. (2016). Social work and child protection in Australia: Whose job is it anyway? *Practice*, 28(2), 83-96.
- Gordon, M. J. (2018). Everyday social work practice: Listening to the voices of practitioners (Doctoral dissertation, University of Edinburgh).  
<https://era.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/31463>
- Guarnaccia, C., Giunta, S., Rasho, A. R., Ferraro, A. M., & Giannone, F. (2020). Working with children who are victims of abuse: Emotions and representations of professionals in residential children's communities. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 8(1). doi:<https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/mjcp-2344>
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (1998). Narrative practice and the coherence of personal stories. *Sociological Quarterly*, 39(1), 163-187.
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (2009). *Analyzing narrative reality*. Sage.
- Hanna, S., & Lyons, K. (2016). 'London calling': The experiences of international social work recruits working in London. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(3), 719-736.
- Hansen, P., & Ainsworth, F. (2013). Australian child protection services: A game without end. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 22(1), 104-110.
- Harnett, P. H., & Featherstone, G. (2020). The role of decision making in the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the Australian child protection system. *Children and Youth Services Review*. Advance online publication. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105019>
- Harrison, G., & Healy, K. (2016). Forging an identity as a newly qualified worker in the non-government community services sector. *Australian Social Work*, 69(1), 80-91.



- Healy, K. (2014). *Social work theories in context: Creating frameworks for practice* (2nd ed.). Macmillan International Higher Education.
- Healy, K., Meagher, G., & Cullin, J. (2009). Retaining novices to become expert child protection practitioners: Creating career pathways in direct practice. *British Journal of Social Work*, 39(2), 299-317.
- Healy, K., & Olteidal, S. (2010). An institutional comparison of child protection systems in Australia and Norway focused on workforce retention. *Journal of Social Policy*, 39(02), 255-274.
- Hunt, S., Goddard, C., Cooper, J., Littlechild, B., & Wild, J. (2016). 'If I feel like this, how does the child feel?': Child protection workers supervision, management and organisational response to parental violence. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 30(1), 5-24.
- Hussein, S. (2014). Hierarchical challenges to transnational social workers' mobility: The United Kingdom as a destination within an expanding European Union. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(suppl\_1), i174-i192.
- Hussein, S. (2018). Inter-European social workers' mobility within a dynamic social work and immigration policy context: A case study of England. *European Journal of Social Work*, 1-14. doi:10.1080/13691457.2018.1539836.
- Hussein, S., Manthorpe, J., & Stevens, M. (2010). People in places: A qualitative exploration of recruitment agencies' perspectives on the employment of international social workers in the UK. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(3), 1000-1016.
- Huws, J. C., & Jones, R. S. (2008). Diagnosis, disclosure, and having autism: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the perceptions of young people with autism. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability*, 33(2), 99-107.
- Kennedy-Kish, B., Sinclair, R., Carniol, B., & Baines, D. (2017). *Case critical: Social service and social justice in Canada* (7th ed.). Between the Lines.
- Kincheloe, J., & McLaren, P. (2000). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 279-314). Sage.
- King, B., Fallon, B., Boyd, R., Black, T., Antwi-Boasiako, K., & O'Connor, C. (2017). Factors associated with racial differences in child welfare investigative decision-making in Ontario, Canada. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 73, 89-105.

- Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45(3), 214-222.
- Land, C. (2015). *Decolonizing solidarity: Dilemmas and directions for supporters of indigenous struggles*. Zed Books.
- Lewig, K., & McLean, S. (2016). *Caring for our frontline child protection workforce*. <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/caring-our-frontline-child-protection-workforce>
- Liamputtong, P. (2013). *Qualitative research methods* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Cannella, G. S. (2019). *Employing critical qualitative inquiry to mount nonviolent resistance*. Meyers Education Press.
- Lindsay, G. M. (2006). Experiencing nursing education research: Narrative inquiry and interpretive phenomenology. *Nurse Researcher*, 13(4), 30-47.
- Littlechild, B., Hunt, S., Goddard, C., Cooper, J., Raynes, B., & Wild, J. (2016). The effects of violence and aggression from parents on child protection workers' personal, family, and professional lives. *SAGE Open*, 6(1), 1-12.
- Lohoar, S., Butera, N., & Kennedy, E. (2014). *Strengths of Australian Aboriginal cultural practices in family life and child rearing*. Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Long, N. (2018). Wearing a social work hat: The experience of social work professional identity development for graduates in the 21st century (Doctoral dissertation, La Trobe University). <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.9/565816>
- Long, N., Hodgkin, S., Gardner, F., & Lehmann, J. (2018). The social work hat as a metaphor for social work professional identity. *Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education*, 20(2), 115-128.
- Lonne, B., Harries, M., & Lantz, S. (2012). Workforce development: A pathway to reforming child protection systems in Australia. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43(8), 1630-1648.
- Lyons, K. (2006). Globalization and social work: International and local implications. *British Journal of Social Work*, 36(3), 365-380.
- Maguire-Jack, K., Font, S. A., & Dillard, R. (2019). Child protective services decision-making: The role of children's race and county factors. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 90(1), 48-62.

- Maggs-Rapport, F. (2000). Combining methodological approaches in research: Ethnography and interpretive phenomenology. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 31(1), 219-225.
- Martin, K., & Mirraboopa, B. (2003). Ways of knowing, being and doing: A theoretical framework and methods for indigenous and indigenist re-search. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 27(76), 203-214.
- McArthur, M., Thomson, L., Barker, J., Winkworth, G., & Campus, C. (2012). *National analysis of workforce trends in statutory child protection*.  
<http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/national-analysis-of-workforce-trends-in-statutory-child-protection>
- McCluskey, K., Sim, C., & Johnson, G. (2011). Imagining a profession: A beginning teacher's story of isolation. *Teaching Education*, 22(1), 79-90.
- McDermott, D. (2019). 'Big sister' wisdom: How might non-Indigenous speech-language pathologists genuinely, and effectively, engage with Indigenous Australia? *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 21(3), 252-262.
- McFadden, P., Mallett, J., & Leiter, M. (2018). Extending the two-process model of burnout in child protection workers: The role of resilience in mediating burnout via organizational factors of control, values, fairness, reward, workload, and community relationships. *Stress and Health*, 34(1), 72-83.
- McMahon, M. (2017). Lotjpa-nhanuk: Indigenous Australian child-rearing discourses (Doctoral dissertation, La Trobe University). <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.9/564852>
- McNamara, B. J., Banks, E., Gubhaju, L., Joshy, G., Williamson, A., Raphael, B., & Eades, S. (2018). Factors relating to high psychological distress in Indigenous Australians and their contribution to Indigenous–non-Indigenous disparities. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 42(2), 145-152.
- McPherson, L., Frederico, M., & McNamara, P. (2015). Safety as a fifth dimension in supervision: Stories from the frontline. *Australian Social Work*, 69(1), 67-79.
- Mendes, P., & McCurdy, S. (2019). Policy and practice supports for young people transitioning from out-of-home care: An analysis of six recent inquiries in Australia. *Journal of Social Work*. doi:10.1177/1468017319852702
- Menzies, K., & Grace, R. (2020). The efficacy of a child protection training program on the historical welfare context and Aboriginal trauma. *Australian Social Work*. doi:10.1080/0312407X.2020.1745857

- Mishler, E. G. (1995). Models of narrative analysis: A typology. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 5(2), 87-123.
- Modderman, C., McMahon, M., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2020). Transnational social workers' understanding of Australian First Nations perspectives in statutory child protection. *Australian Social Work*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2020.1771389>
- Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2017). Transnational social workers in statutory child welfare: A scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 81, 21-28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.07.022>
- Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2018). Transnational social workers' lived experience in statutory child protection. *European Journal of Social Work*, 23(4), 645-657.
- Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2019). The role of place for transnational social workers in statutory child protection. *British Journal of Social Work*, 94(6), 1619–1637.
- Moorhead, B., Bell, K., & Bowles, W. (2016). Exploring the development of professional identity with newly qualified social workers. *Australian Social Work*, 69(4), 456-467.
- Morley, C. (2008). Critical reflection as a research methodology. In P. Liamputtong & J. Rumbold (Eds.), *Knowing differently: Art-based and collaborative research* (pp. 463-491). Nova Science Publishers
- Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 250-260.
- Morse, J., & Niehaus, L. (2009). Mixed methods design: Principles and procedures—Volume 4, developing qualitative inquiry. Pennsylvania State University.
- Muller, L. (2014). *A theory for Indigenous Australian health and human service work*. Allen & Unwin.
- Munro, E. (2011). *The Munro review of child protection: Final report, a child-centred system*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/munro-review>
- Nakata, M. (2002). Indigenous knowledge and the cultural interface: Underlying issues at the intersection of knowledge and information systems. *IFLA journal*, 28(5-6), 281-291.
- Nicholls, R. (2009). Research and Indigenous participation: Critical reflexive methods. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 12(2), 117-126.

- Nolan, S., Hendricks, J., Williamson, M., & Ferguson, S. (2018). Using narrative inquiry to listen to the voices of adolescent mothers in relation to their use of social networking sites (SNS). *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 74(3), 743-751.
- Oates, F. (2018). Working for the welfare: Exploring the experiences of Indigenous child protection workers (Doctoral dissertation, James Cook University).  
<https://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/56112/>
- Oates, F. (2019a). Racism as trauma: Experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian child protection practitioners. *Child Abuse & Neglect*.  
doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104262
- Oates, F. (2019b). You are not allowed to tell: Organisational culture as a barrier for child protection workers seeking assistance for traumatic stress symptomology. *Children Australia*, 44(2), 84-90.
- Ollerenshaw, J. A., & Creswell, J. W. (2002). Narrative research: A comparison of two restorying data analysis approaches. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(3), 329-347.
- Ortega, R. M., & Coulborn, K. (2011). Training child welfare workers from an intersectional cultural humility perspective: A paradigm shift. *Child Welfare*, 90(5), 27-49.
- O'Sullivan, B., Russell, D. J., McGrail, M. R., & Scott, A. (2019). Reviewing reliance on overseas-trained doctors in rural Australia and planning for self-sufficiency: Applying 10 years' MABEL evidence. *Human Resources for Health*, 17(1), 8.
- Papadopoulos, A. (2017). Migrating qualifications: The ethics of recognition. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 47(1), 219-237.
- Papadopoulos, A. (2018). Recognising transnational social workers in Australia. In A. Bartley & L. Beddoe (Eds.), *Transnational social work: Opportunities and challenges of a global profession* (pp. 223-240). Policy Press.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Sage.
- Patterson, C. (2018). Constructing narrative and phenomenological meaning within one study. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 18(3), 223-237.
- Pawson, H., Parsell, C., Saunders, P., Hill, T., & Liu, E. (2018). *Australian homelessness monitor 2018*. <https://www.launchhousing.org.au/australianhomelessnessmonitor/>
- Payne, M. (2007). *What is professional social work?* (2nd ed.). Policy Press.
- Peter, S., Bartley, A., & Beddoe, L. (2019). Transnational social workers' transition into receiving countries: What lessons can be learned from nursing and teaching? *European Journal of Social Work*, 22(1), 16-29.

- Phoenix, C., & Sparkes, A. C. (2009). Being Fred: Big stories, small stories and the accomplishment of a positive ageing identity. *Qualitative Research*, 9(2), 219-236.
- Polson, E. (2016). *Privileged mobilities: Professional migration, geo-social media, and a new global middle class*. Peter Lang.
- Ponterotto, J. G. (2005). Qualitative research in counseling psychology: A primer on research paradigms and philosophy of science. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 126.
- Price-Robertson, R., Bromfield, L., & Lamont, A. (2014). *International approaches to child protection: What can Australia learn?*  
<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/international-approaches-child-protection>
- Probst, B. (2015). The eye regards itself: Benefits and challenges of reflexivity in qualitative social work research. *Social Work Research*, 39(1), 37-48.
- Ravulo, J. (2019). Social work as a recognised profession in the Pacific region. *International Social Work*, 62(2), 712-725.
- Reeves, S., Albert, M., Kuper, A., & Hodges, B. D. (2008). Why use theories in qualitative research? *British Medical Journal*, 337, 631-634.  
doi:10.1136/bmj.a949
- Riessman, C. K. (2000). *Qualitative research in social work*. Sage.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage.
- Riessman, C. K., & Quinney, L. (2005). Narrative in social work: A critical review. *Qualitative Social Work*, 4(4), 391-412.
- Righard, E. (2018). Conceptualising social work through the lens of transnationalism. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 8(4), 245-253.
- Rigney, L.-I. (2001). *A first perspective of Indigenous Australian participation in science: Framing Indigenous research towards Indigenous Australian intellectual sovereignty*. [https://ncis.anu.edu.au/\\_lib/doc/LI\\_Rigney\\_First\\_perspective.pdf](https://ncis.anu.edu.au/_lib/doc/LI_Rigney_First_perspective.pdf)
- Rix, E. F., Barclay, L., & Wilson, S. (2014). Can a white nurse get it?: 'Reflexive practice' and the non-Indigenous clinician/researcher working with Aboriginal people. *Rural & Remote Health*, 14(2), 2679.
- Rogowski, S. (2014). Critical social work in child protection/safeguarding: Challenges and (fewer) opportunities. *Critical and Radical Social Work*, 2(1), 43-58.
- Rowe, S., Baldry, E., & Earles, W. (2015). Decolonising social work research: Learning from critical Indigenous approaches. *Australian Social Work*, 68(3), 296-308.

- Ruch, G. (2009). Identifying 'the critical' in a relationship-based model of reflection. *European Journal of Social Work*, 12(3), 349-362.
- Russ, E., Lonne, B., & Darlington, Y. (2009). Using resilience to reconceptualise child protection workforce capacity. *Australian Social Work*, 62(3), 324-338.
- Russ, E., Lonne, B., & Lynch, D. (2019). Increasing child protection workforce retention through promoting a relational-reflective framework for resilience. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104245
- Salas, L. M., Sen, S., & Segal, E. A. (2010). Critical theory: Pathway from dichotomous to integrated social work practice. *Families in Society*, 91(1), 91-96.
- Sammut, J., & O'Brien, T. (2009). *Fatally flawed: The child protection crisis in Australia*. Centre for Independent Studies.
- Sarantakos, S. (2012). *Social research* (4th ed.). Red Globe Press.
- Schwandt, T. A. (1994). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (pp. 118-137). Sage.
- Scott, D. (2010). 'Here under the Southern Cross...': Reflections on child welfare reform in Australia. *Developing Practice: The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*, 26, 4-6.
- Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. (2019). *The family matters report 2019*. <https://www.familymatters.org.au/the-family-matters-report-2019/>
- Sharplin, E., O'Neill, M., & Chapman, A. (2011). Coping strategies for adaptation to new teacher appointments: Intervention for retention. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(1), 136-146.
- Simmons, H., Walsh-Tapiara, W., Meo-Sewabu, L., & Umugwaneza, A. (2014). 'Cultural encounter': A framework of ethical practice for transnational social workers in Aotearoa. Paper presented at the Protecting the Public—Enhancing the Profession Conference, Auckland.
- Social Work Registration Board. (2020). *Overseas qualifications*. <https://swrb.govt.nz/for-social-workers/overseas-qualified-social-workers/>
- Spector-Mersel, G. (2010). Narrative research: Time for a paradigm. *Narrative Inquiry*, 20(1), 204-224.
- Speller, G. M. (2000). A community in transition: A longitudinal study of place attachment and identity processes in the context of an enforced relocation (Doctoral dissertation, University of Surrey). <http://epubs.surrey.ac.uk/593/>



- Steinhauer, E. (2002). Thoughts on an Indigenous research methodology. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 26(2), 69-81.
- Tamburro, A. (2013). Including decolonization in social work education and practice. *Journal of Indigenous Social Development*, 2(1), 1-16.
- Terare, M., & Rawsthorne, M. (2020). Country is yarning to me: Worldview, health and well-being amongst Australian First Nations people. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 50(3), 944-960.
- Tervalon, M., & Murray-Garcia, J. (1998). Cultural humility versus cultural competence: A critical distinction in defining physician training outcomes in multicultural education. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 9(2), 117-125.
- Trevithick, P. (2011). *Social work skills and knowledge: A practice handbook* (3rd ed.). Open University Press.
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1-40.
- Twigger-Ross, C. L., & Uzzell, D. L. (1996). Place and identity processes. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 16(3), 205-220.
- Van Manen, M. (1998). Modalities of body experience in illness and health. *Qualitative Health Research*, 8(1), 7-24.
- Victorian Auditor-General's Office. (2018). *Maintaining the mental health of child protection practitioners*. [https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/file\\_uploads/VAGO-Child-Protection-Post-Erratum\\_9ysG2Q0X.pdf](https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/file_uploads/VAGO-Child-Protection-Post-Erratum_9ysG2Q0X.pdf)
- Walter, M. (2008). *Lives of diversity: Indigenous Australia*. Australian Academy of the Social Sciences.
- Walter, M., Taylor, S., & Habibis, D. (2011). How white is social work in Australia? *Australian Social Work*, 64(1), 6-19.
- Ward, C. H. (2000). Migration, metamorphosis and the residual link: Resources of British women to re-invent themselves (Doctoral dissertation, Murdoch University). <https://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/id/eprint/388/>
- Watts, L. (2019). Reflective practice, reflexivity, and critical reflection in social work education in Australia. *Australian Social Work*, 72(1), 8-20.
- Welbourne, P., Harrison, G., & Ford, D. (2007). Social work in the UK and the global labour market: Recruitment, practice and ethical considerations. *International Social Work*, 50(1), 27-40.

- Wilson, W. A., & Yellow Bird, M. (2005). Beginning decolonization. In W. A. Wilson & M. Yellow Bird (Eds.), *For Indigenous eyes only: A decolonization handbook* (pp. 1-8). School of American Research Press.
- Winterton, R., & Warburton, J. (2012). Ageing in the bush: The role of rural places in maintaining identity for long term rural residents and retirement migrants in north-east Victoria, Australia. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 28(4), 329-337.
- Wong, Y. C., & Pearson, V. (2007). Mission possible: Building social work professional identity through fieldwork placements in China. *Social Work Education*, 26(3), 292-310.
- Ziebland, S. (2013). Narrative interviewing. In S. Ziebland, A. Coulton, J. D. Calabrese, & L. Locock (Eds.), *Understanding and using health experiences: Improving patient care* (pp. 38-48). Oxford University Press.
- Zubrzycki, J., Green, S., Jones, V., Stratton, K., Young, S., & Bessarab, D. (2014). *Getting it right: Creating partnerships for change—Integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges in social work education and practice*. [https://staff.acu.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/655804/Getting\\_It\\_Right\\_June\\_2014.pdf](https://staff.acu.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/655804/Getting_It_Right_June_2014.pdf)
- Zubrzycki, J., Thomson, L., & Trevithick, P. (2008). International recruitment in child protection: The experiences of workers in the Australian Capital Territory. *Communities, Children and Families Australia*, 3(2), 30-38.
- Zuchowski, I. (2019). Five years after Carmody: Practitioners' views of changes, challenges and research in child protection. *Children Australia*, 44(3), 146-153.