

**LESSONS LEARNED:  
PARENTAL EXPERIENCE OF EMPATHY AND POWER**

**LESSONS LEARNED:  
PARENTAL EXPERIENCE OF EMPATHY AND POWER**

**BY:**

**RHONDA ANN CRAWFORD B.A., B.S.W.**

A Thesis  
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

McMaster University

©Copyright by Rhonda Ann Crawford, January 2010

Master of Social Work  
(2010)

McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Lessons Learned: Parental Experience of Empathy and Power

AUTHOR: Rhonda Ann Crawford, B.A., B.S.W.

SUPERVISOR: Gary Dumbrill

PAGES: 81

## ABSTRACT

Lessons Learned: Parental Experience of Empathy and Power  
Rhonda Ann Crawford  
Masters Thesis 2010  
School of Social Work  
McMaster University

The aim of this study was to examine the experiences of parents receiving child protection intervention. Taking a service user approach to the research, the purpose of the study was to consider the perspectives of service users to learn what could be included in child protection training programs to better prepare new child protection workers for their work with children and families. As a secondary analysis of a qualitative study five interview transcripts were included in the analysis of the research.

Findings of this study affirm previous research that highlight the significance of a worker communicating empathy to a parent receiving child protection intervention. Furthermore, the link between empathy and power and the impact of such on the relationship between a worker and client is a central theme of analysis. Finally, the value of service user theory as an approach to conducting research is validated as a finding of the study.

Implications of this study are considered for child protection workers, the development of child protection training curriculum and its facilitation, child protection agencies, and researchers.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Foremost, in appreciation to those who shared their experiences for the purposes of research I dedicate my thesis. Furthermore, I am grateful to my thesis supervisor, Gary Dumbrill whose encouragement, guidance and patience was appreciated as he supported me in my efforts to complete my thesis.

To my mentors in practice, including Rob Shea, Brigitte Wentlandt, and Donna Mcilroy-Hamelin whose mentorship and encouragement to grow as a professional situated my practice within this thesis in ways they will never know, Additionally, I owe thanks and gratitude to my colleagues, Renay and Melanie whose friendship and willingness to listen, challenge, and encourage me was appreciated as the learning's of my research unfolded.

To my mom, who has been an inspiration and whose unwavering belief in me fuelled my ambition to be a social worker and pursue post-secondary studies. Without your love and support none of my achievements would have been possible.

Thank you to my husband Steve, whose relentless support and encouragement in motivating me instilled the determination I needed to successfully complete my studies. Finally, thank you to my children, Caden and Dryden, who were born during the completion of this thesis. Becoming a mom provided me with a new perspective for my work with children and an appreciation for the experiences of those parents in which I work.

## Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	V
CHAPTER I .....	1
PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH.....	1
<i>Chronicling the Research Journey</i> .....	1
<i>Rationale for the Research</i> .....	8
<i>Scope of the Research</i> .....	10
<i>Approach to the Research</i> .....	11
CHAPTER II .....	13
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE.....	13
<i>Strengths of Service User Theory</i> .....	13
<i>Strengths of Service User Theory</i> .....	14
<i>Challenges to Service User Theory</i> .....	17
CHAPTER III .....	21
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	21
<i>Relationship</i> .....	21
<i>Empathy</i> .....	22
<i>Power</i> .....	25
<i>Discussions and Conclusions</i> .....	28
CHAPTER IV .....	30
METHODOLOGY.....	30
<i>Research Design</i> .....	30
<i>Data Collection and Selection</i> .....	31
<i>Sample Demographics</i> .....	33
<i>Analytic Method</i> .....	34
<i>Trustworthiness</i> .....	36
<i>Ethical Considerations</i> .....	38

CHAPTER V .....	40
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION .....	40
<i>Empathy</i> .....	40
<i>Power and Empathy</i> .....	45
<i>Service User Theory</i> .....	57
<i>Discussion</i> .....	58
CHAPTER VI.....	61
IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS .....	61
<i>Curriculum Authors</i> .....	62
<i>Child Protection Trainers</i> .....	65
<i>Child Protection Agencies</i> .....	67
<i>Researchers</i> .....	68
<i>Strengths and Limitations of the Study</i> .....	70
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	72
REFERENCES .....	74
TABLES .....	
TABLE 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS .....	34
APPENDICES .....	
APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH REVIEW TABLE.....	81

## CHAPTER I

### PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

Can I improve what I teach new child protection workers? The question I pose in this research derives from the personal tensions I have experienced in practice. To provide the context of this research it is important to consider the experiences that influenced my question of study and how I approached my examination of such. Therefore, before I delve into my research question I will reflect on the context of my research.

#### Chronically the Research Journey

In early 2000 I joined Peel Children's Aid Society to provide services to families receiving ongoing child protective services. As a new social work graduate, I was eager to put into practice the skills I learned during my studies. As an ongoing family service worker I was excited about the opportunity to build relationships with families and work with children. Furthermore, as someone who did not have children of my own I was enthusiastic about the possibility to learn from the experiences of parents.

When I entered the child protection field it was considered to be an exciting time for child welfare in Ontario. It marked a time of significant reform. The Reform Agenda was comprised of several interconnected initiatives including amendments to the Child & Family Services Act, the standardization of risk assessment tools, and a revised funding framework. The Agenda also led to the development of a training program that was hoped to build the capacity of child protection staff.



At the time of reform, consideration for the knowledge required to practice in child protection was fuelled by a recognition that workers were ill equipped with the skills to practice in their capacity as a child protection worker (OACAS, 1999b). It was believed that training offered through generic social work education provided a limited focus on child protection work and, as such, was ineffective in preparing new social work graduates for practice in that field (OACAS, 1999a). It was also accepted that some newly hired workers assumed child protection case responsibilities without adequate training provided by the Children's Aid Societies (OACAS, 1999a). In response to these concerns, the New Worker Training Program was developed by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. This program was believed to be a step toward recognizing the unique skills for child protection practice. It acknowledged the specialized training required for practitioners to transition into their role as a child protection worker. It is my participation in this training program where the story of my research journey begins.

The teachings I received as a participant of the new worker training program was my introduction to what was valued practice in child protection. As part of my new hire training, I became informed about documentation and tools which emphasized compliance and risk management. I found the training focused on mandatory standards and prescriptive practices dictated by the Ministry. Little attention was given to learning how to build relationships within the context of authority with the exception of sporadic questions asked by participants about how to engage a specific type of family. Even then, such discussion was limited and often led to a conversation about the mandated responsibilities of a child protection worker.

During the first few months of my training, I began to question my ability to do ‘social work’ within a child welfare context. I found myself asking, how can I integrate what I learned about social work as an undergraduate within such a deficit driven and problem centered field? With time, and through trial and error, I found my balance for practice. This came with challenges. I often found myself torn between what I believed to be good practice, and what I learned about practice through the New Worker Training Program. These experiences were complicated by the orientation to practice I gained through supervision and support provided to me by my colleagues and management staff.

As a participant of the training program I recognize that training, as a vehicle to influence practice, can shape how we work with families. This is particularly profound when child protection work is ones first social work experience. Despite the comfort I have gained with my fit in practice I remain uncertain as to whether my approach is the best approach and, at times, continue to feel conflicted about the formal training that has informed my practice.

After a few years of direct practice as an ongoing services child protection worker I joined the training and mentorship team with Peel Children’s Aid Society. This was considered to be an innovative approach to orienting social workers to protection practice. It was a program created to fill a gap in transitioning the learning new workers received in the classroom to direct practice. This program had allowed me to influence practice in a direct way. I assumed a critical role in mentoring and coaching new child protection workers. My primary responsibilities were to assist new staff in developing

practice skills, understand and adhere to ministry expectations, and become aware of and follow agency policies and standards.

In working with new staff I found they asked similar questions to what I had as a new worker. Consistently curious about how to engage clients to build collaborative relationships they would often ask, “how can I work more effectively with my clients” and, “how can I do this within an anti-oppressive framework.” Concerned about how to balance the role of authority with social work values, they sought guidance in managing these tensions. In an effort to provide guidance I coached workers how to manage these tensions. I endeavored to pass on the practice knowledge and skills I gained through my six years of frontline social work in child protection. However, despite my experience, at times I felt uncomfortable sharing my knowledge. Perhaps, because I felt there was an expectation placed on me, as a mentor, to have all the answers.

A primary responsibility of my role as a mentor/trainer was to deliver modules of the New Worker Training Program. This was the very program I completed as a new worker. As a participant of the training program, I was aware of the inadequacies of the training. I felt that the training lacked a depth of understanding for the tensions that arise when intervening with families. The training failed to recognize the importance of relationship building and the complexities that arise in developing such relationships within the parameters of authority inherent in child protection work. I felt what was missing from the training was the ‘how to’ and instead the focus was on the ‘must do.’

As a facilitator of training, I positioned training as an opportunity to influence practice. As a mentor to practice, I observed workers struggle with their transition into

practice despite the training afforded to them. I recalled how training impacted my developing identity as a social worker and with these tensions of practice in mind, I ventured to help protection workers realize the potential for social work within the parameters of legislation and risk assessment tools. A chance to redress the inadequacies of the New Worker Training Program I used my role as a mentor to incorporate aspects of practice I felt important. Drawing upon my own experiences in child protection and those theories that shape social work practice I began to use training as a caveat to teach new workers what I knew about practice.

Reflecting on what I have taught as a trainer has been a significant aspect to my research journey. Few opportunities arise to reflect on the teachings I have shared with workers about practice. However, as I set a course for my research making my teachings explicit has been integral to establishing my research question. At the cornerstone of my teachings is the inherent value in establishing a positive relationship with a client. Teachings that stem from this value include encouraging workers to ‘go where client is,’ seek to understand the perspective of a client, communicate empathy, and an attempt to engage clients as their own experts. All of these are considered skills for good social work, however, I must question would clients see this as helpful?

When I have taught I have drawn upon what social work theory refers to as going where the client is (Goldstein, 1983; Pilsecker, 1994). As a strategy for practice I have encouraged workers to approach clients in an effort to understand the experiences and point of view of the client. Reflecting on this commonly accepted practice I consider my use of the word ‘strategy’ in teaching new protection workers. As an effort to connect

with clients is it fair to be strategic? As a tenet of engaging a client, I have directed workers to 'see the relationship from the perspective of the client' so that they may empathize with the client to build a relationship. Reflecting on this practice I wonder, what would clients have to say about a protection worker being empathetic? Would they see it as possible?

In that vein, I have encouraged workers to use 'empathy' as a skill to contract with clients for goals. I have directed workers to have clients identify goals for change so that they establish collaborative relationships. In this way, I see myself as promoting the values of practice that allow clients' to act 'as they are their own experts' so that they identify what change would be helpful to their family. Once again, I wonder what a client might have to say about this. Do they think they have any real power to influence goals for change?

Finally, when helping workers balance the inherent authority in their role I would encourage them to recognize the power imbalance. I have guided workers to engage in conversations with clients to expose the undercurrent of power in the hopes that they may manage the imbalance of power. What would clients have to say about this attempt to balance power? Is that possible?

Given my experience as a participant of the New Worker Training, and now as a trainer, I acknowledge the considerable influence training can have on ones developing sense of practice. This has fuelled my interest in questioning what I should be teaching social workers new to child protection. Training orients practitioners to social work and, as a powerful influence to practice, what to include in training is worth examining. It is useful to

explore so that one can capitalize on the opportunity to shape practice in a manner that is meaningful to the families in which we work. This begs the question, what is meaningful to families? How do I know this?

Having assumed a position of knowing, I realize I am an instrument to inform practice, just as legislation mandates child protection work in Ontario. Masked under the cover of helping new workers I am in a position of power, power to influence practice. This has led to the reflection of my position of knowing and has caused led me to question, how do I know what is best practice in child protection?

As I step outside myself to look at my ways of knowing, I realize I have been shaped by forces without question. These forces have been in a variety of forums including my direct practice experience as protection worker, social workers who have mentored me, knowledge I attained through my undergraduate education, and specialized training I have completed as a child protection worker. I have internalized ways of knowing and I have made these claims of knowing my own. Could it be possible that my ways of knowing are not best practice? Where could I look to balance my ways of knowing?

These questions have stimulated my interest to examine the stories of service users to look at what I have taught and consider how can I do this better? This has meant shifting away from what I know, to asking the question ‘what should I know.’ My desire to develop my skills as a teacher has fuelled my research interest. Furthermore, as someone who has never been a recipient of child protection service, I want to go beyond what I think I know about practice to explore what clients can tell us. Knowing the

power I wield as a trainer and the potential I have to influence practice positively I want to learn from clients how I may do this better. By learning from clients I hope to enrich the learning experiences of protection workers to provide a wider perspective about practice, a perspective that includes the voices of clients.

### **Rationale for the Research**

The increasing discomfort with my power to influence practice combined with lack of critical examination for my ways of knowing, has compelled me to pursue my question of inquiry. “What lessons can we learn from those parents receiving child protection intervention that can be built into the training program for new protection workers?” I believe learning from service users is timely given that the child protection field has undergone significant transformation in the past year. Such change is outlined in Position Paper submitted by the Provincial Project Committee on Enhancing Positive Worker Interventions with Children and their Families in Protection Services (Dumbrill, 2005). This paper highlighted the required skills for best practices in child protection service and called for workers to partner with clients. Service recipients voices were included in the position paper and outlined transformation of child protection that called for a shift away from deficit based and problem saturated models of practice toward a strength based, family centered, and child focused approach.

With the dawn of child welfare transformation the training program for new workers underwent substantial change in 2006. This marked a shift in curriculum that focused on documentation, tools and risk management toward a time that focused on building relationships within the parameters of child protection work. Touted as a

curriculum to provide the essential foundation for child protection practice the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Society (OACAS) sought to understand what should be included in the revised training program.

In their efforts to determine what to include in the training program OACAS engaged the professional community to ask what new workers need to know. The academic community, frontline management, direct service workers, and Ministry members were all represented in fielding what to include in the new worker training program. Feedback and voices from the field has been the primary vehicle to define the beginning practice skills important for child protection work. Parents, as service recipients, were not invited to share their thoughts on what workers should know about child protection work or asked what should be included in the training program for new protection workers. Although service recipients were included in setting out the transformation agenda, including service users seemed to fall short when revising the New Worker Training Program. This realization has furthered the impetus for my research.

I should note that, OACAS did include the voices of youth as they developed the new worker program. The experiences of children and youth in the care system offered learning that workers can use in practice through videos that chronicled their stories. In this way, select service recipients have been included in the new worker training program. Given the inclusion of youth as service users in developing the new worker training curriculum one might suggest there is a hint of tokenism (Sainsbury, 1987).



However, it might also suggest that there is an increasing recognition that, what service users have to say is important and should be considered when defining practice.

Despite the inclusion of voices of children in care the absence of parents as recipients of child protection intervention is evident. It would seem that given parents are the primary means to achieve the safety and well-being of children the voices of parents is just as important to include. In an effort to redress the lack of involvement of parents, as service recipients, in identifying the skills included in new worker training, I draw upon the experiences of service recipients to inform what they would have new workers learn about child protection practice. If new worker training programs claim to provide the essential foundation skills for practice it is imperative to learn from the experiences of service recipients to develop an inclusive program that incorporates the knowledge of service users.

### **Scope of the Research**

Gerald de Montigny (1995) wrote that “good social work is not marked by confident pronouncements, certain decisions, and resolute action, but by openness to dialogue, self-reflection, self-doubt and humility.” Through the perspectives of service users in this research I hope that, as a personal journey of self-reflection I will gain a new understanding of the knowledge I share with new child protection workers about practice. The purpose of this research is to discover what to teach social workers that is meaningful to those parents receiving child protection intervention.

Through this research I hope to ask the question, “what lessons can we learn from those parents receiving child protection intervention that can be built into the training

program for new protection workers?” I hope to learn from clients what I can teach about practice. It is conceivable that my research will be consistent with what I already know; however, it is also just as likely that what I know will be challenged. Whatever the outcome, I look forward to the possibilities.

### **Approach to the Research**

When I embarked on this journey I was interested in collaborating with a research supervisor that has knowledge and experience within the child protection field. That said, I approached Gary Dumbrill, given his experience and his research interests were similar to the question I was beginning to chronicle. After much discussion, Gary Dumbrill advised he had data from a qualitative study that might meet the parameters of my research question. I have reviewed Gary’s original research application in detail and believed a secondary analysis was an appropriate use of the data.

The data for which I conducted my analysis originates from a study entitled “Parental Experience of Receiving Child Protection Intervention.” It is a qualitative study made up of 18 interviews with parents who received child protection services. The original study was completed in 2002 and the data was collected when child welfare reform of the late 1990’s was in full effect. Given the recent transformation agenda it makes sense to examine experiences of parents with the last few years.

Under Gary’s guidance I extrapolated a sampling of the 18 interviews conducted in his research. A sampling of the 18 interviews was considered sufficient given the requirements of a Master of Social Work. A more detailed discussion of my approach to

the data with reflection on ethical implications and research limitations will be explored in the methodology section of this paper.

I have purposively drawn upon research whose theoretical framework starts with the client experience. By examining parental experience of child protection intervention I believed that service users could provide an understanding for practice that is in keeping with the principles of practice I teach to new workers, that is, to start where the client is. In my next chapter I will provide the context for service user theory as approach to my research.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Although questions I have asked thus far have been pivotal in shaping the direction of my research, I have found throughout my reflections I have consistently asked myself if what I know, and therefore what I teach, is meaningful to families. In an effort to examine such I felt the only way to balance my ways of knowing was to learn from the stories of parents who receive the services of child protection. Taking such an approach was a reasonable place to start given I encourage workers to engage parents by ‘starting where the client is.’ Furthermore, given it has been said parents have the ability to acknowledge problems and a need for assistance I felt this could be applied in principle to my research (Yatchmenoff, 2005). Efforts of other researchers to engage the perspective of parents in child protection practice has shown parents to be articulate and insightful in understanding and sharing their experiences of child protection intervention (Dumbrill & Maiter, 2003). With this in mind, I felt confident that parents are capable of contributing to the knowledge base for child protection practice. In this chapter, I will delve into service user literature and the utility of this approach within social work research.

#### Service User Theory

Service users feel the direct impact of policy through their lived experience as a recipient of services. The knowledge of service users grow out of their personal and collective experience of policy, practice and services (Beresford, 2000). This suggests

that the individual experience of receiving service provides the foundation of knowledge. The experiences of many allow for shared and common experiences to emerge generating service user knowledge.

Social work theory has been traditionally constructed from the ideas, position, and perspectives of professionals (Beresford, 2000). Engaging service users to theorize about practice is arguably a relatively new approach to knowledge making. That said, Beresford (2000) suggests service user knowledge has always existed through movements for social action and social change. In this way the voice of service users has acted as catalyst of change in response to how they experience services. Despite this, it would seem the social work profession continues to be somewhat ambivalent in proactively seeking the input of service recipients. Often when service user feedback is elicited it is to evaluate or assess the satisfaction of service. As a by-product of service delivery service user knowledge has not traditionally been a means to formally theorize social work practice, research, or teaching.

### **Strengths of Service User Theory**

At a micro-level, it has long been understood that a social worker engages a client by ‘starting where the client is’ (Cournoyer, 2000). This is an approach that practitioners frequently call upon when attempting to understand a client’s perspective for their own needs and how those needs can be met. As an underpinning to social work it is logical that this same approach be applied at a macro-level and, adopted as a method for research. It is this rationale that provides the impetus for my research and my interest in exploring what service users say about child protection intervention.

One might suggest that without diverse perspectives for social work practice, intervention and policy could be unquestioned. Without such, there is a danger that social work practice becomes stagnant. Beresford (2000) contends the service users can generate critical questions and knowledge claims about them as individuals on the receiving end of intervention to challenge practice. In this way, the voice of the service recipient offers a unique perspective that is believed to be a gap in knowledge that no other form of knowledge can satisfy (Glasby & Beresford, 2006; Beresford & Croft, 2001; Beresford, 2000). This form of knowledge creates opportunity for the field to reflect and refine practice to meet the evolving needs of those who receive the intervention.

At the micro-level, the experiences of service users impact the intervention of a worker. It is believed that the process of helping starts by listening to those in which we work. One of the core elements of listening is the ability of a worker to empathize with the client. If we are to ‘walk in the shoes’ of our clients it is wise to learn from the experiences of clients. One way we can do this is to explore what it is like to be on the receiving end of intervention by including the perspectives of clients in our research. Through such research, service user voices are formally validated and legitimized in a manner that not only influences practice and policy but informs and defines it.

Social works commitment to social justice and human rights may be realized by taking an approach to knowledge making that includes service users. As individuals who deserve to be heard and, as members of the community, Beresford (2000) suggests to dismiss the voices of service users is to negate their right as citizens. These arguments

suggest that engaging service users in knowledge making is aligned with the Social Work Code of Ethics which sets out the standards for ethical practice. These ethics outline the rights of clients to be involved in the services that impact them (Canadian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics, 2005). In that vein, the inclusion of service users is compatible with the values associated with ethical practice of social work and social inclusion (Beresford, 2000).

Furthermore, by engaging service users we are able to build theory that is client focused as opposed to expert driven knowledge. As Beresford (2000) points out, experiential-based service user knowledge is valid and a means to construct knowledge from a vantage point other than professionals or ‘experts.’ In this way, the perspective of service users in claims making provides a starting point for clients to be acknowledged as their own experts. Congruent with the current climate of transformation in child protection including service users allows for a shift away from paternalistic approaches of practice toward a client centered and collaborative approach.

Developing service users’ knowledge and involving clients in the design of service they receive is believed by some, to be the starting point of anti-oppressive practice (Dumbrill and Lo, 2009). Beresford (2000) contends that, to ignore the voices of service recipients is to remain a part of dominant discourse that defines service users in ways that are oppressive. As such, including the voices of service users is an avenue to redress oppressive relations. By engaging service users in research it might also change the perception of service users as passive, dependent, or people with problems to more positive and active participants of service (Warren, 2007).

As researchers, there is a responsibility to seek information from variety of sources, multiple perspectives and interpretations to inform practice (Beresford, 2000). This includes the perspectives of those who are on the receiving end of the intervention. Seeking to understand the perspectives of clients is a purposeful activity that can communicate to clients that they are equally valued in the relationship. It has been said that research drives practice, and vice versa. Given this inter-relationship it makes sense to explore the perspectives of clients. In approaching social work theory building by using the perspectives of service users we invite a unique perspective as direct service users to be included (Beresford, 2000). In this way, client experience is not marginalized by individual experience but validated through collective voices.

### **Challenges to Service user theory**

In the early 1960's Mayer & Timms (1970) sought to understand social work through the perspectives of service recipients in their work entitled "The Client Speaks: Working Class Impressions of Casework". Introduced nearly 40 years ago embracing service users and eliciting the opinions and experiences of parents through social work research has failed to capture the interest of the majority of social work researchers. However, there have been some researchers that have made significant progress in learning from the experiences of services users (Drake, 1994; Dumbrill, 2005).

As a relatively innovative approach to developing knowledge about practice there has been a tendency to marginalize and invalidate the views and knowledge of service users (Beresford, 2000; Beresford and Croft, 1998). Reluctance to accept service user knowledge may have arisen out of pressure for the social work field to prove its value



within the professional community. Traditionally, social work has drawn upon medical models to define practice to establish itself among other professions. Such research assumes knowledge is rooted in neutrality, objectivity and distance. This is in contrast to perceptions of social work research where the predominant view about professions using qualitative research is unscientific. This perception serves to invalidate the contributions of service user knowledge situated within the context of multiple truths. It is possible that the negative perception of research that employs qualitative study prevents the social work community from embracing this as an approach to claims making. Perhaps, fearing the perception by other professionals that social work is not a worthy or valid profession.

Given the limited research using this approach it is apparent that there is little confidence in the value of service user knowledge to define practice. To compound the historical tensions of proving the value of social work knowledge Beresford and Evans (1999) suggest that there is pressure on research to explore the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of policy. The increasing reliance on evidence-based research in practice is one form of how this has manifested itself (Beresford and Evans, 1999). Such broader contextual forces toward managerialism and market models of public services impact research, in such a way, that competition for funding hinges on the ability of the researcher to convince funders that service user knowledge is valued. Pressures to succumb to approaches to research that is believed to be worthy of funding prevents the social work field from approaching research from a service user perspective.

Although studies including service users in the area of human services have increased they continue to be unrepresented in the literature of child protection. Magura

and Moses (1984) suggested that parents are not included because of the perception that they are less capable, articulate and objective than other human service recipients. Others have argued that that the stigma attached to child protection service users may have hampered the interest in research on their perspectives (Lo, 2007).

Despite these challenges, the recognition that the experience and contributions of service users is a valid approach to claims making has gained momentum, particularly in the child protection arena (Dale, 2004; Spratt & Callan, 2004; Fine & Mandell, 2003; Dumbrill, 2005). Service user theory is a means for social work to balance the scientific models of theory toward knowledge to include multiple perspectives that is rooted in the underpinnings and ethics of social work practice. It might also be a means for social work to create its own research identity and thereby, stake a claim for how it is unique from other professions.

The shift away from paternalistic and expert driven models of practice to client focused approach is echoed in the agenda of transformation within the child protection field of Ontario. Farmer (1993) proposes that parental views can suggest changes to child protection practice that might improve outcomes. If, by listening to the voices of service users we are more likely to achieve the positive outcomes for child protection intervention, it behooves us not to learn from service users through research.

Given that training is considered to develop the foundation of social work practice, it makes sense to include the voices of service users in developing the training program for new protection workers. On a broader scale it might also be worth exploring

what implications listening to the voices of service users may have for the education of social workers at the undergraduate level.

## CHAPTER III

### LITERATURE REVIEW

When I embarked on this research journey I set out to explore how to improve what I teach new social workers. In chronicling my research journey a number of questions arose that influenced the direction of my thesis. Many of these questions looked at my ways of knowing and my ideas of relationship, empathy, and power within the child protection context. In an effort to situate my research this chapter examines existing literature that begins to answer those questions.

#### **Relationship**

Establishing a positive relationship with the client is at the foundation of what I have taught to workers. The value of which has been affirmed by studies which examine the experience of clients receiving child protection services (Drake, 1994; Mcullum, 1995; Westcott 1995; Spratt & Callan, 2004). One prominent study, although dated, was conducted by Shulman (1978) who examined the practice skills of worker behaviour by surveying client experience of such. As an evaluative study he concluded that a positive worker-client relationship is paramount for the work of helping within the child protection context to occur. In considering other research Shulman's finding has stood the test of time given recent studies have validated his findings.

Drake (1994) conducted a qualitative study and facilitated a series of focus groups with clients and protection workers to examine the competencies necessary to deliver child protective services. In his analysis, he discovered aspects of the client-worker

relationship perceived by clients that positively impacted the intervention of child protective services. He concluded that clients receiving child welfare intervention value worker's who develop a comfortable relationship, show a basic human respect, communicate effectively, withhold judgment and remain calm when defusing client anger.

This is similar to the findings made by Spratt and Callan (2004) who ventured to ascertain the views of 12 families receiving child welfare services through semi-structured interviews. In their findings they affirm the importance of the worker client relationship. They found parents preferred workers who could develop and sustain a relationship with them, was interested in talking about their problems and who demonstrated the ability to empathize and had good communication skills.

### **Empathy**

Another question I considered when narrowing the focus of my research was what clients would have to say about a child protection worker being empathetic. Empathy may be understood as “the act of perceiving, understanding, experiencing, and responding to the emotional state and ideas of another person” (Barker, 2003).

Considered as both an affective and cognitive process to convey empathy a worker must both, feel and understand the clients' world. In doing so a worker listens to a client, acknowledges that they hear and understand, and communicates acceptance for the client's perspective of their world. When I considered a workers' empathy in developing my research question I wondered if it was possible for a client to see protection workers as empathetic given their authority and the legislated mandate of their role. Research

suggests that empathy is possible and it is a preferred approach by those receiving child protective services.

A study by Magura and Moses (1984) had clients share their thoughts about what contributed to positive case outcomes. In his work, Magura found that the accessibility of their worker, empathy, genuineness, and unconditional regard were characteristics identified by parents to be helpful. The findings of this study reiterated previous findings that the relationship between a worker and a client is pivotal to the child protection intervention (Shulman, 1978).

Similar findings were made in 1995 by Westcott. She examined the perceptions of child protection casework and found that clients preferred workers who demonstrated empathy, friendliness, and care and humor (Westcott, 1995). Westcott's study highlighted that parents have a desire to be understood and engage in partnerships with their worker. Clients indicated that they preferred to talk to someone who really cared, was non-judgmental, and offered practical support and material assistance.

McCullum (1995) conducted a qualitative study of ten parents receiving child protection services. In her findings, McCullum noted that parents experienced significant fear of losing their children and feelings of alienation and intimidation. She found that parents preferred workers who showed compassion and commitment, listened to them, treated them as a person, were not judgmental, and who self-disclosed. Out of this research McCullum (1995) proposed a model of practice entitled the Safe Families model which focused on building a relationship between worker and parent.

DeBoer & Coady (2007) were interested in learning from service users the attributes of good helping relationships in child welfare. In their research they found that what was valued was mindful and judicious use of power, humanism, mutual liking, mutual respect and honesty, trust, and going the extra mile to challenge professional boundaries.

Leigh and Miller (2004) examined service user views of child protection service and concluded similar findings to those already mentioned. In their findings they discovered that service users want their workers to be clear about their role, listen to them and attempt to understand their world. They appreciate a social worker who has time to go 'the extra mile to help when they are in crisis. What parents valued was advice given by a worker as opposed to a worker who offered solutions.

Maiter, Palmer, and Manji (2006) studied the experience of 61 parents receiving child protection intervention. Exploring what contributes to positive and negative experiences of child protection intervention they found that support was seen as providing good referrals, emotional support, and concrete help. Furthermore, parents appreciated workers who were caring, genuine, empathetic, exceptionally helpful, non-judgmental and accepting (Maiter et al, 2006). On the other hand, parents who identified negative experiences highlighted being provided inadequate service and feeling they were being treated unjustly through judgment, inaccurate information, and the control of information by the agency.

The Faculty of Social Work, Wilfred Laurier Project, Partnerships for Child and Families Project has made significant contributions to the service user literature on child protection practice (Cameron & Hoy, 2003; Freymond, 2003; Fine & Mandell, 2003;

DeBoer & Coady, 2007). In Cameron and Hoy's (2003) work they compiled stories of 16 mothers who received child protection intervention. When examining the stories they found that quite a few women established a connection with their child protection worker and felt having someone listen and believe in them was helpful. However, experiences that were negative also highlighted infrequent contact with the workers, insensitive workers who were judgmental and fear as a prevalent theme.

Freymond (2003) interviewed mother's experiences of child placement and found that they desired alliances with child welfare workers where their needs can be expressed and acknowledged. They desired emotional and concrete support. Communication problems between mothers and workers were persistent in her findings. Consistent with previous findings many mothers felt that they needed worker to listen and understand.

### **Power**

As I contemplated what parents would consider helpful in light of what I was teaching new social workers I thought about a parent's perception of their own power to influence goals for change. Given the parameters of involvement, often defined by child protection as their legislated mandate, I wondered if parents felt they had any power to identify goals or the means to achieve such. The literature seemed to consistently indicate parents felt they had little control or power over the decisions made in their cases (Diorio, 1992, Corby et al, 1996; Dumbrill & Maiter, 2003).

Diorio (1992) conducted a qualitative study of 13 parents who were receiving child protection services involuntarily. In his research, Diorio found that the anger, fear and powerlessness reported by parents' impacts the intervention process. He makes



recommendations for workers to appreciate a parents' fear that is intensified when agency power is used. He further suggests workers should control biases that lead them to undervalue or disregard the reactions of parents to protection intervention. Finally, he recommends workers not minimize parent criticism as resistance as this may impede the trusting relationship between client and worker.

Farmer (1993) examined the perspectives of children, parents, and workers to assess the impact of child protection intervention in the initial stages of involvement. She discovered that parents and children felt ill informed during the initial involvement. In this way, many expressed feeling excluded from the initial stages and that they felt they had little ability to influence decision making. With little ability to influence decision making Farmers (1994) research is consistent with the findings of other studies which find parents having little or no power when receiving child protection services.

Furthering my understanding of client perception of power when receiving services a study conducted in 1996 by Corby, Miller & Young surveyed the views of professionals and parents participating in child protection conferences. In the views of parents, he found that parents were pleased to be involved in conferencing, highlighting that parents felt it provided them with the opportunity of hearing what was being said about them. Parents also alluded to feelings of powerlessness, not being able to challenge information in the conference, and feeling that their views were not taken into account. The authors cite parents feel intimidated during conferencing and the lack of time to prepare for the meeting intensifies their feelings and inability to participate.

Bell (1996) examined parental experience involved at the initial conference of a child protection intervention. After interviewing 51 families shortly after their participation in a conference she found parents felt their involvement supported a good relationship between them and their worker. However, despite the perceived benefits to the relationship parents also felt being involved in the conference did not impact the decision of a case. Once again, this affirms the feelings of powerlessness experienced by parents as noted in the work of Corby et al (1996) and Farmer (1994).

A unique personal account of child protection intervention was documented by Richardson (2003). In this account the experience of a parent receiving services is chronicled and through their experience provides an in depth perspective of an individual receiving child protection intervention. The author highlights the importance of a worker to keep an open mind and challenge preconceived assumptions or judgments. Parental experiences of feeling powerless during planning conferences and having no ability to impact decisions were echoed in this work.

Expanding my questions for parental perspective for their power to influence goals for change I contemplated the power imbalance inherent within the worker-parent relationship. In teachings I often encouraged workers to take steps to balance power by having a conversation with parents about the authority and power of the worker and the impact of such on the relationship.

Studies completed by Dumbrill (2006) seem to agree with this approach for practice. In his study Dumbrill (2006) explored the perspectives of 18 parents' experiences of child protection service and argues that power is a significant aspect of

practice in child protection. He suggests parents receiving service see power as workers who have power over or power with them. As a source of influence on the perceptions of a parent and their reaction to the intervention, those who perceive a worker as having power over them respond by fighting the system or playing the game. Those who perceive power as with them tend to see intervention as working with the system. Based on this research Dumbrill (2005) concluded that intervention must begin by addressing the power imbalance between worker and client.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

The importance of the relationship between a worker and a client is an aspect of the service user experience that is repeated throughout the literature (Shulman, 1978; Magura, 1980; Diorio, 1992; Drake, 1994; Westcott, 1995; Spratt and Callan, 2004; Leigh and Miller, 2004; Kapp and Vela, 2004; Kapp and Propp, 2002; O'Brien et al, 2001). Specific recommendations for establishing and maintaining a relationship with parents within the child welfare context appear to be consistent. Generally, parents want workers to listen to them, abstain from judgment, be clear, open and honest, acknowledge and value their experiences as parents, and offer emotional support when in crisis (Drake, 1994; Diorio, 1992; Westcott, 1995). The literature seems to be consistently reporting the importance of the relationship between worker and a client and what parents want from workers is to be respected, understood, and included.

Furthermore, specific behaviours they appreciate in a worker includes having a worker available to them, providing concrete material support, inviting them to participate in conferences and adequately preparing them for such meetings (Corby et al,

1996; Bell 1996; Kapp and Vela, 2004; Dale, 2004). The powerlessness of parents and the intense perception of power by agency and worker is also a reoccurring theme of the literature (Diorio, 1992; Corby et al, 1996; Farmer, 1994). This highlights the need for workers to be respectful in their use of authority and the considerations that must be given when managing parental fears and feelings of intimidation when receiving service.

Findings reached in the 80's seem to be consistent with those of the last 5 years. This would indicate that despite changes to the child welfare system overtime parental perspectives have remained consistent and what they want from child protection service is relatively unchanged. Despite the increasing recognition and value of service user knowledge the voices of service users continue to be underrepresented within literature, and in particular within the Canadian context of child protection practice. Furthermore, it is relatively non-existent when you consider whose voices have informed the training programs of new child protection workers in Ontario. Building knowledge out of the perspectives of service users can serve to fill this gap. Particularly when considering what should be considered as the foundation of practice in new worker training.

## CHAPTER IV

### METHODOLOGY

According to Cresswell (1994) "A qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting. This approach is suited to answering my research question given I aim to analyze the textual stories of client's experiences of child protection intervention and the meaning ascribed to such involvement.

#### **Research Design**

Secondary analysis involves the analysis of existing data to find answers to a research question differing from the original question of study (Hinds et al., 1997). In this way, secondary analysis is a mechanism used to extend the context in which we are able to use and interpret qualitative research data (Thorne, 1998; Heaton, 1998). Using this as a framework for my research, I conducted a secondary analysis of a qualitative data set exploring the experiences of clients receiving child protection intervention.

One of the major challenges associated with secondary analysis is whether the nature of the data fits with the secondary question and design of the primary research (Hinds et al., 1997; Thorne, 1994; Thorne, 1998; Szabo and Strang, 1997). Prior to conducting my research I reviewed the methodology of the original study to determine that there was a fit between the original study and my research question. The original research application aimed to conduct a study that would 'be useful in finding out how

Children's Aid Societies and Children Aid workers can be more helpful to parents and families.' It has been argued that in a secondary analysis when a study question is about the same phenomena and is closely related to the original question data of appropriate depth and pertinent detail can be yielded (Hinds et al., 1997). Such is the case with this analysis. Both studies are interested in learning from the experiences of clients receiving child protection intervention. The original data set sought to understand the broader experiences of child protection intervention and it was believed that the interview guide and style of the interview allowed for a richness of data available for secondary analysis. For this reason, new and valid information could result from a secondary analysis. Heaton (2004) suggests that if a research question of a secondary analysis is too closely related than the distinctiveness of the secondary study is diminished. Though the research of the two studies were similar my intentions to examine the interviews from the perspective of what to teach social workers about practice in child protection work allowed for adequate distinction of the two.

### **Data Collection and Selection**

The original data set was generated from eighteen in-depth interviews that were semi-structured and used a grounded theory approach. Participants involved in the original study were from cases that had been closed within eighteen months of their involvement. Snowball sampling was used to gather interview data for the original study and resulted in comprised of seventeen participant form a mix of urban and sub-urban areas in Ontario, and one from an urban area in British Colombia. The study sampled parents whose cases were closed within eighteen months of the study. Participants were

involved in protection services for either alleged or verified cases of physical abuse and neglect, four were due to special or emotional health needs of the child. The mean age of participant was 34 years, with 11 male and 7 female participants. Fifteen participants were included, two of which were of color, and one was of aboriginal descent. The interviews included questions about parents experience with child protection intervention, how they made sense of such intervention, and what they perceived as influencing their experiences.

In collaboration with the primary researcher, I received approval to access all eighteen interviews that were transcribed verbatim for the original research. However, given the limited nature of completing a Masters thesis I approached the data in the spirit of theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is a process whereby persons with particular characteristics are sought for inclusion in the study (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In this case, I attempted to obtain a sample that appeared to be representative of the question of study and tried to ensure a range of ideas were captured to include one extreme to another.

As a purposive sample the dataset used in this analysis was selected subjectively by the original researcher. Given the closeness of the original researcher to the data he purposively selected a sampling of interviews that highlighted information relevant to the scope of my research question. Once the initial interview was selected and coded it was closeness to the dataset that allowed the original research to recommend subsequent interviews relevant to my question of study. Subsequent interviews were selected that both, discredited and affirmed themes as they began to emerge. Theoretical saturation

determined the number of interview transcripts used for this study. Saturation was achieved at the point at which data began to replicate and no new information emerged from the interviews (Morse et al. 2002).

### **Sample Demographics**

In this analysis a total of five interview transcripts were reviewed. Demographics of participants included in this study have been summarized in table 1 with a more detailed description in appendix A. All participants of this study were Caucasian and from a lower socioeconomic background. They ranged in age from 19 to over 55 years with three female and two male participants. Four participants received services within Ontario from an urban CAS while another received services from a Northern CAS. A fifth participant had received services from the child protection authority in British Columbia.



**Table 1: Participant Demographics**

Participant	Occupation	Ethnicity	Age	Region
Ms. C	Homemaker	White	<20	Ontario
Ms. D	Unemployed	White	<20	Ontario
Ms. G	Unskilled worker	White	41-45	Ontario
Ms. K	Homemaker	White	>55	Ontario
Ms. J	Homemaker	White	31-35	British Columbia

Given the original audiotapes were not accessible for the purposes of a secondary analysis the transcripts of eighteen participant interviews served as the raw data of analysis.

### **Analytic Method**

Guba and Lincoln (1985) define inductive data analysis as "a process of 'making sense' of the field data" (p. 202). In an effort to do this I employed a grounded theory approach to the study. This approach has been said to be particularly beneficial when used in qualitative and interpretive studies (Glaser, 1998). Given the exploratory nature of this study a grounded theory approach was deemed appropriate to allow emerging themes and theory to derive from the data.

Theoretical sensitivity proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) includes a researchers' level of insight into the research area. Sensitivity to the research may be considered to be limited within a secondary analysis. However, access to the primary

researcher enhanced the sensitivity of the research to the context of the primary study (Hinds et al., 1997). In this manner, the original researcher offered a closeness of the data to provide me with a context for the interview data that is not captured in written text. Furthermore, as a means to achieve theoretical sensitivity, I complimented my own experience as a child protection worker with an extensive literature review. This review was conceptually based and served to help me recognize data that formulated emerging themes I observed in answering my question.

Text is negotiated by the researcher such that, meanings are made rather than found (Mauthner, et al. 1998). With this in mind, I used a discursive approach to examine the words and language used by participants to make sense and give meaning of relationship in child protection intervention (Mauthner, et al. 1998). Drawing upon Connolly (2003) initial coding involved line by line analysis of text which allowed for concepts and categories to be identified. As the data was reviewed constant comparative analysis of coding allowed for emerging theory to unfold (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Analytic methods also included an interpretative phase which translated themes into categories so I could make connections between categories and sub-categories. (Connolly, 2003). Memos were also used to record thoughts and ideas throughout the coding process. This was a means to document the theorizing ideas about substantive codes and their theoretically coded relationships as they emerged during coding, collecting and analyzing (Glaser 199). The theorizing phase involved a return to open coding so that conceptual categories identified gained support from within the data.

### **Trustworthiness**

Given the theoretical challenges and limitations to this study as a secondary analysis, issues of methodological rigor were addressed so that the research could contribute to existing literature. In an effort to establish trustworthiness of my research, I employed specific tests recommended by Guba & Lincoln (1985). These strategies include auditability, which establishes consistency; confirmability, which establishes neutrality; credibility, which establishes truth value; and transferability, which establishes applicability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). In the following discussion I will provide a more in depth commentary on each of these concepts and how I drew upon them to establish trustworthiness of the research.

To enhance auditability I provided a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of the research project to the development and reporting of findings. In so doing, an inductive analytic process was documented using a discursive approach. Furthermore, auditability was achieved using thematic coding that allowed for consistent coding to be clearly documented. In this way, the auditing of the paradigm model is well documented which is believed to enhance the audit trail of the findings (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results can be confirmed or corroborated by others. Confirmability was enhanced by linking quotes to the explanation of themes identified through my analysis. In this way, the findings were demonstrated as arising from the data itself. Interspersed periods of ‘distance from and immersion in’ the text also proved to be useful so that a fresh approach to the data was maintained. This is

believed to enhance confirmability (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Furthermore, using a reflexive approach to the data, through self-reflection and documented processing of my interpretations, the analysis of the research was transparent (Mantzoukas, 2005; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003).

Given, the distance I had from the original data there was a risk that the interpretation of my findings conveys a false impression of the participants' experiences. Therefore, credibility and applicability was an important consideration for methodology. Credibility and applicability give confidence that the finding of the study was reflective of the experiences of the participants. Such validation typically relies on member checking with the participants of the original study. However, given this was a secondary analysis such an approach was not feasible.

Thorne (1998) suggests when conducting a secondary analysis validity checking may be modified so that those involved in the initial study might offer validation (Thorne, 1998). For the purposes of my research I engaged the original researcher to confirm the categories and core themes found in the data. I also engaged in peer debriefing as a means to discuss and validate themes that emerged with those who have child welfare expertise to identify personal feelings and how they may be impacting my analysis (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). Finally, negative case analysis was used to consider elements of the data that appear to contradict patterns or explanations that are emerging (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). In this way a range of experiences were included in the research to foster authenticity. This approach to negative case analysis served to broaden the pattern that emerged from the data analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Because this research does not involve face-to-face involvement, the issues associated with risk and benefit, intervention and reactivity did not pose problems to the secondary researcher (Hinds, et al, 1997). Furthermore, identifying information of the participants was removed from the transcriptions and therefore confidentiality of participants was maintained. In the original ethics application it was noted that the raw data of the study be disposed of within 7 years of the study. Given the study was completed in 2002 current analysis of the data remains within the time constraints for using the original data.

The issue of informed consent is of concern given I have had no opportunity to gain the consent of the original participants to conduct a secondary analysis. That said, the informed consent of participants applies to the original study with no specific reference to consent for subsequent studies. Informed consent on a secondary analysis would allow participants the opportunity to consider the degree to which the new question reflects their experiences (Thorne, 1998). The original ethics application identified the original researcher, Gary Dumbrill, as the primary researcher with access to the tapes limited to the original research, his research supervisor at that time, and a transcribing assistant who would have access to the interview transcripts, others with access were not specifically identified. At the time of approaching Gary about my research interests he indicated he planned to conduct further analysis of his original data set. As my acting research supervisor I conducted the analysis on his behalf in

fulfillment of my Masters of Social Work. As such, this respects informed consent of the original ethics application for the original data as approved in 2000.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

When I set out to complete this research my goal was to learn from parents receiving child protection intervention what could be built into the training program for new child protection workers. In the following discussion I draw upon the experiences of parents receiving child protection intervention to reveal the lessons I learned through this analysis. These experiences underscore the importance of empathy, uncover a link between empathy and power, and highlight the value of service user knowledge. To help situate the findings of my research I will draw upon existing literature that addresses the themes discovered.

#### Empathy

In this study, it became apparent that empathy is a central theme for analysis. Many of the experiences noted by parents who participated in the study highlighted the need for a worker to listen, understand, and communicate acceptance. All of which are integral to communicating empathy.

Permeating the experiences of clients of this study was the positive experiences noted by parents who had workers who listened, understood and validated their experiences. Further studies which examines the impact of empathy uncover similar findings that facilitate the satisfaction of clients with services (Cameron & Hoy, 2003; Freymond, 2003; Fine & Mandell, 2003; DeBoer & Coady, 2007). While recommendations made by Dumbrill & Maiter (2003) that workers take time to listen and

understand parental perspectives and motives suggest the value of such is not to be underestimated.

In the experience of one grandmother caring for her two grandchildren she highlighted the importance of empathy. She spoke about being able to talk with her worker, the value she placed on the worker listening, and the importance of the worker getting to know her and her families experiences. In research completed by Dale (2004) he also noted parents appreciated a similar professional style of workers which was described as friendly, interested and concerned for families. Statements that highlighted the experience of the grandmother in this study and the importance she placed upon a worker listening included,

Participant K: “you could talk to her, you could explain things to her and she was, she was there to do what was right for AK (child).”

Participant K: “if she (the worker) didn’t hear from me she would be on the phone setting up an appointment to come and see me and just talk while things were okay.”

Participant K: “if I had a problem not related to AK (the child), I could still talk to her about it. Because, a, well anything that goes on in the family is ultimately going to affect the kids anyway...I could talk to her about it, about anything.”

The value this grandmother placed on feeling understood was explicitly reinforced when asked what advice she would give to workers. In her following comment she highlighted the need for workers to understand the uniqueness of a family. This is similar to Fine & Mandell (2003) who echo the importance for a family to be



recognized and understood within their personal context. In this grandmothers statement she stated,

Participant K: “Um, if the person is, the biggest thing is they’ve got to be able to listen to you. They’ve got to understand people, and not everybody is the same. The problems aren’t the same, like every family is different they’ve got to be able to realize that, you can’t, you can’t make a rule and everybody has to fall into it. You have to be able to give and take. And, I think that’s the main thing with somebody that’s coming into CAS care is to be able to listen to them and know that everybody is different and people react different too. Different situations and you just cannot follow in, put everybody in one, not group them, that’s it.”

Another interview that emphasized the importance of an empathic presentation and understanding was with a step-father who received child protection intervention while co-caring for his three year old step-daughter. In this interview a client shared his views about a worker needing to get to know the parent. In his story he stated,

Participant D: “Ms. C had an open communication with her worker. Right, Ms. C talked with her and I think her worker also knew Ms. C before Ms. C was pregnant, like before Ms. C had AC (first child). So if I am correct, so they had that open communication so when Ms. C did have AC you know what I mean, they had that bond, her and her worker had that bond together, you know what I mean. Ever since she was a kid until she was pregnant you know, they had a bond together, and and Ms. C I guess social worker knew Ms. C you know what I mean, knows Ms. C like for Ms. C that that this that is not the way Ms. C is, You know more less is that...”

Participant D: “...our workers will know that’s not what we’re like because they know us”

This sentiment was echoed by one participant who focused on a systemic analysis of his experiences with CAS. He suggested that his worker was able to understand his

perspective and, in some ways, the worker relating to systemic frustrations facilitated a positive relationship. He stated,

Participant J: “he is a fantastic man, good worker, compassionate, understanding of situations and has an extensive legal background and us as such it’s been very difficult for me to because he feels in conflict, legally speaking and in dealing with his works with children.”

The importance of a worker relating to the parent was reiterated by one caregiver who commented that their worker was interested in listening and this helped them connect with their worker because they felt they were developing a relationship that was built, more upon friendship than the formalities of working with a protection worker. She stated,

Participant K: “come on, we don’t want to sit in the house, lets go for a coffee and discuss whatever we had to.”

Participant K: “we talked like friends. If I had a problem relating to (child) I could still talk to her about it. Because, a well anything that goes on in the family is ultimately going to affect the kids anyway...I could talk to her about it, about anything”

The experiences noted by these parents are similar to Drake (1994) who identified a relationship bond and the need for effective communication. The accounts of the parents included in Drakes (1994) study underscore the value of a worker getting to know a client so that they may relate to the parent and come to understand them. Similar to the the findings of de Boer & Coady (2007), they discovered service users preferred humanistic workers. These workers were described as workers who related to their clients in a person-to-person, down-to-earth manner with an authentic style fostering a

comfortable relationship (de Boer & Coady, 2007). The value placed on such humanistic workers was supported by this research.

In this research, I found a workers' inability to listen and understand impacted the parents' perceptions of the worker in such a way that the worker was described in unfavourable and negative terms. In one interview a parent stated,

Participant C: "Like I don't know, she was just one of those people and she was not understanding whatsoever, because you try to talk to her and she was like oh well err I disagree because of dada der and its like exactly what I just said like she just, I didn't like her"

A parent's perception of a workers understanding, or lack thereof, was particularly evident for clients who shared their experiences of having different workers.

One parent noted,

Participant D: "some workers are like, really annoying and you just can't stand. Then there are some workers who are so nice and understanding."

Another parent who had different workers also shared similar feelings about the interaction with their worker stating,

Participant K: "(worker A) deal with, seemed more understanding of people...she never made a decision without our input..."

The findings of this study illustrate the reciprocal nature of a relationship wherein, a worker who communicates empathy is likely to develop a positive relationship as it is received positively by the parent. Whereas, workers who lack empathic understanding can cause a parent to react negatively. Other research has found a client's perception of a worker impacts the relationship. Verge (2005) reported a positive relationship existed when parents felt listened too and heard, while those who perceived

their worker as not listening had experiences that were negative and impacted the relationship as such.

Another element to empathy that was uncovered by one parent was that, efforts to elicit a parents understanding fostered a trusting relationship. I would suggest if trust is established in the relationship, the power exercised by the worker is perceived to be informed by understanding. The importance of trust has been noted by parents in previous studies by de boer & Coady (2007). To illustrate this one parent noted their experience saying,

Participant K: “You know you could talk to her you could explain things to her and she was there to do what was right for (child).

### **Power & Empathy**

As discussed, the empathy of a worker is an organizing theme of this analysis. However, what was most interesting about the empathy of worker’s, was the role power played in a worker seeking to understand the experiences of a client. This link between empathy and power was highlighted by one parent who noted a positive experience with their worker despite their inherent lack of power. This client stated,

Participant K: “Uh yea, well she (the worker) had all the power, but a she um she was understanding”

In this study, parents communicated a desire to have workers understand their perspective before passing judgment. This supports the findings of de boer & Coady (2007) who suggest workers who jump to conclusions or prejudge a parent may not be willing to listen to the story of a parent. In this way, pre-judging parents can inhibit the

ability or willingness of a worker to empathize and understand the parental experience.

In the following statement one parent illustrates the importance of knowing the family particularly when allegations are made and how this impacts the formation of judgments.

This client stated,

Participant C: “If the worker knows you, you know what I mean, and the worker understand you and knows you for you and knows how you’re like, then that worker hears these kind of accusations, she should be understanding....”

The implications of feeling threatened when judged suggest a link between power and empathy. What is important to note in this analysis is not that judgements were made rather, the manner in which judgments were communicated. Communication perceived as criticizing caused parents to make sense of that experience as a workers lack of understanding for their uniqueness in situation and experience. Such an analysis has also been made by Maiter et al (2006) who found clients who sensed judgment by a worker felt threatened by CAS intervention. In one interview of this study a step-father described his feelings about having a judgmental worker without appreciating the situation and illustrated how communication of judgements can impact the clients perception of the worker and their relationship, he noted,

Participant D: “I know it’s like their job to come over and give us advice you know what I mean and help us, but I mean to sit there and you know, more less criticize our parenting and how we parent, it’s not right”

Participant D: “It’s not that the person did not intend to be a good parent, it’s just sometimes they do not know what to do”

In this study, it was apparent that parents preferred workers who did not impose their own values on them. In the parents’ following stories we see how workers call upon

the values of dominant discourse to inform their judgments of parents. Discourse is considered the ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak (Foucault, 1969). Dominant discourse is created by those in power as it becomes the accepted way of looking at a subject, since it is repeated so much. Workers who defer to such discourse in formulating their judgments define parents as different and less than those who conform to the dominant discourse. The experiences of the following parents illustrate how this unfolded in the exchange between them and their worker.

Participant C: “Just because you have different ways of parenting your children, don’t bring it into my house and start comparing me with you. You know what I mean like make yourself feel like a better person by putting my parenting skills down you know, I don’t like that.”

Participant D: “I didn’t like her coming into my house trying to tell me how to parent my child, based upon her parenting skills”

Similar findings have been made by Drake (1996) and are echoed by Maiter et al (2006) who found parents were more favorable to those workers who ‘did not put them down’ or place value judgments on them as parents. The link between empathy and power highlighted through the examples of this study illustrate, to truly be empathic, workers must suspend judgment to understand. For workers to be non-judgmental they must approach a client with an open mind and without preconceived judgments (Drake 1996; Richardson, 2003).

It is important to note given the legislated mandated of the child protection worker, it is not realistic for a worker to not judge the safety and well-being of a child.

What is important to consider is not that judgements are made rather, the importance is placed upon seeking to understand and listen to the uniqueness of a family experience before formulating those conclusions. In this study, when parents felt their workers listened and tried to understand them they considered them to be less judgmental and report positive experiences. In one interview, a parent stated,

Participant C: “But there are those workers who are like open minded and can listen and kind of oh you know, I can kind of relate to that in a way , you know what I mean”

Adding another dimension to the power of a worker assigning meaning to client experience I discovered that empathic communication fosters a less resistant relationship and facilitates a parents’ willingness to share information. This has also been highlighted in the work of Forrester et al (2008). One client whose story I reviewed spoke about workers needing to understand clients when they express feelings about CAS involvement shows the relationship between empathy and its influence on the relationship. He noted,

Participant D: “If I have a question to ask them I’ll come right out and I’ll say it. Even if it’s in a rude way, even if it’s in a swearing matter way I don’t care, I’ll tell them straight up how I feel and I’d expect them to sit there and listen to me and respond to me back on the way they feel straight up. No like, like if I was expressing a feeling and you know and then there were to go, ‘well, uh um,’ you know and da da da da and make a story about it and it is no good like that, it’s like an excuse, you don’t even listen to me don’t even talk, go go I don’t want you here.”

Participant D: “Like if you’re hiding something Ms. C will be like comes straight up and she’ll tell you straight up. You know she’ll even swear, she don’t care you know, but she’s grown that bond with her workers where her workers know, you

know if a call was to come in like that. You know the worker will come over because it is her job, but the workers will know you know, how come these people did call, 'I don't friggen know I have no clue man, they just don't have anything else to do.'

This client illustrates the power of a worker to assign meaning in how a client responds to CAS involvement which then impacts the approach of a worker. In this way, workers can define clients by using language that describes their response as resistant. This client shows how important it is for workers to construct the experience of that client so that they seek understanding for the message and not how that message may be delivered. This notion of suspending judgment with clients who may be angry with CAS involvement is echoed in the findings of Diorio (1992). He suggests workers should not minimize parent criticism as resistance and points out that failing to listen to the messages of parents when upset impedes the relationship between a client and worker.

Workers who noted the strengths of a client despite disagreement were regarded as being helpful. In this way, listening for and responding to, what is working well for the client served to foster a positive working relationship. One client who noted this stated,

Participant G: "Sometimes just to, someone to talk to, both with my son and daughter with the situation with my daughter someone that I could talk with and whether we agreed or didn't agree, there was times I guess you know, there were times I'd get encouragement when they would you know tell me that I was doing a good job."

These findings are consistent with Trotter's (2002) research, which found, focusing on the positive and understanding client strengths can positively impact the experiences of a parent receiving child protection services. This has been furthered by



the research by de Boer & Coady (2007) who found that valuing client strengths and success in coping helped to facilitate a good helping relationship between a worker and a client.

The value clients place on workers who recognize their strengths has informed the analysis of this research given that this illustrates the power of a worker to empathize with clients by seeking to understand and noting their strengths. Shaping client experience in this way can inform the actions taken in working with a client, as noted by one parent who said,

Participant D: "...her worker thought that Ms. C was intelligent, had the smarts, and the potential, has the ability to take care of the child, so that's more less why I think we got a chance."

Power can also be exercised by workers in their ability to inform a parents' construct of themselves. As noted in the work of Fook (2002) he argues that clients are not only constructed but they engage in a process to construct themselves. Through this research I discovered that, a worker who empathically listens for and responds to the strengths of a parent wields power as they inform how a parent defines and views themselves. The following example affirms the power of a worker to impact the meaning a parent can assign to their own context. She noted,

Participant C: "Knowing that somebody, especially a professional, believed in me helped me believe in myself, in that kind of way."

Just as there is power in defining clients according to their strengths, the same is true for defining clients according to their problems. Two clients highlighted the power of a worker to shape their experience under the guise of helping the family. Parents noted

that in order to get services for their children they were at the mercy of a worker who elicited stories from the client that highlighted problems with their parenting. In this way, workers define clients according to what is wrong. One client noted,

Participant K: “Find the problem, there the child is in need of protection, then we can act. We’re not trying to find solution here, we’re trying to find problem. By finding problems, then we can financially act upon it. If we don’t have a problem that’s well-defined and if it takes too long to find the problem or deal with the issue, then we don’t have the resources and we’re not gonna comment.”

Another client noted a similar experience with CAS defining them negatively in an effort to help. In this example we see how language can be used as a means to shape a parents experience. In his interview he stated,

Participant G: “The children’s aid, their approach is that I had to basically admit I abandoned her before they would help. You know and I don’t think that’s right..... I hadn’t abandoned her...”

It is difficult to ascertain whether workers formulate judgments because they are not listening or because what they are listening for is defined by the context of CAS. However, in the following statement made by one parent the power of a worker to define a parents experience becomes evident. In her interview the client articulated her hesitation to share experiences with the worker fearing how it would be interpreted by the worker. This illustrates how a worker can take what a parent says to construct what it means. She stated,

Participant K: “You couldn’t talk to him so you didn’t say anything to him because you didn’t dare, because everything you told him, he used against you. So we just got to the point where we never told him anything.”

Participant K: “he wouldn’t listen, he didn’t, he had his own ideas they were right everybody else was wrong and he wouldn’t listen to anything, anybody had to say and think that’s what really, um, really set us off hehe with him, he just, we knew we knew we couldn’t talk to him so we didn’t bother”

Participant K:” The communication wasn’t there, nothings there, so then we realize that yea things have really changed and we are going to have to fight”

Another client alluded to the link between the power of CAS and empathically understanding client experiences. In his story he exposes the power of CAS to intervene without having an understanding for the client context stating,

Participant D: “They do use their power responsible responsibly in, in some circumstances, like in a lot of circumstances I should say, with the world today especially, like they use their power in a right way, but there there, there are sometimes where they just come and they just do whatever they feel like doing for not even, like they do not even let you talk.”

Participant D: “I think CAS you know, not that they enjoy taking peoples kids, but as soon as they see a problem, and as soon as they think you know what I mean, as soon as they think, never mind what parents think, soon as they think that there is anything wrong or any sign of anything boom they take the kids right away.”

Judgments made by workers impact the actions they take in working with families. When parents see workers forming opinions of them they feel workers are no longer interested in understanding their perspective. For this reason a parent’s ability to redefine the conclusions made by workers becomes more difficult. The work of Monroe (1996) suggests that the lack of open-mindedness a worker may have for a parents’ changing circumstances can lead us to make mistakes in formulating our judgements for the safety and well being of a child. Monroe (1996) suggests that social workers need to

be willing to consider their judgements and decisions are wrong. In this study the rigidity in thinking by a worker renders the client as powerless to a workers construct of their experience. One client who noted this commented,

Participant K: “They don’t want to compromise anymore, they don’t want to listen anymore, they just do as they please”

Participant K: “they just do whatever they feel like doing for not even, like they do not even let you talk.”

Parents who described negative experiences with CAS intervention seemed to lack mutual understanding. This is consistent with the findings of Westcott (1995). One parent noted,

Participant K: “maybe we would have agreed or may we wouldn’t but if he wouldn’t have, we still would have, um talked it out more and until we, we’d all come to a mutual agreement”

In the statement above the parent highlights what makes the difference is not if a worker agrees rather, if a worker listens and tries to understand. This was also found in the research of Maiter et al (2006) who found that parents viewed workers as empathetic even if they disagreed. This reinforces the importance of Trotter’s (2002) findings that working through a problem-solving process, focusing on the client, not the workers, definition of problems improves the likelihood of positive outcomes.

In another interview one father who was involved with CAS for several years felt that although he didn’t agree with CAS he still considered them helpful. Westcott (1995) also suggests similar findings that where parents consider a workers understanding

reflective of acceptance by a worker of the family situation. In the interview with the father noted above he stated,

Participant G: “There was someone that I could turn to, you know. And of course knowing that I turned them for it didn’t mean that we were gonna agree on everything but, someone, like you know, would help.”

The relationship between empathy and power is an important consideration given the understanding a worker draws from a client informs the authority they exercise in the provision of child protective services. In my research I found that workers who were interested in understanding the client’s perspective invited them to share input into the decisions that affected their family. The understanding workers had of parents impacted their use of authority in such a way that, if they understood parents as having something to contribute, mutual understanding was explored. This is consistent with Platt’s (2007) assertion that the depth of a workers understanding for a family may affect their assessment of parental cooperation. One parent who noted this said,

Participant K: “She would listen to what you had to say and a lot of the time she didn’t agree with me but we sat and talked it out and figured out the best solution to the problem.”

Some might suggest that mutual understanding is explored for less serious cases and may argue that, in this research, such was the case. Although this may be possible the findings of Dumbrill (2006) suggest that there doesn’t seem to be a correlation with less serious cases and the workers listening skills.

Throughout my research, the notion of empathy and its link with power was a consistent theme. What permeated the stories of parental experience was CAS as all

powerful. However, an interview with one parent seemed to contradict this notion of CAS power. What was interesting about this clients experience was, despite acknowledging the power of a CAS worker, he considered the parent to be more powerful in that relationship. He suggested parental power was rooted in their legislated rights as a parent. What impacted a parents' ability to exercise this power was the knowledge and ability to exercise such. He believed if parents had the knowledge of legislation and the awareness of their rights they would wield more power within the parent-worker relationship. This clients' experience was puzzling because he challenged my understanding of a workers power to define the client. In his interview he stated,

Participant J: "More powerful than the worker. Except that he doesn't have, he's not getting the ability to deal with the issue. See, the parent, by legislations, has all the rights and power."

Participant J: "If people were empowered with the ability to demand and to understand legislations and procedures, they will have all the power in the world"

As I pondered how this clients experience fit with my thesis I realized what was interesting about this perspective was the ability to resist how CAS understands and interprets the experience of parents. By resisting the power of CAS to define a parents' perspective, he was able to maintain his knowledge claims so that he could assert himself in mitigating the power of CAS. In doing so, resistance in and of itself became the power he exercised within the relationship. When discussing how he challenged CAS he stated,

Participant J: "my children were never under the care of the Ministry. Uh there has been some services provided under the guise of protection. But once those services were uh well stated to me, I started fighting the issue of protection. I felt

my children were not in need of protection, so that I was providing adequate care, and I were capable of seeking out services.”

This client’s story exemplified the power of a worker to shape what workers understand about a client’s experience. As workers, we question and listen to client experience in a manner that allows for a certain story to unfold. It would be easy to dismiss the relevance of this client’s experience were it not for the link between empathy and power. Citing Foucault, Burr (1995) suggests that where there is power there is resistance. Perhaps this client’s ability to resist the definitional power of CAS was rooted in his ability to assert knowledge that legitimated his authority as a parent. In this way, this client resisted the power of workers to define his experience, his assertions as having power, and his ability to exercise power through resistance. He noted,

Participant J: “I’ve been fighting for six years, um I’ve obtained more than anybody else because of my loud voice, because of my assertiveness and legal manner.”

Another aspect to this client’s resistance was what he referred to as detaching. In the following comment he highlights how powerful a worker is when defining the context of a parent’s experience as entrenched with problems. He stated,

Participant J: “You know I have had parents phone me because they’ve heard of me from somebody else, and they cry. And they cry. I says ‘You gotta stop crying and you gotta star acting.’ But once I start telling them the process, then they can’t. because uh they’re too caught up in the emotional issues, that they cannot see the process behind it and they cannot detach themselves. Me, I have had much difficulty detaching from the problems and looking at the delivery of services, per se, it’s been very very difficult.”

This client’s story offers a valuable lesson that highlights the power of a worker to construct the parent context. In making sense of client experience workers exercise

power in creating knowledge about parents that is accepted as truth. For some parents this becomes entrenched within their personal construct. For others they are able to separate themselves from how workers define them so that it is not accepted as truth and internalized within their personal construct.

### **Service User Theory**

When I set out to complete this research I wanted to learn what could be built into a training program for new protection workers. To gain new insights for child protection training, I set out to learn from the client. Through this analysis it became evident that the value of service users sharing their experiences is not to be overlooked. Much like the assertions of Dumbrell and Maiter (2003) service users of this study provided thoughtful and useful information that may be used to inform the training programs of child protection workers. How clients make sense of the services they receive is important to examine because lessons learned from their perspective can help develop services that can facilitate child safety and well being.

As the research of this analysis unfolded and the findings for this study became apparent I was struck by the realization that what parents had to say was not new to social work and previous literature had proposed similar recommendations to the field. However, despite studies highlighting the value and significance of their perspectives, service user theory continues to be underutilized. The findings of this research validate those asserted by Beresford (2001) who tout the value of engaging service users to inform programs and policies. With this analysis the question arises as to why service user



theory has not been integrated within the training and practices of social workers in child protection.

### **Discussion**

What permeated the experiences of each client of this study was need for a worker to be empathetic. Although considered a fundamental skill for practice in social work it was an important theme identified given that my experience has been that empathy, in child protection training, is relatively overlooked.

Complicating the analysis of this research was the relationship revealed between empathy and the power of a worker. Pilsicker (1994) suggests that empathy is a cognitive process that involves understanding what a client feels. As a cognitive process it is my contention that a worker does not act as a passive witness. A worker is actively engaged in eliciting information from a client about their experience. A worker pays attention to particular aspects of client experience. They decide what information they will elicit and what details are relevant to inform their understanding of the client. In this way the clients experience becomes defined by the worker. This allows for a particular understanding to unfold. A worker exerts power in the questions asked, responses exchanged, and the meaning assigned to client experience.

Furthermore, as a client shares their story a worker exchanges verbal and non-verbal cues to communicate they are listening and understanding. A client may interpret these cues in such a way that their story is guided by the reaction of the worker. Therein lies the power of the worker. The worker influences the clients story in such a way that it comes to define their understanding of the client's experience.

Power has been defined in a number of ways. However, to ground the arguments of this analysis, power is defined as both relational and ideological. Power is considered a relational concept that depends on the situation and context of the interaction between two individuals (Smith, 2008). Therefore, how power is exercised and the outcome of such power depends on the dynamics of the relationship that exists. Furthering my understanding of power I draw upon the works of Lukes (1974) who identified power as ideological in that, values and ideas operate behind all language and action. He examined the concept of power and suggested that those in power may not consciously be aware of how values and ideas influence interaction and the outcome of such. Within this context of power, workers have the ability to define and construct the story of a clients experience based on their values and ideas. In this way, clients are being constructed according to the ideological power of the worker.

This thesis argues that workers who empathize with clients, exercise power through their interpretations to assign meaning to the client experiences. With this understanding of client experience knowledge is created about the client. It is such knowledge about a client that determines the actions taken by a child protection worker. These actions operate under the auspices of their legislated mandate and can have significant impact on the outcome of a clients' experience. This is an important lesson to take away given that the authority of CAS is exercised through intervention predicated on a workers understanding of the client. The link between power and empathy also raises questions for the power exercised by the client. In this thesis I discovered client power may be rooted in a clients' ability to resist how workers define a client. The resistance of

a client may be the only means for one to exercise power against what is considered to be the all powerful CAS.

Given the relationship between a worker and client can lead to positive outcomes of CAS intervention, it behooves us not to consider the lessons learned from this study (Trotter, 2002; Lee & Ayon, 2004). Those lessons revealed by service users are both relevant and meaningful when you consider the question of this analysis is to examine what could be built into a training program for new protection workers. In the next chapter, I will examine the implications of such findings in an effort to advance the findings of this research.

## CHAPTER VI

### IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The five interviews included in this study have provided lessons about what to teach social workers. With this insight, themes have emerged that require attention when training new child protection workers. This study highlighted the importance of listening to understand client experience and stressed the power of practitioners to construct a client's experience. The link between listening and power is an important element to the findings of this study given implications for the field may be far reaching. At this point, it is important to revisit the focus of this study to consider the implications as it relates to the purpose of this research. When I set out to conduct this study I was interested in discovering what lessons I could learn from those parents receiving child protection intervention that can be built into the training program for new protection workers.

At the forefront of what to teach workers is the need for them to exercise care in understanding and listening to the insights, perspectives, and experiences of clients. To do this a worker must first value what a client has to say, suspend judgment, and engage in mutual understanding. The inextricable link between understanding and power requires workers to be cognizant of the conclusions they draw when listening to the experiences of parents. Given that, it is those conclusions that direct the power of children's aid intervention. Only with this understanding can a worker action what they hear in a way that is reflective of the client's needs and not their perceived needs. Furthermore, it is evident from client experience that resistance may be considered as a clients' only source of power against an organization that is considered by most as all

powerful. Resistance can manifest itself in several forms and in this study it was through the knowledge of a parent in understanding and asserting their rights. Workers must keep this in perspective when engaging in the work of developing a relationship with the client.

With this in mind it is important to remember that the onus of orientating and training child protection workers falls upon the systems that develop and deliver training programs. As I consider the implications for this study in what to teaching new workers I first consider the child protection training curriculum as well as the implications for those trainers who facilitate the training seminars. Implications for child protection agencies are also considered given that the learning of protection staff is influenced not only by classroom training but also direct practice. Finally, recommendations for further research are generated during this course of study. Such recommendations can be valuable to other researchers who are interested in a similar area of study.

### **Curriculum Authors**

When considering lessons learned from the stories of clients within this study and how this can be applied to the training of new protection workers it is important to first discuss the implications for those who author the training curriculum delivered throughout the province. In Ontario, curriculum development lies in the hands of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. Recommendations for curriculum development includes the involvement of those receiving services, inclusion of anti-oppression curriculum that discusses power within the client-worker relationship and the

skill of listening within the unique and challenging context of child protection practice. Although there is increasing interest in service user knowledge in Canada there is little evidence to suggest that service users are being invited to inform the curriculum of training for child protection workers (Dumbrill, 2003, 2006; McCullum, 1995).

It has been argued that involving service users in curriculum is often an add-on where users are brought in to share their life stories rather than inform the development of the curriculum (Turner, 2002). Given the value of those stories involved in this study in drawing conclusions about power and listening it would be prudent for the authors of child protection curriculum to include clients in designing the training. Including the voices of services users will inform the training programs for protection workers with a broader perspective for practice. Furthermore, engaging clients would parallel the recent transformation changes of the field as an inclusive approach to practice that is client centered. Such a client centered approach begins with what we inform practitioners about how we engage and intervene with families. Through video or narrative stories the experiences of service users may be shared.

If you consider the emerging themes within this analysis it is recommended that anti-oppression theory be built into the curriculum. Adopting this theory might help us in understanding our position of power and privilege and how that impacts the relationship and the understanding of a client experience. In keeping with anti-oppression theory without the critical analysis of our own practice we ignore how oppression is manifested in and perpetuated by social workers' organizational contexts, professionalization, and power over clients' lives (Gill, 2005). This approach to understanding practice might

provide workers with awareness for how clients are constructed and the worker role within that. Curriculum should incorporate a critical view of social work and the societal structures that impact experiences and understanding of such.

The diversity of client experience is as varied as the diversity of the experiences of workers, for this reason, practitioners must be personally responsible for understanding their position of power and aware of how they exercise such. To instil this personal responsibility training becomes the foundation in which this is built. It is reasonable that if a worker is interested in engaging clients in a manner that respects the findings of this study they will listen to the story of service users mindful to the impact of dominant discourses in shaping how they seek to understand the experiences of parents.

In that vein, it is important to consider the practice elements that should be included within curriculum that captures the findings of this study. Lessons learned from service users in this study tell us listening is a critical aspect to working with those receiving child protection services. It is my contention that when listening practitioners have a personal responsibility to be aware of what story they listen for. As workers we have the power to elicit the story that unfolds in the questions we pose and our response to the experiences that are shared. For this reason, when engaging clients we must be mindful of the context in which we listen given we often find ourselves shaping a story according to case type which is informed by dominant discourses and ministry mandated tools. This impacts how we understand, portray, and react to the client. Therefore, the curriculum should thread this understanding of constructing meaning of client experience throughout the training.

Much of the rhetoric that currently exists about practice focuses on the value of using the solution focused approach. This is reproduced in the training curriculum and is touted as a means to engage families. Caution should be exercised when endorsing this practice modality within the context of the findings of this study. I might suggest if we focus only on solutions as our primary means to engage with families we run the risk of marginalizing families further by failing to acknowledge the political context which texture their lives. A fundamental underpinning to this approach supposes that families have the resources for change. Given this presupposition I wonder what the impact is should we not consider the possibility that families may not have access to the resources they need. As social workers we are aware of theories of oppression and in that vein we should be eliciting the story within the larger societal context to situate the client within their experiences. Given that solution focused practice aims to draw upon the hopes and dreams for a different future, if the larger systems at play are impacting that future how can change be fully realized through solution focused practice. Families who are saturated by problems may have difficulty envisioning that future if the systems that are at play are impacting their personal experiences.

### **Child Protection Trainers**

The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies are responsible for the development of new worker training curriculum; however those who deliver the curriculum may be frontline protection workers, supervisors or managers. The findings of this study may be useful to trainers as they are responsible for conveying the messages of the curriculum. In this capacity, it is the role of trainers to bring to life the curriculum



as written. Given this role, trainers can ensure that the inclusion of service users and their views is a theme that runs throughout the facilitation of training seminars. I would also suggest it is essential to elicit practice examples from participants during seminars to highlight the importance of taking the time to listen to clients while paying to how we define clients and their experiences. As a trainer it is also critical opportunities to facilitate worker self-awareness as an element to the training. Understanding the position of worker power and privilege and how this relates to their work with clients is critical to anti-oppressive work.

It is further recommended that opportunities to invite service users to speak at training seminars to that they may share their experiences receiving child protection services. Inviting service users is a way to model the value of listening to clients and the engagement of service users in shaping the services that they receive. This is also a way to elicit experiences of those individuals who experience regionally specific challenges that would not be incorporated in curriculum guides.

As with any educator it is necessary to model good practice in the classroom. Just as my journey for this research meant uncovering my ways of knowing all trainers of child protection curriculum should exercise a level of self awareness for their ways of knowing. What practitioners learn in the classroom can inform direct practice in the field. This means the language communicated during training, the case examples shared, and conclusions drawn through discussion are teaching techniques that must be carefully exercised. I would recommend trainers share with participants the highlights of this research.

### **Child Protection Agencies**

Agencies who are interested in realizing the implications of this study should consider internal training programs that provide new workers with peer consultation, mentorship, and coaching for practice. Opportunities to reflect on practice as a new protection worker are critical if a worker is to take learning's from the classroom and apply it to their cases. It is unrealistic to think that a training program developed to meet the learning at a provincial level will reflect the unique context for the provision of services in your region. Without such learning new workers are not able to develop the backdrop for political context for the jurisdiction in which they serve. Furthermore, the support of mentorship and job coaching offers workers a resource to think critically about their practice. However, mentors must also be given the appropriate training to engage workers in facilitating their self-awareness when engaging clients. With this, workers' can be supported in questioning what conclusions they draw about clients and examining what thinking and systems might be informing those understandings they have for the client experience.

Implications for supervisors should also be considered when looking at the findings of this study. As a tool for influencing practice and shaping the practice of a new worker, supervisors should use supervision as an opportunity to examine and explore our ways of knowing when trying to understand a workers interpretation of a family experience. In supervision workers should be encouraged to reflect on the power they hold and how they use it when engaging a client and listening to the story of the client. Supervisors are in the position to elicit our ways of knowing on a day to day basis and

interrupt ways of knowing that serve to replicate the oppression experienced by those we serve.

### **Researchers**

It is apparent that service user experience has much to offer the field. However, despite the research available that includes the voice of those receiving child protection intervention there is merit in continuing to engage clients as services undergo change. A recent study by Gallagher (2009) echo the message which suggests service users can and should inform change.

Despite available research that includes the voice of service users there continues to be limited research that specifically examines what clients would have workers learn. Even within the parameters of this research the question of study was not directly posed. Further research into what clients would have new workers learn about practice would be useful to the field. It is timely to examine this question as we are in our third year of child welfare transformation. I also believe further research would be helpful examining how protection workers elicit information from clients that highlights the political landscape of client experience. Having such information would be helpful to new protection workers learning how to practice using an anti-oppressive framework within the child protection field.

Given the wealth of service user research that currently exists in the child protection field it would be an interesting question of study to examine what has prevented the field from implementing recommendations that were drawn from those studies. If we explore what has stopped us from listening to client experiences it might

provide useful information that can help us breakdown barriers to using what we learn from service users.

An interesting observation of the study arises from the experience of the client who considered parents as having power in knowledge and exercising such through resistance. Given this study did not consider a gender analysis it would be interesting to explore if there is a gender difference in how resistance is exercised from the perspectives of male and female clients. It would be interesting to examine if there is a difference in how men and women perceive their role in the relationship with CAS and if there is a difference in how they assert resistance and engage in the process with workers. With such a gender analysis in exploring the analysis of power through resistance it might provide a more layered analysis of the such.

Finally, the basis of this analysis finds the individual power of a worker as an organizing theme. I realize that this assertion may be controversial. Some might argue that power and authority of workers is impacted by the larger political system, agency culture and policies, and case related issues such as workload. Under such constraints it may be argued that workers really have no control when working with clients. Although this may be true the discussion as to why some workers feel they can support families in a manner that is highlighted in this study while some are not is not within the parameters of this study. Therefore, examining the barriers that prevent workers from practicing in a way that in keeping with the lessons learned in this study might prove useful. Such knowledge may help in overcoming barriers.

### **Strengths & Limitations of the study**

When I began this journey I set out to ask the question what could be learnt from services that could improve what I teach to social workers in child protection. When interpreting the findings of the study it is important to consider the possible limitations of the study. Firstly, the qualitative nature of the study precludes generalization of the results. That said, I would contend that the findings of the study does seem to be congruent with previous research which suggests that the findings may be transferable to other parents receiving child protection intervention.

Furthermore, the relatively small sample size is also something to consider. A small sample size may not allow for a representative sample of the child welfare population to be captured in the findings of the study. With this in mind, I would be interested to see if this research could be replicated with an increased sample size. This is particularly significant to consider given that none of the clients included in this study were a visible minority. With no parent sharing their perspectives as a visible minority this analysis may not be transferable into how race and ethnicity shape the experiences of parents and how relationships are negotiated between visible minorities and their workers. For this reason, future research might examine if the dynamics of such a relationship might bring another level of analysis given that the experiences of visible minorities might be negotiated and assigned meaning differently.

The sample used in the original study did not include participants who were involved in child protection intervention due to alleged or verified sexual abuse.

Therefore, the analysis offered in my research can only be used to understand the collaborative relationship with parents whose case does not involve sexual abuse. It was argued that the original study did not include such cases in the sample as concepts of such an analysis would be beyond the scope of the original study. This may be an area of further enquiry.

Another possible limitation of the study to consider is that the clients of the study were no longer receiving child protection intervention. It is plausible that the honesty of their responses may have been affected by the possibility of having their case reopened in the future. Although this is not something I would change in future research it is something to consider when examining the findings of the study.

As a new approach to secondary analysis, there appears to be no literature that has employed this method of research thus far. For the reason, the purposive sampling of the interview transcripts might be considered as limited. I would argue that the nature of the sample selection proved to be effective in shaping the findings of the study. Given the closeness of the original researcher to the original data aided in selecting a sample that further the questions I queried as I reviewed the transcripts of the original research. To address concerns for bias of the researcher in selecting interviews included in this study constant discussion of thematic coding was helpful so that the meaning of experiences that unfolded was tested throughout the research.

Some have suggested as a secondary analysis the lack of control over the original data collection might present challenges. Given the original research employed grounded

theory as a method to data collection, there is a possibility that data will be missing and this will impact my analysis (Hinds et al., 1997; Szabo and Strang, 1997). Grounded theory is an iterative process that allows a researcher to solicit certain kinds of responses during the data collection as emerging themes arise. In doing so, questions are not consistently asked of all participants (Szabo and Strang, 1997). As a result, there may be limitations to what the data can tell me through a secondary analysis. Despite this argument, it has been my experience that such a limitation did not present itself. I found information yielded from the original study was useful in generating new understandings of client experience.

### **Conclusion**

As I reflect on the outcome of my thesis I feel I have benefited greatly from listening to the perspectives of service users. Consistent with previous research I have been reminded of the importance of listening and the positive impact it has on the relationship between a worker and a client (de Boer & Coady, 2007). Not only is this seen as helpful but it is clear that positive relationships are possible within the parameters of child protection work.

As a predominant theme of this analysis the underlying power of a worker to construct the stories of clients from a child protection context rather than the context of the parent is critical to consider for practice. However, given the climate of child protection work I question the possibilities of the system to support practice that balances the pressures of the system to inform how we construct client experience, the impact of our own values in defining the client, and truly listening to the client to understand their

experience. It is only in disseminating research such as this study that we can begin to create the environment that enables workers to find this balance.



## REFERENCES

- Barker, R. L. (2003). *The Social Work Dictionary* (Fifth ed.). Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- Bell, M. (1996). An account of the experiences of 51 families involved in an initial child protection conference. *Child and Family Social Work, 1*, 43-55.
- Beresford, P. and Evans, C. (1999). Research and empowerment. *British Journal of Social Work, 29*, 671-677.
- Beresford, P. (2000). Service Users' Knowledge and Social Work Theory: Conflict or Collaboration? *British Journal of Social Work, 30*, 489-503.
- Beresford, P. (2001). Service Users, Social Policy and the Future of Welfare. *Critical Social Policy, 21* (4), 494-512.
- Beresford, P. and Croft, S. (2001). Service Users' Knowledge and the Construction of Social Work. *Journal of Social Work, 1*(3), 295-316.
- Burr, Vivienne. (1995). What is Social Constructionism? In Vivienne Burr, *An Introduction to Social Constructionism* (pp. 1-16). London. Routledge.
- Cameron, G. and Hoy, S. (2003). *Stories of mothers in child welfare*. Partnerships for Child and Families Project, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfred Laurier University, Waterloo. Available at <http://www.wlu.ca> (accessed on February 19, 2008).
- Canadian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics. (2005). Retrieved online on January 12, 2008 from [http://www.casw-acts.ca/practice/codeofethics\\_e\\_000.pdf](http://www.casw-acts.ca/practice/codeofethics_e_000.pdf).
- Connolly, M. (2003). Qualitative analysis: A teaching tool for social work research. *Qualitative Social Work, 2*(1), 103-112
- Corby, B., Millar, M., Young, L. (1996). Parent participation in child protection work: Rethinking the rhetoric. *British Journal of Social Work, 26*(4), 475-790.
- Cournoyer, B. (2000). *The social work skills workbook* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Creswell, J. W. *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1994, 143-172.

Dale, P. (2004). Like a fish in a bowl: parents perceptions of child protection services. *Child Abuse Review, 13*, 137-157.

deBoer, C. & Coady, N (2007). *Good Helping Relationships in Child Welfare: Co-authored stories of Success*. Partnerships for Child and Families Project, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfred Laurier University, Waterloo. Available at [http://www.wlu.ca/documents/7214/Good\\_Helping\\_relationships.pdf](http://www.wlu.ca/documents/7214/Good_Helping_relationships.pdf) (accessed on February 19, 2008)

de Montigny, Gerald A.J. (1995). *Social working: An ethnography of front-line practice*. Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press.

Diorio, W.D. (1992). Parental Perceptions of the Authority of Public Child Welfare Caseworkers. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services, 73*(4), 222-235.

Drake, B. (1994). Relationship competencies in child welfare. *Social Work, 39*(5), 595-602.

Drake, B. (1996). Consumer and worker perceptions of key child welfare competencies. *Children and Youth Services Review, 18*(3), 261-279.

Dumbrill, G. (2005). *Child welfare in Ontario: Developing a collaborative intervention model*. A Position Paper by the Provincial Project Committee on Enhancing Positive Worker Interventions with Children and Their Families in Protection Services. Toronto, ON: Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies.

Dumbrill, G.C. (2006). Parental experience of child protection intervention. A qualitative study. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 30* (1), 27-37.

Dumbrill, G.C, & Lo, W. (2009). What parents say: Service users' theory and anti-oppressive child welfare practice. In Jeannine Carriere & Susan Strega (eds). *Walking this path together: Anti-oppressive child welfare practice*. Halifax: Fernwood Forrester Publishing.

Dumbrill, G. C. and Maiter, S. (2003). Child protection clients designing the services they receive: An idea from practice. *Child and Family: A Journal of the Notre Dame Child and Family Institute, 7*(1): 5-10.

Farmer, E. (1994). *The impact of child protection interventions: The experiences of Parents and Children*. In L. Waterhouse ed. *Child Abuse and Child Abusers: Protection and Prevention*, pp 38-57. London. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Fine, M. and Mandall, D. (2003). *Family Talk Summary: Families and children services*. Partnerships for Child and Families Project, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfred Laurier University, Waterloo. Available at [http://www.wlu.ca/documents/7296/Family\\_talk\\_summary-child\\_welfare.pdf](http://www.wlu.ca/documents/7296/Family_talk_summary-child_welfare.pdf). Accessed on February 12, 2008.

Freymond, N. (2003). *Mothers everyday realities and child placement experiences*. Partnerships for Child and Families Project, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfred Laurier University, Waterloo. Available at [http://www.wlu.ca/documents/7217/Child\\_Placement\\_Experiences.pdf](http://www.wlu.ca/documents/7217/Child_Placement_Experiences.pdf). Accessed on February 12, 2008.

Fook, J. (2002). *Social Work Critical Theory and Practice*. London Sage

Forrester, D., Kershaw, S., Moss, H., & Hughes, L. (2008). Communication skills in child protection: How do social workers talk to parents? *Child and Family Social Work*, 13 (1), 41-51.

Foucault, M. 1969. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

Gallagher, B. (Winter 2009). Adjusting the lens: Parents create change in Ontario's child protection system. *Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies Journal*, 53 (1).

Gill, D. (2005). *Challenging the Silences*. Periodical of the Anti-Oppression Education Committee of McMaster University School of Social Work.

Glasby, J. and Beresford, P. (2006). Who knows best? Evidence-based practice and the service user contribution. *Critical Social Policy*, 26(1), 268-284.

Glaser, B. G. (1978) *Theoretical sensitivity: advances in the methodology of grounded theory*. Mill Valley, Ca: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B.G. (1998). *Doing grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Hawthorn, N.Y. Aldine de Gruyter.

Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Aldine: New York.

Goldstein, H. (1983). Starting where the client is. *Social Case Work*, 64(5), 267-275.

Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1981). *Effective Evaluation. Improving the Usefulness of Evaluation Results Through Responsive and Naturalistic Approaches*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Heaton, J. (1998). *Secondary Analysis of Qualitative Data*. Retrieved November 29, 2005, from Social Research Update Website: <http://www.soc.surrey.ca.uk/sru/SRU22.html>

Heaton, J. (2004). *Reworking qualitative data*. Sage, London.

Hinds, P.S, Vogel R.J and Clarke-Steffen, L (1997). The possibilities and pitfalls of doing a secondary analysis of a qualitative data set. *Qualitative Health Research*, 7 (3): 408-424.

Kapp, A. & Propp, J. (2002). Client satisfaction methods: Input from parents with children in foster care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 19(3), 227-245.

Kapp, A. and Vela, H. (2004). The unheard client: Assessing the satisfaction of parents of children in foster care. *Child and Family Social Work*, 9, 197-206.

Kellington, S. (2002). *Missing voices': Mothers at risk of experiencing apprehension in the child welfare system in B.C.* Report prepared for the National Action Committee on the Status of Women – BC region. Available at [http://www.nac-cca.ca/about.regions/bc/Final\\_Report2.pdf](http://www.nac-cca.ca/about.regions/bc/Final_Report2.pdf) (accessed on February 19, 2008).

Lee, C. & Ayon, C. (2004). Is the client-worker relationship associated with better outcomes in mandated child abuse cases. *Research on Social Work Practice* 14(5), 351-357.

Leigh.S. & Miller, C. (2004). Is the third way the best way: Social work intervention with children and families. *Journal of Social Work*, 4(3), 245-267.

Lo, W. (2007). Parents speak: A study of child protection service-users perspectives. Masters of Social Work dissertation. McMaster University. Canada

Lukes, S. (1974). *Power: A Radical View*. London: Macmillan Press.

Mackinnon, L. (1998). *Trust and betrayal in the treatment of child abuse*. New York: Guilford.

Magura, S. & Moses, B. (1984). Clients as evaluators in child protective services, *Child Welfare*, 63(2).

Maiter, S., Palmer, S., & Manji, S., (2006). Strengthening social worker-client relationships in child protective services: Addressing Power Imbalances and 'Ruptured' Relationships. *Qualitative Social Work*, 5(2): 167-186.

Mantzoukas, S. (2005). The inclusion of bias in reflective and reflexive research: A necessary prerequisite for securing validity. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 10(3): 279-295.

Mauthner, N. and Doucet, A. (2003). Reflexive accounts and accounts of reflexivity in qualitative analysis, *Sociology*, 37 (3): 413-431.

Mauthner, N. & Doucet, A. (1998). Reflections on a voice-centered relational method. In J. Ribbens & R. Edward (Eds.). *Feminist dilemmas in qualitative research*. London: Sage, pp. 119-146.

Mayer, J.E., & Timms, N. (1970). *The client speaks, working class impressions of casework*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

McCullum, S.P. (1995). *Safe Families. A model of Child Protection Intervention Based on parental Voice and Wisdom*. Unpublished PHD Wilfred Laurier.

Monroe, E. (1996). Avoidable and unavoidable mistakes in child protection work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 26(6), 793-808.

Morse, J.M., Barrett, M., Mayan M., Olsen K. and Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 1(2). Retrieved February 8, 2004 from <http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/english/engframeset.html>

O'Brien, P., Massat, C.R., & Gleeson, J.P. (2001). Upping the ante: Relative caregivers' perceptions of changes in child welfare policies. *Child Welfare*, 80 (6), 719-748.

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS). (December 1999a). OACAS wins contract for child welfare training. *OACAS Journal* 43,(3) pp 1-2.

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS). (December, 1999b). The Ontario Child Protection Training Program. *OACAS Journal* 43,(4) p 8-9.

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS). (2005). *Child Welfare in Ontario: Developing a Collaborative Intervention Model*. Toronto: Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies.

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Society. (December 1999). The Ontario child protection training program. *Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies Journal* , 43 (4) 8-9.

Palmer, S., Maiter, S., & Manji, S., (2006). Parents' experiences with child protective services. *Child and Youth Services Review*, 28(7), 812-824.

Pilsecker , C. (1994) Starting where the client is. *Families in Society*, 75(7), 447-452

Platt, D. (2007). Congruence and co-operation in social workers? Assessment of children in need. *Child & Family Social Work*, 12(4), 326-335.

Richardson, M. (2003). A personal reflective account: The impact of the collation and sharing of information during the course of a child protection investigation. *Child and Family Social Work*, 8, 123-132.

Sainsbury, E. (1987). Client studies: Their contribution and limitations in influencing social work practice, *British Journal of Social Work*, 17, 635-644.

Shulman, L. (1978). A study of practice skills. *Social Work*, 23(4), 274-281.

Smith, R. (2008). *Social work and power*. Basingstoke, Palgrave: Macmillan Press.

Spratt, T & Callan, J. (2004). Parents' views on social work intervention in child welfare cases. *British Journal of Social Work*, 34, 199-224.

Strauss, A., and Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research. Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park. CA: Sage.

Szabo, V. and Strang, V.R. (1997). Secondary analysis of qualitative data. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 20(2), 66-74.

Thorne S. (1994). Secondary Analysis in Qualitative Research: Issues and Implications. In: Morse J.M. ed. *Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods*. (pp. 263-279). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Thorne, S. (1998). Ethical and representational issues in qualitative secondary analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 8 (4), 547-555.

Thoburn, J. Lewis, A. and Shemmings, D. (1995). *Paternalism or partnership? Family involvement in the child protection process*. London: HSMO.

Trotter, C. (2002). Worker skill and client outcome in child protection. *Child Abuse Review*, 11, 38-50.

Turner, M. (2002). Guidelines for involving service users in social work education. *Shaping Our Lives National User Network*. Southampton: Social Policy and Social Work Learning and Teaching Support Network. Retrieved December 15, 2008 from <http://www.swap.ac.uk/learning/userSw4.asp>.

Verge, V.M. (2005). The client-worker relationship in a child welfare setting. *Envision: The Manitoba Journal of Child Welfare*, 4(1), 44-66.

Warren, J. (2007). *Service User and Carer Participation in Social Work*. Learning Matters Ltd.

Westcott, H. (1995). Perceptions of child protection casework: Views from children, parents, and practitioners, In C.Cloke & M. Davies (eds). *Participation and empowerment in child protection*. London: Longman.

Yatchmenoff, D.K. (2005). Measuring client engagement from the client's perspective in nonvoluntary child protective services. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 15 (2), 84-96.

**Appendix 1: Research Review Table**

No.	Occupation	Ethnicity	Age	Description
Ms. C	Homemaker	White	<20	A parent and homemaker in her late teens who lives in a small one-bedroom basement apartment. Ms. C initially received services from the Urban CAS as a result of having her child while she was in CAS care herself. What began as supportive intervention soon became protection intervention due to concerns about neglect and also unspecified events that caused physical harm to the child. A Supervision Order was in place for a year followed by an additional period of voluntary support. Ms. C lived in a small basement apartment with her partner Mr. D.
Ms. D	Unemployed	White	<20	A stepparent in his late teens, the partner of Ms. C. Mr. D was also in care of the Urban CAS himself as a child. Mr. D's involvement with the Urban CAS as a parent began when he moved in
Ms. G	Unskilled worker	White	41-45	A single parent in his early 40s who lives in an apartment and is employed in unskilled labour. Mr. G's long-standing involvement with the Northern CAS began due to his children's special needs and because of protection issues.
Ms. K	Homemaker	White	>55	A grandmother who is retired and lives with her partner in an urban apartment. Ms. K and her partner's involvement with the Urban CAS began when she took custody of their two grandchildren as a result of these children being abused and neglected by their mother (Ms. K's daughter). CAS involvement continued due to the children's special needs and one of the children was admitted into care and is now a Crown Ward.
Ms. J	Homemaker	White	31-35	A single parent of three young children with special needs. Mr. J lives in an apartment in a subsidised housing complex. Before becoming a full time homemaker he claims he was a career criminal. Mr. J received services from the BC Ministry and Family and Children's Services because of his children's special needs. Mr. J also had involvement with the Ministry because he advocates for other parents receiving child protection services.