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Is there a place for Social Work within rural schools, and what can it look like?

~Honours Dissertation~

Bachelor of Social Work with Honours
Edith Cowan University, Bunbury, WA

Student Name: Kris Robertson
Supervisor: Dyann Ross
Date Submitted: 31 January 2002
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Kristine Robertson

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author, Kris Robertson is an Honours student in the Bachelor of Social Work degree at Edith Cowan University, Bunbury, Western Australia.

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ABSTRACT

Key words: Youth, Access, Equity, Rurality, School social work

The impetus for this research followed my social work placement in a rural high school in the Southwest area of Western Australia. The aim of this research is to identify a role for school social work in relation to practice in rural schools, and to develop a conceptual framework for practice. The literature review sought to demonstrate a need for such services by demonstrating the issues for youth in rural areas. The claim was that providing such a service in rural areas would address issues of access and equity, in line with social justice principles. The results of this research indicate that staff and students of the study school, in partnership with the researcher recognise there is a role for social work within rural schools. However, it has also raised questions as to whether such a concept can work in schools and how might this look. The study has also revealed schools have been identified as ideal sites for intervention, but that ideology may need to change to embrace such a concept (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998; Kemmis and Lynch, 2001; Department of Education, Western Australia, 2001; Cohen, 1995).

There is a strong focus on the disadvantage experienced by rural people in relation to access and equity and in this respect there is an emphasis on social justice as needing to be valued and struggled for on behalf of rural youth. The concept of rural being complex and contentious was also acknowledged and is shown to be a productive lens for discerning inequities within secondary education in rural areas.

Critical ethnography was the methodology utilised, as this stance provided a focus that allowed more than simply a description of social work practice within a school, it required analysis and action aimed at addressing issues of social justice (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000). Young (1990: 5) suggests that without a “critical stance many questions about what occurs in society, and why, who benefits, and who is harmed, will not be asked and social theory is liable to reaffirm and reify the given social reality”. My feminist ideology, which primarily sits within a Marxist framework and a postmodern lens framed the direction of the project.

The desired outcome is to inform educational policy and practice in the context of school social work in rural areas; in order to assist in addressing the recognised issues related to access and equity for rural youth. As suggested, effective and ethical research is that with intent to make changes to existing structures (Crotty, 1998; Alston and Bowles, 1998). It is also hoped this project will serve as a starting point for further research in this area.
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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

"Schools must embrace a broad responsibility for the education and welfare of young people in the 21st century..."


This thesis presents the results, discussion and recommendations that arose from a project researching a hypothesis that school-based social workers in rural areas can provide a service which is of value and addresses issues of access and equity for rural youth. The impetus to further research the value of such a role was prompted following social work placement at a large high school in the south west area of Western Australia. This experience coupled with my lived experience as a rural practitioner and community member, and enhanced by previous research around issues for youth in rural areas provided the impetus for developing a hypothesis and research question. This project asks the question, "Is there a place for social work within rural schools and what can it look like?" The mix of rurality and current practices in schools led me to believe there were certain predictable injustices for youth and as a social worker this was of concern to me and thus, my interest in researching these issues further.

The thesis will present a literature review related to key concepts in Chapter Two, a description of my theoretical perspective, methodology and methods in Chapter Three, the results and a discussion of those results in Chapter Four and a summary and recommendations in Chapter Five.

1.1 Social Justice and Social Work

Overall, my personal values and my commitment to social justice, as well as my inherent belief in the value of social work guide this research. I have also been influenced by the many years I spent living in a small rural area in central west New South Wales. It is this commitment to the pursuit of social justice as a social worker (and in the context of this project as researcher) that has influenced the position I have taken within this project.

1 See journalised archive, Appendix 1
As a social worker I am interested in youth, the influence schools have on a person's life, and the effects of living in a rural area. My interest in these areas is strongly linked to my understanding of the concepts of access and equity and my perception that rural people are disadvantaged on these indices. I also recognise that what constitutes social justice is difficult to define and the concept is contested, contextual and cultural (Ife, 1995; Young, 1990). Rawls (1972) has three basic principles of social justice. These are “equality in basic liberties, equality of opportunity for advancement and positive discrimination for the underprivileged in order to ensure equity” (cited in Ife, 1995:52). Strategies to address structural inequalities such as access to services will be discussed within this thesis, this focus linked to the second of Rawl’s principles and is also located in Young’s (1990) notion of social justice, which places a strong emphasis on stakeholders rights to be involved in decisions which affect them. Thus the emphasis on involving key stakeholders in this research project.

My personal practice model (Mullen, 1984) is strongly influenced by these concepts because I view social justice as an alternative framing for human rights struggles. Ife (2001) describes human rights on three levels, “first generation, second generation and third generation”. First generation rights relate to “fundamental freedom and the right to citizenship, the right to self-expression, and the right to free participation in society” (p.25). Second generation rights (and perhaps those we readily identify with as social workers) are referred to as “the right of the individual or group to receive various forms of social services in order to realise their full potential” (p.26). Third generation rights are those such as the “right to economic development, or the right to live in a harmonious society (p.27). The rights being discussed within this thesis are related primarily to Ife's (2001) description of second generation rights which compliments Young’s (1990) notion of social justice.

The social work profession is defined by the International Federation of Social Workers (2000) as that which “promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well being” with the principles of human rights and social justice being fundamental for practice.
Social workers are defined as "change agents in society and in the lives of the individuals, families and communities they serve". Thus, social work grapples with both the personal and the political\(^2\) and is located within a human rights stance (Ife, 2001).

Social work grew out of humanitarian and democratic ideals\(^3\), and its values are based on respect for the equality, worth, and dignity of all people, with values embodied in the professions' national and international Code of Ethics. Social work interventions range from "primarily person-focused psychosocial processes to involvement in social policy, planning and development" (International Federation of Social Workers, 2000).

Thus, social work is a profession strongly grounded in values, theory and practice associated with the pursuit of social justice and anti-oppression. At the same time a social worker is defined as a worker in the human services field, with "highly professional qualifications" (Ife, 2001: 4). This statement by Ife can be interpreted as somewhat elitist and Fook (1993: 60) discusses the importance of social workers not becoming so, by retaining an awareness of how the social work profession can also be seen as potentially controlling and therefore oppressive. While social work is professional, it is this very professionalism that can result in oppression (Illich et al, 1977) if one is not mindful of one's actions. Who defines what is a problem for a person, and how it can be addressed is a crucial issue. If a social worker, or any other human services worker takes on the role of defining a person's issues, the risk is that instead of empowerment or enabling, the professional becomes the agent of disempowerment or disabling. To address an issue from a rights perspective, as is the aim of social work, is to recognise the right of the people to define their own needs and to adopt the position of change agent within a rights-based framework for practice (Ife, 2000).

Paradoxically, these interventions can also be seen as controlling and as a reinforcing of disadvantage by upholding the social conditions which contribute to disadvantage.

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\(^2\) The personal is political is a concept aligned with feminist theory and refers to a "method of analysis for gleaning political insights from an analysis of personal experience" (Mullaly, 1993: 155).

\(^3\) Social work origins and its links to empowerment and human rights can be traced back to the work of Jane Addams and her work in the late 1880's and Bertha Reynolds 1885 – 1978. Both practitioners forged the way for modern social work and the principles it adheres to.
However, I feel that my world view and social justice stance assists my practice in working toward recognition of these issues and moving away from assuming the "professional expert" (Fook, 1993: 60) role. This is a principle I try to adhere to in everyday practice, which is inclusive of research. In the context of this thesis, I see my position very much within a personal/political framework, in partnership with other stakeholders, and view this thesis as an example of consciousness raising aimed at social change.

1.2 Why School-based Social Work Services?

It is my inherent belief that it is the right of all, particularly those most vulnerable in our society, to have access to adequate social welfare resources. I also recognise that this view can be contentious in a climate of economic rationalism and managerialism. However, I see it as a responsibility as a social worker, as well as member of society, to advocate for that right. I further see the need to consolidate one's skills in social policy analysis in order to recognise issues such as the effects of centralised policy decisions and how they affect access and equity issues in rural areas. For example, the lack of services and transport.

Given the recognised link between social disadvantage and lower educational outcomes (Sturmfels, cited in Swain et al, 1997; Chamberlain and Mackenzie, 1998; Berk, 1994; Kail and Cavanaugh, 1996; Department of Education, Western Australia, 2001), it is puzzling that the policy makers have appeared reluctant to address this issue in a proactive manner. The Department of Education, Western Australia (2001) has recently released a focus paper titled "Pathways to Health and Well-being in Schools". However, it is my contention that this paper is flawed in that it suggests issues that need addressing, yet it fails to offer valid strategies to address these issues, other than broad strategies which rely on teachers identifying the issues. It also suggests building community networks and accessing relevant services from outside agencies.

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4 Economic rationalism ideology contends that the market or private sector, with minimum state intervention is the "best mechanism for the provision of welfare services in that it maximises efficiency, encourages competition and maximises individual choice and availability (Ife, 1995: 5).

5 Managerialism focuses on performance indicators, outcomes, efficiency and measurable objectives. The central ideology is managing for results (Jones & May, 1999: 386).
This strategy is particularly flawed for rural schools where services are not always accessible, where transport may be an issue for students and most importantly for rural and urban students, because teachers are not trained to identify the issues. It has been expressed that now, more than ever, teachers are being asked to deal with issues for which they have little or no training and that they are expected to be social workers. One would argue this could be harmful for both students and teachers (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998; Hillier and Harrison, 1999; Green and Brown, 1999, cited in Briskman et al; Burkett, 2001).

The strategies suggested in “Pathways to Health and Well-being in Schools” are congruent with the full-service schools concept, which is not a common concept in Western Australia. This thesis will provide a definition of a full-service school, along with an explanation of current government guidelines for funding in this area. It will be argued that a full-service school concept is well placed to address the provision of services to students, in a socially just manner, although current guidelines for funding diminish the overall context, as will be discussed (Kemmis and Lynch, 2001).

1.3 Aim of this Research

The aim of this research is to identify a role for school social work in relation to practice in rural schools, and to develop a conceptual model of practice, which acts to inform educational policy and practice. This thesis will argue there is a role for social work practice within schools, particularly from a social justice and rural perspective. It will also present a conceptual framework for social work practice within these schools. The benefits of such a role and the limitations, including the political constraints of implementing such a role within an institutionalised setting such as a school will also be discussed.

6 To question the role of the educators within the school is not an aim. However, it is intended to discuss social justice from a welfare perspective and this will necessitate some discussion of traditional school practices.

7 This will include a critique of social injustice and power within schools.
1.3.1 Current Theory on the Role of School-Based Social Workers and Full-Service Schools

Social work is a highly valued position in the school system, in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, and the strategy is re-emerging in Australia, particularly in New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria, with recognition of the value of school-based social work and the adoption of the full service schools concept in those states. This concept, while advocated by the Australian Centre for Equity through Education has been researched extensively. However, the literature neglects to fully explore the need, if any, in Western Australia, as well as within rural schools (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998).

The role of social work within the full-service schools concept does involve work with students on a one-to-one basis, however, equally important for social workers is establishing links in the student's home, school and community systems. The aim is to ascertain how all those systems interface and how one can improve the environmental fit of the students in their systems (Markwood, 2000; Cohen, 1995; Raham, 1998; Florida Department of Education, 1992; DEETYA, 2000; Kemmis and Lynch, 2001; Robertson, 2000).

There is some controversy in the way the Department of Education (2001) has presented their argument in their research, documented in “Pathways to Health and Well-being in Schools”. They have utilised research from the Western Australian Child Health Survey (Zubrick, et al, 1995) to state “that parents with concerns about their children’s behaviour or emotional well-being were more likely to seek assistance from teachers or school psychologists as a first or only option” (p.3). What has not been presented in the Department of Education’s paper is that Zubrick et al (1995) found these disciplines were not viewed as the most beneficial forms of intervention, mainly due to the lack of expertise by school staff. Yet, these same disciplines are those suggested by the Department of Education to address the strategies outlined in “Pathways to Health and Well-being in Schools”. It is suggested a school-based social worker would provide an accessible service, with workers educated and trained to address social and emotional problems for adolescents and others.
1.3.2 Access and Equity

Access refers to "the capacity of consumers to obtain the services being provided" (Jones and May, 1999: 328). It is suggested that social workers need to think about access in terms of "obstacles that must be overcome to gain entry to services" such as lack of services, geographical issues; poverty, lack of relevant information, and policy decisions (Jones and May, 1999: 329). Equity on the other hand, refers to just provision of services. It is a "contested concept" however, in the main it relates to fairness, impartiality, consistency and, where necessary, positive discrimination to enable people to access services (Jones and May, 1999: 400). Zubrick et al (1995) reports that child and adolescent mental health clinics are concentrated in the Perth metropolitan area. This concentration of services for youth in metropolitan areas is supported in findings by Chamberlain and MacKenzie, and this is an example of the inequity experienced by rural youth (1998, cited in Robertson, 1999). It is well documented that Australia’s rural population is disadvantaged in terms of access to services and a shortage of providers (Cheers, 1999; Alston, 2000; Ruth. 1999). For rural youth, who represent a multiplicity of identities, as do their urban counterparts, this is further impacted upon by the lack of public transport (AIHW, 1999; Hillier and Harrison, 1999; Cheers, 1992; Martinez-Brawley, 1987; Sjostedt, 2000).

The argument that school-based services can address some of the issues associated with access and equity has been supported to some degree in an evaluation of a school-based program run by social workers in a small rural town in New South Wales (Hodgkins and Davis, 1998). In this evaluation, students identified accessibility as a benefit. Like many rural areas, transport was a key issue in relation to having access to services for students at the school and this will be discussed in more detail (Hillier and Harrison, 1999; Green and Brown, 1999, cited in Briskman et al; Robertson, 2000).

1.4 The Local Context:

The high school involved in the study, is situated in a town with a population of around 5,700 (ABS, 1996).
The school also caters for students from small rural towns within their catchment area, some with a population of less than 1,000 people (ABS, 1996; Robertson, 2000). The wider area in which the study school is located has three senior high schools in the public school system. None of these schools has a school based social worker. Despite this, there is recognition that there are a myriad of social issues which impact upon a student’s educational outcomes (Sturmfels, cited in Swain et al., 1997; Chamberlain and Mackenzie, 1998; Berk, 1994; Kail and Cavanaugh, 1996; Kemmis and Lynch, 2001). There are social workers based in public schools in metropolitan Western Australia, yet there are none in rural areas (Robertson, 2000).

This lack of school based social workers is contrary to the reported former long term goal of the Department of Education, Western Australia to service all major schools with a school-based team of nurse, guidance officer and Social Worker (Craft, 1980). No doubt changes of governments and economic rationalism have played a part in these goals no longer being recognised (Robertson, 2000). The decline of school based social workers since the 1980’s is a phenomena that has been researched in other areas of Australia (Coop, 1996). However, there is little information available related to these services in Western Australia. Contrary to the fact that social work services have declined in schools, problems for youth appear to be increasing (Hillier and Harrison; Green and Brown, cited in Briskman et al., 1999).

The study school is large, with a population of over 1300 students, representing a diverse community. There is recognition that with a population of that size, there may be a wide range of issues that arise. There was a misconception by many of the school staff that the geographical school area, was predominantly middle class and that there were not a lot of social issues. However, that has not been my experience, living and working within this community. There is a wide socio-economic range within the area, as in many other similar areas and many of the issues affecting youth throughout Australia were evident amongst the students at this school (Robertson, 2000). Contact with students at the study school involved many of the recognised issues for rural youth.
The issues included drug and alcohol misuse and abuse, depression, sexuality issues, bullying, low self esteem, the effects of poor parenting, poverty, family violence and lack of employment opportunities (Hillier and Harrison, 1999; Green and Brown, 1999; Ife, 1997; Fook, 1993; Zastrow, 1995; Abbott-Chapman, 2000; Horan, 1998).

This knowledge of “my patch” was invaluable during my placement at the school and reflects a community-embedded framework for practice which Cheers (1999), argues is essential for rural practitioners. A community-embedded framework “provides a different way of looking at rural practice – a new angle on where the practitioner, and practice, fit within a community” (Cheers, 1999: 93). He further argues “community-embedded practice puts social care, and practitioners, back into the real world” (p. 93). My lived and practice experiences previously discussed have enriched my interaction with my environment and have provided a wealth of knowledge related to the importance of knowing “my patch”, as indeed the school at which I was working and my community are.

In relation to self as researcher and rural practitioner, Fook (1993) discusses the importance of social workers documenting and researching their practice in order to influence ongoing analysis and policy adoption. The research is also viewed as a valuable learning tool for myself as researcher and rural practitioner. From a consciousness-raising perspective, there is a goal of contributing to the knowledge base for social workers, and to contribute to policy and practice development. There is also a commitment to enabling members of the school community to identify their position and perceived need, if any, for social work within schools (Sarantakos, 1993; Ife, 1995; Fook, 1993).

1.5 Informing Theories and Methodology

This research project is informed by critical constructionism and my feminist, Marxist and post-modern philosophies. Constructionism names social reality as meaningful reality, which is constructed, sustained and reproduced through social life. My feminist, Marxist and post-modern ideologies are seen as relevant to this project, as the aim of this research is to bring about structural change and empowerment and my world view is strongly influenced by these ideologies, all of which are defined in later chapters.
Critical feminist research aims to identify the structural issues impacting on society and in the context of this research this relates to access and equity (Alston and Bowles, 1998; Mullaly, 1993:154 - 155; Hearn, 1998).

Critical inquiry (the process of linking thinking to action) emerged from Marxist theory and has been supported by many prominent writers such as Freire (1972), Weber (1970) and Crotty (1998). While Marx has been criticised for his exclusive focus on the conflict between capital and labour forces, all the same, he presents us with a foundation for critical inquiry with a blending of philosophy, history and economics. He provided a focus on power and domination to the way we think about class and capitalism and a Marxist analysis related to education will be briefly discussed within this thesis (Crotty, 1998; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Alston and Bowles, 1998).

The theoretical perspectives embedded in constructionism influencing this proposed project are primarily symbolic interactionism and phenomenology (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Crotty, 1998; Ife, 1997). Symbolic interactionism is defined as a theoretical perspective that "informs a range of methodologies, including some forms of ethnography. It is a perspective that seeks to inform our understanding related to "society and the human world" (Crotty, 1998:3). Phenomenology defines consciousness as intentional and human beings as being totally and intentionally related to their world (Lyotard, 1991; Crotty, 1998).

1.5.1 Introduction to Methodology

The methodology I have adopted for this research project is critical ethnography. In the context of this research critical ethnography provides more than a description of social work practice within a school, it is linked to action research, aimed at addressing issues of social justice, in line with anti-oppressive practice (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000). Crotty (1998:12) has described critical ethnography as a "methodology that strives to unmask hegemony and address oppressive forces". Ethnography is a form of qualitative research and its roots are embedded in anthropology.
Hammersley (1985, cited in Crotty, 1998:76) states "ethnography is a form of research in which the social settings to be studied, however, familiar to the researcher, must be treated as anthropologically strange; and the task is to document the culture – the perspectives and practices – of the people in those settings. The aim is to 'get inside' the way each group of people sees the world". Critical ethnography is also an emancipatory practice aimed at the pursuit of social justice and a commitment to challenging oppressive structures.

1.5.2 Introduction to Methods

The proposed methods to undertake this research include a critical reflection (reflexivity) of my own practice and research methods, a case study of social work within a high school in rural Western Australia, establishing dialogue with stakeholders by conversations around the research topic, and open-ended questionnaires.

1.6 Key Concepts

The key concepts of this thesis are rurality, access and equity in line with social justice principles. Social justice from an education perspective will be discussed.

1.7 Summary

The following chapter will present a literature review aimed at identifying how I seek to understand why and how practices are enacted in schools and to present an overview of current issues for youth, the concept of rurality, and school-based social work.

The argument for school based social workers throughout Australia in general has been supported by many writers (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998; Sturmfels, 1997; Kemmis and Lynch, 2001), although little attention has been paid to this concept in Western Australia. Where I hope to make a unique contribution is from a contemporary rural perspective.

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8 The concept of rurality is discussed in later chapters.
CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

"Education has two equal and complementary purposes; the formation of autonomous and responsible persons, and the formation of a productive, rational and socially just society"

Kemmis and Lynch, 2001: 1

2.1 Introduction:

The literature review aims to identify issues in line with the themes I believe act to establish the relevance of social work in rural secondary schools. The review will address the following issues, all of which are linked to issues around rurality:

- Social justice\(^9\) in education;
- Power within schools;
- Significance of definitions of rurality;
- Context and effects of living in rural areas;
- Issues for Rural Youth;
- Full-service schools; and
- School social work.

In the context of rurality there have been many issues identified as unjust, for example, access and equity to services (Cheers, 1992; Alston, 2000). This injustice has been linked to practices and policies associated with rural schools throughout Australia (Sturman, 1997; Down, 1999; Ministerial Review of Schooling in Western Australia, 1994). What has also been identified is that there is a strong link between social disadvantage and educational outcomes (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998; Sturmfels, 1997), and that it is increasingly recognised that issues for rural youth appear to be more problematic in recent times (Department of Human Services and Health, 1995; Green and Brown, 1999; Hillier and Harrison, 1999; Horan, 1998).

\(^9\) Perhaps more accurately this relates to social injustice, and to provide an analysis a social justice framework is being utilised.
The review of literature related to the concepts of social justice and power is designed to provide a framing for how I see these concepts enacted within a school setting. I believe it is the framing of these concepts that can act to inform how an issue may be addressed and that this is a distinctive contribution that social work can make.

### 2.2 Social Justice in Education:

Solomon (1976) describes the public education system, as is the case with most bureaucracies, as ineffectual in dealing with issues of social injustice in education. She further argues that public schools are complex and unwieldy sites where the abuse of power is enacted upon those less powerful, and this in itself constitutes a social injustice or structural inequality. This form of structural inequality, often witnessed in bureaucracies can and does lead to oppressive practices (Jones and May, 1999; Fook, 1993). Fook (1993: 92) argues that ongoing analysis of these inequalities is required in order to “bring to notice repressive policies and practices which may need to be changed to benefit the client”. Dominelli (1998:18) also presents a similar argument, suggesting organisational change must be considered in bureaucracies if an “anti-oppressive working environment is to prevail”. She further argues “more egalitarian ways of working” are required (p. 19). This in itself may prove to be a major obstacle for many schools where the hierarchy is firmly entrenched and resistant to change. Mullender and Perrott state “we need multi-layered and complex ideas in order to develop an understanding of how organisations function” (cited in Adams et al, 1998:68).

A social justice discourse as I see it sits within the conflict theory of education which enables analysis of reasons for the reinforcement of class structures and other differences which underpin oppression. Marxists argue that the education system reproduces a system of inequality favourable to capitalist interests and thus makes the school an arena of class conflict (Karabel and Halsey, 1977).

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10 Social justice refers to the rights of human beings to fairness and equity, thus injustice is the denial or non-recognition of those rights. It is a problematic concept in that there is conflict as to who decides what is fair and equitable. Ife (1995: 71) argues that a social justice perspective acknowledges the “structural disadvantages and acts to empower” individuals and communities to address this disadvantage.

11 Oppression refers to the concept of domination of those less powerful by those who are part of the dominant hierarchy. It too, is a problematic concept and requires a deep understanding of the concept of power and the valuing of difference in order to work toward anti-oppressive practice (Dominelli, 1998: 10).

12 For example, marginalisation of cultural or social groups.
Weber (1972, cited in Karabel and Halsey, 1977) argues that "education serves to reinforce ‘status cultures’ by identifying ‘insiders’ and posing barriers to ‘outsiders’. That is, there is often conflict between superordinate groups trying to monopolise positions of privilege and subordinate groups trying to gain access to them and this results in oppression of those less favoured. Whilst these issues were described in 1977, little seems to have changed in practice within contemporary schools (Yates, 1993; Robertson, 2000). Aubert (1970:94) discusses a child’s experience at school in terms of subordination, also, stating “they learn to take on the role of subordinate in a larger social system demanding obedience to figures of authority other than their parents”. The argument is not aimed at diminishing the important socialising role schools have in society, but to raise awareness of how the misuse of power can result in oppression.

Yates (1993:168) argues that “schooling is a system and a compulsory form of acculturation”. She further discusses inequality in schools (with particular reference to girls) with a comment on “schooling’s contribution to inequality coming not simply from what it does to groups” and relates this issue to a focus on curriculum and student learning, rather than questioning what pedagogical practices engage the students. Are these practices still being seen as oppressive? Yates (1993: 181) also argues that there has been a shift from “equality to difference” in the education agenda and while acknowledging the appropriateness of difference, she argues that “difference is a needed term, not as an absolute identity, rather it is necessary as an agreement to treat as equal a group who have some other qualities of diversity” (p. 181). In some instances difference can be seen to marginalise groups within school settings (Yates, 1993).

2.3 Power:

The second research theme is the abuse of power in schools and I see this concept strongly linked to social justice, as suggested by Young (1990). From a Marxist perspective, schools are ideal sites for the reinforcement of dominant forms of power. Marx maintained that power and control is related to class. Those from the higher strata were the most wealthy and powerful and therefore maintained the balance of power (Coop, 1996; Karabel and Halsey, 1977). Down (1993, 1999) recognises other structural differences in addition to class and argues that “rather than creating greater equality schooling has historically served to perpetuate already existing social differences based on class, race and gender".
Down further cites Henry, Knight, Linguard and Taylor (1998: 137) who argue these "structural features" are those that "tend to intersect to shape cultural milieux".

Burke and Harrison (1998:231) cite Barker and Roberts (1993) who describe power as a "social concept (and practice) which can be used to explore the public and private spheres of life". They argue that power is "influenced by social, cultural, economic and psychological factors", all of which impact on students. Jones and May (1997:60) distinguish between power, authority and influence in the following manner. Power is described as the "capacity to force compliance"; authority as "legitimate or accepted power"; and influence as the "capacity to have an effect on the actions or behaviours of others".

Tyack (cited in Karabel and Halsey, 1977:399) described schools as "a bureaucracy, a system bound by obsolete rules and regulations, rigid and uniform in dealing with students and staff, ill adapted to changing conditions...". From my observations whilst on placement, little has changed for some predictable groups of students. The major power, authority and influence within a school setting, like most bureaucratic agencies, are located directly with the management and teaching levels of the structure. That is, the power is exercised within the agency in line with a hierarchical structure (Jones and May, 1997). It must be recognised that teachers and administrative staff are also powerless in certain situations, where inappropriate policy dictates service provision. Decisions can be steeped in economic rationalism and decision making and power sit at the political level, "where the motivating factors are often financial rather than welfare oriented" (Lapompe, cited in Carter et al, 1995: 141). This situation is not a new phenomenon, it is an issue that has been studied for many years, yet little appears to have changed.

From a constructionist perspective, one must accept that schools are "humanly constructed" and staff and students are "actors in everyday life". The struggle for power is defined by the situation, where teachers "by virtue of their powerful, institutional positions, wield sanctions that not only delimit the boundaries of what may be ‘negotiated’, but also give them a crucial advantage in determining whose ‘definitions’ will prevail (Karabel and Halsey, 1977:58)."
Aubert (1970:112 - 113) discusses this dichotomous division that occurs in schools in relation to the gap between students and teachers in terms of "power, esteem and income" and "additional traits" related to "general social rank". He argues the "distinction between superordinate and subordinate is quite clear" (p. 113). Power is also exercised by students in the schools according to their perceived place in the hierarchy, which is determined by age and class level (Aubert, 1970). This was evident within the study school.

Power can also be exercised through the physical environment of the school such as seating arrangements in a class and the overall environment of the school (Franklin and Warren, 1999:414). They argue that this environment "influences individuals because of the implicit understanding that certain actions will happen in certain settings" and that the "physical and social act to reinforce the desired behaviours and to discourage those not considered appropriate". They further discuss how within most schools, there is an absence of seating in hallways to "discourage sitting" and to "encourage motion", whilst most classrooms are designed to reinforce the authority of the teacher. Seating the teacher in front of the rows of desks not only creates a more powerful position for the teacher, but studies have shown that it affects the interaction between teacher and students. Berk (1995:632) argues that when students "are seated in rows and columns, teachers interact with the children seated 'front and centre'. This can result in shyer children becoming more withdrawn (Berk, 1995) and this in turn can affect their place in the hierarchy in relation to peer acceptance.

The significance of understanding power relationships should not be underrated. As suggested by Ife (1997: 39):

"the importance of discourse as the location in which power is defined and redefined provides a useful way of understanding the contested field of human service provision, and of enabling social workers to develop ways in which they seek to alter the discourse and have an impact on working toward change."

2.3.1 Understanding the Organisation in Order to Effect Change

I believe one cannot have a strong social justice platform without knowledge of the structures that cause or add to that inequality.
Leonard (1997: 90) suggests this knowledge is crucial in order to understand the “microprocesses of knowledge, power and resistance in the organisation”. He further argues that from a feminist or Marxist perspective organisations such as schools reinforce the “patriarchal structures and capitalist domination”, evidenced in the proliferation of a “dominant masculine culture” which results in a gender bias in relation to how one operationalises the concepts of “power, hierarchy, and instrumental values” (1997: 91). Further from a Foucauldian (1965) perspective, Leonard (1997: 91) suggests that the discourse of organisation can be seen as that which seeks to “separate order from disorder, predictability from unpredictability and organisation from disorganisation”.

In the context of a school this is attempted by the “categorisation and classification” (Leonard, 1997: 91) of students into orderly groups which serve to meet the requirements of the dominant group, and thus, to not upset the status quo within the organisation. These strategies can also be seen to be aligned with a managerialist approach, with the focus on measurable outcomes and efficiency (Jones and May, 1999). Overall, however, the main objective appears to be the maintenance of a system that serves to reinforce the entrenched power relationships within such a setting. Fox (1994) claims: “all organisations are mythologies constituted discursively to serve particular interests of power and contested by other interests of power” (cited in Leonard, 1997: 91). There can be a contradiction between care and control and the attempt to regain some power can be enacted in a form of resistance (Leonard, 1997: 95). For the students, this can result in truancy, skipping class or disruptive behaviour. From a postmodern social work position one can link this to an understanding of why a situation is occurring, rather than focussing on what is occurring and blaming the victim (Healy, 2000). For the dominant group however, this resistance represents disorganisation. Leonard (1997) refers to this form of resistance as the “micro-resistance of everyday life” (p. 95).

Most structural inequalities are related to politics and bureaucracies (Zastrow, 1995). Netting, Kettner and McMurtry (1993:123) when discussing political action, state “social workers with little or no idea of how organisations operate, how they interact, or how they can be influenced and changed from both outside and inside are likely to be severely limited in their effectiveness”. Yet, much is expected of social workers.
The Code of the Ethics of the AASW (1994:5) states "... the social worker will endeavour to effect change through appropriate organisation channels... contribute to the development of its policy... to work towards the best possible standards of service to the clients". This ethical and political stance is crucial in order to present a sound argument, without which there can be little hope of effecting change. Warham, (1977: 82 – 83), states, "...what is needed by those who are going to work in an organisation, is some way of knowing what makes it distinctive: of conceptualising the differences between that organisation and another which may, or may not be, in the same line of business" (cited in Jones and May, 1999). That is, to understand the power structures within schools, one must first be able to understand the structure of such an organisation and its relation to other structures in a broader context.

The notion that "one size fits all", along with trends such as downsizing, and centralised structures and policies are indicative of economic rationalism and managerialism (Ife, 1997). This ideology was evident in the study school. The problems that become evident appear to be related to the organisational structure being based very much on scientific management\(^{13}\), whereas I believe schools should function from a human relations\(^{14}\) (or ecological) perspective. Schools have a very formal structure and there is a strong focus on statistical outcomes and performance agreements, or efficiency and (perceived) effectiveness (Ife, 1997; Jones and May, 1999), with little focus on social and psychological factors, despite the rhetoric. Beilharz et al (1992) argue that schools are increasingly required "to meet rising expectations for more detailed data and sharper measures of success". Managerialist requirements such as these result in a 'top down'\(^{15}\) mentality and this in itself can result in oppression of those at the bottom of the scale (Ife, 1995:42). In the context of a school, the students are almost always going to be those at the bottom.

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\(^{13}\) Scientific management is also referred to as managerialism, where the focus is on measurable outcomes. There is also a strong "top down" management structure within such organisations (Jones & May, 1999: 38 – 39).

\(^{14}\) A human relations perspective focuses on relationships, democratic leadership, and interaction within the organisation. There is a commitment balancing organisational goals and those of the worker (Jones & May, 1999).

\(^{15}\) Top down refers to an hierarchical system where the power is located at the top of the organisational chart and there is little scope for front line workers to be involved in the decision making processes. This type of organisational structure also embraces "vertical interaction" with downward ("between superior and subordinate") rather than upward communication the means of control (Jones & May, 1999: 198).
2.4 **Conceptualising Rural:**

In order to suggest a framework for a rural based practice, one must first identify how one conceptualises rural. The context of rural is perhaps one of the most contested and problematic in contemporary Australian literature (Sturman, 1997; Cheers, 1992). Issues such as whose interests are being served and who is disadvantaged when defining rural need to be asked. Briskman (1999) refers to these issues and the complexity around the political nature of rural issues. She suggests “rural issues remain marginal to mainstream policy agendas and rural communities often feel excluded from the policy development and implementation process”.

Yet, if the policy makers were to recognise rurality as a social issue, requiring relevant policy and practices as well as allocation of resources, this would not sit well within current political ideology, aligned with a “monocultural, measurable and output based approach”. The current focus is on “competitive tendering” rather than identifying and addressing needs within a localised framework relevant to each rural community, and recognising that rural communities are not an homogenous group with needs that will differ accordingly (Briskman, 1999: pp. 6 - 11).

One argument put forward for the complexity in defining rural is aligned with the discourse of disadvantage (Sturman, 1997). If one is to accept that people living in rural areas are disadvantaged (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 1998), then it may be that to define an area as such would indicate that that area requires services or resources that would alleviate that disadvantage, in order to address issues associated with social injustice.

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16 That rural communities are not homogenous is reflected in the following statement by Cox and Vetri (1992, cited in Briskman et al (1999:4): “The word rural is a descriptive term which can be used to describe a location, a person or a perspective. The terms, the country, rural and regional, rural and remote, rural communities and non-metropolitan are often used interchangeably. Some people find these terms are used too loosely and would prefer clearer boundaries and more absolute definitions. There is however, no one all encompassing definition which will capture the whole meaning of ‘rural’ for all people. Any attempt to come to a singular, all encompassing definition only serves to restrict rather than to encourage an understanding of the great wealth of diversity that is rural”
Share et al (2000) also argue that rural is “diverse and often contradictory” and that it should not be seen as a “singular object of discourse” (Halfacree, cited in Share et al, 2000). Rousseaux (1994) cited in Share et al (2000:409) suggests rurality may be conceptualised in three ways; “the socio-cultural, the social representational and the descriptive”. She further argues that the descriptive which “reflects a statistical or demographic stance” is that most often used by policy makers. Share et al (2000) argue the definition needs to be broader, that we cannot assume that because people live in rural areas they identify with being “rural people”. Many people in Australia associate “rural people” with the popular themes represented in the media, such as farming, yet there are many more people who reside in rural areas who do not “fit” the popular image. Like their urban counterparts, rural people are diverse and complex. Share et al (2000) further argues that it is the relationships with metropolitan areas and the global economy that have shaped rural Australia.

Sturman (1997: 97), refers to the problems of classification in relation to schooling, citing the many definitions used, such as “non-metropolitan, country, rural, remote and isolated” and argues that the “semantic problems with defining rurality” have arisen due to the “perception standpoint of the creator”. The Australian Education Council has called for “greater consistency” in definitions, while at the same time acknowledging that “different classification methods might have to be applied for different purposes” (cited in Sturman, 1997: 97).

Cheers (1992) suggests rural populations are broadly defined as those people living outside of capital cities in settlements comprised of up to approximately 10,000 people. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (1998:214) uses the following classifications:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZONE</th>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>M1</td>
<td>Capital cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zone</td>
<td>M2</td>
<td>Other metropolitan centres w/ urban population &gt; 100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural zone</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>Large rural centre w/ urban population 25,000–99,999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R2</td>
<td>Small rural centre w/ urban population 10,000–24,999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R3</td>
<td>Other rural centre w/ urban population &lt; 10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote zone</td>
<td>Rem 1</td>
<td>Remote centre w/ urban population ≥ 5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rem 2</td>
<td>Other remote areas w/ urban population &lt; 5,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the purpose of this research the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare classification is used as a reference point. In the context of these classifications, the study school is located in an R2, rural zone and the many of the towns serviced by the school would be classified as Rem2 remote zones. The school and community population is also diverse and complex, as in many rural communities.

In closing this section I offer the definition of rurality as put forward by Whatmore et al (1990:41), which will serve to demonstrate the complexity of such a concept.

"... the rural is a category that each society takes and reconstructs, and this social construction, with all its implications, defines the object of a sociology on the rural."

2.5 Context and Effects of Living in Rural Areas:

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (1998: 214) indicate several areas where rural residents are disadvantaged. In particular health is an issue and many factors are said to contribute to this including “geographic isolation, problems of access, socio-economic disparities, and shortage of providers”. In comparison to metropolitan areas or rural urban areas, where the concentration of the population dictates service provision, based on the “number crunchers” analysis, and thus allows easy access to services, scattered rural populations can mean high per capita service costs (Demone, 1982 cited in Cheers, 1992:13; Down, 1999; Alston, 2000).

In addition, other unique servicing problems including, accessibility, availability and relevance are evident in rural areas (Homes, 1985 cited in Cheers, 1992: 13; Alston, 2000). While it is acknowledged that welfare services are available in rural areas, these services are often viewed as “inappropriate urban models of service delivery” (Barlow, 1997:4). Many factors have been suggested as reasons for the inappropriateness of available services, including managerialism, viewed as part of the economic rationalism process. This context views the cutting of services as a “cost cutting exercise” attributed to the decision making, planning and policy development of regulations taking place in capital cities. It is further argued that there is little commitment to giving special consideration to particular areas or groups (Sjostedt, 2000: 3; Main et al, 2000).
The subsequent closure of local services, inadequate or non-existent public transport along with the increasing costs in fuel prices, have resulted in a number of expenses including "fuel costs; vehicle wear and depreciation; accommodation; food; and lost productivity and earnings because of temporary absence from work" for rural people who have to travel to distant locations to access services, work or education opportunities (Cheers, 2000:5; Alston, 2000; Main et al, 2000).

Many of the students who accessed social work services at the study school were reliant on bus transport which was limited to travel to and from school only. There were no relevant services available in many of the towns in which they lived, public transport was virtually non-existent, and the service at the school was in many cases the most accessible and relevant service (Robertson, 2000). Students also expressed the view that they experienced disadvantage when it came to social and recreational activities, especially if their parents were unable to transport them (Robertson, 2000). Strategies for inclusion of all students need to be looked at in order to decrease young people's "sense of isolation and distance from social and cultural resources" (Daniels and Cornwall, 1993 cited in Croce, 2000:2).

Within the academic context, it is argued that living in rural areas is a disadvantage when looking at Year 12 completion rates, although it is argued this has improved slightly in recent times. However, the completion rate still appears to be 5 per cent lower in rural areas (Sturman, 1997; Down, 1999). The Ministerial Review of Schooling in Western Australia (1994) also noted that "only the top 30 per cent of rural candidates compared with the top 40 per cent of metropolitan candidates qualified for entrance to university, but that this reflected the socioeconomic localities in which the rural students lived" (cited in Sturman, 1997:94–95; Down, 1999). Alston (2000:31) cites data which reflects that the drop out rates for rural students in Western Australia is between 50 and 75 per cent, compared with 25 per cent in Perth. This may constitute a factor that requires positive discrimination\(^\text{17}\) to be applied, in order to make the opportunities more equitable.

\(^{17}\) Positive discrimination refers to a process of increasing access for "certain groups or classes of people to compensate for unequal opportunities (Jones & May, 1999: 400).
Studies have also shown that literacy and numeracy skills are lower for rural students and that “rural schools were more restricted in their offerings for post-compulsory subjects” (State Board of Education Victoria, cited in Sturman, 1997:95).

Aubert (1970:223) argues studies have revealed “considerable disparity between consciously voiced ideals and actual practice” when discussing the right of everyone to “an equal opportunity to an education”. It is rather unjust that over thirty years later, the education system is still struggling with this concept for rural Australia. Sher and Sher (1994:27) discuss the disparity between urban and rural schools, noting “rural schools are usually smaller, more basic, and less comprehensive than their metropolitan counterparts”. They further argue that much of the education curriculum is based on an “urban context” and that in rural areas this may be “less relevant”. Their argument is not that rural students do not need to be “prepared for the urban context”, but that they also require an awareness of their “local rural context”.

In closing this section, it is fitting to note that there are many benefits to be gained from living in rural areas. Rural communities have been described as diverse, creative, responsive to their perceived needs (Lynn, 1999, Alston, 2000). Lynn further states “in smaller geographically focussed communities, informal networks have the potential to operate powerfully to shape information, provide support and material assistance, and act as agents of social control” (p. 21).

2.6 Issues for Rural Youth:

For the purpose of this study, the term youth is related to young people primarily under the age of 18 years, although the context raised by Martinez-Brawley (1987), that the description of youth often refers to those young people who are still making choices around education or career options, is acknowledged.
2.6.1 An Overview of Issues

The following summary presents an overview of the findings of research conducted during this project and previous research related to issues for rural youth. My concern with the documented increase in issues impacting on rural youth, along with my concerns related to access and equity have been a strong focus of this research project.

According to the statistics presented in the Western Australian Child Health Survey (Zubrick et al, 1995) which indicated that 17.7% of children will be affected by mental health problems in any six month period, and with 9.2% of those having a severe mental health problem, it is estimated that approximately 65 students at the study school will have a severe mental health problem in any given six month period (Robertson, 1999). Kosky and Hardy (1992, cited in O’Hanlon et al, 2000) argue that the “futures of young people affected with mental health conditions are placed in jeopardy, their families are stressed and there are serious ramifications at every level of society”. It is also noted that the teenage years and early adulthood is when mental illness can often have its onset (Rey, 1992).

The New South Wales Health Department has been very proactive in attempting to address these problems throughout the state, with a particular focus on rural areas. Problems such as “depression, anxiety disorders, grief, challenging and disruptive behaviours (for example, conduct disorders and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), post traumatic stress, psychosis, eating disorders and suicide” will be targeted (NSW Health, 1998). Williams and Aoun (2000:86) discuss issues affecting youth suicide and note that “young people in rural areas are particularly at risk” and “that youth suicide is perhaps the most significant Australian social and health issue”.

The Institute for Child Health Research (ICHR) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) presented research in 1993 which indicated the suicide rate among young people was rising (Rich et al 1990; Garland and Ziegler, 1993; Atwater, 1992, all cited in Kail and Cavanaugh, 1996; NSW Health, 1998; National Health and Medical Research Council, 1997). Rich et al (1990) argue that depression is one precursor of suicide; substance abuse is another” (Cited in Kail and Cavanough, 1996).

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18 See Appendix 2
Alcohol misuse at hazardous levels is increasing in rural areas. Between 1993 and 1998 the use of alcohol by rural youth (14 – 19 years age bracket) increased from 53.7% to 82%. In comparison, there was a minimal rise in metropolitan areas, from 67.4% to 71.5%. (Australian Institute of Criminology, 1999). Risk-taking such as binge drinking, illegal drug use, fighting and risky sexual activity have also received attention in recent studies (Duberstein et al, 2000; Hillier and Harrison, 1999; Lindsay et al, 1997). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports that the number of teenage girls who have tried drugs has doubled since 1995, and it is reported the figure now stands at 51.6 per cent (Horan, 1998:2).

Poverty is also a significant issue for rural youth. Flanagan and Eccles (1993, cited in Schaffer, 1998:192) argue that poverty has a negative impact on adolescents, particularly those in transition from primary to secondary school. Poverty is also linked to family violence and family breakdown (primarily as a result of associated stress) and this is one of the leading factors related to youth homelessness, which is also linked to academic risk (Sarantakos, 1993; Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998; Berk, 1995). While previously thought of as a “city” problem there is well documented evidence to suggest that numbers are spread evenly per capita between rural and city areas. It has been suggested that within a “rural school of 500 students, there is likely to be 50 – 70 who are potentially at risk and of those, 20 – 30 may be in serious trouble at home” (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998:98).

Culturally appropriate services are also hard to access in rural areas, although the study school does have an Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer (AIEO). Down (1999) cites Beazley (1984: 323) in stating “Aborigines are probably the most disadvantaged group in our community. Aborigines suffer disadvantage arising from cultural differences, history, living conditions and illness”. I have not sought permission to comment in detail on issues for Aboriginal students, therefore do not see it as culturally appropriate to do so (Fook, 1993:124).
According to Kemmis and Lynch (2001) there are many schools in Australia who are attempting to develop a community development model of education. This, they argue is the basis of providing socially just education by building on relationships that foster “self-expression, self-realisation and self-determination for each individual and for all” (p. 1). Kemmis and Lynch further argue that the full-service schools concept is a model that encompasses this ideology, with its aims of inclusivity, enabling and engagement. The development of this model does not need to be confined within the school campus, however, the school is seen as the central body for coordination and accessing of services. The students, families and the wider community are encouraged to access services and support which assist them in overcoming disadvantage. A major aim is to link with students who have dropped out from school in order to support them returning to school if that is their aim.

The Florida Department of Education (1992) defines a full-service school as one that “integrates educational, medical and / or social and human services that are beneficial to meeting the needs of children and youth and their families on school grounds or in locations that are easily accessible” (p.1). The services provided in any school community should reflect “the expressed needs of the citizens from each neighbourhood” (p.1) The vision puts forward the notion of a “seamless” institution providing educational, recreational and welfare services, thereby offering optimum accessibility19. It is my belief that the role of social work fits within this framework. From a social justice perspective, we are looking at issues of equity and access (AASW, 1994, Ife, 1997; Fook, 1995).

Kemmis and Lynch (2001) state that within a full service school there is recognition of “different kinds of experience, education and expertise”. They further argue that by different disciplines, for example, “teachers and social workers” working together, students, families and the community can receive services aimed at maximising their life chances.

19 Cohen (1995: 1) writes: “the vision of community sketched by dreamers of this movement extends beyond the schoolhouse or city hall. It is neighbour helping neighbour writ large. Teachers and social workers, Mayors and Principals, public agencies and private organisations, CEO’s and the folks who own the small stores. Day care providers and parents. Coaches and college students. Landlords and church deacons”.
This multi-disciplinary approach is achieved by recognition and fostering of “distinctive strengths and distinctive expertise of people from different professions and agencies”. The major limitation Kemmis and Lynch see to implementing such a program are based on the structural issues often associated with bureaucracies, such as tradition, socio-cultural factors and economic structures. These structures can often result in an unconscious sustaining of oppression and alienation, and thus social injustice, even when the aim is to improve such inequalities.

In Australia, I think that the concept of full service schools has been diverted somewhat by the Federal Government and the prime focus now appears to be indicative of mangerialism, rather than humanism (Ellison, 2000). Under the guise of assistance, the Government is in effect imposing requirements on students, in a manner that could be described as oppressive, and this is the antithesis of the ideals of the full-service schools concept.

2.8 School-based Social Work:

Picton and Keegel (1978:3) argue Social Workers have a variety of roles to play “within schools and between schools and families, and the wider community”. In line with this statement, Sturmfels (cited in Swain, 1995:124) states the role of school social work sits “where child, family and community meet”. Craft (1978; 1980) describes the role of school social work as:

- individual and family work;
- advocacy on behalf of students or groups;
- within schools, contribution to curriculum or policy development and organisational changes;

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20 In a recent media release (August 2000) Senator Ellison outlined the Government’s funding guidelines for full-service schools, which are all tied in with changes to the Youth Allowance. In part this reads: “In order to receive the new Youth Allowance from January 1999, eligible people under 18 years who have not completed Year 12 or equivalent will be required to be in full-time education or training unless they are specifically exempted from this requirement”. The Full Services Schools Programme will assist schools to develop innovative programmes and services that address the specific needs of young people returning to school following changes to the Youth Allowance”.

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• group work with students or parents, including skills training;
• consultation with teachers, administrators and welfare staff;
• developing support networks;
• staff in-service education;
• crisis response during school community disasters;
• community development work.

This description of social work within schools fit within recommendations made by the Australian Centre for Equity through Education (1996 and 1997) regarding the vision of Full Service Schools. Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1998:116) state “Schools must embrace a broad responsibility for the education and welfare of young people in the 21st century and become full-service schools. Student support and welfare have to become a secure part of the curriculum and schools must work closely with community agencies”.

Research has shown that the building and maintenance of these links between students, families and communities have resulted in the elimination of many barriers to educational success (Ferguson, 2000; Siegle Diagnostic Center, 1999; Markwood, 2000; Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998; Waterhouse and McGhee, 1998; Cohen, 1995).

The Department of Education, Western Australia (2001) suggests that the role of the School Social Worker is to “identify and address the social and emotional issues, which adversely affect student’s learning potential and social development”. Service provision by the School Social Worker is conducted on “three levels: individual; family; group and school level using a range of strategies which provide counselling, assessment, facilitating communication and problem solving”. This description neglects any mention of a community development focus, policy development, or an educative / consultative role for other staff.

Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1998) discuss the stance some Principals in Australian schools have taken, with their vision to provide a comprehensive pastoral care program and building links with community services. These Principals recognise that issues for many students are extremely complex and that provision of these services is essential. One Principal stated that if he had “three counsellors working full-time and a social worker, then we might be able to make some headway” (Robertson, 2000).
Schools as ideal sites for intervention have been named by many (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998; Kemmis and Lynch, 2001; Dryfoos, 1994; Wilcox, 2001; Florida Department of Education, 1992; Sanders et al, 2000; Department of Education, Western Australia, 2001). Ginsburg (1990) discusses the role of social work within schools as a “collaborative partnership with other school personnel”. These theorists maintain that a school-based social worker would assist in addressing many of the social and emotional issues faced by students. The inequity experienced by the lack of appropriate resources further disadvantages an already disadvantaged group, namely our youth, and a model designed collaboratively would create some equity. In planning for any such service it would be essential that the social worker collaborate with staff, students and families to further analyse their needs to enable the development of a local service model (Sjostedt, 2000).

Cohen (1995) suggests provision of school-based social work services can be problematic due to the difficulty of changing the ideology of such institutions, where often the service reflects the “operational desires and needs of the schools rather than the complex needs of families”. She further argues that without the appropriate support the services of professionals such as social workers can be “co-opted for any number of purposes, from policing attendance to resolving discipline matters”. It would be essential for any social worker, or other professional to maintain an awareness of these issues and to employ strategies aimed at maintaining the integrity of their profession.

2.9 Summary

This literature review highlighted issues such as social injustice and power inequities that still exist in schools today; the contested view of rurality; a snapshot of issues for rural youth; the context of full-service schools and the role of social work within rural schools.

Martinez-Brawley (1987:23) discusses the aspect that rural communities can enhance a person’s life and are “worth maintaining” whilst other aspects are “limiting to individuals and must be overcome”. She further discusses problems such as access, lack of public transport and the need to look at rural needs within a rural context (1987: 24).
These issues will be further developed in Chapter Four as a basis to support the argument that social work services would address these inequities. It will also be argued that policy makers need to look at alternative practices for welfare provision currently available within schools. Given that there has been significant increases in problematic areas such as drug and alcohol misuse and mental health issues, despite intervention being provided in these areas, one could argue more effective interventions, provided by relevant professionals needs to be considered.

It was evident whilst on placement at the study school, following the results of a staff survey that with some staff there was the notion that they can do it all, while the majority stated they do not have the required skills to address many social issues. (Robertson, 2000). The key to effective intervention may be in having the relevant professionals build relationships with students, families and the community, as suggested by Kemmis and Lynch (2001) and the Department of Education (2001). Where the discrepancy may lie, is who determines who the relevant professionals may be. The difficulties associated with providing school social work will also be addressed in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER THREE – THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE, METHODOLOGY and METHODS

"...discourse is the material practice that constitutes representation and description."


3.1 What Contributes to Effective Research?

Alston and Bowles (1998:6) have defined research as “the systematic observation and / or collection of information to find or impose a pattern, to make a decision, or to take some action”. Research is a purposeful practice with ethical and political implications and social work research has been described as applying social work values to social science research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Crotty, 1998; Alston and Bowles, 1998; Palmer, 2000). Research provides a mechanism for identifying themes from information or observations, and presenting this information in a meaningful fashion. In the social work field most research is undertaken in order to effect or contribute to change, or in order to make a decision (Alston and Bowles, 1998:5; Bessant et al, 1998). McDermott suggests that effective social work research is that which:

- arises from a particular theorisation of the acting subject within his / her social, political and economic context;
- privileges the research process as an intervention leading to the possibility of constructive change; and
- enables the participation of the researched – the vulnerable, the oppressed and those who interact with them.


These definitions sit within the aims and purpose of this research project and will remain a focus throughout the project and beyond. That said, there is recognition not all voices will be heard and given the current economic constraints of most governments in Australia in relation to education, I recognise change may not be effected. However, I feel that by making the document available to relevant bodies such as the Department of Education, and social work educators, awareness may be raised around these issues.
3.2 Contested Use of Descriptors in Research

The terms methods and methodology can be contested and are described in alternative means, according to the theorist. What one sees as a methodology can be described by another theorist as a method (Crotty, 1998, Sarantakos, 1993; Alston and Bowles, 1998). For the purpose of this research I will define my position in the following diagram. It is hoped this map will enable the reader to clearly identify how I view my position in the context of this research project.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 1: Description of Theoretical Position for Research

It is important to plan the research project, methodology and methods of analysis thoroughly and to ensure the methods chosen reflect the epistemology and theoretical stance of the researcher. At the same time, the emergent, messy and emotionally challenging nature of the inquiry process needs to be appreciated (Denzin, 1994; Marcus, 1994).
Methodology is a model, which includes the theoretical principles, guidelines and a framework for researching within the context of a particular paradigm, for example, from a critical constructionism perspective. It is argued by some that only quantitative methods can prove or disprove a proposition, while qualitative methods are less scientific, however the use of such methods are increasing amongst modern theorists (Crotty, 1998; Alston and Bowles, 1998; Epstein, 1988). This project is utilising a qualitative methodology.

Methods on the other hand are the tools utilised by the researcher to obtain the required data and the choice of methods is governed by the chosen methodology (Sarantakos, 1993; Crotty, 1998).

3.3 Epistemology

Epistemology is best described as the "theory of knowledge embedded in our theoretical position" (Crotty, 1998: 3), or more succinctly, our worldview. As shown in the map above, my worldview and how I make sense of it, is based on constructionism. Crotty (1998: 42) describes constructionism as the view that:

"all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context."

That is, meaning is constructed and it is the engagement of human beings in interpreting their world that constructs their meaning of the world. Without the ability to interpret the world, it has no meaning. Likewise, meaning is both subjective and objective and it is the bringing together of this subjectivity and objectivity that results in constructionism. (Crotty, 1998: 43 – 44; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Biever, et al, 1999; Gergen, 1985). To construct such meaning, one must recognise the lens on one's world view is coloured by significant symbols such as our culture, our gender, history and current socio-political factors. All contribute to how we interpret what is presented to us and this can also mean we may ignore some of that presented to us (Crotty, 1998:54).

Within social work research, the "social" in constructionism is about "the mode of meaning generation and not about the kind of object that has meaning" (Crotty, 1998: 55; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Biever, et al, 1999).
That is, the meaning is constructed as a result of our interaction with our social world and this affects the manner in which we present our research. Giddens (1972) suggests that the basis of social research is to embrace the views and language of participants in the research project and not to try to minimise those views or substitute the use of everyday language with scientific meta-language. He further differentiates between social research and scientific research by suggesting that social research is conducted from the inside, rather than the outside, as in scientific research (cited in Crotty, 1998: 56). Research from the inside refers to the researcher being required to "enter and grasp the frames of meaning" of the participants and then "reconstitute these meanings in technical concepts".

Within this project there is no attempt to separate myself from the object(s), namely myself as participant and researcher, other participants in the project, the agency and my construct of school social work. What is presented within the case study is very much my construction (Smith, 1987), firmly embedded in my lived experience and reflexivity of the experience and the construction of school social work. The research project also seeks to bridge the gap between subjectivity and objectivity, recognising there is a blurring between "consciousness and thing" and between "interpretation of the mind and objective facts" (Sadler, cited in Crotty, 1998: 151). There is a commitment to presenting data that demonstrates the union of this objectivity and subjectivity in the manner in which the data was collected and the results are presented. Freire (1972: 13) suggests that it is this unity that shapes our consciousness, as a result of this "dialectical relationship between human beings and their concrete historical and cultural reality".

3.4 **Theoretical Perspective**

My theoretical perspective consists of several theoretical influences; critical inquiry, symbolic interactionism, feminism and postmodernism. These perspectives shape my world view and thus, my personal practice model. They are also perspectives that sit within social constructionism, a framework that again shapes my world view and the epistemological underpinnings of this research project (Crotty, 1998; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).
3.4.1 Critical Inquiry

Ife (2000: 33) suggests critical theory is a paradigm aligned with the “valuing and legitimising of alternative voices and aspirations, while at the same time “acknowledging human suffering and oppression”. Critical inquiry is described as a theory that seeks to change a situation, rather than simply reflect the current situation (Crotty, 1998: 130; Thompson, 1995). As previously stated, critical inquiry is strongly influenced by the writings of Freire (1972) and Marxist analysis and as such draws on an historical as well as contemporary analysis, and it has been described as a form of praxis\(^2\) (Crotty, 1998; Alston and Bowles, 1998). Thompson (1995: 45) argues that critical theory is about more than Marxism, or psychoanalytical theory, however, and suggests it refers to a “range of theoretical analysis which seek to integrate phenomenological issues with wider social and political factors” which impact on people’s lives.

Sarantakos (1993: 58) argues that for critical researchers “reality is complex, diverse and multi-faceted” and that it reflects “real facts that are hidden behind appearances it contains personal perceptions that are expressions of consciousness, it is the result of historical processes and it reflects powerlessness of people in institutionally reinforced systems of power”. The role of the researcher is to utilise a methodology that is reflective of “interpersonal relationships, systems and situations that are unique to the researcher” (Sarantakos, 1993: 58).

Paulo Freire (1972) was another influential writer associated with critical inquiry. Freire (1972) suggested that “humans do not exist apart from their world, they experience a relationship with their world and are submerged in the ‘here and now’. Freire further suggests that in order to achieve movement it is essential to “emerge from that situation, reflect upon it and intervene in it” – this is the essence of critical inquiry and it forms the basis of praxis (Friere, 1972; Fook, 1993; Carter et al, 1995; Ife, 1997), which translates to “reflection and action” and this is a crucial aspect of my practice.

\(^{2}\) Praxis refers to the process of linking analysis and action (Fook, 1993:15)
Critical inquiry is less about interpretation as an end in itself and more about why a particular issue is interpreted or experienced in such a way. For instance, in the context of this study, how is social justice constructed in a certain manner, what influences this construction, and why is this so? Fook (1993: 29) argues that critical theory is necessary in practice. Further, she suggests that one must also be aware of the “limitations of social work power within present institutional systems”. This has been an issue of consideration throughout this research project given that social work has not had a strong presence in the education system and to some degree has been disempowered within that system (Kemmis and Lynch, 2001; Sturmfels, 1997). Yet, as argued by Mayo (1998: 171) it is crucial we as social workers come together with our communities to assess any perceived need and to take action to assist in meeting those needs, and in order to achieve this, practice must be “informed by critical theory”. This project is seen in this light, by working with the stakeholders in a manner which it is hoped assists in empowering both teachers and students to identify needs and suggest strategies. The limitations and complexity of such an aim, as referred to by Fook, are reflected by Mayo (1998: 171) who suggests that in the contemporary context this is “more problematic than ever, with risk of further fragmentation and conflict”. There is recognition by all involved in this project that funding for a position such as a school-based social worker may not be available, and that schools more commonly will continue to seek funding for curriculum based activities. However, it is still felt there is importance in identifying and challenging issues which are seen to contribute to exclusion, discrimination and inequity.

3.4.2 Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism has three basic assumptions:

- that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning these things have for them;
- that the meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows; and
- that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things they encounter.

(Blume, 1969, cited in Crotty, 1998: 72)
Crotty (1998) suggests that symbolic interactionism is influenced by pragmatist philosophy. By this he means that the world according to pragmatists is to be explored uncritically, and that we make the most of the world we have as we experience it. While this may seem at odds with adopting a critical approach throughout this project, it can be argued that symbolic interactionism is how many view their world. Unquestioning and accepting of what is, rather than what could be. It is focused on communication, language, inter-relationships and community and the overriding concept is that we embrace the notion of placing ourselves in another’s place (Crotty, 1998; Alston and Bowles, 1998). From the standpoint of this research this equates with me seeking to understand how the staff (myself included) and students experience life in a rural school and my seeking to understand their perspectives (Alston and Bowles, 1998). Combining this perspective with a critical analysis may mean a critique of power differences or in the case of this research to bring the focus back to the structural analysis related to access and equity.

Alston and Bowles (1998) suggest a person utilising a symbolic interaction approach in the context of this project would be interested in understanding how the staff and students experience the education system and how they perceive the role of a school social worker. These views are crucial to the project. Without a sound appreciation of how participants construct the meaning in their world and what the education system, for example means to them, I believe I do not have a sound basis for applying critical inquiry to these concepts. It is also important that I provide a basis for participants to demonstrate their meaning of their world, rather than myself attributing meaning on their behalf (Crotty, 1998).

This process is achieved through interaction or dialogue\footnote{Dialogue refers to the process of action and reflection between human beings to bring meaning to their world. All meaning exists contextually and how our reality is constructed depends on creative transactions with others (Ife, 1997; Crotty, 1998). Freire (1972: 75) argues that without dialogue there can be no conscientisation and without conscientisation there can be no change.}, which is more than conversation (Crotty, 1998). The importance of dialogue is evident throughout all helping and social work fields and whilst engaged in research the importance of building a dialogical relationship with one’s subject is paramount. A sound attempt has been made to establish and work with this process throughout this research project.
Without these transactions or dialogue, we cannot discover or challenge our knowledge (Turner, 1996; lfc, 1997). That is, we must have an awareness of participants meaning of their world in order to be able to interpret and critique these existing worldviews. Levi-Strauss describes the process as “turning back to already existent materials, reconsidering them, and engaging in a sort of dialogue with them, before choosing possible answers” (cited in Crotty, 1998:50).

Symbolic interactionism has long been associated with ethnography as it provides a means of the researcher to “take the place of the other” (Crotty, 1998: 77). It is further argued that this theoretical perspective is useful as a tool to assist in identifying one’s research question and enabling the constructing and subsequent deconstructing of particular concepts and their meanings (Crotty, 1998; Olesen, 2000). I am also very much aware that it is the meaning I have given to the education system and the role of school social work that has framed my thinking and the subsequent action I am taking in researching this topic further.

3.4.3 Feminist Theory

I believe my “feminist consciousness” (Stanley and Wise, 1983: 18) has shaped my values and direction in practice and the stance I take as a feminist researcher. I sit within this perspective, and recognise that my lived experience as a woman, in a dominant male society has contributed to my world view.

From a broader feminist perspective, among others, there is my commitment to explicitly stating my interests, my gender and my background; explicitly acknowledging my position as researcher and my relationship with other parties involved in this research project; and acknowledging the political role of the researcher and researched. I am firmly embedded within this research and acknowledge fully the influence of my lived experience and my values, which have contributed, to my thinking. There is also a strong commitment to contribute to social change.
Stanley and Wise (1990:38) argue the four basic assumptions of feminist research are:

- all knowledge is socially constructed;
- the dominant ideology is that of the ruling group;
- there is no such thing as value-free science and so far the social sciences have served and reflected men’s interests;
- the perspectives of men and women differ because people’s perspectives vary systematically with their position in society.

While these assumptions are broad and do not seek to categorise or label a particular typology of feminism, I recognise there are certain values, concepts and theories that shape how I make sense of the world. Tong (1995: 8) argues that within feminist research to place a label on oneself as a particular genre of feminist is limiting and that many of us find our own understanding of where we sit within feminism and our understanding of the world. Along with Sarantakos (1993), Tong further argues that many researchers “overlap” in typologies of feminist research and I find myself very much within this genre. While my overriding emphasis throughout this research project sits within a Marxist or structural framework, I acknowledge I am also strongly influenced by postmodern and egalitarian feminism.

The methodology employed in this project is indicative of feminist research as it seeks to bring about structural change and empowerment, however, I do not define it as a feminist methodology as such. Rather I see that feminist theory has influenced my choice of methodology (Reinharz, 1992; Alston and Bowles, 1998). Reinharz (1992) supports this stance in suggesting that feminist research is that which is conducted by researchers who claim a feminist perspective.

From a Marxist perspective, which is perhaps the most influential on my everyday practice, there is a strong commitment to understanding structural issues and the role our history, socio-economic, political and cultural issues (indicative of a patriarchal structure) impact on current practices and ideology, in order to work toward addressing perceived inequities (Tong, 1995; Crotty, 1998).
Postmodern feminism has provided a lens for viewing my world in which I feel comfortable. It provides a mechanism for deconstructing "traditional antinomies" or contradictions between principles such as self/other, where female is seen as the "Other" in a male dominated world (Crotty, 1998: 167). More than that, however, the major influence associated with postmodernism is that it provides a means of intellectual framing in order to assist in the process of transforming society (p. 167).

It is this stance which I feel sits well within a social work framing of society and the issues that impact on it, in order to work toward affecting change. McLlaly (1993; 1997) suggests that working toward structural change in society is the basis of social work and this position sits well within my framing of social work. That is not to say working toward structural change is not problematic, however, I feel even small changes or consciousness raising can be achieved in everyday practice. As suggested by Fook (1993: 7) it is essential to make links between personal issues and broader socio-economic structures in any analysis of a client’s situation and in the context of research, this is moved to a broader political level on a collective basis. This stance is reflected by Alston and Bowles, (1998: 12) who describe feminist research as that which is an "influential form of emancipatory research". Again, in emancipatory research we see the influence of Marxism, Freire (1970) and critical theory (Alston and Bowles, 1998; Crotty, 1998; Leonard, 1997).

The influence of egalitarian feminism is evident in my thinking as I firmly believe the state should intervene in providing a socially just, equitable society (Crotty, 1998). It has long been argued that services in rural areas are inequitable (Cheers, 1992; Alston, 2000) and this research project aims to politicise some of these issues.

Sarantakos (1993:64) argues that within feminist research what matters "is not the method but the way and the context in which the results of the research are used to answer substantive questions about the nature of oppressive social structures". How and why this research is being conducted will remain a paramount issue throughout this research.

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23 Also referred to as welfare feminism (Crotty, 1998)
3.4.4 Postmodernism

Parton and Marshall (1998: 241) suggest that a postmodern lens “draws attention to a number of areas of social transformation in terms of: the pace of change; the emergence of new complexities and forms of fragmentation; the growing significance of difference, plurality and the various political movements and strategies, and the pervasive awareness of relativities; the opening up of individual ‘choice’ and freedom”; and the awareness of the socially constructed nature of existence”. They further suggest that debates about particular issues assist in developing awareness and “creative ways of thinking and acting”. There is growing recognition that truth is constructed according to the “context and culture of specific groups and no group has a monopoly on what constitutes truth”. Thus truth is relative, uncertain and contingent (Parton and Marshall, 1998: 243).

Leonard (1997:90) argues that a postmodern critique of bureaucracy “focuses primarily upon the microprocesses of knowledge, power and resistance”. In the context of a school setting students are those upon whom oppressive forces are primarily imposed. Leonard (1997) argues students must become de-personalised to the point of relative passivity whereupon, they are “acted upon in their own interests” by teachers and administrators. Further that the requirements of a managerialist focus are the means of control. That is, it is the impact of the context that results in certain behaviours being subscribed to or demanded within the social reality of a school environment (Biever, et al, 1999). This concept itself is problematic in that again, this “truth” is the construct of the theorists, and it is possible it is not seen this way by some. However, it does give a lens to understanding how one might begin to understand how and why certain practices occur in school settings; who has the knowledge and how is it imparted; where the power lies and how is it enacted; and what are the forms of resistance in such an agency?

It is argued postmodernism is an intellectual movement that goes “hand in glove” with social constructionism (Biever et al, 1999; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Smith (1989) described postmodernism as “a linguistic theory that proposes that the social world cannot be treated as an objective system” (cited in Biever, et al, 1999: 143).
The postmodern view of the world explores the way in which our history, language, power and social world influence the way in which we interpret truth, knowledge and reality (Biever, et al. 1999; Crotty, 1998; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Pease and Fook, 1999; lfe, 2000). Contested views suggest postmodernism avoids stating a reality, and that it seeks to reject notions or theories of "science, progress, Marxism, humanism" (Crotty, 1998: 212) that help to explain our world, while at the same time claiming its status as a legitimate theory (lfe, 1997; Crotty, 1998; Parton and Marshall, 1998). However, I believe this stance sits well within a Marxist framework, which also seeks to understand structural inequalities in order to work toward addressing them (Tong, 1995; Crotty, 1998). Postmodern theory has also been labeled elitist and intellectual, although Ife, (2000: 106) argues "social work is beginning to come to terms" with this theory.

Biever et al (1999:145) suggest postmodern thinkers are more concerned with the "why" of a situation rather than the "what" and this has always been a crucial aspect of my personal practice model. It is essential the contextual reasons for certain behaviours are understood and also that the constructed meanings are taken in context. For example, how does the education system conceptualise social justice and why is it constructed in this way? As suggested by Parton and Marshall (1998), this conceptualisation may differ to that of social work due to the informing theories and practices of each profession and the influence of the historical and cultural context of both professions and their role in society. This is not to say one view is superior to another, but to acknowledge the pluralism that exists in society, and between different disciplines. This pluralism can also exist within disciplines, according to the epistemological perspective or world view of particular people.

3.5 Methodology

3.5.1 Critical Ethnography

Critical ethnography is a methodology that has developed from critical inquiry theory. The critical inquiry influence is evident in that critical ethnography seeks to challenge rather than simply understand a situation (Crotty, 1998: 113).
This stance is very much linked to understanding the issues for youth in rural areas, in particular in relation to access and equity, and the role the education system plays in oppression of students, and seeking to bring about change.

Critical ethnography provides a vehicle to seek such change with the focus on challenging “current ideologies and seeking to initiate action, in the cause of social justice” (Crotty, 1998: 157). Questions such as why are there no rural school-based social workers, despite recognition that issues for rural youth are increasing; why is the relationship between the education and social work profession seen to be problematic; who has the power within schools and why; and, who would be challenged and who would benefit by the inclusion of social workers in schools? This project seeks to question these issues and to challenge conventional practices in the area of welfare provision in schools, in a manner inclusive of the views of other stakeholders.

By taking a critical ethnographical position, I must retain an awareness of my role at all times, in order to seek to avoid a reproduction of oppression as a result of my privilege and potential power as researcher. Thus, the attempt to be inclusive. This was an important consideration of my research within this setting. While I am familiar with school-based social work, and living and working in rural areas, I did not wish to present an autoethnographic perspective (Ellis and Bochner, 2000), rather it was my intent to present the views of the people from their perspective, whilst still placing myself as a member of the group.

Dominelli (1993:24) defines anti-oppressive practice as:

“a form of social work practice which addresses social divisions and structural inequalities in the work that is done with ‘client’ or workers. Anti-oppressive practice aims to provide more appropriate and sensitive services by responding to people’s needs regardless of social status. Anti-oppressive practice embodies a person-centred philosophy, an egalitarian value system, concerned with reducing the deleterious effects of structural inequalities upon people’s lives; a methodology focussing on process and outcome; a way of structuring relationships between individuals that aims to empower users by reducing the negative effects of hierarchy in their immediate interaction and the work they do together”
The methods chosen were designed to work with the complexity around building relationships, to work with and value different ideologies and value systems and to assist in the empowering of participants to be involved in both the research process.

The aim of engaging in reflexivity of my practice was to provide more than an insight into the lives of the study group, myself included, the aim is to bring about change, for example, by political lobbying for services (Lareau and Schulz, 1996; Crotty, 1998). Clifford and Marcus (1986) reflect this stance in suggesting that ethnography is no longer seen as an anthropological study of a certain culture in an objective manner. They suggest ethnography is a model that embraces the interaction between researcher and the participants in the study and the reader of the results of the research.

Critical ethnography is also a contested theory in that seeking to "unmask hegemony and address oppressive forces" (Crotty, 1998: 12) it is value-laden, contextual and can challenge the status quo. Who decides what constitutes an oppressive force? From a feminist perspective I am mindful that it is my value base that has shaped my construction of these issues and that I am aware of the complexity of attempting representiveness (Sarantakos, 1993) when presenting the views of others (Olesen, cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Another critique aligned with critical ethnography is that it is deemed to be an "emerging methodology" (Sarantakos, 1993: 58) and it is argued it has yet to establish its position in the research field.

3.6 Methods

The methods chosen should reflect the theoretical position of the researcher, in line with the chosen methodology. It is the methodology, which determines the methods and it stands to reason they should be congruent (Crotty, 1998; Alston and Bowles, 1998).

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24 Ethnographic research can also be conducted without the researcher being a member of the community being studied. Many studies are conducted by researchers from the perimeter and the most important aspect is to conduct the research with the full participation and awareness of your study group (Palmer, 2000).
Prior to commencing formal research and conducting interviews the study school was sent a covering letter outlining the project\textsuperscript{25} and in addition, presented with the research proposal in order to be fully informed in relation to the what, why, and how of the project.

The methods employed in this project were; a survey, utilising open-ended questionnaires and a focus group, a case study based on reflexivity of practice and conversations with a current and a former school social worker. How each of these methods was utilised is described below.

3.6.1 Survey

The questions in the survey were asked with a specific purpose, that is to determine the views of participants, and to provide a validity check, in relation to my hypotheses that school-based social workers have a role to play in rural areas. The aim of utilising open-ended questionnaires as a research instrument (Alston and Bowles, 1998) is to present informed dialogue, representative of the views of staff, students and parents in regard to:

- how participants conceptualise social work(ers);
- whether participants see any benefit in having social workers within rural schools;
- how the role of social work can look within schools;
- whether social work or related services were accessible in local areas; and
- whether school-based social workers should have an education background.

Open-ended questions were utilised in order to provide an instrument for participants to state their views openly and without any pretext of anticipated results on my part. The questions were designed as prompts, albeit in a semi-structured fashion\textsuperscript{26} (Alston and Bowles, 1998; de Vaus, 1995). Another strategy utilised to assist with overcoming any perceived bias or pre-selecting of participants on behalf of myself, was that I abstained from the selection process for participants, the questionnaire was anonymous and a self-addressed, stamped envelope was attached for responses. The only request to the school was that both students and staff were included. Twenty surveys were provided to the school, and of these the placement supervisor distributed eighteen.

\textsuperscript{25} See Appendix 3
\textsuperscript{26} See Appendix 4
While the twenty surveys only represents approximately 1.4% of the school population, it was considered to be sufficient, primarily as the data was being utilised as supporting material to the case study and a focus group was also to be conducted.

Had the research project, conducted as part of the requirement for my Honours degree (and therefore extremely time limited), been of a longer duration, I would have preferred to have a much larger number of questionnaires, and do see this as somewhat of a limitation. Another consideration, given a longer time frame, would have been to have piloted the questionnaire, and allowed more time for revising and refining the questions (Alston and Bowles, 1998).

3.6.2 Focus Group

The purpose of the focus group, which was scheduled to be conducted following initial data analysis arising from the questionnaires, was to further develop or explore some of the concepts raised in responses to the questions asked within the questionnaires (Alston and Bowles, 1998). There was a process of deconstructing the responses from the surveys and reconstructing in a dialogical process in order to attempt to establish meaning and contested points of view. To grapple with the language of the competing, yet complimentary ideologies of education and social work was seen as essential. In order to come to an agreement on the meaning of the data presented, a common discourse was required, one which validated the voice of the teaching profession and that of the social work profession (Parton and Marshall, 1998: 244). It was a system of reaching a consensus around the meaning of responses, the language and what should and should not be included in the thesis. For example, what does social work mean to the teaching profession, is it seen as a function carried out by many, or as a role?

The data collected was taped, with the full permission of the participants, who had signed consent forms prior to the interviews, and had been fully informed of the purpose of the research. All members were also informed the written transcripts of the interviews would be presented and that they could withdraw or alter their comments prior to inclusion in the thesis. The transcripts were duly provided to participants, as part of the commitment to working within a dialogical relationship, and some clarification of comments was made.
None of the participants chose to withdraw from the project. This step was also seen as ethical and as a means of empowerment and providing protection to participants, indicative of a feminist research methodology (Fook, 1993; Alston and Bowles, 1998).

Again, throughout the selection process for the focus group members, I abstained. The Deputy Principal responsible for overseeing the Pastoral Care team at the study school chose the members. All members of the focus group were teaching staff who also had a designated pastoral care role within the school. The group included the Deputy Principal, Pastoral Care Coordinator, Year Advisers, and myself, all of who have had an active role in the provision of support services to students. Where this process was flawed was that there were no students involved in the focus group. Therefore, constructed meanings are not indicative of their voice and this is seen as a loss to the process.

3.6.3 Case Study

Alston and Bowles (1998: 185) describe a case study as a method of research that is focussed on a “single case, issue, group, organisation or event”. The aim is not to seek comparisons with a similar phenomena, rather it is to “investigate and thoroughly analyse” the events in a particular case. The importance of utilising one case is to provide a means of revealing data that may assist in further analysis of a wider group and therefore, assist in the development of relevant policy, aimed at change. Babbie (1986) describes the role of a case study as an activity utilised to collect data in order to generate a theory.

Feminist researchers often use case studies and this method is viewed as relevant and valuable material. A case study also compliments with my theoretical perspectives, (in particular the influence of feminist theory), and methodology (Alston and Bowles, 1998; Sarantakos, 1993; Crotty, 1998; Babbie, 1986). The focus of my critical inquiry, within the case study centred on grappling with my construction around concepts of social justice in education and in rural areas in general, the issues for rural youth, and the role of social work in rural schools. This process was enabled by the availability of the research data, and my emphasis on reflexive practice. This process and the recording of my observations were deemed to be ethical practice, as it was conducted with the full knowledge and approval of my placement supervisor.
The aim of utilising one school as a case study was not to seek a generalisation, although this was questioned by a member of the focus group.

Some comparison will be made in the supporting literature, however, the aim was to raise questions or identify themes, which would assist in the development of theory and this is indicative of critical inquiry (Crotty, 1998).

3.6.3 Conversations

In order to provide a voice from key stakeholders in the provision of school social work, a conversation was held with a social worker from the Department of Education in the metropolitan area in October, 2001 and a former school social worker in July, 2001.

These conversations were seen as essential, again to build on the process of constructing what the role did, could, and does look like from other members of the social work profession, in order to deepen the critical inquiry process. Also, to access a person who works with a current prescribed model of practice and with the complexities was considered to be of immense value to the research. Speaking to a former worker allowed an historical picture to emerge, which assisted in building the analysis.

The process with the current worker consisted of looking at the current role description and how that is enacted, and exploring possibilities for such a role. This conversation took place following the initial analysis of the results from the questionnaires. By working with a practitioner, who is working at a grass roots level and is therefore well placed to assist with explaining the constraints and complexities of such a role and with the development of a theoretical base I believe provided a grounding for the research. While the reflexivity on my part was seen to be of benefit, it was only one facet of the research and the voices of those who may be working toward the co-construction of a possible role for a school-based social worker in rural areas.
The aim was to co-construct with other stakeholders, what (if any) value social work has in a rural school, in order to work toward addressing any perceived inequities for a marginalised and excluded group in society.

Both participants were granted anonymity.

3.7 Data Analysis

The data from the surveys has been analysed in accordance with a qualitative research methodology and like many in the qualitative field, I approached this step with some trepidation, given there are no “set in concrete” rules for data analysis in qualitative research (Alston and Bowles, 1998; Tutty, et al, 1996). I was also conscious of the fact I was analysing the data throughout the collection phase, constantly identifying variables or themes that were recurring and noting any similarities or dissimilarities and attempting to identify a common language (Babbie, 1986; Parton and Marshall, 1998).

While the primary hypothesis that there is a place for social work in rural schools, and that this would assist in addressing some of the inequities experienced by rural youth arose from a process of reflexivity or induction (Strauss, 1990, cited in Alston and Bowles, 1998), the primary method of analysis was in line with the principles of the grounded theory approach. From this process core categories were organised and interpreted (Crotty, 1998; Alston and Bowles, 1998). The process necessitated deconstructing and reconstructing key concepts constantly and with much rigor. This analysis was designed to identify common and divergent themes related to the aims of the project, which was to identify whether there is a role for school-based social workers in rural areas. The responses to the questionnaires and the results of the focus group discussion were coded as to the common themes that emerged: a) understanding of the role of social work; b) relevance of social work in rural schools; c) access to services, and d) whether an education background is necessary for school-based social workers.

27 Grounded theory is described as a “form of ethnographic inquiry”, which through the steps in the analysis process allows the development of theory, arising from the data collected (Crotty, 1998: 78)
The grounded theory process, while lengthy, was chosen as I believed it provided structure and a means of theoretical analysis and rigor to the process.

The complexities of interpretation and representation were again an issue for consideration (Sarantakos, 1993) and care was taken to represent views and common themes as honestly and accurately as possible. Thus, the source of the data will be identified throughout the discussion. That is, whether the results presented arose from my observations whilst on placement, the questionnaires or the focus group. Of the eighteen questionnaires disseminated by the school, fourteen were returned, this equates to almost a 78% return rate. There were many common themes that emerged from the questionnaires, in the preliminary analysis. For example, lack of understanding of the role of social work, that access to services was an issue or the availability of social work or welfare services was not known and that social workers have a role to play in schools.

I also wish to acknowledge that the time limit afforded this research project resulted in the questionnaires, and therefore the available data being somewhat targeted. Perhaps a more comprehensive questionnaire or including a form of storying in the presentation of the data would have produced a more extensive argument, although I am satisfied that the information presented not only supported the hypothesis, it also raised some questions for further exploration. Again, this is indicative of the grounded theory approach (Alston and Bowles, 1998).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

As a social work researcher, it was imperative I maintained an awareness of the values and ethics of research and the impact that my actions could potentially have on others (Alston and Bowles, 1998; Crotty, 1998). I saw it as essential to have a commitment to engaging in a dialogical relationship with the other stakeholders in this research project, namely the staff and students of the study school and the school-based social worker, and to maintaining an awareness of my use of power with those less powerful (Mullaly, 1997).

See Footnote Page 41
In addition, I feel I have maintained an awareness of non-maleficence\(^{29}\), of beneficence\(^{30}\) and of justice\(^{31}\) throughout this project and see this awareness as essential in working with any clients or group members (Alston and Bowles, 1998).

While consent was sought and given I was also aware of issues associated with consent and what constitutes a participant's rights in relation to consent and the right to withdraw. In line with critical and feminist theories, we need to think about the personal and structural issues, which may be impacting on participants' lives, and to ask ourselves if the consent to participate is being given freely and if participants are fully aware of their right to anonymity and to withdraw from the project at any stage of that project (Alston and Bowles, 1998). There was some complexity for me around this issue. While I chose to abstain from the selection process for ethical reasons, I also realise that by doing so, I was abstaining somewhat from fully explaining participants' rights. Also, to establish whether those chosen to participate did so out of a genuine wish to be involved, or whether there was some sense of obligation, due to the position of the placement supervisor.

Singleton et al (1988) discuss the difficulty in predicting the extent to which (or if) one's research processes can be harmful to research participants. My knowledge that the results of any research may potentially have political ramifications for participants was maintained at all times, hence the discussion around this issue and the invitation to withdraw at any time, as well as granting anonymity to the school-based social worker. To address this issue to the best of my ability, the political implications were discussed with school staff and they were given the opportunity to withdraw from the project or to remain anonymous, as far as was humanly possible (AASW, 1994; Alston and Bowles, 1998; Singleton et al, 1988).

Throughout this research process, I feel I have been ethical in stating my position and interest in the role of social work within schools. I have demonstrated this research is not value-free, yet I have allowed the space for alternative voices (Singleton et al, 1988).

\(^{29}\) Non-maleficence refers to the commitment to do no harm to participants.  
\(^{30}\) Beneficence refers to a consciousness around the care and wellbeing of research participants. 
\(^{31}\) Justice refers to a commitment to a sharing of power with research participants.
I also acknowledge that reflexive practice is subjective and that there may be differences in the perception I have of a particular event or phenomena, and for that reason, I have been very clear about naming whether the data presented has resulted from my case study, and therefore reflexivity, or if the views are those stated by other participants throughout the project.

While limited discussion of current pastoral care roles is necessary, this thesis is not intended as a tool to question these positions within traditional school settings. The intent is to discuss a role, which it is argued, would add a valuable dimension to complement existing roles. While current staff play a valuable role, it is argued the added dimension of social work theory and practice can enhance the provision of effective pastoral care within a multi-disciplinary focus.

3.9 Limitations

As a feminist writer I am very aware that the literature presented in relation to problems for youth, or what is the best intervention, is based very much on what the authors of each article purport to be issues for youth and strategies to address those issues. That is not to say the views are not valid, my own understanding of the issues presented places them very much in the problematic arena. The point I am making is the constructs of problematic issues have not been raised by the youth themselves and I view this issue as one of the limitations of presenting such research.

Blitzer (1991:12) writes “Children have traditionally been the objects rather than subjects of study”. She further states that the “prevailing tendency in social sciences is to look at children ‘from the outside’ making them objects of the study while failing to incorporate into theory children’s own views of society”. Gramsci (1971) discusses the importance of inclusion and puts forward the notion of the dominant fundamental group imposing the social direction on social life. I carry this awareness with me throughout this project.

The time frame for this project has always been considered a structural inadequacy of undertaking a research within the strictly limited time frame for an Honours project.
However, it is felt my prior knowledge and contact with my study group, and my prior practice experience forming part of the case study will overcome some of the issues associated with the time frame allocated to this project. That this prior contact can also be problematic itself is also acknowledged and care will be taken to be mindful of issues that may arise, for example, reporter bias. A strategy to address this issue was the use of an anonymous questionnaire to participants, with a stamped envelope attached for responses.

As the case study could be construed as representative only of a small sample, argument will be supported with theoretical analysis of some aspects of this research, particularly in relation to issues around rurality, social justice and power within schools (Epstein, 1988; Babbie, 1986). That generalisability cannot be claimed, by utilising only one school in the case study is not seen as a deficit of this research and this view is most indicative of the influence of post-modernism on my world view. What I aim to present is not an objective truth. What is being offered will be subject to one’s own interpretation and whether it has relativity to the reader will be determined by that reader (Crotty, 1998).
CHAPTER FOUR – RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

"There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus to speak a true word is to transform the world."

(Paulo Freire, 1972: 60)

4.1 Introduction:

The findings of this research have resulted from a variety of sources, which included a survey to staff and students of the study school, a focus group with pastoral care staff, conversations with a current and a former school social worker, reflexivity of practice and my lived experience,*32* as well as secondary data included in the literature review. Reamer (cited in Adams et al, 1998: 270) suggests “that social workers need to draw systematically on various research perspectives and techniques in order to produce the most lucid, illuminating and compelling body of information required by various practice circumstances”. This suggestion sounds somewhat elitist and unattainable, given that any results that are presented are subject to the author and readers’ interpretations. However, to draw on multiple methods was seen as a means of providing a more egalitarian perspective, rather than presenting only my own interpretation. I also wish to acknowledge that while this ideal has been attempted throughout this project, I am aware of the restrictions and complexity of achieving such an outcome. Issues such as time constraints, work loads of participants, the auspice of the research project,*33* and thus the limited scope of the questionnaires have all limited the outcome of this project. However, it is hoped the process undertaken has provided a beginning point for further exploration and partnerships with stakeholders.

The surveys, focus group, and conversations with the social workers while designed to primarily be inclusive, were also seen as a means to provide triangulation*34* (Alston and Bowles, 1998). Triangulation was seen as appropriate as it provided the means for alternate voices and for the inclusion of secondary data not available as a result of utilising reflexive practice as the only means of data collection and analysis.

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*32 See Appendix 1
*33 The study school had recently been subject to media attention, thus some issues were felt too politically fraught (by me and other stakeholders) to address.
*34 Triangulation refers to a combination of methods designed to obtain a wide range of views or information (Alton & Bowles, 1998: 65)
The importance of providing a means for the voice to others to be heard was of paramount importance to me as researcher, and participant. I also acknowledge the voice of the students was limited. Freire (1972:61) argues to have a voice around issues is a fundamental right of every human being and that no person can accurately reflect the views of another. He further argues this process is achieved through the conscious use of dialogue, describing dialogue as an “existential necessity” (p. 61). Dialogue is more than conversation, it is about providing an opportunity for multiple voices and contested positions to be involved in the “reflection and action” process in order to come to a united position to address the issue that is to be transformed. To truly engage in a dialogical process requires one to enter into a horizontal relationship with fellow participants (thus avoiding oppressive practice) and to have faith and trust that change can occur (Freire, 1972: 63 - 64). Such a process was sought through strategies such as building a dialogical relationship within the focus group and with the school social worker. Meanings from responses and the focus group transcripts were deconstructed, challenged, then re-explored and clarified. To have presented this research according to my own construct exclusively, and with solely a social work lens, would have denied the perspectives of other stakeholders (Lishman, 1998; Parton and Marshall, 1998).

4.2 Results and Discussion

The following discussion aims to present the results and analysis in manner designed to be inclusive of all voices. However, my critique of how social justice and power is enacted within the education system would seem to contra-indicate this aim, given that the analysis projects singular authority (Scheurich, 1997), that is, it is subjective and value-laden. I wish to identify that these issues were not included in the surveys or focus group discussion, however, sources drawn upon have been inclusive of educational theorists. The intent is not to give prominence to my voice; rather presenting my analysis of these concepts allows the reader to identify how I come to understand these concepts and what has contributed to my analysis of responses. I also acknowledge these views may be both contested and critiqued.
From a post-modern perspective, understanding the historical sites of power within a school setting, how this power is enacted and for whose benefit was seen as essential. As was recognising the difference in discourse between the professions of social work and teaching (Parton and Marshall, 1998). How does each profession understand and explain a situation or phenomena? What is the truth of a situation and who determines that truth?

While a concerted effort was made to be inclusive and to establish dialogue and to some degree, this was achieved, I acknowledge the interpretation of these results is largely my own, and is therefore coloured by my positioning as a social worker. There has also been a concerted effort on my part to approach this research from a position of uncertainty or ambiguity. That is, with respect for the differences in positionings, lived experiences, gender and for the complexity in each situation. There was also an awareness of self as social worker, conducting research in a domain traditionally dominated by teachers, and in this context I was aware I was in a less powerful position, not due to individual participants, but to the constraints of the system and historical factors.

4.2.1 Critique of Social Justice and Power within the Education System

Young (1990: 9) argues that “when people say a rule or practice or cultural meaning is wrong and should be changed they are usually making a claim about social justice”. While an objective of this research has been to politicise issues around social justice in education, it is not about calling to question the actions of individual teachers, it is aligned with a critical questioning35 of the authoritarian nature of education. This analysis has linked the historical and social context of the education system and has sought to understand why decisions or practices are framed in a particular way. It is my belief that like many bureaucratic institutions, the practices within a school setting are based on patriarchal ideology, and it is this very structure which serves to oppress, creating an environment of “political and social inequality” (Jones and May, 1997: 65).

35 In saying this, I am also aware that critical questioning is aligned with dialogue (Freire, 1972) and yet I have not engaged in such a process within this analysis. However, perhaps these initial results can generate a dialogical relationship between stakeholders to further explore these concepts.
Leonard (1997: 91) suggests that such organisations seek to "separate order from disorder, predictability from unpredictability, and organisation from disorganisation". This need to achieve such functioning can result in those less powerful, those who are marginalised or those that challenge the status quo, being oppressed. Leonard (1997: 91) discusses the need those with the expertise (and therefore the power) have to "fit the user into the preferred structures of the expert". This need to hold onto the power bases is further explored by Fox (1994, cited in Leonard, 1997: 91) who suggests that bureaucracies are "constituted discursively to serve particular interests of power, and to be contested by other interests of power".

Leonard further explores the notion of conceptualising bureaucracies as "processes rather structures" and in this context, a bureaucracy is seen as reacting or attempting to resolve perceived disorganisation (1997: 92). This is how I analyse the school as a system. There appears to be an overwhelming need for conformity, to acknowledge and award those who achieve highly, and thus meet the objectives of the organisation, and to marginalise those who differ. To challenge the system or to attempt to effect change often meets with resistance and where change is invited it is often resisted by "re-interpretation of new ideas in accord with their own norms" (Mullender and Perrott, 1998: 76).

Jones and May (1997) argue that most bureaucracies are resistant to change and I believe this to be the case within the school setting, where the balance of power favours the teaching and administrative staff. Power is also exercised overtly with most rooms within the study school indicative of traditional teaching methods, where the teacher, who has the "expert" knowledge sits at the front of the class with the desk dividing teacher and students. The tendency to embrace the banking notion (Freire, 1972) of imparting knowledge, with the teacher seen as having the expert position and students seen as empty receptacles to be "filled with knowledge" is still evident, and there appears to be reluctance to acknowledge that teaching and learning is a reciprocal process. This in itself is a means of controlling power by the dominant hierarchy, and thus a means of maintaining the "social and intellectual elitism" which pervades many schools (Lawton, 1977: 5).

Oppression refers to the concept of domination of those less powerful by those who are part of the dominant hierarchy and within the education system, it is often the students who are oppressed, along with other professionals who may question pedagogical practices (Leonard, 1997; Freire, 1972).
Analysis of the social justice policy\(^{37}\) of the (then) Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA, 1994) indicates a commitment to justice around issues such as Aboriginal education, academic extension, disability, gender, geographic location, non-English speaking background, socio-economic factors and language usage. All these sections of the policy are comprehensive, but most disturbingly I did not experience a sound understanding of these policies by staff and in fact I first accessed them at home via the Internet, having been told there were policies, but “we’re not sure where they are”. As with most policy, it is much harder to change a mindset and words alone will not achieve this change.

Not having policies readily available does not help either. Some staff may not even be aware they exist, or if they do, are not aware of the content of such policies (Robertson, 2000). One teacher surveyed also related their experience in attempting to access the social justice policy within the school, and not being able to do so had to request to have the policy sent to them. It could also be argued that the policy makers themselves have little understanding of the concept of social justice. In April 2001, it was reported that the Department of Education had denied a Muslim woman employment because she wears a veil (Welham, cited in Sunday Times, April 1, 2001, p. 7). In the same article, the Education Minister, Alan Carpenter and the Education Department Director-General, Peter Browne, argued that the Department has a strong commitment to “equal opportunity, diversity and inclusivity”. I would argue that the actions described above contradict this view and also that this is not the case in many schools.

When students are excluded from participating for various reasons, despite rhetoric stating students will not be excluded due to these same factors (for example, economic disadvantage), and this exclusion is a pattern across youth as a social group (Young, 1990), or are compelled to do compulsory subjects\(^ {38}\) this does not equate with social justice.

\(^{37}\) See Appendix 5

\(^{38}\) According to staff members from the study school, it is Department of Education, Western Australia, policy that students with literacy problems are required to do double LOTE (Language other than English). This could be perceived as particularly unjust and serving to further disadvantage students. The only means of redress is for students to exercise resistance by non-attendance, for which they are then penalised.
The social justice policy also states that “students should be empowered to challenge inequality”. However, my observation while on placement indicated that some students are penalised for challenging what they perceive to be inequality, for example, the actions of a teacher. A critique of this issue would be that there needs to be some clarity around what constitutes social justice or a challenging of inequality, for both students and staff, in order to work toward addressing injustice. It is not enough to question what these concepts mean. The questioning of current practices and policy interpretation should be aimed at changing the system, or making the policy available and more equitable (Robertson, 2000).

As stated in the introduction, it is acknowledged that this section, along with the literature review of these concepts in Chapter Two, is included to provide a framing for the reader as to how I theorise about social justice and power within schools. The examples and discussion presented do not necessarily reflect the views of other participants in this research project and I acknowledge that their views may vary considerably from mine and from each other’s.

4.2.2 Defining Rural

As indicated in the literature search, the context of rurality is contested and this was also evident during the focus group discussion. One of the participants questioned whether the study school could be classified as rural. I accept that to some, the study school may not fit the definition of a rural high school, given its population (over 1300) and accessibility to a larger centre. This participant also felt that the students at the study school did not miss out on much “that the metropolitan kids have”. There may be some contestation around this position given the responses from other participants, available literature and research results. However, it is acknowledged that this position is valid. It may also be that this person may not identify himself or herself as being part of a rural community and thus the query whether the school could be classified as rural.

39 I view this as a critique of the inquiry and acknowledge it was a conscious decision not to survey participants in relation to these concepts, primarily due to the time frame and thus the inability to build a dialogical relationship to jointly explore these potentially contentious concepts. To critique a particular ideological stance requires a relationship based on trust, respect and valuing of difference and such a relationship requires time to develop. This is an area I would like to see explored further.
Whatmore et al (1990: 41) suggest that “rural exists primarily as a representation serving to analyse both the social and the space” and in terms of this research project, I concede that it is my construct of rurality that I am in some ways imposing on other participants.

As indicated in Chapter Two, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (1998) indices on rurality is that which is being used in this study, however the contested concepts are also acknowledged, as is the fact that rural people often do not control the definitions assigned them yet have to live with the consequences of such definitions. Often it is centralised policy development and practices that determines a classification and the discriminatory effect that this can have on a group of people (Whatmore, 1990; Alston, 2000).

4.2.3 Context and Effects of Living in Rural Areas

The importance of identifying issues associated with living in rural areas in the framing of the social justice issues of access and equity for rural youth, relates to linking personal troubles with public issues, to establish this as an area of concern for social work and specifically for social work research. The limited political appreciation of the impact of context at a policy development level may aggravate, for example, the implementation of the Department of Education, Western Australia’s policy on health and wellbeing in schools. The issues around acknowledging the disadvantage of rural people has enormous implications and the reluctance to do so by federal and state governments is at best questionable, at worst discriminatory. By avoiding the analysis and acknowledgement of this disadvantage, governments can avoid the formulation of rural policy and allocation of resources to address disadvantage, particularly in the areas of access and equity to services.

As argued by Alston (2000: 32) “governments have turned their attention outward toward the global marketplace, unconvinced that the problems of rural Australia are the concern of responsible governments”. One could question whether they are in fact unconvinced, or whether there is a concerted effort to avoid formulating policy that is relevant and equitable to rural people. Alston (2000: 32) further argues that the formulation of rural policy should be based on premises such as:

- people should be placed before profits;
- rural citizenship rights should be equal to urban rights;
• that service delivery models should be relevant to rural areas, not based on centralised decision-making, taking into account that "urban based models of services do not readily translate into effective rural services;"

• an extension of communication technologies should be made available to rural Australia.

One must ask whose interests are being served by this neglect and who is bearing the cost. There is growing concern in Australia at the widening gap between rich and poor (Henderson, 1999), or to frame it another way, between the privileged and the disadvantaged, yet little is being done to address these issues. There is also recognition that often it is those most marginalised (for example, youth) who have the least opportunity to have a voice, therefore it is hoped this research can serve to bring these issues to the attention of the policy makers.

Staff and students at the study school indicated they were aware of the issues for youth associated with rurality. Responses indicated that while there was acknowledgement of the issues for youth on a broader scale there was also a sentiment that "many problems are different in rural areas", as indicated in a survey response. The results of this research also indicated that teachers recognised that there is a dearth of available services, and that services need to be more equitable in rural areas. Further analysis within the focus group reiterated the views of the questionnaire responses related to this inequity and school-based services were suggested as a possible strategy to address the issue. These views are reflected in the following statements:

"I think from that perspective that social work should be in schools to have that access, particularly in rural areas. Even here in this area there are not a lot of services, they have to travel to the closest larger centre. How do they get there, how do they access the services without their parents necessarily knowing?"

"Also, by and large, there is still a cry for help and if you can pick up issues and provide support, education, referral, you may prevent issues from escalating. This is especially pertinent for students who have to travel from smaller centres on the school bus and have limited transport."

"It is my experience that rural schools are probably more in need of this service because of the lack of other facilities that are available to them."

"Students could access easily at school without parental consent"

"When referring to an outside agency, kids don't always follow up and there is generally no feedback to the school"
“Students often need help dealing with relationship problems outside of school, have no ready access to assistance outside of school, and feel uncomfortable accessing existing assistance in school”

The question again must be asked, why are rural schools neglected in this area? In addition to the above comments, my practice experience indicated similar concerns.

Access was an issue for many of the students, particularly those from outlying areas, many of which rely on the rural economy, most notably farming, for their existence. As noted by Alston (2000), rural incomes are in decline and poverty is increasing. As the literature and (for me) practice experience indicates, poverty is a precursor for many socio-economic issues, yet along with the decline in rural income, there is also a cut to welfare expenditure in rural areas (Alston, 2000; Ruth, 1999). If we are genuine about addressing issues for rural youth, the provision of accessible services must be considered. There was also recognition of the lack of referral services. I acknowledge that this phenomenon is not isolated to rural youth and that the nearby large centre is quite well serviced. However, it is still an issue when specialist youth services are required and when transport, and thus access, is an issue. Problems such as accessibility, availability and relevance are identified throughout rural Australia (Homes, 1981, 1985 cited in Cheers, 1992:13), and with the effects of economic rationalism and cuts to welfare services (Alston, 2000; Ruth, 1999), access and equity for rural people will continue to be a problem.

Access was a targeted theme within the survey and focus group and the majority of respondents indicated they were not aware of social work or related services in their local area, that they felt services were limited, or they stated they did not have ease of access to services. When asked the question, “do you have easy access to social work or related services in your community?” comments such as the following were offered:

“Sort of … via Government agencies”

“Local community, no. Further afield, yes”

“No, not really”.

“Limited access – require referral, parental consent and time out of school”

“No”

“Social workers are available”
My understanding is that there are no social workers practising in the local town and services are virtually non-existent for the outlying areas. There are some outreach services; however, access to these services is limited and transport is an issue for students. Some services are available in the larger town, where many of the teaching staff reside.

In addition to the anecdotal information from students related to access, staff were approached to provide input around the issues associated with rural schools. Structured discussions with various staff at the study school indicated that many identified issues associated with rurality. The analysis following the discussion with colleagues and noting of the anecdotal information from students was supplemented by reflecting on my lived experiences, observation, and initial research on rural issues\(^\text{40}\) (Robertson, 2000).

Transport was named as an issue within specialised learning areas, for example, Performing Arts students having to travel to Perth to access plays, and the cost of travelling to Perth for Country Week sporting activities. These costs can be quite inhibitive for many families and this results in already disadvantaged students being further disadvantaged. Funding should be factored in for these activities for disadvantaged students. Living in a rural area should not preclude these students from access to the resources city children have (Robertson, 2000).

The lack of professional development for staff is seen as a distinct disadvantage and this not only affects the staff, but the flow-on effect is the disadvantage to the students. Most courses are held in Perth, which lessens access, due to expense and availability of placements and replacement staff. This inequity experienced by teaching and support staff is indicative of many professions practicing in rural Australia (Lonne and Cheers, 2000).

As far as the benefits of attending a rural high school, staff identified the following. There is an increased knowledge of students, for example the School Psychologist also attends feeder primary schools and therefore can assist in the integration to high school.

\(^\text{40}\) See Appendix 1
This of course can also be viewed as a disadvantage; for example, pre-conceived values can be placed upon students. There is increased networking with primary schools as with only one high school in the area this means most local students come to the study school (again, there are advantages and disadvantages in this). From the students’ perspective the benefit of continued friendships from primary through into secondary was named.

The focus group discussion related to this theme demonstrated there was a majority opinion that access was a problematic factor for many students, and that a school based social worker may assist in addressing social problems for students. One of the members however, felt that having a social worker in the school was not going to address existing problems and that funding may be more beneficial in resourcing existing positions within school. Again, this raises the question as to how this may look and what positions would be targeted.

4.2.4 Perspectives of Social Work by Teachers from the Study School

Contact with students at the study school, indicated to staff members and myself that many of the recognised issues for rural youth (see Chapter Two, and Appendix 2) were evident amongst the students. The vignettes presented in Appendix 6 give a brief example of these issues and how social work theory and practice may be utilised to address those issues.

With both examples, the referrals were by teachers, and this seems to indicate two things: 1) the teachers recognised there was an issue to be dealt with; 2) that the teachers felt social work intervention may be of benefit to these students. The focus group discussion also revealed that most of the teachers who had used the service available in the school for referral found it to be beneficial from the student’s and their own perspectives. Although, there was a disagreement by one member of the group as to the reasons students accessed the service. These views are reflected in the following statements:

"We have a number of families we deal with on an ongoing basis, where we know there are problems at home. A social worker has more opportunity, or it is part of their job, to go beyond the schools and meet with parents and maybe that’s looked on more favourably by them, as opposed to a teacher, someone who is trained in education. We’re not necessarily fully trained under student services in counselling or that sort of stuff".
“From my experience with the work social workers have done in this school is that they seem to be able to add something extra to what I can provide to the students and what I see the school can provide to the students. I think for a lot of kids that is a very comforting thing and that anything we can do to help them, even if we do duplicate services, we should do it. My experience is that they’re tremendous”.

“Much as kids quite readily come to speak to our Chaplain or our school psych, I’m sure there’s a fairly significant number who still feel there’s a stigma about going to the “shrink” or the Chaplain. I’ve never from a kid heard any sort of stigma about going to the social worker”.

“I saw students who came to you last year who never would have sought help in any other way and didn’t necessarily need it. I know there are issues there, too, because if a kid is coming to talk, then they do want someone to talk to. But if you are in a school and you’re available, you will be constantly bombarded, I feel”.

**The Promise of Multi-Disciplinary Practice**

An important facet of working with staff on placement and during the inquiry was the strengthening of the multi-disciplinary team focus, with the contact providing a two-way benefit facilitated by the sharing of knowledge between colleagues. This increased the understanding of the specific roles within the study school and resulted in increased awareness and respect for those roles, although it is still evident, as indicated in the questionnaire responses, that almost 50% of the participants did not fully understand the role of a social worker. Social work was also referred to by one participant as a “function” rather than a role and the respondent also felt that “social work” was already provided by the School Chaplain, form teachers, and other student services staff. There may be many reasons for this position, including a sense of ownership and a wish to retain the status quo, or these views may be related to the devalued role social work often has in society. There were also a number of participants who saw the role as counselling. Comments included:

“Offering support to students.”

“Limited. In schools to assist students who are having relationships problems at home or in the wider community.”

“A link between home and school.”

“Aim is to develop positive relationships with individuals who have problems / challenges and to help them move towards solving / improving the problem / situation.”
Picton and Keegel (1978: 13) also found that there was a limited understanding of the role of social work by teachers, stating that the “teachers’ perception” of the role of social work was that of a “counsellor” rather than a “facilitator of social change”, or rather than viewing it from a human rights or social justice perspective. Kemmis and Lynch (2001) discuss the need for recognition of particular skills and adopting a multi-disciplinary approach to providing services, to maximise a student’s life chances.

As suggested by Sturmfels (1997: 124) “no more than a small proportion of student welfare is handled by school social workers alone” and that the social worker forms part of a multi-disciplinary team, which can include teachers, pastoral care staff, administration staff and educational psychologists. Without a sound understanding of individual roles, working within a multi-disciplinary team is difficult. How can one ascertain who is best equipped to deal with a particular issue in such an environment? Also, how can we be sure we are providing opportunities for the best possible outcome or intervention if the person making the assessment does not have the relevant training to assist with identifying an issue and relevant intervention? This issue is crucial when dealing with problems such as mental illness, for example, an anxiety disorder, or whether an issue is due to structural disadvantage, including the school environment, which research has shown education staff are reluctant to recognise (Mrazek and Haggerty, 1994; Dadds, et al, 2000; Ginsburg, 1990; Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998). I also acknowledge that the recognition of structural issues can also be a problem in social work.

4.2.5 Can Social Work be of Benefit?

The results presented above indicate that despite the literature that the role of social workers is not fully understood, and that teachers can be reluctant to work with other professionals within the school environment, that a multi-disciplinary focus can work and be of benefit to all members of the school community. Also, that the role was utilised and valued. From the student’s perspective there is an accessible service and their needs can be addressed, and this can also have an impact on the agency’s goals, given that social disadvantage can lead to lower educational outcomes.
I suggest that a social worker is trained to identify issues that may be impacting on a person's emotional wellbeing, as well as to identify the social injustices in society (often due to structural disadvantage). Assessment occurs at an individual, structural or community level in order to assist in the facilitation of change. Social work, while embracing many techniques and theories, aims to de-personalise issues, and thus move away from deficit-based models often enacted in institutions such as schools (Fook, 1993; Ife, 1997; 2001; Mullaly, 1995). Rather, models from overseas suggest school social workers tend to work from a systems perspective, seeing the student as functioning in home, school and community systems and seek to assess how these systems interface (Markwood, 2000). In this respect, the role is more than counselling, however, that is not to say counselling does not have a role to play in school social work.

Evaluation of school social work programs conducted in America (Markwood, University of Georgia, 2000; Duval County, 2001) indicated that providing social work services has enhanced outcomes for students and their families. In one school, a teen parenting program maintained a 98 to 100 per cent graduation rate over six years. It has also been established that in schools where social workers were not available, issues were more problematic as a result of links between schools, homes and communities not being established. What was also established was that services were sometimes diminished in capacity due to the inadequate number of social workers appointed to individual schools, resulting in reactive, rather than proactive interventions being provided (Markward, 2000).

Research and literature related to current practices is readily available, there is recognition that there are serious issues for youth and rural families, recognition that social workers have a role to play, so who is making the decisions not to appoint them? Could it be that teachers at a grass roots level are not being consulted and therefore the need is not being recognised, or is it yet another case of decisions being made on economic rather than welfare considerations? As stated by Fook (2000: 63) often "social values give way to economic concerns" and the non-provision of these roles may be due to economic reasons. However, an alternative argument could be that the cost is greater, both socially and economically if relevant services are not provided, and that it is the students and their families who are bearing the bulk of that cost.
It would appear that despite the lack of social workers in schools in Western Australia, the Department of Education, Western Australia (2001) recognises that there is a role for such practitioners in schools. Their job description for social workers in schools is very clear in suggesting that social workers have a "range of strategies" to address social and emotional issues which may be impacting adversely on a student's outcomes. There is recognition that social and emotional disadvantage can severely impact on a student's educational outcomes, and therefore their possible life chances, and that social workers can be of benefit within schools. Therefore, the questions must be asked as to why the Department of Education, Western Australia is reluctant to resource schools with a service which may benefit disadvantaged students? Perhaps the appointment of a social worker is seen as an admission of "failure" in an organisation where the ideology is based on measuring successes.

Whilst on placement at the study school, I found that addressing student issues from a social work perspective enabled a more holistic picture to emerge. Further, by making this service accessible to the students, choices and options were provided. These options were aimed at enabling the students to identify their own issues and possible solutions, thus assisting in an empowerment process, rather than having the problem identified for them, often inaccurately, due to a teacher's lack of understanding of the issue. As identified by Hamilton, an education professional, (1985: 4) "teachers are ill-equipped to handle the complex range of issues that surface". Choices also work to alleviate a sense of compliance and control.

From my observations, it appeared that students felt they had no choice but to comply, when referred to either the social worker, or psychologist, thus leaving them disempowered. Human service workers by their very roles (for example, social workers, teachers, police) operate from a more powerful level than their service recipients (Healy, 2000) and to maintain an awareness of how that power is exercised is essential. If power is exercised in an oppressive manner, then that power constitutes domination of one group by another and thus the opportunity for assisting in the empowerment process for students is diminished (Healy, 2000).
When the evidence indicates that issues for youth are increasing, as demonstrated in the literature review\(^{41}\) and that current strategies do not appear to be working, alternative strategies must be looked at. Forman (1987: 2) argues "for those students with problems, the easy accessibility of school-based as opposed to clinic-based programs may make participation more likely" and this perspective is supported in recent research (Sanders et al, 2000; Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998). Again, this may suggest a viable alternative.

Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1998) and the Department of Education (2001) argue schools are prime sites to address many of the factors associated with, for example, substance abuse. Yet it would appear, if the figures have doubled since 1995, strategies in place by the Department of Education are not addressing the issues adequately. As a social worker, a criticism I have in relation to this issue is the focus on "what" is happening in relation to drugs, rather than attempting to find out "why" this is happening. Why the emphasis in schools on the illegality or harmful effects (which do need addressing) at the expense of addressing predisposing factors such as relationship issues, poor self esteem or poor body image. I would argue that this emphasis is imperative, and suggest it may not be a focus in schools because those presenting the programs do not have the relevant training in assessment and intervention, or in presenting programs that target the predisposing factors. It is pretty hard to change a mindset or alter patterns of behaviour if the predisposing factor is not addressed. Cohen (1995: 5) relates the current practices to the mentality that pervades many schools, which she suggests is a "linear, fix-then-teach philosophy" which often looks toward "quick-fix" and is very much based on a deficit model.

Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1998) also allude to the ineffectiveness of many school programs, and cite the inexperience and lack of trained professionals available in schools to address these issues in an effective manner. They further argue it is imperative that staff providing welfare services in schools are professionally trained and have recommended that only those with relevant tertiary degrees, for example, in Youth Work or Social Work be accredited to provide such services. This raises the question of who assesses these workers to be accredited? And if not youth workers or social workers, then who?

\(^{41}\) See Appendix 2 also.
And, are schools the ideal sites, or are the claims grandiose? Cohen (1995: 2) suggests “some see schools as the logical place to deploy a wide range of services and supports in partnership with health and human services.....others think schools are too isolated from their communities and entrenched in their bureaucratic cultures to the focal point”. I do see this as an issue that would need to be explored further, and I do feel that for any school-based service to work, strong leadership would be required from administration. However, this leadership would require a move away from current hierarchical structures to a more egalitarian and democratic approach, otherwise I feel there is a danger the service could simply be a reflection of the school’s agenda. Cohen (1995: 4) discusses this very issue and suggests that "schools operate in a kind of isolation that makes them one of the most difficult institutions to change, much less mesh with other agencies".

Cohen (1995: 4) further suggests that “services and resources can be co-opted for any number of purposes, from policing attendance to resolving discipline matters”. Therefore, for any such service to be effective and relevant, clear delineation and operational guidelines would seem necessary.

4.3 A Critique of Social Work in Schools

The non-allocation of social workers to schools by the Department of Education, Western Australia seems to indicate that there is not a great value placed on resourcing such a position. Conversations with a former social worker indicated there was a considerable withdrawal of such services in the early 1990’s, with little explanation given for this withdrawal. My contact with the Department of Education to inquire further met with the same response. While it was agreed there might be some archived documentation related to this issue, it was not readily available and current staff could offer no further explanation. The issue at hand was whose interests were being served by the withdrawal of such services and who bore the cost. There is evidence that rural youth are disadvantaged, and also that social work has a recognised role to play in addressing that disadvantage according to the Department of Education, Western Australia. Yet positions are limited and as noted previously non-existent in rural areas, other than in the private school system.

The conversation with a current employee indicated to me, that there is not great value placed on the role, and the worker supported this to some degree.
For example, in one district in the metropolitan area, there are only two social workers allocated to 92 schools. The catchment area ranges from a reasonably high socio-economic area to a very low socio-economic area. Despite this lack of resource allocation, there are numerous issues such as substance abuse, sexual assault, issues with sexual identity, self-esteem, family conflict and eating disorders that are referred. The social worker’s role has thus become more of a consultative nature, an educator, a mediator and a source of referral. Again, this may work to some degree in an urban area, but referring back to Alston’s (2000) comments, this model may not transfer to a rural setting. Given the lack of external services, and the geographical factors for travel between schools, I would argue that there would need to be a larger concentration of resources in rural areas.

Social work is constantly changing and the profession currently finds itself in a state of uncertainty, due to the forces of economic rationalism and the focus on a market driven approach to the provision of services and perhaps this accounts somewhat for the inequity in service provision and delivery (Ruth, 1999). However, as a social worker, for me there is a responsibility to ask the questions and to act.

Another possibility for the demise of social workers in schools may be that they brought an element of uncertainty or disorganisation to the education bureaucracy. Perhaps social work ideology and its emphasis on policy analysis was unsettling. Or was the client group of the social worker, and thus the social worker devalued in education? If a school is focussed on compliance, uniformity and organisation, putting forward an alternative view of an issue can be seen as a threat or a challenge to the status quo, and thus a threat to those who hold the power in the organisation (Leonard, 1997).

Are the social justice principles and focus on empowerment seen as a form of resistance to the dominant hierarchy? Leonard (1997: 95) argues that “alternative ideologies and knowledge claims may challenge dominant discourses”. This can be useful; it can also be a source of conflict. Where challenge is seen as a threat the result can often be enacted by oppressing the challenger, thus maintaining organisation and power. The challenge to ideologies is often related to the contradiction between “care and control” and who decides what those concepts look like. Picton and Keegel (1978: 8) argue that due to the “different value system underpinning a social worker’s ideology, conflict is inevitable”.

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This conflict has been attributed to the "social worker's goals being focussed on the individual, the teacher's goals on the group progress and administration's focus on a smooth functioning of the system" (Picton and Keegel, 1978: 13). Who decides what forms of resistance to bureaucratic power are acceptable, and what forms are seen as compromising organisational objectives?

The subjectivity of the social work profession and its focus on the uniqueness of each person and each situation may not sit well within a structure where the students' role is to submit to those who hold the knowledge and power, and thus who decide what knowledge is to be imparted, or what service will be provided. Despite being problematic issues to resolve, they are critical to explore prior to considering the implementation of a school-based social work service. How do we work together to change the mindset to encompass social work ideology within a school setting and yet respect and work with difference (Kemmis and Lynch, 2001). To facilitate effective practice in such a manner it would be essential that education and human services are interacting effectively, and working with difference, rather than "running on separate tracks" (Cohen, 1995: 5).

As identified, working with difference can create tensions and thus a threat to the status quo. Who decides what or whose goals are of primary importance? With social workers often employed by the education system, and therefore under the control of the school principal, these administrators often feel their needs should take precedence (Craft, 1978; 1990). This is re-iterated by Sturmfels (1997: 127) who suggests school-based social workers "are a minority subset within a bureaucracy, with allegiances to the administrative unit and its primary goals, but also with their own professional values, ethics and practice standards" and it is these competing views that creates the conflict or tension. Sturmfels (1997: 127) further argues that this tension is "not always easy to manage" and that the social worker is often the person in the least powerful position when tensions arise. Therefore knowing the power structures and how the agency functions is essential (Sturmfels, 1997; Jones and May, 1997).

42 It is recognised this concept is problematic. Weedon (cited in Parton & Marshall, 1997: 247) argues "subjectivity is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in the discourses".
The freedom to operate within professional boundaries and to apply professional discretion within such an organisation was an issue discussed in the focus group and participants of that group identified these very tensions. Comments included:

"That's why I wonder whether working under EDWA, within school grounds you are suddenly going to be prevented from doing some of the things you would find necessary."

"That would be interesting to find out from EDWA as to whether social workers in schools are entitled to do."

This issue was also identified in a response in the questionnaires, with the following response received:

"Any social worker planning to work in a school would need to accept limits to their area of operation. The Principal and deputies retain responsibility for many decisions that would be made by a social worker in many other organisations."

These responses suggest that social workers may be seen as a threat to the organisation or an attempt by some to hold onto one's power base and an unwillingness to transcend professional boundaries. Also, that there needs to be clear delineation of roles and expectations for any social worker entering a school environment. It would also seem to suggest that more dialogue is required between social workers, the school administration and teachers and other staff.

There was also some contradiction expressed in relation to whether a school-based social worker should have an education background. While a majority (46%) felt it was not necessary, the remaining responses were equally divided with some participants feeling they should and the remainder undecided. Of those that did feel an education background was necessary, however, some participants felt social work placement equated with training for an education background. Of those that did not feel this training was necessary, views expressed were very clear as to the benefit of not having an education background, reflected in the following comments:

"Role is not teaching, but rather support and expert skills in areas most teachers are not trained in."

"No, no, no!! We value the social workers - we need social thinkers."

Participants who indicated an education background would be of benefit cited such reasons as:
"...having a greater understanding of the system"

"To allow for greater rapport with teachers"

These latter responses seem to imply one needs to be centred within an educational framework or ideology in order to practice within a school, build an institutional awareness or build a workable relationship with teachers. They seem to suggest an element of expected compliance or uniformity, or to suggest that one cannot comprehend the education system unless one is a teacher. Rather than being open to the notion that both teachers and social workers can “learn to fit in each others’ cultures and work around each other’s rules” (Cohen, 1995: 7). It is this very tolerance that can work to alleviate tensions and build appreciation.

Craft (1980: 3) suggests that some “inter-professional training” may be of benefit, but states it should not “in any way weaken the basically generic nature of social work training”. By this he means some overlap in terms of “basic skills and theory” in order to gain an understanding of the roles of both teacher and social worker. I would argue this is afforded in most university settings with education electives available to social work students and social work electives available to education students. This has been my experience at Edith Cowan University.

The questions raised need to be explored further in order to reach a position that enables socially just principles and practices to be enacted. There needs to be greater inclusion of all members of the school community and more transparency. All parties need to come to the table with an acknowledgment of uncertainty, which allows for the “respect and valuing of cultural and ideological difference and to recognise objectivity as an illusion” (Parton and Marshall, 1997: 246).

One recommendation that has been put forward in recent times (Kemmis and Lynch, 2001; Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998) to achieve an environment conducive to social justice being enacted in schools has been the full-service schools concept as discussed in Chapter Two. The following section will offer a brief discussion around this concept, with reference to access and equity.
4.4 Social Justice from a Welfare Perspective in Schools

I concur with Kemmis and Lynch's (2001) belief that the full-service schools concept is a model that can facilitate the enactment of social justice in schools. I also believe that a model developed in line with a community development framework for service delivery (Ife, 1995; Cheers, 1999) would be beneficial in rural areas, given the inequity associated with access and lack of appropriate services, and that most rural towns have a school. I do not envisage this model in the prescribed form, as per the American models, with a full range of services based in schools, but by placing a relevant professional(s) within the school who was equipped to make comprehensive assessments, as well as provide intervention, advocacy and a referral service to relevant agencies in the community. I also see that the concept can be problematic, as has been discussed above.

Any person appointed as (for example) a social worker would need the ability to build the links with relevant community agencies, with the school retaining the central coordinating, though not controlling role. That way, members of the community have a known access point. This last point is linked to the concept of building resilient communities, particularly in relation to rural areas. Chenowith and Stehlik (2001) suggest that the human service practitioner can act as the "linkage person" enabling a proactive, rather than reactive approach in building resilient communities and alliances between community agencies.

Suggestions as to how such a model could look will be offered in Chapter Five.

4.5 Current Policy Implications

On a broad scale the role of social work within schools is clouded due to the lack of national policy related to school social work. This lack of policy is further complicated by the differing views of the state governments and their welfare policies (Craft, 1980; Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998). In addition, even within state governments, school social work services may be overseen by various Departments, who have little, if any formal liaison. For example, agencies such the Department of Health, or Department of Community Development could both be working with the Department of Education to provide services and this can lead to fragmented services and conflicting lines of authority (Craft, 1980; Robertson, 2000).
Kemmis and Lynch (2001) suggest that the full-service schools concept acts to overcome the fragmentation that can occur by integrating service delivery, but again policy in this area needs to be coordinated. The concept of full-service schools as described by Kemmis and Lynch (2001) is vastly different to that prescribed by the Government (Ellison, 2000), with one focussed on social justice and inclusion and the other on compliance. The current Federal Government’s (Ellison, 2000) requirements for funding under the full-service schools program serves to undermine the overall full-service school concept. Schools are afforded funding primarily as a retention program for students to remain at, or return to school, following changes to the Youth Allowance requirements. I would argue that if the students received support to return to school of their own volition and not because of any penalty being imposed if they chose not to return, then one could view this policy and the funding that was provided as just. The overall stance of the full-service schools concept is to provide an environment conducive to social justice, and it could be questioned whether the current stance by the Government could be described as socially just. There is recognition of the need to work towards encouraging students to remain at school, however, along with this there is the recognition that those who return due to the Government’s requirements may require special programs and consideration. It is further recognised (Lowe and Krahn, 1993) that schools do not necessarily serve returning students well. The return to school is often associated with an “education ethic” (Lowe and Krahn, 1993: 3), rather than a genuine attempt to facilitate a school to work transition, which appears to be the aim of the government.

The Department of Education, Western Australia’s (2001) discussion paper, Pathways to Health and Wellbeing in Schools touches on the concept of full-service schools, without naming it as such, discussing strategies such as including the wider community and building partnerships with other professionals and service providers, although it does not seem to be inclusive of consumer participation. Where this policy is fraught in rural areas is the availability of those other professionals. The discussion paper recognises professional “expertise” is necessary to deal with complex social and emotional issues students may be experiencing, but fails to take into account the lack of relevant services in rural areas, and the issues associated with access.
In the nearest large centre the specialist child and adolescent agency has a 2 – 3 month waiting list and resources are limited (Robertson, 1999). Once again, this policy is indicative of a “one size fits all” policy that appears better suited to metropolitan areas where there is a concentration of available services (Alston, 2000; Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998).

Another concern with the Department of Education’s discussion paper again relates back to agendas and ownership. The policy document does not seem to recognise the student as being part of a system. The focus still seems to be on “fixing” in order to teach, which reflects the linear description by Cohen (1995).

Continuity of service was another concern that arose whilst on placement and following my departure. The concern relates to the impact on students during school breaks, especially the extended Christmas break. Measures such as peer support, a paging service for serious issues and an extensive referral service could be utilised to overcome the lack of availability during school breaks. Being a member of my local community I am often accessed for information or advice by former students, or their parents. These encounters often occur in inappropriate places and highlight the need for continuity, particularly as rural areas are disadvantaged in terms of access to appropriate services. Where a Social Worker was appointed and funded by joint bodies, for example, Department of Education/Department of Community Services, the Social Worker could be accessed via the external agency (DCS) during these breaks. This would also provide the opportunity for calls to be screened and/or referred elsewhere.

Again, this is an area that requires a concerted effort for all parties, including service users, to come together and explore possibilities. It is also an area that requires analysis at a State and Federal Government level. Kemmis and Lynch (2001) suggest that full-service schools provide a basis for social justice to be enacted through, and with the cooperation of their local communities. As stated by Kemmis and Lynch (2001: 4):

“Children, young people and adults all too often feel that they live their lives according to scripts written by others, constrained by circumstances beyond their control. Full service school, working together with communities and with other agencies and service providers aim to help children and young people become the authors – and critical readers – of the conditions of their own lives and the lives of their communities”.
4.6 **Summary**

This project took a critical stance in seeking to answer the question of whether social work has a role in rural schools. The project discussed the inequities experienced by students living in rural areas, and the results of this research project indicated that the role of school-based social workers was seen to be of value in rural areas by staff and students, particularly in terms of access and equity. The contention and political implications around the context of rurality were also discussed.

The research also identified that the issues for youth are increasing and these issues can impact on their educational and life chances. Thus, it has been suggested that social work theories and practices have a contribution to make in addressing these issues, and thus improving the life chances of rural youth. Another issue identified is that the role of social work is not fully understood by some staff and further dialogue is required to build a better understanding of this role and how it can work alongside and within the education field. The project also critiqued some of the political issues associated with the lack of social workers in schools, and working within the educating system to implement such a role. Also identified is that the concepts of social justice and power appear to be require further clarification within the education system.

While one of the participants in the focus group questioned the validity of utilising one school only in this research, supporting the research with questionnaires, conversations and a focus group discussion, as well as utilising relevant literature was seen as sufficient. This study did not attempt to prove a hypothesis empirically, nor to demonstrate generalisability. The intent was to raise consciousness and perhaps raise more questions for future research, which in turn may lead to structural change.

A suggested framework for practice and recommendations will be presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE – TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND POLICY RESPONSE

"How we view justice depends on our practice of looking deeply."

(Thich Nhat Hanh, cited in hooks, 2000)

5.1 Introduction

I acknowledge the need for further exploration of the role of school social work in relation to practice in rural schools, yet feel the results have indicated such a concept has merit. The literature review and subsequent analysis has also demonstrated a need for services for youth in rural areas. However, it has also raised questions as to whether such a concept, particularly that with a community focus, can work in schools and how could this look. The second part of the research aim was to develop a conceptual framework for practice, which, it is hoped would act to inform educational policy and practice and this framework will be developed within this chapter.

The primary principle guiding this research project was that of social justice and this was viewed in terms of access and equity of service for rural youth. I believe this research project has established: that a school-based social work service can be of value; that access is seen as an issue for students at the study school, as it is for many rural people; and that there are concerns with current interventions and practices within schools (Down, 1999; Hillier and Harrison, 1999; Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998, Green and Brown, 1999; Cheers, 1992). The study has also revealed schools have been identified as ideal sites for intervention, but that the ideology may need to change to embrace such a concept (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998; Kemmis and Lynch, 2001; Department of Education, Western Australia, 2001; Cohen, 1995).

Also identified in previous chapters, is the major concern that despite current interventions in schools, issues for youth are increasing, particularly in rural areas.
It has been suggested that this can be partly attributed to the lack of expertise of staff providing those interventions. Further, it has also been suggested that education staff need to embrace an environment that is inclusive of other professionals who do have the relevant training (Kemmis and Lynch, 2001; Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998). To provide services that may assist in addressing recognised issues alleviating disadvantage, and therefore increase a young person’s life chances could be considered socially just. Particularly given the recognised link between social disadvantage and educational outcomes (Stumfels, 1997; Berk, 1994; Kail and Cavanough, 1996; Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998),

5.2 So, Why Social Work?

First and foremost, one could argue the relevance of this role has already been demonstrated by the Department of Education, Western Australia (2001). They have a designated role description for social workers in schools, and it is clear that they see the mandate of the social worker as providing intervention aimed at addressing social and emotional issues which may be impacting adversely on a student’s outcomes. Therefore, again, one could simply question the reluctance to resource schools with such a service. What was also identified by staff and students of the study school and as illustrated by the literature, is that where social work is provided within schools, it is viewed as a valuable service by students and staff (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998; Stumfels, 1997; Markwood, 2000; Cohen, 1995; Raham, 1998).

As stated in Chapter One, the social work profession is grounded in the interlinked values, theories, practices and ethics associated with the pursuit of social justice, and it is this very principle being addressed within this research project. It is a profession that requires students and practitioners to work with a range of theories, and to demonstrate ethical practice, competency and awareness in areas such as:

• interpersonal skills;
• assessment and intervention skills to assist problem solving in human relationships, at an individual or group level;
• how to enact an empowerment process;
• how to identify and work with structural inequality in order to promote social change;
• policy analysis and development;
• needs analysis; and
• community development work, including building community alliances, education and consultation,

all within a framework of human rights and social justice principles (which it has been alluded to previously is a problematic concept) (Ife, 2001; Zastrow, 1995). The focus on these competencies and practices is essential if one is to work toward betterment for individuals, groups and communities. Yet, these same competencies can be challenging within bureaucratic organisations. From a managerialist perspective, how does one measure outcomes, and by whose definition is there an improvement in a situation? These issues have been recognised within the social work profession as problematic, yet many agencies work within such a framework, and this can potentially be disempowering, which contradicts the values of social work (Ife, 1997).

Within a school there can also be difficulties working with difference and coming to a consensual view as to what the problem may be. If it is seen by the social worker that it is the school environment that is contributing to the structural inequality a student is experiencing, there may well be reluctance on the part of teachers or administrators to acknowledge or assist in addressing this issue. These threats to existing power bases and constructs can result, as discussed earlier, in conflict. A social worker in a school can also be seen by service users to represent that inequality, and awareness by the social worker as to how power is enacted, and how the role is perceived by staff and students and families is essential.

Social work is effected through the building of relationships that are inclusive, engaging and enabling, which assists a transparent working partnership to develop (Thompson, 1998). Further, it recognises the relationship between people and the society within which they live, which of course includes the school environment (Fook, 1993). These aims may not be exclusive to the social work profession, but they are named and enacted ideals of the social work profession. As stated, social work assessment and intervention occurs at an individual, structural or community level, and the aim is to effect change.
Social work also has a strong tradition of ongoing professional accountability, development and supervision, yet it is also recognised the profession is plagued with uncertainty and a troubled public image (Fook, 1993; Ife, 1997; Carter et al, 1995).

This paper is not suggesting that a social worker has the exclusive skills required to provide welfare services within schools. However, it is suggesting that the particular skills of social work can enhance a multi-disciplinary team, working toward a mutual goal of maximising the life chances of students (Kemmis and Lynch, 2001; Sturmfels, 1997).

5.3 Toward a Conceptual Framework for Rural School-based Social Workers

As identified, an aim of this research was to develop a conceptual framework for rural practice. The following framework is intended as a starting point for further discussion with key stakeholders. This proposed framework, while recognising students’ outcomes as a priority area for service delivery, focuses on the well-being of the whole school community. The logic behind this is that research has suggested this focus is conducive to the maximisation of school success for the individual (Seigle Diagnostic Centre, 1999; Markwood, 2000). The framework is not seen as a 'set in concrete' model, rather as one that provides a basis for deconstruction and reconstruction by all stakeholders, including service users, in order to work toward a model that is suitable and relevant to each community. To develop yet another ‘one size fits all’ goes against the grain of a point I have been arguing. That is, that ‘one size fits all’ type policies serve to disadvantage and do not display relevance to particular communities, given that while rural communities require special consideration, they are not homogenous.

5.3.1 Overview of the Proposed Framework

The framework I am proposing is strongly influenced by:

- Cheers (1999) framework for community-embedded rural practice;
- the full-service schools concept (Kemmis and Lynch, 2001); and,
It is my belief that the limited scope of the job description for social workers, according to the Department of Education, Western Australia does not facilitate a community focus or a focus on social justice to the degree the models for practice I have drawn upon do. Cheers (1999) and La Nauze (1999) suggest a community development or embedded approach is essential in rural areas and this framework sits within a full-service schools (Kemmis and Lynch, 2001; Dryfoos, 1990, 1994) approach. The Seigle Diagnostic Center (1999: 1) suggests “school social work emphasises an approach involving interaction between the home, school and community and a belief that the three must collaborate to maximise the climate for school success”. Combining this framework with Cheer’s (1999) concept of community-embedded rural practice, where practitioners “are out in the community, being visible, becoming known, learning of people in need, working their way into social and political networks and connecting people with each other” would work toward providing a basis for effective practice (1999: 95). Cheers (1999) suggests community-embedded rural practice also facilitates a focus on “local needs and priorities” (p. 95) and that it is based on the “dialectics of human existence – those of individuality and social belonging, of self-interest and social duty” (p. 101) rather than a focus on current Government ideology in regard to provision of social services, with its focus on managerialism and the market economy (Ife, 1997). This objective can be problematic and would need to be considered in a context inclusive of youth and education.

Overall, whatever model is chosen (or if), a focus on power relationships and agendas must be maintained. For the model to be successful there must be a broader focus, than currently appears to be the case, with clear guidelines for service delivery. That is, the role must not be overtaken solely by a school’s agenda as discussed by Cohen (1995) and for social workers to be effective; they must be afforded professional recognition and discretion to practice according to their professional mandate.

5.3.2 Proposed Framework / Model

This proposal suggests that the school-based social workers in rural areas work with, and within, the school community to provide interventions aimed at eliminating barriers that may impede a student’s educational outcomes and thus their life chances.
It is envisaged they will endeavour to act as a connection between students / families, the school and the community. Further that they enter into mutual relationships with the community in which the school is situated, and its outlying school areas, to identify and respond to personal and community issues. To achieve these objectives a range of strategies are suggested, with intervention occurring at an individual, group and community level. The following guidelines offer a broad outline of how this may be achieved.

Assessment: This models suggests that using a broad range of theories, the school-based social worker will employ assessment skills to identify the social, emotional and structural needs of members of the school community. This may include individual students, their families or other members of the school community who access the service. The term assessment refers to the process of making a professional judgment about the problems or issues for clients, following the collection of relevant data or identifying presenting issues included in a referral (Fook, 1993). Zastrow (1995: 15) refers to assessment as the “process of analysing data to make sense of it”. Assessment also involves identifying the perceptions, needs and expectations of the client / family or the community, and thus provides the basis for delivery of best possible practice. It is also essential to identify a client’s / community’s strengths during this process, rather than focus on pathologising an issue. Without this focus, often the capacity to effect positive change is diminished (Saleeby, 1997; Zastrow, 1995).

Within a school there has been a focus on pathologising issues and “fix-then-teach” approach (Cohen, 1995: 5) and while it is essential to pay attention to the referring issue and to consult with those making the referral, it is necessary to focus on why something may be occurring, more so than what is occurring. That is to move away from a deficit-based model. This step is relevant in community analysis also and thus the assessment process is transferable across individual and group processes as well as macro practice. From an environmental systems perspective (Zastrow, 1995), this proposed model locates the students within their environment and pays attention to how the inter-relationship of all facets of their personal, social, and structural environment impacts on them (Fook, 1993).

Intervention: It is suggested that the school-based social worker will employ appropriate social work practices in line with their theoretical approach.
The aim of this step is to assist in the improvement or resolution of issues for students and/or their families and members of the community. Intervention would also require work at a macro level with members of the community to address issues identified by the community as problematic.

Intervention may occur with the school-based social worker, within the school or community, or by way of referral to community resources (if available) that provide specialist services. For example, Disability Services, or Mental Health. This may entail providing transport to such services or where not available, the school-based social worker acting as a case manager on a local level and in consultation with other professionals. It can include assisting with the accessing material resources such as housing, food, clothing, or financial support and advocacy. Each community and each individual will have unique needs and not all of these can be addressed in providing guidelines. Again, these are suggestions only.

Advocacy for students and/or families, as well as the community may involve issues both within the school environment and outside the immediate environment. For example, providing advocacy in relation to legal matters, in relation to accessing medical treatment, or in relation to provision of social services by local councils. The overall aim of adopting an advocacy model is to work towards ensuring that the human rights (on an educational, social, emotional and structural level) of students/families and the community are met.

Consultation/Education: The school-based social worker would have a responsibility to consult with teachers and staff, students and families, community members and external agencies, in order to engage in the mutual exchange of information. This may include attendance at meetings, school conferences or community information sessions, contact with parents or external agency personnel.

From an education perspective it is envisaged that student/parent education sessions could be an avenue for early intervention or prevention based programs. There is also opportunity to engage in mutual professional development between staff.
There is also scope to be involved in the policy analysis / development processes, given social work's focus on this area.

Community Liaison: In line with Cheers (1999: 95) model of community-embedded practice, I envisage the role of the school-based social worker in rural areas very much as the "connector". The role involves learning about and being involved in "social and political networks, current and emerging social issues, learning of people in need, and connecting people with each other". It is about responding to "local needs and priorities". As stated earlier, most rural communities have schools, therefore I see a role such as this accessible within such a facility. An effort to connect with and maintain relationships with those most marginalised and disadvantaged should be made and this would require knowledge of one's patch.

Administration: The school-based social worker would be responsible for the organisation of their workload, time management and management of allocated resources. In addition case notes and other relevant documentation should by maintained in line with legal and ethical requirements.

How this might look will differ from school to school. It is my belief that working within a multi-disciplinary framework entails the sharing of relevant information, and utilising a common file, however, I believe this is not a common practice within schools. There are also issues with this stance, in relation to privacy and confidentiality issues, therefore, again this is an area that requires further consultation and development.

Supervision: Given that school-based social workers are often a minority group (Sturmefels, 1997; Picton and Keegel, 1978), and that they can be professionally isolated, further that this is an issue for all rural social workers, all rural school-based social workers will maintain a strong commitment to high standards of professional practice and will actively seek professional support and development.

The proposed draft policy in Appendix 6 provides an exemplar of the contribution that can be made at this macro level. It is acknowledged this has been developed by the author of this project, not in consultation with other stakeholders, therefore it is very much in the developmental stage. However, it could serve as a starting point from which to work toward developing a relevant policy for rural school-based social workers.
The provision of such supervision and support should be provided by a senior social worker, and accessing this service should be a joint responsibility of the social worker and school administration, with financial costs borne by the school or joint funding body, if applicable. Line management supervision for day to day activities would differ within schools areas, and this is not to be confused with professional supervision.

**Planning / Evaluation:** It is envisaged that planning of services would involve students, parents, teachers, administration staff and relevant community members and agencies working with the school-based social worker to determine needs on an annual and "as needs" basis. This may be achieved by the formulation of a committee, who work together to identify and prioritise needs and appropriate evaluation methods.

Strategies to include disadvantaged groups should be considered and all service users should be encouraged to offer suggestions in an empowering manner as possible, at all times. Consideration should also be given to strategies such as allowing sufficient time for consultation with their representative group, where service users or community members are the elected representatives of a broader group. This should occur prior to elected representatives having to be involved in any decision making process. Offering education or training to members of the committee, in order to empower members to make informed decisions could also be considered. However, the option not to participate in any such programs should not exclude participation in the planning and evaluation.

**5.3.3 Summary**

As mentioned in the opening paragraph of this section, this framework is intended as a guide and starting point only. I do not presume to have all the answers and I am no expert in the development of frameworks or models of service delivery. While I feel I have drawn on relevant practices and models of service delivery in schools, I realise there are those with added expertise to further develop a model. I would also like to see any development of models involve a dialogical process.
Without dialogue occurring between the service providers and the service users (or those that can potentially provide a service) there can be no challenge to existing or proposed practices (Orme, 1998: 227). It is recognised that there are common goals to be achieved and that working together can maximise outcomes in the development of any policy or processes for service delivery.

5.4 Some Possibilities for Funding Such a Position

Given that the Department of Education recognises that there is a role for social work within schools; and the recommendations of policy document “Pathways to Health and Wellbeing in Schools” suggest schools as ideal sites of intervention; as well as the recognition by teachers, and theorists that teachers do not have the necessary skills to address many of the social and emotional needs of students and their families, one could lobby for inclusion of social workers in schools.

If one was to adopt a community-embedded approach, possibilities such as partnerships with local councils, the Department of Health or the Department of Community Development could be sought. A school-based social worker could benefit these agencies with recognition that there would be clients of those agencies who are also receiving intervention within schools, as was identified whilst on placement.

However, to achieve a working partnership for a united provision of services would require commitment by all parties, and there would need to be clear delineation of the duties and to whom the social worker is responsible. Were the position to be funded entirely by the Department of Education, an allowance for professional social work supervision would need to factored in to the budget. As stated above, supervision is seen as essential given that there can be complexity in cases that arise, also recognising issues that can arise if one works in isolation from one’s professional group, such as burnout, lack of accountability and lack of educational opportunities (Robertson, 2000).
5.5 Issues for Future Consideration

Issues and themes that I believe have arisen from this research and that require further exploration are:

- that social work has a role to play in rural schools;
- there are concerns with the training and qualifications of those currently providing welfare services in schools;
- that rural school-based social work services should be rural focused;
- that the role of social work in schools is not fully understood;
- if not school-based services then what and how; and
- that the enactment of social justice in schools is problematic and the fit between policy and practice requires further clarification.

I believe the further exploration of these issues will produce a more comprehensive understanding of the role and scope of a school-based social worker for rural areas. It may also initiate further consideration of policy development at a State and Federal level aimed at addressing disadvantage. Therefore the following recommendations are made.

5.5.1 That the Department of Education, Western Australia, in consultation with key stakeholders, including teachers, students, families, and community members review the provision of school-based social workers in rural areas.

The Department has recognised a role for social workers within schools and suggests that schools are ideal sites for intervention, yet as stated in Chapter One, there are no social workers appointed to rural schools, other than in the private sector.

Further, the issues around access and equity for rural people have been identified and providing accessible, relevant services is socially just. Many of the students that attend rural schools do not have access to local services or transport.

The reasons for non-provision of such services must be explored. Is it a case of the difficulties of working with different ideologies, is the role not valued by the Department of Education, or is the decision based on economic not social values? This process may also generate an alternative model, where the social worker is located in the community, in close proximity to the school, however still maintaining a multi-disciplinary focus.

Again I wish to acknowledge these issues are largely my construct, based on the research findings. The recognition of the value of school-based services, however, was identified by staff and students at the study school.
5.5.2 That consideration be given to the requirement that those providing welfare services in schools are equipped with the relevant training to provide those services.

Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998) argue it is imperative that staff providing welfare services in schools are professionally trained and have recommended that only those with relevant tertiary degrees, for example, in Youth Work or Social Work be accredited to provide such services. This recommendation needs to be addressed at a State and Federal level. Further, while it is recognised that school-based social work is generic in nature (Sturmfels, 1997; Picton and Keegel, 1978), as is rural practice (Cheers, 1999), it is my recommendation that staff working in rural schools should have met recommended rural-based competencies (O'Sullivan, Ross and Young, 1997). A placement within a school, or the attaining of relevant education units would also be of benefit.

Further as suggested by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998) teacher training should include a unit on pastoral care skills for all teachers. This is not suggested as an alternative to providing relevant professionals, but to enhance overall service delivery.

5.5.3 That guidelines are introduced that encourage community-embedded practices in rural schools or communities.

This recommendation is supported in literature by Kemmis and Lynch (2001). It is suggested that such a model would serve to improve the overall outcomes for students / families and the wider school community. This involves the acceptance of local knowledge and a move away from homogenised policies that “lump” all service users into the one category. Thus, it would recognise the diversity of rural communities and their particular needs, and encourages a move away from centralised policies (Cheers, 1999; Fook, 2000: 62; Ife, 1997). It would also serve to reduce the notion that schools operate in isolation from the rest of the community.

Rural communities require localised services that demonstrate an awareness of the issues for their community members, that are responsive to, and that cater to specific community needs.
It is essential the needs of particular communities be analysed, in order to facilitate the development of a service delivery model that is relevant. Needs analysis would also allow the targeting of funding for those services (Sjostedt, 2000).

5.5.4 That consideration is given to providing more education to staff and students in relation to the Department's of Education, Western Australia's Social Justice policy. Also that the policy is made widely available.

This is seen as an essential step to provide some clarity for staff, students / families and the community. What constitutes social justice from the perspective of the education system? How is it enacted?

5.5.5 That the social work profession takes responsibility to provide education to schools and the wider community related to their role.

This research has identified that the role is of social work in schools is not fully understood (Sturmfels, 1997; Picton and Keegel, 1978; Kemmis and Lynch, 2001). Perhaps this is one of the reasons for the decline of social workers in schools. Fook, (2000) and Ife (1997) discuss the problems with professional identity since the introduction of managerialism. They suggest there has been a de-valuing of these skills in favour of the market discourse and while at risk of sounding elitist, there is an argument that we should reclaim our professional status and identify what it is that makes social work different from other roles (Fook, 2000).

There is also a responsibility on the part of the education profession to address this issue. If a school-based social worker is introduced into any school, there is a responsibility for management, in collaboration with the social worker, to identify to all members of the school community what that role is about and what it is not.

5.6 Closing Summary

While I believe this project has demonstrated that there can be value in having school-based social worker in rural areas and that such a service can serve to address social justice principles related to access and equity, I also recognise there are areas of this research project that could have been refined.
This closing summary will include a critique of this inquiry, which will illustrate some points of learning, and offer a suggestion as to where to from here.

5.6.1 Critique of the Inquiry

I feel my main critique of this inquiry is related to my choice of methodology and theoretical perspective, given that I was working within a bureaucracy that does not traditionally embrace a position that may serve to unsettle. Some facets of adopting a critical inquiry position and a postmodern perspective were unsettling for participants, and there appeared to be a need by some members to reach an empirical conclusion. For this reason, it would have served the purpose better if I had consulted with the staff prior to commencing the study and we had worked through theoretical perspectives and come to a united position about how this study was going to look.

As a relatively novice researcher, I also found my choice of methodology challenging. While I was happy with the stance of not wishing to “prove” a position, I found myself falling back into models which sought to do so, or were more about interpreting, rather than questioning. I also found that my use of language at times was indicative of adopting an “expert” position and this was something I was striving to avoid.

Lishman (1998:94) states “we need to develop a discipline of reflecting on what we have done and how we have behaved ....in order to learn, confirm good practice, analyse mistakes and develop alternative actions and responses”. The process I am undertaking in writing this section is indicative of this approach and this reflection and analysis will serve to strengthen my self-awareness as a researcher for future projects. It is all too easy to seek to prove a point, but in doing so, we can lose sight of another person’s perspective or interpretation, we can also neglect to ask the questions, so necessary if one is to adopt a critical stance.

Another issue was the time frame, which was particularly problematic, given the methodology and theoretical perspective and taking into account the workloads and commitments of the participants.
While this project may have been a major commitment for me, I recognise that the people I chose to work with had other priorities and therefore while very supportive, had less time to commit to the project and to engage in the dialogical process. I do not wish to imply that my priorities were of more importance than other participants, I am seeking to validate the other participants by acknowledging their workloads and to acknowledge my gratitude to them for giving of their time and themselves. At the same time I need to acknowledge that processes were restricted due to these structural issues.

Another critique is that in seeking to demonstrate a need, that is, by identifying the issues for rural youth, younger children and other members of the school community (for example, parents) were somewhat neglected in this project. Yet research and practice suggests that social work has a valuable role to play with these groups. In young children this can be especially pertinent in the transition from primary to secondary school (Markwood, 2000). There is also recognition that interventions for younger children can differ from those in an older age bracket (Geldard and Geldard, 2000). While many of the issues and goals can be similar techniques employed may look different. Also, as this project is suggesting a community-embedded approach, it should have been inclusive of a wider group of participants. This issue was also related to me making choices and being conscious throughout the project of issues such as the word count and time frame, as well as my level of expertise. Therefore I feel valuable data has been omitted, yet I also recognise there is scope for further exploration.

However, it also needs to be acknowledged that while there were issues, the data collection and analysis did produce valuable results, which have served to provide a basis for further enquiry. The input by the participants of the research project also enabled me to present a conceptual model of practice, which is designed to be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of the school community. However, more time for engaging in dialogue, learning to understand each others language to a greater degree, and more time to work together on recommendations would have added a valuable layer to the process.
I also acknowledge that while there has been encouragement and support by the study school, to undertake this research, there is recognition that policy makers at a State and Federal level may be reluctant to address any issues or recommendations that arise as a result of this research. This can undermine the theoretical underpinnings of critical inquiry, which is to seek change. This is a political reality I have carried with me throughout this project.

5.6.2 Where to From Here?

There are several things I would like to see eventuate from this research project. Firstly, I would like to see this initial research made available to those involved in policy development in education and social work for their analysis and to comment on. I would also like to see a process emerge that allowed further dialogue related to the concept of such a role, and how it could look within schools.

I think that building working relationships with key stakeholders such as students/families, teachers, support staff, community members, administrators and those involved at a policy development level in education and social work would work toward facilitating such a process. From that process I would like to see further research or perhaps a pilot program conducted in order to evaluate such a role. Engaging in dialogue with the key stakeholders may also reveal a social worker is not the preferred service provider and the process may identify alternative suggestions. A further research question may be “If not social workers, then who?”

For myself, this thesis marks the end of my formal education in social work and my transition into practice. I feel the process has enriched my learning and that this learning will enhance the practitioner I will become. I strongly believe in the uniqueness of rural practice and the need for rural practitioners to study the context and complexities of such practice, and this project has assisted in developing my ability to apply critical awareness to my practice. Fook (2000) and Liepens (1996) refer to the importance of rural practitioners engaging in research in order to generate an understanding of the local area.
Fook (2000: 62) also points to a "post-modern analysis" which identifies a "widening gap between theory and practice". She further suggests that this gap can be addressed to some degree by acknowledging it is the "on-the-ground knowledge embodied in the daily experience of both practitioners and service users" that serves to generate theory (p. 62). I have made a concerted effort prior to, and throughout this project to link theory and practice and recognise that this is how I come to understand my world. These processes, I feel, can only serve to enhance my self-awareness as a practitioner, for it is by committing to ongoing learning and reflection, and developing this critical awareness, that we allow ourselves to be open to new possibilities.
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APPENDIX I - PERSONAL / PROFESSIONAL ANTECEDENTS TO THE INQUIRY

This journal presents a self-exploration of the personal and professional antecedents to my research project.

For almost eighteen years I lived with my family on our farm in the central west area of New South Wales. My initial move to this rural area was a "culture shock" as I quickly discovered the inequalities around issues such as access. Simple things I took for granted available to me as a result of living in a city (Perth) were challenged on a daily basis. On a basic level I quickly discovered I could not "pop down" to the local shop and purchase my favoured Asian herbs, or that if I wanted to cook a veal dish, I had to order the veal in advance. On a more important level, I found my choice of General Practitioner was severely limited, that to visit the dentist meant a trip to a larger town, and that there was only the school bus available for transport for those who did not own a car.

I was the mother of children growing up in a rural area. I saw the benefits my children received attending a rural school, which catered from Kindergarten to Year Twelve, and which was proactive in addressing student's needs. I also experienced the inequalities for my children attending such as school, such as lack of subject choice, transport issues, access to events such as theatre, and specialist sporting activities, which would enhance their education and physical well-being. I witnessed the problems associated with access and equity for my own children and their peers, as well as other members of our community. In addition, I was a front line worker for over nine years at the local hospital and later, the community health centre. During this time, I had the privilege of being on two valuable committees, for our community. One, in collaboration with education, health and police, related to rural youth, the other as a member on the committee for long term health planning for the area. The structural and political nature of personal experience of unfair treatment became increasingly obvious, although I did not have the language of social justice at that time, to anchor these observations in.

Critical inquiry\textsuperscript{45}, along with previous research projects I conducted in the local area were instrumental in raising my consciousness regarding the issues for people living in rural areas. I was very much aware of my linking of the personal and political (Stanley and Wise, 1983) in the ongoing evaluation of my environment.

\textsuperscript{45} Critical inquiry is described as a "cyclical process of reflection and action" (Crotty, 1998: 157).
These political and structural issues, while affecting my family on a personal level, also indicated a lived reality indicative of the plight of many rural people (Fook, 1993, 1996; Ife, 2001).

The community health centre in which I worked was situated in an area which could be described as remote and it was strongly focussed toward adolescent services. It was during this time my awareness was initially raised. The most important lessons learnt in relation to working with youth, relate to making services accessible, engagement and confidentiality. The skills required to engage with this target group and to be able to demonstrate the adherence to confidentiality and privacy were essential, as was being aware of the issues associated with access for this group. Many of the clients were “bus kids” and transport was a crucial issue. Privacy and confidentiality were essential, as most of the young people who utilised the service knew at least one staff member, and also knew there was a good chance you knew their parents. Being a small community you often had contact with them through activities involving your own children.

Further crucial learning was related to the fact that we involved our target group in the planning and development of the service, both at the health centre and within the school based services. The value of this strategy cannot be underestimated. For those adults on the planning committee, the youth provided very valuable learning. In turn we were able to provide services which were targeted toward meeting the prioritised needs of the youth in our area. Involving community members was also an ideal forum to raise community members’ consciousness and to politicise the rights of youth in our area to have their needs met. Ife (2001) argues that “social workers must always be articulating the political aspects of the personal and the personal aspects of the political”.

This awareness and my own values, strongly embedded in a human rights / social justice perspective have influenced and shaped much of my practice, and this research demonstrates a linking of my own values, and social work theories and practice. Subsequent learning and experience has equipped me with the intervention and analytical skills necessary to further explore the concept of school-based social work in rural areas, in line with the concepts of equality and access.
APPENDIX 2 – RESEARCH SUMMARY ON ISSUES FOR RURAL YOUTH

A4.1 Mental Health

According to the statistics presented in the Western Australian Child Health Survey (Zubrick et al, 1995) which indicated that 17.7% of children will be affected by mental health problems in any six month period, and with 9.2% of those having a severe mental health problem, it is estimated that approximately 65 students at the study school will have a severe mental health problem in any given six month period (Robertson, 1999). These figures demonstrate the importance of appropriate services for youth. Mental health morbidity is estimated to be the leading cause of disability in the world, with almost 11% of disease accounted for worldwide. It is estimated that by 2020, mental health conditions will constitute the greatest disease burden in the developing world. In the Child and Adolescent area, mental health conditions are now comparable to adult rates (Zubrick et al, 1995). Kosky and Hardy (1992, cited in O’Hanlon et al, 2000) argue that the “futures of young people affected with mental health conditions are placed in jeopardy, their families are stressed and there are serious ramifications at every level of society”. It is also noted that the teenage years and early adulthood is when mental illness can often have its onset (Rey, 1992).

It can be argued that social work has a role to play in delivering services to youth, due to the training which facilitates the ability to see things complexly and across levels of issues so that the individual is not blamed (Ife, 1995; Fook, 1993). In New South Wales 150 new positions have been established which will address mental health issues in the child and adolescent area. These positions include education and health staff working together in schools to “establish depression education and prevention program”. Within these programs there will also be a focus on early intervention. Problems such as “depression, anxiety disorders, grief, challenging and disruptive behaviours (for example, conduct disorders and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), post traumatic stress, psychosis, eating disorders and suicide” will be targeted (NSW Health, 1998).

Williams and Aoun (2000:86) discuss issues affecting youth suicide and note that “young people in rural areas are particularly at risk” and “that youth suicide is perhaps the most significant Australian social and health issue”.

A4.2 Youth Suicide

The Institute for Child Health Research (ICHR) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) presented research in 1993 which indicated the suicide rate among young people was rising. The fact that suicide is second only to road deaths amongst 15 - 24 year olds in Australia and the recognition that many of these people had a recognised depressive disorder prior to either their attempted or completed suicide is alarming. The recognition that depression is a major factor attributable to youth suicide is supported in literature by many (Rich et al 1990; Garland and Zigler, 1993; Atwater, 1992, all cited in Kail and Cavanaugh, 1996; NSW Health, 1998; National Health and Medical Research Council, 1997).
Rich et al (1990) argue that depression is one precursor of suicide; substance abuse is another (Cited in Kail and Cavanough, 1996). 16 per cent of adolescents in the 12 - 16 year old group reported having had suicidal thoughts and 69 per cent of these children had mental health problems (ICHR / ABS, 1993). Also alarming is the recognition that child mental health clinics are scarce, and are concentrated in the Perth metropolitan area (Zubrick et al, 1995).

Another issue associated with youth suicide in rural areas is associated with sexuality issues. Thorpe (1999: 182) cites figures from the Department of Human Services and Health (1995: 4) which show “there has been an increase in completed suicides of almost fifty per cent for this group from 1979 to 1993”. Thorpe also identifies the higher incidence amongst rural youth in general, stating “young males living in rural and remote areas have a consistently higher rate of suicide than those in urban areas” (1999:182; Down, 1999). the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2000) report “suicide rates amongst young Australians have risen 70 per cent in the last twenty years”. Down (1999) also reports that death rates for women in remote areas are 32 per cent higher than for women in urban areas.

A4.3 Loneliness

Another issue associated with mental illness is loneliness. Loneliness is a subject that has received little attention in relation to youth. Davis (1990) found loneliness was a significant issue for many students and quotes research from Schultz and Moore (1988) who found that “the greatest degree of loneliness was among the high school students” (p. 59). In advocating early intervention, Davis cites “low social risk taking, low perceived likeability, high social anxiety and high public self consciousness” (p. 63) as significant issues for early intervention. She further argues aggressive behaviour and substance abuse are manifestations of loneliness. Of particular significance to this study, Woodward and Frank (1988) reported “rural adolescents were found to have extremely high loneliness scores”.

A4.4 Alcohol and Other Drug Use

As briefly discussed in Chapter One, alcohol and other substance use and abuse is far more prevalent in rural areas (Colman, 2000; Green and Brown, 1999; Australian Institute of Criminology, 1999). Research by Lawrence and Williams (1990 cited in Sjostedt, 2000:4) has shown that rural people consume “30 per cent more alcohol.” than their “urban counterparts”. This leads to increased domestic violence, which in turn impacts on the overall conflict in the home (Sjostedt, 2000; Main et al, 2000).

Alcohol is also a known depressant (Bloch and Singh, 1996; Kail and Cavanough, 1996) and given the link to youth suicide, combined with the higher alcohol consumption rate in rural areas, this may present some indicators where early intervention can be targeted. Alcohol use in adolescents has bee attributed to peer pressure, stress (particularly due to family problems), or as a result of modelling by the parents.
Another major factor is that adolescents are unaware of the effects alcohol can have on their body or their behaviour (Kail and Cavanaugh, 1996). Alcohol misuse is also strongly linked to risk-taking behaviour and anti-social behaviour, such as crime. Risk-taking such as binge drinking, illegal drug use, fighting and risky sexual activity have also received attention in recent studies (Duberstein et al., 2000; Hillier and Harrison, 1999; Lindsay et al., 1997). Hillier and Harrison (1999:202) report that “24 per cent of the sexually active senior students reported that they occasionally, often or always combined alcohol and sex”. As stated (p. 202) “this is a totally unsatisfactory and dangerous technique for exploring their sexuality”. In a survey of tertiary students Grunseit et al (1995:389) found that “rural students were more sexually experienced than urban students”, also that the “rural students had less accurate knowledge of HIV/AIDS”, and that they displayed less confidence in condoms protecting them against infection”. Hillier and Harrison (1999) offer some explanation for young rural women living in smaller towns being less likely to use condoms, relating it to access and the lack of privacy buying such items.

It must also be noted that like their city counterparts, perhaps more so, young women are still governed by the “dominant constructions of heterosexuality” which privilege penetrative sex (Hillier and Harrison, 1999:198) and often favour their construction of “love and romance” and seek to avoid confrontation. They are therefore less likely to challenge their partner over non-protection (Grunseit et al, 1995:402). This issues has particular relevance in the local area, with recent reports of “girls as young as fourteen stupefied with alcohol and drugs, and then sexually assaulted by a group” (Kelly, 2001). This practice, known as “fanging” is seen as a game by participants and this suggests that an education program needs to be offered promoting safe sex and responsible drinking, and targeting illegal drug use and sexual assault.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports there has been an increase in the number of young women who are experimenting with drugs, with almost one in four over the age of fourteen years reporting using illicit drugs. Cannabis appears to be the most common drug of choice. It is also reported that drug problems are rising in rural areas and that agencies are experiencing difficulties trying to address this issue, with inadequate resources (Horan, 1998:2). What is problematic is that the number of teenage girls who have tried drugs has doubled since 1995. It is reported the figure now stands at 51.6 per cent. The major reason for drug use cited by girls was as a means to address stress or depression. Many also attributed using drugs to their satisfaction with their body image. For boys, the main reasons cited were to be “cool”, to relieve boredom, to live up to peer expectations or to get a girlfriend (Mackay, 1999:15) Studies cited by Darke and Ross (1997) indicate that it is in their teenage years that teenagers begin to use hard drugs and there is clear evidence that this is linked to severe psychiatric problems.

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46 This study must be taken in context. It was noted by Grunseit et al that the rural students were living away from home, whilst the majority of the city students resided at home with their parents.
Walker and Walker (cited in Adams et al, 1998:46) argue that the issue of poverty is often overlooked as a structural issue, primarily because it has become so common. They argue that instead policy has individualised the behaviour of the “poor” in order to “reduce their dependence of state benefits, rather than tackling the underlying factors, such as unemployment, which cause poverty”. This ideology is evident in current Government policy, in particular in the reforms named in the McClure Report (Cox and Lewis, 2000). For example, under the mutual obligation requirement, there is an obligation on the person receiving a benefit to seek work, undergo training or to participate in voluntary work, while the Government sees its obligation as providing a conditional payment, rather than to ensure there is a change in the climate of the job market.

It is a failing of the current Liberal Government that they compel individuals to participate in work that is often low paid, or in voluntary work and this results in these people joining the ranks of Australia’s “working poor” (Haynes et al, 2001). This is a particular issue for youth. There can be many adverse social and psychological effects associated with poverty. This can include for youth low self esteem, a significant impact on life and educational opportunities, leading to loss of future hope and a lack of empowerment (Waterhouse and McGee, 1998; Berk, 1995; Australian Institute of Family Studies, 1999).

Flanagan and Eccles (1993, cited in Schaffer, 1998:192) argue that poverty has a negative impact on adolescents, particularly those in transition from primary to secondary school. Their research revealed that “young people’s ability to cope with stress was affected by their parent’s work status”. Townsend (1979) and Davidson and Lees (1993) define poverty as “relative deprivation” (cited in Alston, 2000: 29).

Alston describes this issue by stating “by comparison with the majority of the general population those experiencing poverty lack access to resources, assets and income resulting in material deprivation”. She further argues that “the failure of governments to ensure equitable distribution of and access to resources such as services, employment and income opportunities is a major cause of rural poverty”. In these terms Alston is not simply discussing fiscal poverty but deprivation of essential services which in turn can render people powerless and alienated.

Rishworth (1999) argues that people cannot really be truly self reliant when they are living with an acute lack of resources. With unemployment rates higher in rural areas, due to the closure of “mines, mills banks and other rural business” strategies to address school retention need to be re-visited. Down (1999) states “non-metropolitan Australia accounts for 35 per cent of the workforce, but is home to 42 per cent of the unemployed”. It has been reported that in rural Australia “...incomes are dropping and the increased costs and reduced services are leading to a new form of rural poverty” (Sjostedt, 2000:2; Main et al, 2000). It is often the youth that are affected and they required to. we rural communities and their families in search of income.
A4.6 Youth Homelessness

Poverty is also linked to family violence and family breakdown (primarily as a result of associated stress) and this is one of the leading factors related to youth homelessness (Sarantakos, 1993; Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998; Berk, 1995). Homelessness is also linked to academic risk, with figures suggesting this is not due to ability, with an estimated “80 per cent not failing academically”. The drop out rate is associated with the lack of support available in schools. As stated in Chapter One, this issue is a significant problem in rural areas, as well as metropolitan areas (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998:99). It is argued that many schools are not effective in addressing the problem of youth homelessness and this was an issue I encountered whilst at the study school, as will be discussed in Chapter Four. One of the reasons put forward is the lack of trained welfare staff within schools. Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998) argue that in “many rural communities there is a widespread belief that homelessness is a city issue, and this belief is often shared by teachers in the local school”.

A4.7 Cross-cultural Issues

Culturally appropriate services are also hard to access in rural areas, although the study school does have an Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer (AIEO). Down (1999) cites Beazley (1984: 323) in stating “Aborigines are probably the most disadvantaged group in our community. Aborigines suffer disadvantage arising from cultural differences, history, living conditions and illness”. Down further argues the “general lack of interest, understanding and sympathy on the part of many in the non-Aboriginal community” results in further disadvantage. I was very much aware of these issues whilst on placement at the study school. However, as I have not sought permission to comment in detail on issues for Aboriginal students, and therefore do not see it as culturally appropriate, these issues will not be addressed in detail within this thesis. To speak on behalf of the Aboriginal students could well be seen as a form of covert racism, which would in fact perpetuate their oppression and powerlessness. As a white Australian worker I can be viewed as “a representative of an exploitive structure” (Fook, 1993:124).

From a Social Work perspective, I see culture as broader than race or ethnicity. Sargent (1994: 75) refers to culture as the “knowledge, beliefs, customs and habits of a group of people” and argues that our culture helps us to “develop the sense we have of ourselves”. In the context of the study school, there is the culture of youth in a myriad of ways. For example, among others, there are the students who are on the fringes of the drug culture, those that are part of a strong sporting fraternity, those from disadvantaged families, those from farming communities, those with sexuality issues, students at educational risk, the Bible Group (Robertson, 2000).
Dear XX XXXXXXX,

Re: Research Project

Further to preliminary discussion with Mr. XXX XXXXX re the viability of conducting my research within XXXXXX Senior High School, I wish to offer the following information. I am currently completing my Social Work with Honours degree at Edith Cowan University, Bunbury. My research topic aims to assess whether there is a place for social work within rural schools. Further, I aim to develop a conceptual framework for such practice. I have attached a copy of my proposal for your information. This proposal has received clearance by the Ethics Committee of Edith Cowan University.

It is my aim to have as little impact on the school as possible. All questionnaires and consent forms will be supplied (20 only), and a stamped, self-addressed envelope will be attached for completed surveys. As previously discussed with XXX the taped conversations will only be with staff and they will be brief. Further, they will be conducted at a time suitable to the school. Prior to inclusion in my thesis, transcripts of taped conversations will be presented to staff for any alteration or withdrawal of consent. Once the transcripts have been approved, the tapes will be destroyed in accordance with University guidelines. No identifying information will be included and the name of the school will not be disclosed. The only change to this criteria would be that you wished to have the school acknowledged publicly for their participation.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this proposal, please feel free to contact either myself, on XXXX XXXX, or my Honours Supervisor at Edith Cowan University, XXXXX XXXX, on XXXX XXXX.

Yours sincerely,

XXXX XXXXXXXXXX.

9 September 2001
Project Title: Is there a place for social work within rural schools and what can it look like?

I am a Social Work Honours student at Edith Cowan University, Bunbury, researching the above topic. The project aims to identify a role for social work within rural schools, and suggest a framework for practice. My recent social work placement within your school led me to believe that the concept of a school based social worker has merit, especially in rural areas, with issues of access and equity, a strong focus. It is hoped the findings may be utilised to advance knowledge, and to possibly influence policy regarding such a role. The research is not intended as a tool to question the current pastoral care positions within traditional school settings.

A case study will be utilised and will be supplemented with conversations and questionnaires to provide a venue for your views, in order to present a balanced argument. You can help in this study by consenting to complete a survey and/or be involved in semi-structured conversations which may be taped. The time to complete the survey should be no more than 30 minutes and conversations will be limited to 30 – 60 minutes. Taping will only occur where permission is granted. All information given during the survey is confidential and any information which might identify you or the school will not be used in any publication arising from the research. Any participant who does consent to participate has the right to withdraw consent at any time.

If you are willing to participate in this study, could you please complete the details below.

If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact either myself on XXXX XXXX or my supervisor, XXXXX XXXX on XXXX XXXX.

Thank you,

XXXX XXXXXXX.

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- I have read the information above (or have been fully informed about the research project) and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I agree to participate in this research and retain the right to withdraw at any time.
- I agree that the research data gathered from this study may be published provided I am not identifiable.
- I agree to my conversation being taped and understand a transcript will be made available prior to publication and that the tape will then be wiped. YES / NO

Participant or authorised representative ........................................ Date: ........../......../2001

Researcher ........................................ Date: ........../......../2001
Project Title: Is there a place for social work within rural schools and what can it look like?

I am a Social Work Honours student at Edith Cowan University, Bunbury, researching the above topic. The project aims to identify a role for social work within rural schools, and suggest a framework for practice. My recent social work placement within your school led me to believe that the concept of a school based social worker has merit, especially in rural areas, with issues of access and equity, a strong focus. It is hoped the findings may be utilised to advance knowledge, and to possibly influence policy regarding such a role. The research is not intended as a tool to question the current pastoral care positions within traditional school settings.

You can help in this study by consenting to complete the following survey. The time to complete the survey should be no more than 30 minutes. All information given during the survey is confidential and any information which might identify you or the school will not be used in any publication arising from the research.

If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact either myself on XXXX XXXX, or my supervisor XXXXX XXXX on XXXX XXXX

Thank you,

XXXX XXXXXXXXXX.

This is an anonymous questionnaire. Please ensure that you do not write your name, or any other comments that may identify you on the attached. By completing the questionnaire you are consenting to take part in this research. As such please read the information above carefully as it explains the intention of this project.

Q1. It is argued social workers have a variety of roles to play "within schools and between schools and families, and the wider community". What understanding do you have of the role of a social worker?
Q2. Do you see any benefits in having school based social workers in rural areas?
   What are your reasons?

Q3. Do you have easy access to social work or related services within your community?

Q4. If you required such a service, (for self or referral) would it be of benefit if it was available within the school?
   What are your reasons?

Q5. Do you think a school based social worker should have a background in education / teaching?
   What are your reasons?

Any other comments?

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in this research project, please post your questionnaire in the attached stamped envelope by 19 September 2001. The findings will be published in my thesis at Edith Cowan University. A printed copy should be available early in the 2002 school year.

Regards,

XXXX XExampleXX
The Ministry of Education, Western Australia (1991) state in their Social Justice in Education Policy that social justice in education will be achieved to the degree that:

- there are no significant differences in educational outcomes arising from ethnicity, socio-economic status, race, sex, physical ability, geographic location or any other variable irrelevant to educational achievement;
- educational provisions reflect the diversity of needs and contributions of all ability, social and cultural groups;
- all students fully develop their abilities, talents and interests and assume responsibility for their lives;
- all students and their parents receive relevant information to enable them to make informed educational decisions and choices;
- all students participate in a relevant and enriching curriculum within a supportive school environment, that is free from harassment;
- the different capacities and backgrounds of students are valued for the positive contribution they can make to a diverse and complex society;
- all students understand, appreciate and respect differences amongst groups in society;
- all students understand the nature of society in which they live and are empowered to redress inequities.
The following case studies give a brief description of how social work theory was utilised to address the presenting issues for these two students. The names and any identifying information in these case studies have been changed to protect the privacy of the particular students.

**Case Study 1 - Cassie:**

Cassie (15 years old) was referred by her form teacher. Cassie was asked by her teacher to move seat and she became aggressive and verbally abused the teacher. These incidents had been occurring frequently with Cassie for over twelve months, and had resulted in multiple episodes of suspension, both in and out of school. Cassie had received intervention for almost a full school year, and had been involved in multiple mediation sessions with pastoral care staff to negotiate her re-entry to class. She also had a history of truancy. She lived with a family friend. Her parents were divorced and had limited contact with her and this was a source of loss for Cassie. She was hoping to return to live with her mother.

Cassie equated punishment with physical violence (corporal punishment) as a result of her experiences with her father, and felt she could get rid of her frustrations at school, because she felt they were not able "to do anything to her". Cassie was bright and was able to recognise and name her issues very clearly. She was also unaware of the behaviour profile the school held on all students, and how this could affect her life chances.

In relation to Cassie, I believe that social work assessment and the application of social work theory, (in particular empowerment theory) assisted in achieving a positive outcome for this student. Previous assessment appeared to have focused on Cassie’s behaviour and did not appear to take into account that Cassie was part of an intricate system both within the school and in her external environment. Her behaviour profile labelled her as disruptive and aggressive. The linear process described by Cohen (1995) had previously been attempted, with the aim being to modify Cassie’s behaviour, in order to teach her. It was my belief that first and foremost, to enable change, it was necessary to engage Cassie and build a relationship. This was partly achieved by offering Cassie a choice on whether or not she engaged in the intervention process. Cassie approached later and asked for an appointment. I believe this first step was crucial in Cassie regaining some power in her life. The intervention provided was in line with empowerment theory (Lee, 1996) with a systems (Pincus and Minahan, 1973) and strengths (Saleebey, 1997) perspective. Initial assessment indicated Cassie’s aggressive behaviour was an outcome of more serious issues in her external environment. Given the mandate of the social work position there was little that could be effected outside the school, however, information re Cassie’s options and external agencies were provided. Providing support and assisting Cassie to identify the reasons for her behaviour and to employ positive strategies achieved a beneficial outcome, for both Cassie and the agency. It was essential to demonstrate to Cassie her power in shaping her behaviour profile and to identify the benefit to her, rather than the focus being on how her changed behaviour would benefit the agency. As a result, there was a visible improvement in the aggressive behaviour. Focussing on why the student was being aggressive to teachers and providing support for the serious external issues being faced, rather than what the student was doing, also lead to a worthwhile relationship developing.
Case Study 2 – Sharie:

Sharie (16 years old) lived in a small town and commuted to the school. She had a significant weight problem, which was impacting on her physical and mental health, as well as her social relationships. There was a history of family violence, particularly between Sharie and her stepfather. Sharie reported she often hit out at him if he commented on her size or questioned her behaviour.

Sharie had inappropriate friendships and often participated in risk taking behaviours to gain acceptance. These behaviours included self-harm, smoking, drug use, binge drinking and unsafe sexual activities. She often discussed her suicidal thoughts and appeared depressed. Many of her friends were younger than her and she appeared unable to sustain friendships with peers her own age. Sharie was also amenable to intervention and was communicative.

In relation to Sharie, structural issues (Fook, 1993) related to access and equity to appropriate services was definitely an issue. The town in which Sharie lives has no appropriate services and her only means of transport is by the school bus. School staff appeared to be at a loss as to how to deal with Sharie. She had often attempted to access intervention with various staff members and it was felt she did so to avoid class, thus she was often sent back to class without receiving intervention. With Sharie, unconditional positive regard was essential, as was a move away from pathologising the issues she was experiencing. I felt that Sharie required ongoing intervention and this in itself was problematic, given the social work placement was time limited and Sharie was not prepared to accept outside intervention. Therefore counselling techniques which enabled a process where Sharie could be listened to, and where further assessment re Sharie’s suicidal thoughts could be facilitated were employed. Sharie was at risk but had no plans to act. A strengths perspective (Saleeby, 1997) within a client-centred approach (Rowe, 1996; Rogers, 1980) was utilised. It became clear that Sharie had a need to be accepted and had adopted her current behaviour patterns in order to seek this acceptance. Initial work centred on her willingness to access intervention and identifying her strengths. Intervention was also strongly focussed on education related to self-esteem, risk-taking behaviours and anger management. Sharie was offered referral to a specialist agency, prior to the social work placement being completed, but again declined. This was partly due to transport issues. Sharie’s mother worked and she also did not particularly want her mother to have to transport her. Sharie was also provided with information re contact numbers, options and external agencies.
The following policy is an exemplar only. In order to develop a conceptual framework for practice (the HOW), I first had to have in my mind a policy framework (the WHAT and WHY). Policy development should not be a sole practice. Without democratic processes that are inclusive of consultation, debate and defining it is difficult to develop effective policy (Kahn, 1969). The first step in developing social policy should be to establish social inequity (Fook, 1993) and I believe this research project has identified a need for further research and / or alternative practices, therefore this policy has been developed with a sense of the “unfinished” (Fook, 1993: 94). That is, I view it as the initial step toward achieving social justice for rural students.

**Policy Statement**

School-based social workers in rural areas will work with and within the school community to provide interventions aimed at eliminating barriers that may impede a student’s educational outcomes and thus their life chances. They will act as a connection between students / families, the school and the community. Further they will enter into mutual relationships with the community in which the school is situated to identify and respond to personal and community issues.

**Core Values**

- The social worker will embrace the professional wisdom of other disciplines, the local knowledge and wisdom of students / families and community members and will enter into partnerships with those people to facilitate best practice in planning and service delivery, relevant to the local community.

- Required services / intervention should be determined by the student’s and family needs in collaboration with teaching and support staff, and by identified issues within the community.

- Decision making responsibility should remain with the student / family and community members.

- All intervention should be culturally sensitive and responsive to the specific needs of the student / family and community.

- Comprehensive processes inclusive of preventative / promotional options, community participation, education, and research based inquiry and evaluation will be utilised to assist in the achievement of optimum outcomes for all members of the school community.

- With individual casework, as far as is possible, services should be provided from a perspective of collaboration, utilising case management processes to ensure that multiple services are delivered in a coordinated and therapeutic manner.
Objectives

- To provide practices that ensure the highest possible outcomes in relation to the social, emotional and structural needs of students / families in order to improve educational outcomes, and to the wider community.

- To assist in the provision of a community-embedded approach towards the provision of services.

- To empower clients / families, other relevant agencies and clinicians to become involved in the assessment and management, needs assessment, and planning and service delivery processes.

- To ensure equity in service delivery regardless of geographic location, socio-economic status, culture, or physical or other disability, thus working toward establishing and maintaining social justice principles for practice.

- To meet the needs of the community in relation to social, emotional and structural disadvantage.

- To provide appropriate health promotion on a universal\(^{47}\), selective\(^{48}\) and indicated\(^{49}\) level, designed to achieve positive health and quality of life for individuals and community.

- To undertake research from an individual/ family and community perspective in order to identify and provide appropriate intervention strategies, designed to reduce the incidence and flow-on effects of issues that may arise.

\(^{47}\) Universal refers to interventions targeted to the general public or a whole population group that has not been identified on the basis of individual risk.

\(^{48}\) Selective refers to interventions targeted to individuals or population subgroups who have a significantly higher than average risk (either imminent or lifetime) of developing problems.

\(^{49}\) Indicated refers targeted intervention to those identified as high-risk individuals, with minimal but detectable signs and symptoms of a disorder, or predisposing issue.

(Williams, 1998)