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Dedication

In memory of Chris Donovan (1958-2007)
Acknowledgements

Sue White has been a tremendous source of support and encouragement over the years while challenging my thinking about professional practice. An enduring friendship has grown out of an intellectual collaboration – long may it continue! Colleagues in the Salford Centre for Social Work Research, the School of Community, Health Sciences and Social Care, the Institute for Health and Social Care Research and the Discourse and Textual Analysis Group at the University of Salford have also been supportive in various ways. A special mention is due to Steve Hicks and Steve Myers for their good friendship and sound advice. Family and friends outside the academic world have helped and supported me over the years – special thanks go to Gill, Peter, Katie, Bev, Cath, Julie and Marion. My son, Patrick, is rather bemused by this project but nonetheless has some appreciation of what it means to me.

And finally, thanks are owed to my supervisors: Dr Greg Smith for his perceptive and constructive feedback on drafts of the Critical Summary and Review and Professor Steven Shardlow for his advice on preparing a PhD by publication. Responsibility for the thesis of course rests with me.
Declaration

The work submitted in this thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Published Works is the candidate's own, either individually or jointly authored as indicated in the List of Published Work (Part I, pp.3-4). Permission has been sought to present the joint-authored work and Sue White, my co-author has verified my contribution to the work (Appendix II). The published work included here has previously been placed in the public domain but has not been presented for any other award at this university or elsewhere.

Copyright for this thesis rests with the author and no part of it may be reproduced without the written consent of the author. Where reference has been made to the work of others it has been appropriately credited.
Abstract

In this thesis by published work nine works are presented, prefaced by a Critical Summary and Review which discusses the genesis of the work and its theoretical presuppositions, and evaluates their contribution to knowledge. The work includes both sole-authored and collaborative writing.

This published work adopts a social constructionist approach to knowledge in health and welfare. The first work explores critical approaches to child development and their relevance to professional practice. Subsequent work adopts a post-Wittgensteinian approach to language as practical activity, exploring how practitioners such as social workers and nurses do ‘case work’, making knowledge about people, events and situations in their talk and writing and, in doing so, enact the institutional order. An exploration of the ways in which practitioners construct their practice in reflective writing is a significant focus within several pieces of work.

Attention is paid to what social actors (patients/service users and professionals) do in their interactions and communicative practices. Thus, talk and text are not treated as simple vehicles for conveying literal, factual descriptions but as the means by which moral adequacy is portrayed and authentic versions of events are established. These analyses draw inspiration from a variety of sources including micro sociology, discursive psychology and narrative analysis, emphasizing the practical-moral aspects of health and welfare practice in which the production of identity, for example as a caring practitioner, plays a key part.

The published work has a strong practice orientation and the implications for professional education are highlighted throughout. ‘Reflexive awareness’ is promoted as a means by which health and welfare
professionals may challenges tendencies to take practice for granted. By engaging in the processes of making the familiar strange, it is argued that better understandings of practice can be achieved and a stance of ‘respectful uncertainty’ deployed.
Part I: Critical Appraisal of Published Work
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Critical Summary and Review
1. Introduction

1.1 The argument of the thesis

Professional practice in health and welfare has been subject to a great deal of scrutiny in recent decades. Public enquiries and official media reports have castigated professionals for failing to intervene to protect vulnerable adults and children or, conversely, intervening too hastily to break up families, for example in situations where child sexual abuse is alleged. Practitioners tend to consider themselves damned if they do act and damned if they don't. In consequence, a certain defensiveness has prevailed as demonstrably 'getting it right' becomes a major factor in practitioner endeavours. This in turn has led to specific responses on the part of policymakers, managers and academics: one is the 'managerial turn' epitomised by the promotion of formal systems of accountability and the development of technical-procedural measures in an endeavour to make practice consistent across teams and agencies. The second is the 'professional turn', that is the turn to knowledge and evidence as the foundations for competent and effective practice. Both of these, which are in fact closely associated in contemporary health and welfare, tend to focus on what is currently wrong with practice and how it may be put right. Both, either implicitly or explicitly, are suspicious of tacit wisdom and practice experience suggesting it leads to ad-hocery, unreflective and potentially unaccountable practice.

Neither of these approaches is adopted in this thesis. My work does not seek to criticize current health and welfare practice, nor to lay down normative prescriptions as to how practice should be carried out. The existing literature amply fulfils these needs. Rather, my published work,  

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1 I have used this term and the 'professional turn' to invoke parallels with the 'linguistic turn' and the 'rhetorical turn' referred to subsequently (see Section 2.2 and n. 22 below).

2 Some of which involves a collaboration with Dr. Sue White who, at the time of writing, is Professor of Social Work at the University of Lancaster. From 1995-2002 we were colleagues in the Department of Applied Social Science at the University of Manchester.
taken as a whole, asserts the importance of getting closer to the everyday routines of professional practice to understand how practitioners accomplish the business of being a social worker, nurse or counsellor, and so forth, and do 'case work'. Specifically, my published work addresses the following questions:

a) How does everyday practice get done?: how do professionals routinely accomplish their work through talk and text?
b) How do professionals 'do' professional identity?: how do they demonstrate in their talk and writing 'who I am, what I know, what my relevancies are' (Baker, 1997: 134, cited in PW2: 101)?
c) How are interactional and rhetorical strategies put to work in talk and text and to what purpose?3

Not only has this meant departing from the typical topics of interest to academics teaching on qualifying and post qualifying programmes, it also represents a departure from the conventional theoretical approaches to the study of professional practice by those within the health and welfare professions. I have sought to problematize approaches that prioritize the gathering of facts in practice and research. These, in my view, fail to take sufficient account of significant debates that have occurred within the social sciences and humanities in recent times about the nature of knowledge and representation. If we take these debates seriously, and the tenor of my work suggests that we should, then we need to think again about the nature of professional practice. The conventional view that practitioners apply external knowledge4 to practice in order to assess

3 The title for my thesis reflects these concerns, drawing in part upon Don Zimmerman’s assertion, based on his study of the intake process in a public welfare agency, that: ‘[p]ersonnel trafficked in . . . facts – they collected them, generated them, and used them in consequential ways’ (Zimmerman, 1969: 354).
4 for example in relation to law, policy, and theories of human behaviour – this, in my view, is the dominant view expressed in textbooks, which are the primary sources for health and welfare students and practitioners. I acknowledge that a critical realist approach has been articulated in academic journals (Houston, 2002) but this has not (yet) permeated the professional literature and, in any event, is still concerned with achieving certainty. Stan Houston (2002: 856), for example, states that: ‘deductive thinking is necessary if logical inferences are to be drawn, hypotheses are to be constructed and relevant explanatory theory selected’.
situations and formulate plans of action is undermined by the suggestion that professionals are not simply users of propositional knowledge but, importantly, makers of knowledge about people, events and behaviours. Defining something as 'child abuse' or 'risk' or 'significant harm', or someone as a 'good' or 'bad' patient, involves processes of categorization that make knowledge as well as use it. This serves to unsettle the standard view of language within health and welfare, that it is a transparent medium for conveying thoughts and facts about the world.

Instead, I propose that we follow post-Wittgensteinian thought in recognizing the importance of language in use. In particular, the published work pays attention to what social actors (clients, patients, service users and professionals) accomplish in their interactions and communicative practices. Thus, talk and text are not treated as simple vehicles for literal, factual descriptions but as the means by which 'moral adequacy' is portrayed and authentic versions of events are established by means of various rhetorical strategies and interactional devices. This kind of analysis draws inspiration from a variety of sources including micro sociology, discursive psychology and narrative analysis, all of which challenge us to treat language as practical activity, and to recognize health and welfare practice as a practical-moral activity in which the production of identity plays a key part: practitioners attempt to pass as competent and caring members of their profession, while service users must either show their worthiness to receive services or resist attempts to have service user status foist upon them against their will.

1.2 The organisation of the thesis

The above argument is developed in detail in this thesis which presents work published, or in one instance accepted for publication, between

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5 A term used in PW2 and other published work (see PW2: 51-2ff); see also Baruch (1981).
2000 and 2007. In total nine published works are included: a book (PW2) and three peer reviewed articles (PW3; PW4 and PW5), all jointly authored with Susan White; four sole authored, peer reviewed journal articles (PW1; PW6, PW7; PW9); and a sole authored chapter from an edited work (PW8).

For the purposes of this thesis, the published work is ordered in the following way: my article on child development theory is placed first as this was in large measure drafted before the other pieces and represents an early articulation of my thinking on the relevance of 'social constructionism' to professional knowledge and practice. Next I have grouped together the joint-authored work which develops certain themes around a critique of 'technical-rationality' (Schön, 1983) and its attempts to impose certainty in professional practice, arguing that this fails to take account of the ambiguities and complexities of professional practice and the consequent difficulties of judgement making in the making of health and welfare 'cases'. These works present arguments for the relevance of discourse and textual analysis to the study of professional practice, offering examples of analyses of transcripts of interactions and of written texts as a means to interrogate how practice is accomplished in ordinary everyday routines and categorizations of people, events and behaviours are made. This group of works concludes with an article on 'educating for uncertainty' (PW5) that draws out in more detail the implications of this approach for professional education.

In essence, the first collaborative work (PW2) can be said to provide a foundation both for the further collaborative work (PW3; PW4; PW5) and for the subsequent sole authored work (PW6; PW7; PW8; PW9). The

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6 PW1 - PW8 were published between 2000 and 2006; PW9 was accepted for publication by *Qualitative Social Work* in February 2007 and is scheduled to appear in early 2008. A copy of the acceptance letter is located in Appendix III, this volume.

7 Details of the published work submitted in this thesis are contained in the list that precedes this Critical Summary (q.v.). They are summarized in Appendix I.

8 I explain this in some detail in Section 2.2. A first draft of PW1 was originally presented as a conference paper (Taylor, 1999).

9 These terms are examined in detail in PW2.
latter works share the theoretical perspective of PW2 while focusing specifically on certain themes and aspects arising from that work: the first of these is reflective practice and its salience to the performance of professional identity; the second is the place of texts in the enactment of institutional order. Where the joint authored work focuses on the performative work of descriptions and factual accounts, the sole authored work has developed these arguments, recognizing the storied nature of practice and giving prominence to written texts such as case records and reflective practice as essential elements in accomplishing the business of the institution. This serves to extend the underpinning theoretical ideas and analyses of PW2. Taken as a whole, the published works provide an innovative and original way of making sense of the interactional and rhetorical strategies deployed in professional practice, thereby making a significant contribution to contemporary understandings of ‘doing’ health and welfare. In particular, it is argued that this can serve the useful function for professionals and academics of making the familiar routines of practice strange.

The published works are presented in Volume Two, Part III of the thesis. Readers may, of course, choose to familiarize themselves with these works before reading this Critical Summary and Review in full. However, this review may be the preferred starting point. A few words here may help the reader decide. What follows is not a summary in a simple sense; those seeking an overview of the main thrust of the argument in each of the published works may wish to refer to the brief summaries provided in Appendix I, located in this volume. Rather the review aims to orient the reader to the theoretical presuppositions that underpin the published work while sketching out something of my intellectual journey towards a particular way of studying professional practice. I also take the opportunity to acknowledge some important, but contested, concepts in the published work and subject them to critical appraisal. Lastly the review provides an overview of the contribution of the published work to knowledge, demonstrating the coherence of the research undertaken and
the work's innovative and original approach. In doing so, this demonstrates the requisite degree of scholarship for this award.

Specifically, the summary and review is organized in the following manner: Section 2 traces my path towards a particular theoretical perspective since becoming an academic. In particular, I address my engagement with social constructionist ideas and the changes this has wrought upon my view of my academic contribution to the study of professional practice. In Section 3, I expound further on my approach to studying professional practice and the notion of professional practice as 'practical-moral' activity. In Section 4, I discuss definitions and review debates about 'reflexivity' and 'reflexive awareness' since these are concepts used throughout the published work. In Section 5, I explore the implications of the approach for professional education which is another theme running through the published work. Issues of authorship and collaborative writing (a feature of some of the published work, as indicated previously) are discussed in Section 6; the summary and review concludes in Section 7 with an assessment of the strength of the published work, in toto, and its contribution to making sense of professional practice.

As readers will already have noted, in this review additional commentary is contained in footnotes. References, using the Harvard system, can be found in Part II (this volume) and include a small number of citations drawn from the published work. Each individual published work (located in Volume II) contains its own set of references.
2. Theoretical orientation

2.1 Past influences

Leaving practice and moving from 'doing' to 'talking about knowing' (Seymour, 2006), the conventional career trajectory for the health and welfare academic, is a challenging experience.\textsuperscript{10} Typically, academics engaged in professional education establish themselves by commenting in their writing on how practice should (and shouldn't) be carried out, with the aim of strengthening occupations that have often been rather patronizingly designated semi- or minor professions. Alternatively, or additionally, academic writing in health and welfare seeks to place practice in its legal and policy context and to bring relevant underpinning knowledge to the attention of students and practitioners. Standard student textbooks of the 'working with . . .' variety exemplify these foci of attention (see, for example, Colton \textit{et al.}, 2001; Phillips \textit{et al.}, 2006).

Whilst these are undoubtedly appropriate preoccupations for the practitioner turned academic and ones that I too embraced in my early academic career, in the late 1990s I changed direction and focus. Two 'pull' factors in particular were influential in this: one was my re-awakened interest in the 'linguistic turn' and the second was my growing interest in studies of contemporary professional practice within the social sciences, many of which are themselves influenced by, and can be located within, the linguistic turn (see, for example, Silverman, 1987; Drew and Heritage, 1992; Prior, 1993).\textsuperscript{11} I discuss the latter in due course in Section 2. Here it is perhaps worth saying a little more about my 're-awakened' interest in the linguistic turn. In the 1980s I undertook a study of the development of child health and welfare services from 1870 to 1920, focusing on

\textsuperscript{10} Kate Seymour's description of a life of quiet contemplation in the academy, however, does not quite resonate with my own experience of 'doing' teaching and administration in a demanding environment.

\textsuperscript{11} A definition of the 'linguistic turn' is provided in n. 22 below as part of a provisional glossary of terms.
Manchester and Salford as a case study of the development of health visiting. 12 This led me to consider different ways of writing of welfare history.

Standard histories of welfare were cast in the progressivist mode. 13 They tended to focus on the work of charismatic individual reformers in the nineteenth century and their efforts to ameliorate the worst effects of industrialization and urbanization, and the gradual emergence of the modern welfare state in the twentieth century. This was 'history from above' which took for granted its representation of the past. In the 1960s and 1970s, influenced particularly by Marxism and feminism, a 'new social history' challenged the progressivist account in two ways: the first was by restoring to the historical record those who had been 'hidden from history', assigning agency to the labouring poor in a 'history from below'； the second was by challenging interpretations of the actions and motivations of middle-class reformers. This writing emphasized the controlling functions of welfare in capitalist and/or patriarchal society and its role in the reproduction of labour power and specific class and/or gender relations. 15 These views were also to find expression in the radical social work movement of the 1970s which defined itself as 'in and against the state' (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979).

Histories from above and below clearly raise issues about matters of focus and interpretation of historical facts. However, at the time of my studies it was impossible to ignore more fundamental challenges to the doing of history. While Michel Foucault's credentials as a historian are disputed, nonetheless his work offers important insights about the ways that phenomena such as mental illness and sexuality are discursively

12 At the time I held an SSRC PhD studentship in the School for Advanced Urban Studies at the University of Bristol.
13 Heywood (1978) and Jones (1972) exemplify this approach.
14 See, for example, the classic work by the renowned British historian, Edward P. Thompson (1968); a collection edited by Newton et al. (1983) brings together work by prominent 'second wave' feminist historians of the period.
15 There are some rather crude articulations of this thesis; analyses of a more nuanced kind include Donajgrodzki (1977); Jones (G Stedman, 1976) and Walkowitz (1980).
produced in different historical periods. It resists the notion of history as a steady march of progress, pointing up breaks and discontinuities with the past and signalling changes that have ambiguous effects in practice. For Foucault 'progress' in treatment and reform, for example in relation to psychiatry and the penal system, subjects individuals to the disciplinary gaze and involves surveillance and control. It serves a normalizing function. Foucauldian analyses\(^\text{16}\) led me to think differently about the work of professionals in policing the boundaries of the 'normal' and 'abnormal':

The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the 'social-worker'-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements.

(Foucault, 1979: 304)

Foucault, of course, is also suggestive about the process by which individuals are turned into writing through the production of case records and reports, tests and so forth, which become key elements in the processes of disciplining 'undocile bodies' (Green, 1983) through discursive practices:

This turning of real lives into writing is no longer a procedure of heroization: it functions as a procedure of objectification and subjection. The carefully collated life of mental patients or delinquents belongs, as did the chronicle of kings or the adventures of the great popular bandits, to a certain political functioning of writing; but in a different technique of power.

(Foucault, 1979: 192)

Thus discourse circumscribes what a person should/should not be and defines how we should think about, and know about, 'social problems'\(^{16}\) space precludes a detailed discussion here of Foucault’s ideas, particularly about power and his challenge to Marxist theory. Readers may wish to consult Sawicki (1991) for a thoughtful exposition of his ideas from a feminist perspective; also useful are Jones and Porter (1994); Petersen and Bunton (1997) and Rose (1989) for examples of Foucault’s influence on studies of medicine and health and Chambon et al. (1999) on social work.
and determine what should be done about them.\textsuperscript{17} A debt to Foucault is acknowledged to a certain extent in PW2 (see Chapter 3: 43-4)\textsuperscript{18} but writing this commentary has made me aware that my ongoing preoccupations with documents and writing in the present owe much to these explorations of the writing of history and my empirical researches into the institutional practices of earlier philanthropic organizations.\textsuperscript{19} Rather than mining historical documents for facts, it has led me to explore how the work of reform is warranted within organizational reporting. This firmly locates my concerns with historiography within the ‘crisis of representation’, which is a central issue within my approach to the study of professional practice in the published work.\textsuperscript{20}

2.2 The ‘crisis of representation’, social constructionism and the study of health and welfare

Challenges to objectivism have proliferated in the late twentieth century and beyond, under the aegis of various critical movements such as feminism, postmodernism and post colonialism (PW2: 24). At issue are arguments about the nature of truth, method and representation in the natural and social sciences that have come to be known as ‘the crisis of representation’. While the heterogeneity of critical positions within this umbrella term cannot be denied, a common starting point is the rejection of a ‘correspondence theory of truth’ (PW2: 20) and of a view of language as a transparent instrument for describing the world, ideas which have

\textsuperscript{17} The following quotation further illuminates Foucault’s position:

Truth is a thing of the world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general regime of truth’: that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

(Foucault, 1980: 31)

\textsuperscript{18} Citations of published work in this review refer to pagination in the original. For the purposes of the thesis new pagination has been superimposed.

\textsuperscript{19} Some of this work is discussed in the following unpublished papers: Taylor (1995); Taylor (1997); Taylor (1998).

\textsuperscript{20} It also signals my broader interest in professional work in health and welfare past and present, rather than simply in social work.
been extremely influential in modern Western thought. The sociologist, John Heritage, for example, draws attention to:

a pervasive and long-standing view which treats language exclusively in terms of its representation function. Within this view, the meaning of a word is what it references, corresponds with, or 'stands for' in the real world . . . the function of sentences is to express propositions, preferably true ones, about the world . . . this essentially pre-Wittgensteinian view of language has remained a tacit assumption for generations of social scientists. As such, it has permeated sociological activity at all levels – empirical, theoretical and metatheoretical.

(Heritage, 1984: 137)

Wittgenstein, in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1963) rejected this 'picture theory of language'\(^\text{21}\) in favour of focusing on language in use:

For the later Wittgenstein language had to be understood as an activity. Understanding language is not a matter of grasping some inner essence nor of following determinate rules, but of knowing how to do certain things.

(Hughes, 1977: 724-5)

Consequently it makes sense to study how language functions within the active, practical lives of speakers (and writers), treating language as a set of instruments and techniques for doing things in particular cases and contexts (McGinn, 1997: 50).

Social constructionism, the rhetorical turn, the linguistic turn, deconstructionism and postmodernism are all terms appended to these developments (Brown, 1994: 13, cited in PW2: 24).\(^\text{22}\) Use of the term

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\(^\text{22}\) *Social constructionism* needs no further clarification at this point since it is discussed shortly and at some length in PW2. At the risk of subscribing to an 'impossible glossary' (Lemert, 1997 cited in PW2: 202), not least because any 'fixing' of definitions prompts a need for further 'fixings' of terms that in turn defy neat description, I offer the following brief, tentative descriptions:

*The rhetorical turn* – recovers rhetoric from its pejorative connotations of insincerity and/or untruthfulness, arguing that argument and justification are intrinsic to communicative practices. Rhetorical analysis involves the study of the forms of

(Cont. on p. 17)
'social construction' increased significantly during the 1980s and 1990s; indeed it became commonplace to make assertions of the kind that:

the existence or character of \( X \) is not determined by the nature of things. \( X \) is not inevitable. \( X \) was brought into existence or shaped by social events, forces, history, all of which could well have been different.

(Hacking, 1999b: 7)

Examples of \( X \) cover a wide spectrum: emotions (Harré, 1986), lesbianism (Kitzinger, 1987), scientific facts (Latour and Woolgar, 1979) and youth homelessness (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994), to name but a few.

The concept of social construction has taken root within studies of health and welfare: subjects addressed include illness (Lorber, 1997), intellectual disability (Rapley, 2004) and community care (Symonds and

\[ n. \ 22 \ cont. \]

expression and the devices used in writing and speech to persuade hearers/readers of the authenticity of the account and the credibility of the speaker/writer (Simons, 1990; Billig, 1996).

The linguistic turn - refers to the turn to language, or discourse, in the social sciences and humanities since the 1960s (see Rorty, 1966); it emphasises the performative aspects of language in use (see above), drawing particular attention to representation.

Deconstructionism - a technique drawn from Jacques Derrida (1976), involving the identification of the ways in which a discourse works by mapping its configuration of binary oppositions and the construction of subject positions, and then attempting to destabilise the ways in which positions of privilege are constructed (see also Culler, 1983).

Postmodernism - the trickiest of these terms as there are multiple, even conflicting, positions that can be included within the umbrella term 'postmodernism'. One definition is associated with the 'aesthetic forms and practices that come after and break with modernism' (Best and Kellner, 1991: 4), particularly in relation to art and architecture. Postmodernism is also used to define the challenge to the modernist ideas of the Enlightenment:

Postmodern theory provides a critique of representation and the modern belief that theory mirrors reality, taking instead 'perspectivist' and 'relativist' positions that theories at best provide partial perspectives on their objects, and that all cognitive representations of the world are historically and linguistically mediated.

Some postmodern theory accordingly rejects the totalizing macroperpectives on society and history favoured by modern theory in favour of microtheory and micropolitics . . . Postmodern theory also rejects modern assumptions of social coherence and notions of causality in favour of multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation, and indeterminacy. In addition, postmodern theory abandons the rational and unified subject postulated by such modern theory in favour of a socially and linguistically decentred subject.

(Best and Kellner, 1991: 4-5)

For further discussion see also Berman (1982); Harvey (1989); Lemert (1997); and, for discussion in a social work context, Fawcett and Featherstone (1995). Enlightenment ideas of modernity are discussed in PW2.
Kelly, 1998). Within social policy it has become accepted to acknowledge the historical and cultural specificity of 'social problems' and the complex mediations of the social, economic and political upon contemporary public issues, values and concerns (Clarke and Cochrane, 1998; Saraga, 1998). Child abuse is a key example of this and Nigel Parton's work, documenting how 'child abuse was discovered, and the political processes whereby it was defined, brought to public attention and made the subject of state intervention' (Parton, 1986: x), has proved to be enormously influential.

There are great benefits to be derived from using social construction as a form of analysis. The philosopher, Ian Hacking argues that social construction has been in some ways 'wonderfully liberating' (1999b: 2), offering the following illustration:

> It reminds us . . . that motherhood and its meanings are not fixed and inevitable, the consequences of child-bearing and rearing. They are the product of historical events, social forces and ideology. Mothers who accept current canons of emotion and behaviour may learn that what they are supposed to feel and act are not ordained by human nature or the biology of reproduction. They need not feel quite as guilty as they are supposed to, if they do not obey either the old rules of family or whatever is the official psycho-pediatric [sic] rule of the day, such as, "you must bond with your infant, or you both will perish".
> (Hacking, 1999b: 2)

PW2 is centrally concerned with the 'crisis of representation' and its implications for understanding professional practice. The term social constructionism was chosen to define the position presented, although I would acknowledge that this term is not without difficulties, as I explain below, and the very idea of social constructionism is anathema to some proponents of experimental methods within health and welfare. Nonetheless there was a need in PW2 to distinguish the approach from the prevailing forms of realism and to categorize the approach in a way that was accessible to a health and welfare readership.
2.3 Using social constructionism to critique child development theory

Despite the criticisms that can be made of its application (see below), the concept of social construction has undoubtedly helped clarify my own thinking in terms of my teaching and research in social work and welfare. An example of this is child development theory, a subject I have taught for many years to undergraduate and postgraduate social work students, and about which I wrote in PW1. My concern was that social work and healthcare practitioners are very much part of interpreting 'current canons of emotion and behaviour' with little directly available to them in terms of critique and counter argument. In an earlier incarnation of this paper (Taylor, 1999), I endeavoured to bring critiques from sociology and critical psychology to bear on the subject of developmental psychology for practitioners and educators. However, further consideration of these issues led me to a more tempered approach to the social construction of child development in the version reworked for publication (PW1).

My aim was to draw attention to opposing discourses of children and childhood: on the one hand, social work operates within a naturalized discourse of childhood dependency, vulnerability and neediness; on the other hand, a sociological discourse of childhood emphasizes children's capacity as social actors to understand complex situations, to make judgements and to participate in decision-making. Elements of the latter are undoubtedly persuasive to health and welfare professionals, for instance, those working with children and young people facing life-threatening surgery (Alderson, 1993) or making decisions affecting children and young people's lives while in public care (Thomas, 2000). Nonetheless, it is perhaps understandable to find a protectionist stance and considerably more suspicion about sustaining an argument for children's capacity in the context of child abuse and neglect, and

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23 This of course connects back to the discussion of Foucault and professionals as 'judges of normality' in Section 2.1 above.
especially where child sexual abuse is alleged to have occurred (PW1; although see Kitzinger, 1990).

In this way my 'grade of commitment' (Hacking, 1999b) to this form of social construction shifted over time. I began by using the idea 'enthusiastically to criticize, change or destroy' (Hacking, 1999b: 7) child development in 'rebellious' fashion (and was thoroughly rebuffed by the first set of reviewers for my pains), whereas PW1 expresses a more 'ironic' grade of commitment (Hacking, 1999b: 19-20) in which I argue for a more reflexive approach to both child development knowledge and its critiques. I want, if I may, to set aside this reference to reflexivity at this stage; I will, however, return to it in due course in Section 4. For the moment I want to stay with social constructionism and its relevance to my research and writing.

The argument in PW1 rests on the version of social constructionism exemplified in the Hacking quotation, cited above. Taken in this way, the concept is perhaps open to the charge of being bland and overused, a badge of radicalism that has simply become the new orthodoxy (see Hacking, 1999b: vii and passim). If virtually everything (e.g. child abuse, mental illness, disability, race, gender) is 'socially constructed', the concept may cease to have critical purchase. In PW1, however, I believe I demonstrate how social constructionism can provide a theoretically informed way of developing a critique of child development theory. It helps us to look afresh at what seems natural and inevitable about espoused theory and embedded assumptions in policy and practice, thus contributing to a questioning approach to the formulation of assessments about children's needs and parenting capacity.

In the remaining published work, influenced by post-Wittgensteinian thought about language as a practical activity, the focus of my analysis

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24 In actuality, there was no intent or presumption on my part to destroy child development theory as a foundation for social work practice, merely to unsettle its 'taken-for-grantedness'.
has shifted somewhat to an exploration of communicative practices in health and welfare. These ideas receive extended treatment in PW2 where the differences between realism and social constructionism are set out at some length (see chapters 1 to 3; also PW3) and the relevance of the latter to the study of health and welfare practice is explained. Here I will focus more on the influence these ideas have had on my intellectual development, by exploring what this form of social constructionist approach offers as a means to extend a critical understanding of professional practice.

2.4 From realism to social constructionism

In 1995 Margaret Lloyd and I published a paper in the *British Journal of Social Work* about social work assessment (Lloyd and Taylor, 1995). Assessment is a key aspect of social work (just as diagnosis is in medicine) and yet relatively little is written about it, other than rather perfunctory treatments in general student textbooks. Our aim was to set out a model for good practice in answer to criticisms by government inspectors and academics about deficiencies in assessment practice. The article was entirely realist in its assumptions that 'out there' was a world of families and problems about which social workers needed to gather information in order to establish what precisely was wrong. Having systematically investigated, workers should then analyse their findings in order to determine the right solution, in the face of several possible alternatives, before implementing a plan of action and completing the process by a review of process and outcomes.

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25 The influence of Wittgenstein on the development of social constructionist ideas is given greater prominence in this Critical Summary and Review than in the published work. The influence of Wittgenstein on ethnomethodology is acknowledged by Polner (1987) and on discursive psychology by Edwards (1997).

26 Now Holloway, Professor of Social Work at the University of Hull, a former colleague at the University of Manchester.

27 Since 1995 a certain amount of work has been published, including Milner and O'Byrne, (1998).

28 Realism is discussed at length in PW2 and PW3 (q.v.).
Re-appraising this work as part of subsequent developments in my thinking prompted recognition of some of its problematic assumptions, particularly in relation to the 'prescribed' image of practitioners as 'thoughtful decision makers, putting time and effort into considering alternative actions, deliberating about their possible consequences and choosing the option that seems most likely to satisfy their goals' (Munro, 2002: 107). The article assumed that assessment is normally a rational, orderly process, only disorderly when the process is faulty in some way and error and bias creep in. The argument in Lloyd and Taylor (1995) implicitly adopted an inductive model, viewing the assessor as a tabula rasa (at least in respect of the situation being assessed) and the assessment as finished product as emanating from empirical findings.

The article also implicitly adopted an individualistic model of assessment and decision-making, emphasizing the autonomy and independence of assessors, alongside their capacity for rational thinking. This clearly bears a strong resemblance to the 'self-contained ideal' at times articulated in the social sciences, and notably in psychology, in which the self is conceived as a 'kind of bounded container, separate from other similarly bounded containers and in possession or ownership of its own capacities and abilities' (Sampson, 2003: 122). Overall, it appears, with hindsight, to be a rather idealized version of what assessment should be from a rational, deliberative perspective:

In the decision-theory literature “decision making” is taken to mean the rational selection of alternatives from a set of mutually exclusive possibilities; the selection is based on values associated with each possible outcome, and the probability of each outcome given the possible course of action. The continuing use of this language, and the characteristic focus on conscious analysis, often results in an inappropriately broad generalization: that all expert judgement is deliberative and analytic and if not, it could be improved by making it more analytic. (Benner et al., 1996: 2)
Joanna Latimer makes similar criticisms of nursing assessment, arguing that in the textbook version of the nursing process, '[n]ursing assessment is primarily a cognitive activity which involves information processing and problem identification, or ‘diagnostic reasoning’ (Latimer, 2000: 128). She argues that this has three primary effects: first, it implies that patients' needs are givens, 'matters of fact waiting to be detected or revealed through the appropriate application of the skilled and educated nursing gaze' (Latimer, 2000: 128). Second, assessment becomes a stage in the nursing process, and part of 'managerial technology' designed to make nurses more accountable. Third, assessment becomes a set of discrete problem-solving activities, separate from other aspects of nursing practice (Latimer, 2000: 129).

My inquiries in sociology and discursive psychology started a process of regarding assessment and decision-making rather differently. Theodor Sarbin and John Kitsuse perhaps encapsulate different possible takes on assessment with their well-known sporting analogy:

Three baseball umpires are reflecting on their professional practice of calling balls and strikes. The first, a self-confident realist, says, "I call 'em the way they are," to which the second who leans toward phenomenological analysis says, "I call 'em as I see 'em," and the third closes the discussion with "They ain't nothin' until I call 'em."
(Sarbin and Kitsuse, 1994: 1, original punctuation)

Here, in essence, is the social constructionist approach: the existence of balls, people and a field is not in question but there is a direct challenge to the claim that balls and strikes are simply called objectively ('the way they are') or subjectively ('the way I see 'em') in a decontextualized way. The calling of balls and strikes, it is argued, is enmeshed in a set of rules and procedures which then have to be invoked by someone invested with the role of 'umpire', in the course of something designated as 'a game of baseball', which proceeds in a defined way, played by teams who are themselves operating within a network of rules. Decisions about balls and strikes are only intelligible within this framework of rules. What, on the
face of it, may appear to be a series of individual decisions (albeit highly contestable ones to players and spectators), is actually a profoundly social accomplishment.

In my published work, this way of interpreting phenomena as social practices has been applied to health and welfare work, challenging these disciplines to see assessment very differently. From this perspective, it is no longer a case of regarding practitioners as 'calling it the way it is' as the literature, including Lloyd and Taylor (1995), would have us believe, or attributing difference to subjectivity on the part of an assessor. Rather, the complexities and ambiguities of situations are recognized. In a child protection inquiry, for example, there may be a child with an injury but the question is how 'to call it' in the face of often inconclusive and highly contested evidence, and conflicting accounts of events (PW2, Chapter 1, see also Chapter 9). And, it might be added, it is not 'child abuse' until an institutional categorization has occurred, but once this has occurred it may have very serious material effects. To call it 'non-accidental injury' requires practitioners to know and invoke those particular rules of naming and categorization that have been developed and refined since the 'rediscovery' of child abuse in the United States in the 1960s (Kempe et al., 1962) and to attach a particular set of meanings to the situation and events at hand. In doing so, I would argue, the institutional order is enacted. This argument, using varied examples, is made throughout the published work presented here.

2.5 **Facts and versions: language as performative**

Social constructionism can thus be taken further than it was in PW1 by paying closer attention to language in use in professional practice. In my published work (see, for example, PW2; PW7; PW9), I have emphasized the performativity of language in contrast to the dominant conduit metaphor of human communication. In the latter it is assumed that:
(1) language functions like a conduit, transferring thoughts bodily from one person to another; (2) in writing and speaking, people insert their thoughts and feelings in the words; (3) words accomplish the transfer by containing the thoughts or feelings and conveying them to others; and (4) in listening or reading, people extract the thoughts and feelings once again from the words. 
(Reddy, 1979: 290)

Thus, language is understood to be transparent and reflective of thoughts and feelings, providing literal descriptions of external or interior worlds. Pamela Trevithick (2000: 53), for example, states that ‘learning to understand what people are communicating, and to put our own thoughts and feelings into words, is a crucial skill within social work’. In contrast, for social constructionism, language is ‘constitutive: it is the site where meanings are created and changed’ (Taylor, 2001: 6; see also PW2: 26-7). As social actors, people use language to claim, deny, justify, blame and undermine other’s arguments (and many other things besides) in their personal and working lives (examples can be found in PW2; PW3).

I pay particular attention in my published work to the ways in which language and communicative practices are deployed to moralize about oneself and others. In PW7, I discuss how professionals construct themselves as competent practitioners and, in PW2, there are many examples of the ways in which clients and patients attempt to construct moral worthiness, for example, in order to gain access to services. However, these social interactions are never secure in their effects. Kenneth Gergen suggests, in a different example, that ‘whether an act is defined as envy, flirtation, or anger floats on a sea of social interchange. Interpretation may be suggested, fastened upon, and abandoned as social relationships unfold across time’ (Gergen, 2003: 16). There are many examples of the ‘sea of social interchange’ throughout my published work: particular examples are to be found in PW2; PW6; PW7.
2.6 Producing insider knowledge

Taking on board messages from constructionism about the analysis of social interaction has changed the way that I approach the task of being an academic based within a professional discipline. My work does not intend to undermine or discredit the practice of social workers and others. Neither do I seek to imply that providing advice and guidance to workers is an inappropriate or unimportant task for academics. I do want to argue, nonetheless, that there is an alternative role for the health and welfare academic from that of delivering normative statements about practice.

In his study of counselling, David Silverman (1997: 35) states: 'my preference is not to criticize professionals but to understand the logic of their work'. Silverman, of course, is writing as an 'outsider' sociologist of professional practice (see also Silverman, 1987). In addition I want to suggest that those of us with ‘insider’ status have a valid, indeed, vital role, to play in researching how practice is accomplished in particular settings.29 We can do so in order to make sense of it, in order to ‘describe and illuminate . . . practice rather than promote or undermine it’ (Hall et al., 2006: 10; see also Pithouse, 1988). Moreover, this enables us to explore areas of practice that sociologists have tended to overlook. It is noticeable, for example, that significantly more attention has been given by sociologists to the elite professions of medicine and law compared with nursing, social work and professions allied to medicine (itself a significant term). However, taken as a whole, the literature on professional practice undoubtedly challenges our thinking about practice and helps us to see it differently, as I discuss in the next section.

29 See Shaw and Gould (2001) for several interesting commentaries on this kind of research. Insider- and outsider-dom is not as straightforward as this perhaps suggests: White (2001) discusses being ‘inside out’ as a researcher-practitioner.
3. Understanding professional practice

Sociology has had rather a mixed reception in health and welfare. As Law and Urry (2004) suggest, sociology can easily be seen either as dangerously radical or as a joke subject, full of jargon and pretentious ways of stating the fairly obvious. Mainstream social work, for instance, since the demise of the radical social work of the 1970s, has tended to keep sociology rather at arms' length, accepting the substantive knowledge it provides about social divisions, families, social problems and suchlike but distancing itself (at least until recently) from debates about ontology and epistemology that have caused such upheaval in the social sciences in recent decades. In essence, social work has tended to adopt a pragmatic approach to external knowledge, using what seems useful and relevant while ignoring the rest of the discipline. Indeed, students and practitioners tend to rely on the rather diluted forms of knowledge provided in social work textbooks rather than consulting original texts and grappling with complex arguments (a point made in PW1 with regard to child development; see also PW5). Issues of method and inquiry have remained somewhat at the margins until now, but things are beginning to change as a research culture takes root among health and welfare academics and stronger connections with the social sciences are established.

I would place myself among those health and welfare academics who have become increasingly responsive to work in the social sciences, arguing that this helps us make sense of professional culture and practice. In this sense, I have shifted from drawing on the social sciences as knowledge for practice (i.e. to be used by practitioners to inform their assessments and interventions) towards exploring what they offer in terms of knowledge of practice (i.e. describing and understanding

30 There are of course some notable exceptions, for example Rojek et al. (1988).
31 In part, this may be accounted for by divergence of interests and fragmentation of the subject matter in recent decades. Moreover, treatments of subjects such as race, class and gender have become vastly more theoretical and less amenable to easy translation into professional practice.
everyday practice and its associated routines). I will explore this issue of knowledge of practice (or perhaps 'knowing practice' is better) by first comparing different approaches to professional practice and then exploring social work as practical-moral activity.

3.1 'It's not like that in practice': acknowledging messiness and ambiguity in practice

A remark made by a former social work student has stayed with me. Describing her experience since completing her qualifying programme, she told me that, although she had enjoyed the course, 'it's not like that in practice'. Initially I was rather puzzled and discomfited by this remark. Did this student not ascribe value to the programme she had completed? Was she blaming the staff team for failing to provide the right sort of education to equip her for practice? However, thinking about this in the context of studying professional practice, I make different sense of it now, and the above questions do not seem the right ones to pose. The student's assertion exemplifies the disjunction between the theories, models and concepts developed in the classroom and the experience of real practice.

Now within the professional literature, acknowledgment of this disjunction has led to considerable efforts either to close 'the theory-practice gap' (see, for example, Rolfe, 1996) or to articulate different formulations of practice (Benner et al., 1996; Napier and Fook, 2000; Higgs and Titchen, 2001). Micro sociological studies of professional practice (for exposition of these see PW2, Chapter 2) have taken a rather different route. They

However, I will also suggest in Section 4 that 'knowing practice' can also assist practitioners in the performance of practice. With regard to knowledge 'for' and 'of' practice, Malcolm Payne (1997: 39) proposes three types of theory: i) 'theories of what social work is'; ii) 'theories of how to do social work'; iii) 'theories of the client world'. Formal expressions of the first type are defined as 'written accounts defining the nature and purposes of welfare (e.g. personal pathology, liberal reform, Marxist, feminist)' (Payne, 1997: 39), i.e. macro level theorizing, but the category could usefully be extended to include micro sociological analyses of how social work is performed.
acknowledge that practice does not conform to the versions found in textbooks:

Practices are not accomplished merely by following theories, models or concepts. Theories and models are general idealizations, whereas practices are carried out in situ. Theories and concepts related to practices consist of ideals and visions of the ‘best possible situations’, whereas institutional practices constantly deal with a range of cases that do not reach such ideals. Furthermore, institutional practices always involve aims that are not articulated as ‘goals’ or ‘ideals’, but nonetheless fundamentally organize the actual practice.
(Peräkylä and Vehviläinen, 2003: 728)

This directly challenges two significant perspectives in health and welfare research. The first, the pragmatic approach characterizes much empirical research, particularly the kinds of work commissioned by central government departments (see, for example, Department of Health, 2001). Operating within a realist epistemological framework, pragmatists aim to get on with the job of producing useful knowledge for practice:

Epistemological discussions and theory are not part of pragmatism, and the pragmatists appear to continue to exist in splendid isolation from the developments and debates in research methodology . . . For pragmatists research design is therefore based on technical rather than epistemological, ontological or theoretical grounds.
(Trinder, 2000: 43)

A typical pragmatist study would deploy non-experimental methods of quantitative data collection supplemented by qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviewing (Trinder, 2000: 43). The questions addressed by pragmatist research tend to be of the following nature: what are users’ perceptions of services?; to what extent are they (dis)satisfied with services and access to services?; what issues/problems are there in service availability and delivery?; and how might services be improved?
The second, evidence-based practice (EBP) movement has been gathering momentum in health and welfare since the 1990s. EBP draws upon a positivist or postpositivist framework, assuming an objective reality which can be captured by rigorous, scientific methods (see PW2, Chapter 2; PW3; PW4; PW5). While I have not addressed the weaknesses of a pragmatic approach in my published work (as perhaps I could have done), a critique of 'narrow-stream' EBP runs through my work and is particularly to be found in PW2; PW3; PW4. The effectiveness of EBP, or rather experimental methods, in certain areas of research is not at issue. Their place among the panoply of research methods is accepted. In my work with White, however, I have been critical of the prominence given to randomised control trials as the 'gold standard' for research and the relegation of qualitative methods to a lowly place in a 'hierarchy of evidence' (see PW2; PW3; PW4). Testing the effectiveness of interventions is undoubtedly relevant to health and welfare research but, in my view, it should not dominate as there are many other significant research questions to be asked and answered. A rigid and inflexible application of a hierarchy of methods is inhibiting to research and has often been accompanied by condescension or hostility towards qualitative research, which has tended to inflame rather than inform debate (PW4). Although different in many ways, both pragmatic and evidence-based approaches concern themselves with righting the alleged wrongs of practice. Yet, I would argue, neither of these stances is particularly illuminating about the nature of everyday practice routines.

In EBP the workings of 'practice' are largely taken for granted. The emphasis is on the generation of knowledge that can be applied to make service delivery more economic, efficient and effective. It is assumed that workers will (or should) follow models for good practice, eschewing reliance on outmoded concepts, habit, dubious opinion and/or impressions and intuition (PW2; PW4). As critics have pointed out, EBP

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33 Although experimental approaches clearly have a much longer history than this (PW4).
34 Within social work the work of Sheldon (2001) is a prime example.
does not necessarily follow its own injunctions when opining about knowledge and its transmission to practice. It assumes linearity of the process\textsuperscript{35} and ease of knowledge application in practice (PW1).

On the face of it, the pragmatic approach gets much closer to practice as it seeks to study current practice (‘what’s wrong’) and to set it right.\textsuperscript{36} However, this closeness to practice is somewhat illusory. Pragmatist research relies primarily upon the views of service users and workers, verbalized in interviews, or inscribed in documents as sources of information about the current state of practice and how it could be improved. Unsurprisingly, given its suspension of ‘not-to-be-resolved philosophical conundra in the interests of getting on with the job’ (Fuller, 1996: 59, cited in Trinder, 2000: 43), it fails to acknowledge the disjunction between what people say and write about practice after the event, and what they do in practice, or how people’s talk about practice may vary according to context.\textsuperscript{37}

3.2 **Analysing practice: beyond pragmatism and EBP**

My adopted approach brackets the normative evaluations of practice and prescriptions for model practice found in pragmatism and EBP, in favour of more open questions about:

a) how everyday practice gets done: how do professionals routinely accomplish their work in their talk and writing?

b) how professionals ‘do’ professional identity: how do they demonstrate in their talk and writing ‘who I am, what I know, what my relevancies are’ (Baker, 1997: 134, cited in PW2: 101)?

\textsuperscript{35} This parallels the way assessment is portrayed (see Section 2.4 above).

\textsuperscript{36} The pragmatic approach does not fit neatly into the ‘what works’ approach of EBP, its recommendations for change seem less concerned with specific structured interventions, notably cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), and more broadly oriented to improving systems, assessment and intervention, based on principles of user involvement and partnership.

\textsuperscript{37} The ‘indexicality and occasionedness’ (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998) of talk is discussed in PW2; see also White (2006).
c) how interactional and rhetorical strategies are put to work in talk and text.

These questions form the backbone of PW2 and subsequent work, with explorations in relation to: interactions between professional and clients (PW2; PW3); collegial interactions (PW2; PW3); documents as instruments for ‘crystallizing action’ (Miller, 1997: 78, cited in PW2: 141\(^{38}\), PW9); and professional reflective writing (PW6; PW7; PW8; PW9). These explorations serve to ‘trouble’ the professional agenda. Rather than starting from the premise that order and regularity must prevail in (good) practice, it is acknowledged that practice is a messy, complex and risky business and that what, at one level can appear to be deviations from order (the ‘theory-practice’ gap), can in fact be seen as practitioners’ attempts to impose order in situations that can never be completely known, as indicated in the example of child abuse (Section 2.4; elaborated in PW2; PW3).

In effect, this leads us into the territory of exploring the hows of practice while suspending the imperative to pronounce upon matters of competence and effectiveness in the form of what and should. In the next section I will elaborate further on the contribution this makes to understanding health and welfare practice.

3.3 Practice as practical-moral activity

If neither EBP nor pragmatism deals satisfactorily with the issue of practice, it clearly behoves us to look elsewhere: ‘research methodologies are needed that can conceptualize nursing [or other health and welfare work] as an active and knowledgeable social accomplishment’ (Purkis, 2003: 35). It is for this reason that certain qualitative approaches have proved so fruitful in problematizing what has been taken for granted

\(^{38}\) I have found an error in the quotation in PW2: 141. It should read ‘. . . making it possible for us to return . . . ’ (it currently says ‘impossible’!); in addition the quotation from Miller (1997) is to be found on p.78 not p.72.
within health and welfare professions (PW4). An inspiration for this approach has been the ethnomethodological work of Harold Garfinkel who, *inter alia*, signalled the 'good organizational reasons' that might underpin 'bad records' (Garfinkel, 1967; see PW9): the completion of medical records, for example, may conform more to the exigencies surrounding defensive practice (avoiding litigation by patients/relatives), or exacting payment for healthcare, than providing illuminating accounts for future case workers or patients themselves.

Insights from ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and discourse analysis have informed my approach to aspects of professional practice in the published work. In particular, I have focused on talk and text, not as resources providing 'information about something else' (Smith, 1990, cited in PW9) and therefore interesting simply as 'containers of content' (Prior, 2003). Instead, the published work emphasizes the active, performative aspects of talk and text, paying attention to the work that they accomplish in social interaction. I am particularly interested in 'identity-work' as 'something that is part and parcel of the routines of everyday life, brought off in the fine detail of everyday interaction' (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 1). Thus, rather than taking identity as a phenomenon that precedes social encounters, the published work, from PW2 onwards, is predicated upon the assumption that identities are constructed in social interaction: 'identity is available for use: something

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39 This distinction between 'topic' and 'resource' is a standard one in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (Zimmerman and Pollner, 1970) and is drawn on in the published work. As Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein (1997: 33) note: Conversation analysts ... examine in systematic detail what members *do with* words, rather than just use subjects' words to show what members are thinking and doing. Regarding conversation as their topic, they refuse to treat it as epiphenomenal, as merely a source of illustration for other concepts and constructs the analyst has uncovered.

40 In the published work the terms 'talk' and 'text' have been used to distinguish between spoken and written forms of communication. I recognize, of course, that 'text' may include other documentary forms (film, art works, forms, diagrams and so forth) and that 'text' may also be used generically by certain authors, notably poststructuralists, to include talk. In his overview, Mark Smith's (1998: 252) list of texts includes: 'talking, writing, posters, paintings, cartoons, computer-generated imagery, statistics, films, e-mails, web sites, computer games and even cyber pets - in fact anything through which meanings can be produced'. This implies that such a list is constantly in flux as new forms of text are generated.
that people do which is embedded in some other activity, and not something they 'are" (Widdicombe, 1998: 191).

Conversation analysts have used these insights primarily in relation to talk; I also take the view that they are relevant to documentary forms, noting Dorothy Smith's observations concerning texts as 'active constituents of social relations' (Smith, 1990: 121-2; see also PW9). Exploring how social identity categories are handled in use is thus an important aspect of the published work. In health and welfare practice, it can be noted that displays of moral adequacy are particularly important: in some arenas, for instance, patients and service users seek to claim worthiness to receive treatment or services (PW2 Ch. 5) or to display their moral adequacy as parents/carers (Baruch, 1981, cited in PW2: 84-6); in others, notably in mental health and child protection work, considerable work may be done to resist client or user status (see, for example, the case of Vladimir cited in PW2: 12-14).

Practitioners, too, engage in these processes of identity work. Matters of competence are rarely far from the surface as workers seek to warrant their actions and show themselves to be caring and/or accountable professionals in both their talk with patients/clients, colleagues and other professionals. In their writing (case records, reports and reflective accounts) similar processes are at work (PW9). For this reason, following Antaki and Widdicombe (1998) and others, I have argued that identity is not a static possession brought to encounters with patients and others. Rather, a professional identity as a nurse, social worker and so forth is mobilized in the processes of engaging with patients/clients and colleagues, and/or writing about them (PW6; PW7; PW8; PW9).

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41 These may include instances where reflective writers challenge colleagues or 'the system' in the name of caring practice (e.g. PW7).
42 Similarly, the philosopher, Charles Taylor (1989: 177) states: 'we come to think that we 'have' selves as we have heads. But the very idea that we have or are a 'self', that human agency is essentially defined as 'the self', is a linguistic reflection of our modern understanding and the radical reflexivity it involves.'
4. Reflexive awareness: challenging the mundane mode

At this point I want to return to the 'theory-practice' gap and the practice response outlined in Section 3.1, in order to signal another concept that is important in my work, namely that of reflexivity. Although in many ways EBP could be said to be in the ascendancy at present, there is significant critique of forms of 'technical-rationality' in health and welfare (PW2; PW4), alongside strong support for reflective practice as 'a new epistemology of practice' (Napier and Fook, 2000). This strand of thought conventionally draws on the work of Donald Schön (1983, 1987, discussed in PW2; PW6; PW7; PW8) who, unlike proponents of EBP, connotes intuition and practice wisdom positively as both a necessary and positive feature of practice:

The problems of real-world practice do not present themselves to practitioners as well-formed structures. Indeed they tend not to present themselves as problems at all but as messy, indeterminate situations . . . When a practitioner sets a problem, he chooses and names the things he will notice . . . Through complementary acts of naming and framing, the practitioner selects the things for attention and organizes them, guided by an appreciation of the situation that gives it coherence and sets a direction for action. (Schön, 1987: 4)

From this perspective, practitioners are not primarily rule-followers or importers of formal knowledge into practice. Rather, they 'improvise, invent and test' (Schön, 1987: 5) in such a way that it is more apposite to say that 'the best theories are the ones that [they] make up in the situation' (Schön, 1995: 53). In PW2 the different forms of reflective practice (knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action) are reviewed. Particular attention is paid in my published work to reflection-on-action as this aspect has been most emphasized in professional education where forms of verbal and written reflection are compulsory elements of qualifying and post qualifying curricula. Again, my contention is that reflective writing, rather than simply acting as a container of
content, is an important arena in which practitioner identity is constructed. Consequently, reflective practice itself is placed under considerable scrutiny in the published work (PW2; PW6; PW7; PW8; PW9).

The early analysis of reflective practice in PW2 makes brief reference to the significance of narrative but this theme is developed more extensively in later sole-authored work (PW6; PW7; PW8; PW9). In this, a key influence has been Paul Atkinson’s work on ethnographic texts in which he argues that:

The ethnography . . . cannot inhabit a world of texts where conventionality is taken for granted, or where language is treated as unproblematic. The fully mature ethnography requires a reflexive awareness of its own writing, the possibilities and limits of its own language, and a principled exploration of its modes of representation.

(Atkinson, 1990: 180)

This seems to me an important lesson for professional practice. It too should establish a ‘reflexive awareness’, interrogating the processes and products of practice. In his work on ethnographic texts Atkinson (1990: 105) argues that ‘ethnography delineates patterns of interpretation and understanding through narrative forms’. I have applied this insight to reflective practice and case records, exploring practitioners’ narrations of practice (PW6; PW7; PW8; PW9) and arguing that case stories of practice are not faithful replications of past events. Rather, they involve tellers, hearers, writers and readers in complex interactions, using particular conventions and devices to ‘traffic in facts’ (Zimmerman, 1969) and ‘tell the case’ (Pithouse and Atkinson, 1988). Thus, narratives are oriented to the past (the events), the present (the telling) and the future (interpretation by hearers/readers; see PW9).

4.1 Practising reflexivity

Promoting greater reflexivity on the part of students, practitioners and academics in health and welfare forms a major aim of my published work.
As a tool for appraising practice, reflective practice has strengths but also certain limitations (see PW2 Chapter 10; PW6), not least that it may consist of little more than 'benign introspection', entailing 'loose injunctions to think about what we are doing' (Woolgar, 1988b: 22, cited in PW2: 34-5). Invoking the concept of reflexivity provides a means for health and welfare professionals to move beyond reflecting on their thoughts and feelings about specific pieces of work to interrogating their practice in a more searching fashion. This, I would contend, is extremely important, given the challenging and highly complex work that practitioners undertake. In particular, practitioners should acknowledge and explore the ways in which practice necessitates making knowledge and categorizing events and situations:

> categorisation involves a set of processes which result in facts, opinions and circumstances being established as one type or category rather than another; for example this is a case of 'failure-to-thrive', not delayed development. (Hall et al., 2006: 15)

Moreover, ‘making up cases’ practitioners involves ‘making up people’ (Hacking, 1999a) as I demonstrate, for example in PW9, in ‘Andrew’s story’ where he constructs himself as a caring, sensitive practitioner and Susan, a patient with HIV/AIDS, as a ‘survivor’ rather than a ‘junkie’ and difficult, manipulative patient.

As I indicate throughout the published work, there is a clear role for the health and welfare academic to engage students and practitioners in interrogating the processes by which they ‘make up’ cases and people.  

43 Interestingly Schón makes similar points about practitioner reflexivity in a work that has only recently come to my attention (Schón, 1995). Without using the term reflexivity, he advocates a partnership between practitioners and researchers, stating that: ‘[a]cademic researchers could help practitioners make explicit, cumulatively develop, criticize, and test the tacit knowing embedded and generated in their practice’ (Schón, 1995: 53).
The reflexive turn

Earlier, in Section 2.3, I acknowledged that the term 'social construction' is not without difficulty, while proposing, nonetheless, its relevance for making sense of health and welfare. The same might also be said of 'reflexivity'; in the published work it is it is acknowledged as slippery and elusive in terms of definition and usage (PW2: 197-8), not least because some authors use 'reflection' and 'reflexivity' interchangeably in relation to professional practice (e.g. Bolton, 2006). In addition the complexities of the term are often inadequately acknowledged in the health and welfare literature. This is clearly at variance with the social sciences where discussion and debate about definitions and usage have been intense; indeed, it might be more apposite to speak of 'reflexivities' in recognition of the considerable disagreement that exists about the virtues of reflexivity and the forms that it should take.44

44 As part of attempts to get to grips with the nature and benefits (or otherwise) of reflexivity several differing typologies have been offered. The more simple of these suggest a dichotomous structure, Tim May, for example, differentiates between the 'endogenous' and 'referential' dimensions of reflexivity thus:

**Endogenous reflexivity** - 'refers to an agent's understanding of the knowledge that is born, deployed and arises within his immediate social and cultural milieus. This knowledge informs practical actions that are oriented to those localities' (May, 2000: 157).

**Referential reflexivity** - 'refers to a process of re-cognition in which the knowledge generated enables the agent to understand the conditions under and through which such practices are enabled and constrained' (May, 2000: 157).

May perceives a movement from endogenous to referential reflexivity as one of reflexivity 'within actions' to reflexivity 'upon actions' which enables 'connections to be made between the individual and social conditions of which they are a part, to bring attention to the unacknowledged conditions of action at the level of inter-subjectively shared lifeworlds' (2000: 158). May, of course argues ultimately for a fusion of endogenous and referential reflexivity as important to processes of social transformation.

Douglas Macbeth (2001) also adopts a binary structure in his delineation of 'positional' and 'textual' reflexivity:

**Positional reflexivity** - 'takes up the analysts' (uncertain) position and positioning in the world he or she studies and is often expressed with a vigilance for unseen, privileged, or, worse, exploitative relationships between analyst and the world' (Macbeth, 2001: 38).

**Textual reflexivity** - disrupting the text to 'interrogate and find strange the process of representation as we engage in it' (Woolgar, 1988b: 29).

A more extensive typology has been developed by the ethnomethodologist, Michael Lynch, who distinguishes between mechanical, substantive, methodological, meta-theoretical, interpretative and ethnomethodological reflexivities before further sub-categorizing them (Lynch, 2000). Briefly stated, these are defined as follows:

(cont. on p. 39)
In part these debates and disagreements about reflexivity parallel discussions in the published work about the differences between reflective practice and the form of reflexivity advocated in PW2 and subsequently. Just as health and welfare practice displays its 'reflective turn', so too have the social sciences engaged in a 'subjective turn' which insists upon recognizing 'the constitutive inseparability of knower and known' (Pels, 2000: 2). In rejection of an 'unreflexive objectivism' (Lynch, 2000), there has been an emphasis in qualitative research upon 'reflexive self-disclosure' (Pels, 2000:1). In the latter, the presence of the author in the text is advocated, along with the adoption of an 'autobiographical and personalistic style' (Pels, 2000). This acts to make visible both an authorial voice and what lies behind the description of the social world. Personal narratives and confessional tales of the research process have thus become commonplace (Coffey, 2002) to the extent of being incorporated into the disciplinary apprenticeship of students of the social sciences (Burman, 2006), just as reflective practice has been assimilated

(n. 44 cont.)

Mechanical – 'a kind of recursive process that involves feedback' (Lynch, 2000: 27); habitual and operating through a series of actions and responses.

Substantive – this is treated as a real phenomenon in the social world and 'emblematic of late modernity' (Lynch, 2000: 28) as in work on reflexive modernization or intrinsic to human activity.

Methodological – associated with self-knowledge; the kind of self-consciousness and self-criticism/congratulation that has become an established feature of participant-observation/ethnography.

Meta-theoretical – a form of 'ironic detachment' or disengagement from tribal custom in order to make the familiar strange. Lynch identifies feminist standpoint theory as one example of this: Harding, for example, argues that 'the conceptual frameworks within which we work . . . [should] be subjected to the same critical examination that we bring to bear on whatever else we are studying' (Harding, 1996: 159, cited in Lynch, 2000: 31).

Interpretative – broadly speaking, 'reading, thinking, contemplating or making sense of, an object or text' (Lynch, 2000: 32). Lynch particularly associates this with 'radical referential reflexivity' and the constructionist analysis of representations and texts (broadly conceived).

Ethnomethodological – simultaneously methodological and substantive: 'the reflexivity of accounts implies interpretation – expressing, indicating or recognizing meaning – but, more than that, it alludes to the embodied practices through which persons singly and together, retrospectively and prospectively, produce account-able states of affairs' (Lynch, 2000: 33, italics in original). Reflexivity, thus defined, is 'ubiquitous and unremarkable' (Lynch, 2000: 34), an intrinsic element of everyday routines of social interaction. For Lynch and many other ethnomethodologists there is no inherent virtue to reflexivity – a point I address in the above discussion.
into health and welfare education. In his characterization of 'confessional tales' John Van Maanen (1988) suggests that:

[t]he confessional attempts to represent the fieldworker's participative presence in the studied scene, the fieldworker's rapport and sensitive contact with others in the world described, and something of the concrete cultural particulars that baffle the fieldworker while he learns to live in that setting.
(Van Maanen, 1988: 75)

If we substitute 'practise in that setting' for 'live', the similarities between the concerns of reflective practice and ethnography are readily discernible. Both reflective accounts and tales from the field may account for 'errors, misgivings . . . and misperceptions' (Van Maanen, 1988: 79) in their respective settings, albeit in ways that do not undermine the authority of the writer and their identity as a morally adequate practitioner of their particular trade (PW2; PW7).

The limitations of reflective practice articulated in the published work also apply to the reflexive self-disclosure of 'endogenous reflexivity' (n. 44). May refers to the need to keep 'self-referential indulgence' (1999: para. 3.9) and 'self-fascinated observation' (1999, para. 3.14) in check, while Burman (2006: 324) cautions that 'the talk has become the walk: the researcher's reflection upon the action is the action'. In consequence, there have been attempts to refine and extend the concept of reflexivity beyond the kinds of self-absorbed ruminations on research practice which may bedevil endogenous reflexivity. In this vein, it is argued in PW2 that academics and practitioners in health and welfare should interrogate 'the process by which interpretation has been fabricated', defining reflexivity (in contradistinction to reflective practice) 'as requiring any effort to describe or represent to consider how that process of description was achieved, what claims to 'presence' were made, what authority was used to claim knowledge' (Fox, 1999: 220, cited in PW2: 198).
This clearly resonates with some forms of 'methodological' and 'interpretative' reflexivity (Lynch, 2000) since it is argued in the published work that an understanding of the processes and products of practice should not be taken for granted as 'just the ways things are' or 'the way that things get done around here'. As I note in PW8: 75, 'health and welfare practice constructs reality as much as it produces descriptions of it' and it follows from this that practitioners and academics should explore these processes of description and 'claims to presence' (Fox, 1999). I would of course acknowledge that this form of interpretative reflexivity is not itself without critics:

There is no special reason to be for or against such a conception of reflexivity. Studies of 'our own' investigative practices may, in some cases, be interesting, insightful and cleverly written, or come across as tedious, pretentious and unrevealing. Close textual studies of scientific and administrative reports may reveal significant contingencies covered over by equivocal claims, or they may turn up nothing of great interest to anybody. Ordinary and occasional virtues and difficulties can be ascribed to thinking about what one is doing or reflecting on the moral consequences of one's actions, but reflexivity in general offers no guarantee of insight or revelation. (Lynch, 2000: 47; italics in original)

Michael Lynch undoubtedly has a point. To be interesting and insightful is not intrinsic to reflexivity of any stripe. Equally, I would argue that tedium and pretension are not inevitable features of interpretative reflexivity. Ethnomethodologists such as Lynch (2000) prefer to focus upon the 'local procedures through which members 'achieve' accountable activities' (Lynch, 2000: 43): for example the way which teachers 'analyze and interpret what students make of their questions and reflexively reveal their analyses in next questions and remarks' (Macbeth, 2001: 54). In the classroom teachers thus act reflexively, making analytic moves shaped

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45 It is clear from Lynch's discussion that he does not view these categories as mutually exclusive: 'interpretation is more or less prominent in many of the above categories of substantive, methodological and meta-theoretical reflexivity' (Lynch, 2000: 32).
46 The ethnomethodological use of the term 'account-able' is explained in PW2: 40-1.
by their ongoing analyses of pupils' talk and adapting their practice to engage pupils and elicit responses.

This contention clearly has validity. Reflexivity is not the prerogative of the social scientist; it can be found in everyday communicative practices. However, ethnomethodological reflexivity is not itself beyond critique and some points are worth making in this regard. First, in the above example there is a danger of equating 'teaching' as an activity with classroom interaction to the detriment of other sites for teaching (the staffroom, the playground, the canteen, the school office to name but a few) and other activities (preparation, marking, talking to colleagues and parents formally and informally, registration, detention and so forth). Moreover, the place of text in teaching (policy documents, pupil reports, SATS tests, homework and so forth) can be all too easily overlooked. There is more to teaching than classroom interactions between a teacher and their pupils, just as there is more to nursing and social work than verbal interactions with patients or service users. The shift of focus towards analyses of textual sources in the published work is intended to recognize this fact.

Second, 'competent practitioners' may be 'the first reflexive analysts on the scene' (Macbeth, 2001: 54) but it could be argued that they are often 'unconsciously competent' analysts.47 Other analysts and analyses, therefore, may need to be called upon.48 As suggested in the published work, in the thick of the action practitioners' capacity for overt reflexivity is

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47 This is a reference to a term used in professional education to signify tacit ignorance and competence - learners are said to go through stages as follows: i) unconscious incompetence - not knowing what they don't know; ii) conscious incompetence - knowing what they don't know; iii) conscious competence - overtly knowing (how to do); iv) unconscious competence - 'just doing', knowing tacitly, practising expertly. I have been unable to trace the original source. In this regard the former US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld (2002), was much maligned for stating that:

Reports that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns; the ones we don't know we don't know.

Ridiculed at the time as nonsense, the last of these can in fact be seen as an articulation of the concept of 'unconscious incompetence'.

48 Indeed this is implied by ethnomethodology itself: it is ethnomethodologists who 'find' reflexivity, not teachers and other professionals themselves.
often blunted. Professionals often ‘just know’ and ‘just do’; in order to gain some critical purchase on their practice they need outsider insights and/or tools and techniques to develop their own post hoc reflexive analyses of practice. And, it should be said, to continue with the teaching example, understanding teaching as social practice is not just about understanding a teacher’s reflexive engagement with pupils but making sense more broadly of how one constitutes oneself as ‘a teacher’ and one’s pupils as ‘pupils’, what classroom arrangements are being reproduced and what forms of knowledge are being drawn on. Thus, analytically, conditions of enactment must be addressed as well as enactment itself.49

In this way different forms of reflexivity can be ‘interesting and insightful’ in making sense of professional practice. While we cannot assume that reflexive analysis is inevitably ‘invested with critical potency and emancipatory potential’ (Lynch, 2000: 36), we can aspire to this goal in our studies of professional practice. Indeed, there is some support for the ‘promising and provocative resource’ of ‘radical referential reflexivity’ from within ethnomethodology itself:

In the mundane mode, ethnomethodology, like all of the human sciences, suppresses reflexivity and thereby settles down. In the mundane mode, ethnomethodology necessarily partakes of the practices that provide the sense of an “always already there” world (of members’ practices or conversational structures, or features of discovering sciences) awaiting description . . . In the reflexive mode, however, the primordial suppositions and practices allowing for the constitution of the very field or domain of study become the phenomena, with the full recognition that whatever is produced is itself an “achievement” – including, of course, the characterization of them as an achievement. (Pollner, 1991: 378-9, italics in original)

In their daily practice, health and welfare practitioners may all too easily settle down in the mundane mode, but will benefit from moving into the

49 My thanks to Greg Smith for suggesting this succinct articulation of what I was trying to say.
reflexive mode, to better understand the ways in which practice is 'achieved'.

5. Contributing to professional education

My approach is not one that provides 'how-to' knowledge for practice. Nonetheless, I would argue strongly that this should not belie its relevance to a health and welfare audience, be they practitioners or academics. PW2, for example, presents micro sociological and discourse analysis approaches to a health and welfare audience. It was specifically designed to give readers opportunities to test out the practical relevance of these ideas and concepts with further suggested exercises developed from examples used on a Masters module at the University of Manchester (see PW2 Chapters 4-9). This enables students to look afresh at taken-for-granted aspects of their practice, to make sense of the ways in which they construct cases and clients in their talk and case recording and, importantly for students, to understand how they are constructed as (in)competent practitioners in the assessment process.

The concepts of 'practising reflexivity' and 'making knowledge', discussed in Section 4, provide further examples of innovation. PW1 argues against the dilution of knowledge for a practitioner audience, proposing that practitioners need to engage with a much wider literature beyond developmental psychology in order to critically reflect on the knowledge they are using and making in practice. Similarly, in PW7 and PW8, I argue for the relevance of narrative approaches to the analysis of reflective practice, thus contributing to a research culture within health and welfare education and the adoption of a wider range of research methods and tools within a qualitative methodology.

50 The module, offered as part of the MRes in Health and Social Care and MA (Econs) in Social Work, was entitled 'Critical Thinking and Reflexive Decision-Making for Health and Welfare Professionals' and led by Sue White and me from 1999-2002.
5.1 Educating for uncertainty

The published work has critically evaluated the conventional approach to knowledge transmission: that knowledge for practice derived from research is then applied to practice in an unproblematic way (see PW1; PW2; PW4). This is particularly important in the current climate in which EBP is being extensively promoted (for critique see PW4). My work underlines the argument that the processes of applying knowledge in practice are far more complex, particularly as routine is so important in getting the work done (Eraut, 1994, cited in PW1). Practitioners necessarily rely on 'knowing-in-action' and 'just doing' to a significant degree in the heat of the action. Typically, it is when something unknown or unexpected occurs that workers have recourse to formal, propositional knowledge. 51

In PW5, White and I challenge more directly the current propensity within the professions to 'educate for certainty', under the assumption that workers tend toward indecision and uncertainty in their assessment and decision-making. We argue against this, using inter alia evidence from the inquiry report into the death of Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003), which suggests that practitioners are, in fact, more likely to make over-hasty categorizations of referrals, prematurely closing down discussion and debate about the nature of cases and options for intervention. We propose that educating for 'respectful uncertainty' (Laming, 2003) is a more appropriate starting point and explore ways in which this might be done. We note some parallel developments in the medical humanities and suggest that our own work on 'practising reflexivity' can be used to extend processes of critical thinking. Specifically, we argue that this could encourage the generation of alternative readings of cases and assist

51 In my own case particular prompts were working with child sexual abuse cases and becoming a practice teacher (this is the term typically used in practice education for managing, supervising and assessing the practice learning of qualifying social work students; in health and welfare alternative terms may be used).
practitioners to understand the processes of 'knowledge-making' in which they are engaged in everyday practice (PW5).

6. Academic writing: on authorship and joint authorship

It seems appropriate, as I draw towards a conclusion to this summary and review, to say something about authorship in relation to the published work. First I should perhaps acknowledge that in poststructuralist thought the conventional notion of the text as authoritative carrier of the author's meaning has been disputed. Roland Barthes (1977) famously and provocatively referred to the 'death of the author', a phrase that has been misunderstood. Barthes was presenting a challenge to the notion of the 'Author-God' who, by controlling the writing of the text, also controlled its reading. Instead, Barthes insists that the reader participates in the production of meaning, establishing their own connections and building their own versions. It is in this context that he asserts that 'the birth of the

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*This is another inclusion in 'the impossible glossary' (Lemert, 1997; PW2; see n. 22). Poststructuralist thought is generally associated with Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva, Lacan, although their approaches are far from homogeneous. Chris Weedon states:*

For poststructuralist theory the common factor in the analysis of social organization, social meanings, power and individual consciousness is *language*. Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is *constructed*. The assumption that subjectivity is constructed implies that it is not innate, not genetically determined, but socially produced. Subjectivity is produced in a whole range of discursive practices – economic, social and political – the meanings of which are a constant site of struggle over power. Language is not the expression of unique individuality; it constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways which are socially specific. Moreover for poststructuralism, subjectivity is neither unified nor fixed. Unlike humanism, which implies a conscious, knowing, unified, rational subject, poststructuralism theorizes subjectivity as a site of disunity and conflict, central to the process of political change and preserving the status quo.

(Weedon, 1987: 21, italics in original)

Fawcett and Featherstone (1995), writing from a feminist perspective for a social work audience, explore some of the similarities and differences in the 'isms'; Cheek (2000) covers somewhat similar ground in relation to nursing research.
reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author' (Barthes, 1977: 148).

In some quarters, this seems to have been interpreted as absolving the author of responsibility for their text. I do not think that this is so; in my view two things follow from what Barthes says: one is that, while an author has undoubted responsibilities for the integrity of their writing, nonetheless they cannot control the meaning constructed by the reader – as anyone producing writing for assessment, such as this, will be all too painfully aware. The second is that writing is not simply an act by which an individual spills the contents of their mind onto the page or computer screen; rather there is an inevitable intertextuality to (academic) writing.53 We are always writing for and against other writings and positions and involving ourselves in discussions and debates, sometimes consciously and, at other times, less knowingly. Writing, in this sense, is a dialogical and social act; and reading, rather than a private act of interpretation on the part of an individual, ‘plunges us into a network of textual relations . . . [it] becomes a process of moving between texts’ (Allen, 2000: 1).54

This, of course, is evidenced in this critical summary and review, where I am specifically positioning myself outside a certain way of writing about professional practice and aligning myself with other, more sociologically informed approaches to the study of professional practice. At the same time I am implicitly adhering to a conventional academic style of writing by using ‘externalizing devices’ such as the passive tense, as in the first sentence of this paragraph (see PW2; PW9 for discussion of writing

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53 Intertextuality, yet another term that defies easy definition, is associated with literary criticism and poststructuralist thought. Graham Allen (2000) provides an accessible introduction to the topic in which he states that:

Intertextuality reminds us that all texts are potentially plural, reversible, open to the reader's own presuppositions, lacking in clearly defined boundaries, and always involved in the expression or repression of the dialogic 'voices' which exist within society. A term which continually refers to the impossibility of singularity, unity, and thus of unquestionable authority, intertextuality remains a potent tool within any reader's vocabulary.


54 'Theory tells us that all authorship is collaborative' (Law, n.d.) – Greg Smith brought this to my attention.
styles) and carefully referencing my argument, while at other times I use the first person to assert ownership of the ideas and argument being presented. I am thus making distinct claims to be considered a worthy member of the academic community. I have chosen not to adopt some of the more playful and experimental forms to be found in poststructuralist writing.\(^{55}\) While some consider these liberating, or truly illuminating of the human condition and subjective experience, other readers find them distracting and alienating.\(^{56}\) My sympathies with the latter position mean that I have retained a modernist form of writing in my published work.

6.1 Writing as collaboration

In the joining of authors, at best there is the possibility of new connections, intensity, sustaining presence and challenge.

(Ely et al., 1997: 307)

Joint authorship in published work is regarded differently depending on the discipline. In the natural sciences multiple authors of scientific papers are the norm; in the humanities sole authored work is most highly prized. In the social sciences and academic writing in health and welfare the conventions are less fixed and there is greater heterogeneity in forms of authorship.

With regard to a doctoral thesis by publication, collaboration could be seen as detracting from the merit of one's contribution to knowledge. However, I would wish to rebut any such deficit model of co-authorship: both Sue White and I bring different, complementary knowledge and expertise to our collaboration. I would claim, and Sue White would support this, that ours has been an equal partnership with shared responsibility for developing an original and innovative approach to health

\(^{55}\) For postmodern examples, see contributions to Woolgar (1988a); Richardson, 1992; Hall (1997); Freshwater and Rolfe (2004).

\(^{56}\) Exponents of 'emotional' writing can be found in Ellis and Bochner (1996); for a thoughtful discussion of experimental forms see Charmaz and Mitchell (1997).
and welfare practice. Sue White, for example, could bring examples of practice from paediatrics, childcare social work and family therapy to PW2. I researched widely to find examples from law, education, health and welfare to illuminate our arguments and to ensure that PW2 might appeal to a wide audience.

In terms of analysis we were able to share and add depth to our ideas by discussions about ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and discursive psychology. During the writing of PW2, for example, we were avid followers of the Louise Woodward case, fascinated by how the arguments of the book were being played out in open court and the media, as protagonists wrestled with making and interpreting knowledge about how Matthew Eappen had died. Moral reasoning loomed large in this case as both the baby's parents and Louise Woodward's actions and personalities came under intense scrutiny. This trial material formed the basis for Chapter 9 of PW2 (q.v.). In our subsequent writing we have been able to build on PW2 and take forward our argument about the relevance of studying talk and text, culminating with our argument about 'educating for uncertainty' (PW5).

What have I gained from this collaboration? This can be quite simply articulated in the old adage that 'two heads are better than one'. This was especially the case in writing PW2, our first collaboration, where we were trying to break new ground by making micro sociological and discourse analysis accessible to a health and welfare audience, in a way that did not 'dumb down' or patronize. This required us to think very carefully about our writing style and the presentation of complex and, in some senses, controversial ideas, given the battles over realism and constructionism that have bedevilled debate about knowledge in recent times. The following quotation sums up my view of the process:

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57 For confirmation of joint authorship see Appendix II: Signed Declaration by Joint Author.
58 For example we opted for a direct and less formal address to the reader as 'you' rather than 'they'.

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I feel that I do a much better job than I would have done alone. I extend myself further and I think I have a clearer idea of what we are trying to do. It brings more out of me so I think it is more mine.


In short, sharing ideas and their presentation has been enormously beneficial to our jointly produced work (PW2; PW3; PW4; PW5) and, I would also argue, to my sole-authored work (PW6; PW7; PW8; PW9). Working with Sue White has stimulated my thinking about language in use, suggested new avenues for inquiry and broadened my knowledge of micro sociologies. In turn this inquiry has developed my interests in different directions, for example the parallels between Science and Technology Studies (STS) and the ‘sociology of practice knowledge’. In the published work (PW2 Chapter 10; PW8 and PW9) parallels are drawn between the ways that scientists and health and welfare practitioners write about their work. Like scientists, practitioners invoke different ‘interpretive repertoires’ (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984) in different settings. Case records conform much more to an ‘empiricist repertoire’, using a variety of ‘externalizing devices’ to produce the ‘out-thereness’ of facts (PW9). In PW8 I draw on Rom Harre’s work (Harre, 1990) about the moral order of scientific discourse to illuminate the ways in which reflective practice functions in health and welfare.

7. Conclusion

I begin by summarizing the strengths of my submission before providing some critical reflections on my published work. My final comments briefly address the direction my work might take in the future.

7.1 Coherence of the published work

A critique of technical-rationality and ‘narrow-stream’ forms of EBP underpins all the published work to produce a coherent stance towards
professional practice. This work is theoretically grounded in micro-sociological approaches and narrative analysis. It is carefully and thoroughly researched and addresses potential criticisms. Taken as a whole, it demonstrates a wide understanding of the field, depth of scholarship and a capacity to make a significant contribution to knowledge of health and welfare. The work develops specific themes, for example the discussion of reflective practice begun in PW2 has been amplified in subsequent work while PW9 returns to the theme of documentary analysis and extends the analysis of writing practices. The concept of reflexivity as the process of critically appraising the processes and products of knowledge-making in health and welfare generally, or more specifically in social work, is developed throughout the work.

7.2 Scholarship and contribution to knowledge

I have demonstrated how the published work presented here makes a significant contribution to understandings of professional practice. In essence I have treated talk and text within professional practice as topics for study rather than resources that simply give us access to information about something else (Smith, 1990). I have thus demonstrated how sociological understandings can be deployed to make sense of professional practice. In doing so, I have extended the repertoire of techniques and methods that other researchers and practitioners might use to study practice, a stance which is supported by others, for example:

I would propose that social work students and, ultimately, service-users, would be better served if students were taught how theory-construction takes place and how to unpackage and critically examine theoretical edifices, accounts and the components through which they are constructed. (Penna, 2004: 6)

At the heart of the work presented for the award is extensive inquiry and research. I traced a large number of sources and read extensively in the social sciences and, to a significant extent, in the humanities. All of the
published work demonstrates depth of knowledge of the field, proven by its citation of a wide range of source material, for example in relation to ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, discursive psychology and narrative analysis. In addition I have conducted a careful study of written reflections on practice in order to illustrate my arguments about reflective practice. 59

7.3 Originality

My work explores areas that are largely overlooked within health and welfare. Health and welfare academics tend to focus on 'how-to' guides or underpinning knowledge such as child development; 'outsider' researchers have tended to focus on medicine, law and education in their studies of professional practice. De-familiarizing professional practice is a key theme in my published work and one that demonstrates originality. Furthermore my approach is distinctive in that the professional literature in the main is realist in orientation, assuming that client needs are 'out there' waiting to be assessed (see PW1; PW2; and earlier discussion of assessment in Section 2.4). Exploring how professional and client identities are produced in institutional interaction, using devices and techniques drawn from the social sciences and humanities, is an innovative way to proceed, and one that pays dividends in terms of contributing to knowledge and understanding in the discipline. 60 It foregrounds how practitioners make knowledge about service users in the course of their activities and assign moral worth to themselves and

59 To avoid issues in relation to student and service user anonymity, I have used previously published reflective accounts as exemplars in the published work.

60 On this issue of de-familiarizing practice, the contribution of ethnomethodology is worth reiterating (see PW2 and above), since it captures nicely the relevance of focusing on the practices of reality construction, rather than the substance of reality:

One of ethnomethodology's contributions to the understanding of social life is its capacity to produce a deep wonder about what is often regarded as obvious, given or natural. Whether it be the interpretation of documents, the utterance of "uh-huh" or the flow of everyday interaction, ethnomethodology has provided a way of questioning which begins to reveal the richly layered skills, assumptions and practices through which the most commonplace (and not so commonplace) activities and experiences are constructed.

(Pollner, 1987: ix)
others. This has been recognized by peers, for example PW2 has been described in a review as 'ground-breaking' (Trinder, 2001: 361).

In terms of my work on reflective practice, I would argue that this is unique. While critiques of reflection exist, I am not aware of any other work using a discourse analytic approach or narrative analysis to study reflective practice. My approach enables me to comment perceptively on the ways in which reflective practice functions to produce professional identity. Similarly, my most recently accepted work (PW9) adopts an innovative approach to writing practices in social work, again addressing an area that has been given little attention within health and welfare professions. I have also shown originality in seeing the relevance of STS for the study of professional practice (PW2; PW9).

7.4 Looking back, looking forward

Reading my work again has been an interesting and illuminating experience. It was a task I approached with some trepidation but it has provided a valuable period of analysis and reflection, one that I might not have otherwise engaged in, but have undoubtedly gained from. I consider that the body of work presented in this thesis amply demonstrates scholarship and originality. With the benefit of hindsight, there are, inevitably, things that I might have expressed a little differently and certainly things that I might have added, had the exigencies of journal word limits not prevailed. PW2 provides a strong foundation for the work that has followed. It sets out the main arguments in favour of analysing talk and text, and addresses critics of a realist, anti-relativist persuasion.

On this issue I would make an additional point. There will undoubtedly be those who are opposed to the kind of analyses I have chosen to make. Health and welfare is currently engaged in its own mini-version of 'the science wars' with much sniping above the parapets by either side. As was suggested in PW4, this can be exceedingly unhelpful, generating
more heat than light. Instead, in my single and joint authored work, I have argued for a more inclusive approach, characterized by open debate and discussion rather than the adoption of entrenched positions and the intemperate dismissal of opponents' ideas. In defence of my own theoretical position, I am much persuaded by the argument of the anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, against what he perceives as the unfounded dread of cultural relativism:

It is unfounded because the moral and intellectual consequences that are commonly supposed to flow from relativism - subjectivism, nihilism, incoherence, Machiavellianism, ethical idiocy, esthetic [sic] blindness and so on – do not in fact do so and the promised rewards of escaping its clutches, mostly having to do with pasteurized knowledge, are illusory.

(Geertz, 2000: 42).

This echoes arguments made in PW2 and PW3. Geertz, however, extends the argument by introducing the concept of ‘anti anti-relativism’ to encapsulate his stance, which is not to defend relativism but rather to challenge anti-relativism. He explains it by making an analogy with the stance one might take on abortion:

Those of us who are opposed to increased legal restrictions on abortion, are not . . . pro-abortion, in the sense that we think abortion a wonderful thing and hold that the greater the abortion rate the greater the well-being of society; we are “anti anti-abortionist” for quite other reasons I need not rehearse. In this frame the double negative simply doesn’t work in the usual way; and therein lies [sic] its rhetorical attractions. It enables one to reject something without committing oneself to what it rejects. And this is precisely what I want to do with relativism.

(Geertz, 2000: 43)

This captures the stance I choose to take, namely one that is critical of the espousal of an uncritical positivism within health and welfare, respectful of other positions but concerned to adopt a coherent ‘anti anti-relativism’ in my own work.
I do not suggest that my chosen approach is the only way to proceed, but I do contend that it offers important insights into professional practice. By studying talk and text as ‘topics’ in their own right rather than ‘resources’ for information about something else we can understand much more about the everyday routines of practice and how the business of teams and organizations gets done. In this respect the approach I adopt is resolutely social. It eschews what is ‘out there’ or ‘in people’s heads’ in favour of exploring communicative practices as social interactions. It also, I hope, rescues rhetoric from the pejorative connotations that are often assigned to it. Instead we can see that interactional and rhetorical strategies are crucial to talk, text and identity making in health and welfare. Passing as a competent practitioner, or being accepted as a worthy client or patient, depends on the success of these strategies. Because they are an inescapable part of practice, it is important for practitioners and academics to understand these processes better, to make the familiar and routine strange.

In sum, the ‘working skepticism’ (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997) advocated within qualitative inquiry is just as relevant to contemporary health and welfare. ‘Worlding’, rather than ‘the world’ can provide a valuable orientation to our research endeavours:

The phenomenon *par excellence* is not the world *per se* but worlding, the work whereby a world *per se* and the attendant concerns which derive from a world *per se* – truth and error, to mention two – are constructed and sustained. Pollner (1987: 7)

Understanding the ‘worlding’ of health and welfare will continue to be the focus of my work: my immediate plans are to pursue analyses of textual forms in two ways: one is by returning to the study of the ‘origins’ of social work and welfare, exploring the discursive production of humanitarian narratives in child welfare; the second is by continuing to examine contemporary forms of documenting health and welfare practice, particularly as they are being shaped by developments in information
technology and electronic recording. I also aspire to further develop theoretically as I continue to engage with discussions and debates within the social sciences and the humanities about the nature of representation and knowledge.
Part II: Appendices
Appendix I:
Details and Abstracts of Published Work

The starting point for this article is the uncritical way in which child development theory has been assimilated into the knowledge base for social work, often in extremely diluted form. The article discusses the ways in which a lack of recognition of critical approaches to child development (drawn primarily from discursive psychology and the sociology of childhood) impacts on social work. It also takes issue with linear models of research and evidence dissemination, arguing that the process of knowledge use in practice is in fact highly complex. It thus makes links to arguments on PW2 and PW3 about the limitations of evidence-based practice and any simple notions of knowledge replication in professional practice.


This work has made a significant contribution to the development of understanding of health and welfare practice in the UK, Europe and Australia. A social constructionist perspective to knowledge is adopted, challenging naïve forms of realism which assume that talk and text unproblematically correspond to the ‘real world’ of health and welfare practice. Instead it is argued that talk and text are performative, they do things in the world. Using methods and techniques drawn from micro-sociological approaches, discourse and conversation analysis the book analyses interactions between practitioners and clients, backstage talk among practitioners and the production of written case material. It shows how the work of health and welfare organizations is accomplished in everyday, mundane activities, suggesting how knowledge about clients and cases is made in and through practice. In order to extend readers’ understanding of the approach, several chapters conclude with suggestions for exercises that can be undertaken by practitioners. The
aim is to provide tools for enhancing a questioning, reflexive approach to practice. The book has formed the basis for modules both within my own teaching and elsewhere.

**PW3**


**Summary:** The authors argue that social work is a much a practical-moral activity than a technical-rational one. In order to pursue these themes, they explore the place of realist knowledge in a social work and their alternative position on the complexities and ambiguities of practice.

**Findings:** Social work has long been troubled by the adequacy of its claims to professional status and about its possession of appropriate levels of knowledge and expertise. The dominant responses to this have been managerialist and procedural, or rational and technical, as represented in the evidence-based practice movement. This article acknowledges the contribution of such approaches, but argues that they are unrealistic in that they fail to recognize the practical-moral dimensions of social work and the role of emotion and normative judgement in assessment and intervention.

**PW4**


This article was published as part of a two-volume special edition on evidence-based practice, and subsequently published in an edited book. It considers some key debates about evidence-based practice and is intended as a critical appraisal of EBP. The paper begins by underlying the key premises of EBP and what it promises to deliver. It discusses the 'hierarchy of evidence' and the sorts of clinical questions that EBP is designed to address before considering its limitations and how it may usefully be supplemented by other approaches. In particular it argues for
a more methodologically inclusive framing of what is meant by EBP which acknowledges the messiness and ambiguities of professional practice.

PW5

Much has been made of the uncertainties and contingencies of practice, and of the need for social workers to make more explicit use of formal knowledge in order to reduce this uncertainty. However, we argue that this focus on making certainty out of uncertainty glosses over the ways in which both knowledge and practice often propel practitioners towards early and certain judgements when a position of ‘respectful uncertainty’ might be more appropriate. Facilitating learning that will help equip social workers with the skills to exercise ‘wise judgement under conditions of uncertainty’, they will need to recognize the ways in which both theory and popular knowledge are invoked to make unequivocal knowledge in case formulation. In this paper, we suggest ways in which students can be helped to remain in uncertainty and interrogate their knowledge and case reasoning.

PW6

**Background:** Two approaches dominate current thinking about professional thinking in health and welfare: evidence-based practice and reflective practice. Whilst there is debate about the merits of evidence-based practice, reflective practice is generally accepted as an important educational tool. Where critique does exist it tends to adopt a Foucauldian approach, focusing on the surveillance and self-regulatory aspects of reflective practice.

**Aim:** This article acknowledges the critical purchase on the concept of reflective practice offered by Foucauldian approaches but argues that
micro sociological and discourse analytic approaches can further illuminate the subject and thus serve as a complement to them.

**Methods:** The claims of proponents of reflective practice are explored, in opposition to the technical-rational approach of evidence-based practice.

**Findings:** Reflective practice tends to adopt a naïve or realist position and fails to acknowledge the ways in which reflective account construct the world of practice.

**Conclusions:** Micro sociological approaches can help us to understand reflective accounts as examples of case-talk, constructed in narrative form in a similar way to case records and verbal presentations.

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**PW7**


This single authored article continues my exploration of reflective practice as an articulation of professional culture within health and welfare. Notwithstanding the rise of evidence-based practice, other tendencies within social work scholarship are also discernible. One of these is the study of the everyday, routine accomplishment of practice, drawing on micro sociological methods and techniques. In this article I apply techniques drawn from narrative and discourse analysis to the study of reflective practice accounts, which hold an important place in social work education. In particular, it is relevant to examine the form that reflective accounts take and rhetorical and narrative devices deployed within them to accomplish a competent professional identity. My argument is not that such accounts are untruthful; rather I propose that we would do well to move beyond taking texts (and talk) for granted and treating language as merely the medium for expressing inner thoughts and feelings. Social work should take seriously the need to explore its modes of representation and to cultivate a more self-conscious approach to the way professional and client identities are produced in practice.
This again centres on my interest in reflective practice and the processes by which practitioners articulate professional culture. It develops a connection made in PW2 between the study of the work of scientists and the study of health and welfare practitioners. In this instance I draw on the work of Rom Harré (1990) about the moral order of the scientific community to illuminate the processes by which social workers consolidate their position as competent members of the social work profession. Reflective accounts therefore can be seen, not as simple descriptions of past events and cases, but as a particular vehicle for the production of a professional identity.

This article continues my exploration of professional culture, drawing on the work of the sociologist Dorothy Smith and her focus on the 'active text'. Written documents are important, but often overlooked, sites where professional culture is articulated and here I explore some of the similarities and differences between the ways in which practice is produced in reports, case recording and reflective practice accounts.

Writing in contemporary social work has been given limited attention. Documents tend to be regarded as simply a medium for the transmission of information about something else. In the social sciences there has been greater recognition of the pervasiveness of texts and the functions they perform. Texts are active in influencing and structuring the world and this applies as much to social work as to everyday activities in modern society. Insights from ethnomethodology and literary criticism can help us to explore writing practices in social work, and these are used here in
relation to reports, case records and reflective practice. They show how these work to persuade of their claims to truth and, in doing so, how they categorize practitioners and service users. By focusing on texts we further our understanding of communicative practices in social work and of professional culture.
Appendix II:
Signed Declaration by Joint Author
Trafficking in facts: Talk, text and identity in professional practice

Published Work 2 (PW2)

Published Work 3 (PW3)

Published Work 4 (PW4)

Published Work 5 (PW5)

In respect of the above works I confirm the following authorial arrangements:

PW2 Taylor and White (2000): Carolyn Taylor is the joint author (50%)
PW3 Taylor and White (2001): Carolyn Taylor is the joint author (50%)
PW4 Taylor and White (2002): Carolyn Taylor is the joint author (50%)
PW5 Taylor and White (2006): Carolyn Taylor is the joint author (50%)

Signed: .................................. Date: ..................................

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Appendix III: Letter confirming acceptance of Published Work 9 (PW9)
Ms Carolyn Taylor  
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University of Salford, Allerton Building 
Frederick Road 
Salford 
M6 6PU

22 February 2007

Dear Ms Taylor,

Re: Article for publication on QSW

This is to confirm that the article entitled 'Trafficking in facts: writing practices in social work' has been accepted for publication on *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice*.

Your article will likely appear in one of the early editions in 2008. You can anticipate receiving a galley proof from Sage Publications within the next several months. Please review this carefully for accuracy in text and references.

If you have any questions about the above and/or if there are any changes in your address or status, please feel free to contact me.

Congratulations and thank you for your interest in QSW. Please consider our journal for future submissions.

Best wishes,

Samantha A. McDermott  
Journal administrator
References cited in the Critical Summary & Review


