ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, MEDICINE & SOCIAL CARE

What are the merits and limitations of a novel metatheoretical artefact with promoting the learning and teaching of theory for Social Work?

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Acknowledgements

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, MEDICINE & SOCIAL CARE DOCTOR
OF EDUCATION

**What are the merits and limitations of a novel metatheoretical artefact with promoting
the learning and teaching of theory for Social Work?**

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*A series of government-commissioned inquiries, serious case reviews, and social work
academics, have consistently highlighted shortcomings with the education of Social Work
students on higher education courses in England.*

*This thesis embraces criticisms of theoretical education and samples different theoretical
approaches to enable a critical appraisal of the merits and limitations of the Blended Theory
Model (the Artefact) for learning and teaching purposes. The Artefact, initially drafted by the
writer, was developed with feedback from student social workers, and researched by a
Participatory Action Research project, with the aim of improving the learning, teaching and
application of theory for social work.*

*The Participatory Action Research project involved research participants, as cooperative
researchers, and included face-to-face focus group meetings, to explore the merits and
limitations of the Artefact in promoting theoretical learning and its application to practice. The
researchers agreed the merits of the Artefact included promoting a foundational
understanding in mapping, selecting, blending, and applying multiple theories within specific
contexts of social work practice. Further, unexpected merits were found in the potential of
applying the Artefact as a reflective/reflexive model and with understanding the theoretical
underpinnings of other professions and professionals. Limitations were noted to be
associated with potential for misunderstanding and wariness initially engaging with the
Artefact, and in transparently representing emotional states when applying the Artefact.*

*The participatory process and agreed findings are examined in this thesis, which is written
with attention to Critical theory and language that aligns with actions and goals for
emancipation, inclusion, and independence.*

v

Table of contents

ix

List of Figures

Chapter 1: *Introduction*

1.1: *Purpose and aims for this research inquiry*

Social work qualifying courses (in England) have two fields for learning and assessment purposes: Academe and Practice. Higher education and training standards for both fields are woven into all qualifying programmes. Social Work England (SWE) standard 4.5 requires the integration of theory and practice as 'central to the course' (SWE, 2019). The education of social workers though, and particularly the teaching of theory, is an established area of academic discord (Thompson, 2010; Munro, 2011; Payne, 2014).

> *(T)he social work curriculum encourages an eclectic supermarket approach where all theories are treated as potentially of equal status and value.*

Stepney, 2012, p.28.

Stepney's critique (above) resonated with my own experiences of learning theory and became the source of my aspiration to engage with the problem and offer an academic contribution for validation by experts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Larochelle, 1998; Golden-Biddle and Locke, 2007). The thesis discusses the academic criticisms (Munro, 2011; Stepney, 2012), related educational, political and regulatory influences (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014; SWE, 2019), as well as personal and professional motivations in addressing the research question:

What are the merits and limitations of a novel metatheoretical artefact with promoting the learning and teaching of theory for Social Work?

Following this introduction, the thesis offers a review of relevant literature and a rationale for a Participatory Action Research project within in a higher education setting (McTaggart, 1997; Kemmis, 2008). The research findings, and related discussion, are subsequently presented, before a summary of reflective learning concludes the thesis. The thesis is written for examination purposes, specifically, for consideration for the award of professional Doctor of Education (Kuhn, 1962; Orme and Shemmings, 2010).

1.2: *Language*

This research inquiry is aligned to Critical theory (Habermas, 1979; 1981; Morrow, 1994), to engage with emancipatory language and actions that align with professional standards for research, education and social work (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2018; UK Professional Standards Framework [PSF], 2011; SWE, 2019). Therefore, in promoting clarity of language, the following terms are defined for the context of this inquiry:

'Educators' refers to persons engaged with teaching and assessing learning in the classroom and/or workplace and includes practice educators.

'Exponents' refers to persons applying a theoretical representation of information by way of a diagram or artefact.

'Learners' is inclusive of all pre- and post-qualified practitioners undertaking assessed learning in the promotion of ethical practice (BASW, 2014; SWE, 2019).

'Members' refers to persons who chose to engage as Focus Group cooperative researchers in assessing and agreeing findings for the Artefact.

'Metatheoretical' is a recognized adjective to mean both 'theory of theories' and 'theorizing about theories' (Collins, 2020).

'Participants' refers to persons who engaged with the research project

'Persons with lived experience of Social Work', includes carers.

"Praxis' is the committed engagement with cycles of education, action and reflection that is aligned to inclusion (Freire, 2000).

'Reflective practice' aligns with Schön's (1983) discerning for theorizing on-action to mean after-the-event theorizing (1991a, p.21).

'Reflexive practice' aligns with Schön's (1983) discerning for reflection-in-action to mean in-the-moment theorizing (1991a, p.276).

'Respondents' are persons that have submitted a completed research questionnaire

'Students' refers to persons engaged with higher educational learning

'The Artefact' refers to the metatheoretical artefact (the Blended Theory Model) which forms part of this inquiry.

'Transtheoretical' is applied to promote clarity for social work's inclusive approach to accommodating theories from different fields of study (Cameron and Kennan, 2010).

The use of proper nouns (for example, Psychology, Overarching, Modified subjectivity) is intended to promote clarity and engagement specifically with understanding the associated theoretical epistemology as a distinct body of knowledge; rather than the wider associations consistent with the common noun (for example, psychology, overarching, modified subjectivity).

1.3: *Personal and professional motivations*

After qualifying in 2001 (Diploma in Social Work), I began specializing in forensic mental health and trained as a Practice Educator in 2006. Keen to progress in both practitioner and educator roles, I reduced my practice to 2/3 days per week and began working as a practice educator for the remainder of the week. In 2010, I shifted from practice education to higher education and qualified as a higher education lecturer in 2012. I trained as an Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) in 2015 and worked part-time as both a lecturer and as a mental health social worker (and AMHP) until October 2019; when I started transitioning to work full-time in higher education. I have therefore been privileged to work for over ten years with a spectrum of learners in classrooms, on placements, and in statutory practice settings. I first started *teaching* theory as a practice educator candidate and quickly felt exposed at my lack of theoretical knowledge and understanding. My anxieties were compounded by that sinking feeling when thinking about which theory to learn and how to choose from the (too) many available (Gardner, 1993; Payne, 2014). I remember reading Thompson (1993) and Pease and Fook (1999), with a focus for identifying how I might understand, and share, so many different theories as an educator: at the same time, I was questioning the merits of collating a library-long list of theoretical perspectives. In supervisory roles, I had been regularly applying Thompson's Personal, Cultural and Structural model (PCS) (1993). Thompson's artefact is presented in the form of three nested circles in order to promote engagement with the interconnectedness of person, environmental influences and legislative frameworks (Thompson, 1993).

I was further inspired by Hartman's (1978) developing of Ecomaps, and her recognition that practitioners are 'faced with an overwhelming amount of data' that somehow has to be 'ordered, selected and arranged to reduce confusion and overload'. Hartman was concerned that without tools to make sense of complex information, practitioners would engage with *reductionism,* wherein a superficial knowledge base is considered *knowing*; a concern widely shared across the literature (Beckett, 2006; Howe, 2009; Fook, 2012; Stepney & Thompson, 2018). I valued theories, and particularly learning from the visual representations of complex information. Therefore, I wanted to apply an artefact that would promote further direct case work theorizing and engage with the enmeshed crossover between assessment functions and intervention duties (Morgan, 1994; Cleaver, Wattam and Cawson, 1998; Heslop and Meredith, 2019). Therefore, whilst I scoured the literature, I began drawing Venn diagrams (Chen and Boutros, 2011) to align specific theories for the placement or workplace, with the related assessment and intervention roles and duties. From these early drawings, and with thanks to feedback received, the first iteration of the Artefact was developed as shown in figure 1.1 (below). This first iteration of the Artefact offered a framework for an initial metatheorizing of social work's transtheoretical epistemology, aligned to the practice-related domain headings of Overarching, Assessment and Intervention. This first iteration would also form part of a draft article which was written to introduce the Artefact as an additional learning and teaching resource, and with goals for publication. However, initial feedback was that both the Artefact and draft article were difficult to understand and contained too much information to process in the classroom. In the first iteration, the Artefact was populated with many different theories to suggest some of the theories that *might* be aligned to each of the domain headings. However, feedback was that this appeared overwhelming and that theories were fixed to certain domains. This was unexpected feedback that galvanized thoughts for exponents' participation as essential in further developing the Artefact and overcoming my bias for the presentation of information.

Figure 1.1 (below) represents the first draft of the Blended Contexts Theory Model (2013).

Overarching

(Generic; applicable to groups & communities)

Examples might include:

Anti-Oppressive Practice;

Person-Centred; Systems theories;

Medical & Social models;

Sociological theories   (Includes research)

Assessment

(Applicable with individuals)

Examples might include:

Attachment theory

Strengths Perspective

Systems theories

Motivational Interviewing

Intervention

(Applicable with individuals)

Examples might include:

Solution-focused

Task-centred

Transactional Analysis

Figure: *1.1.*

5

In further responding to feedback received, I amended (2014) the Artefact to that shown in figure 1.2 (below).

OVERARCHING
Groups and communities

ASSESSMENT
Individuals

INTERVENTION
Individuals
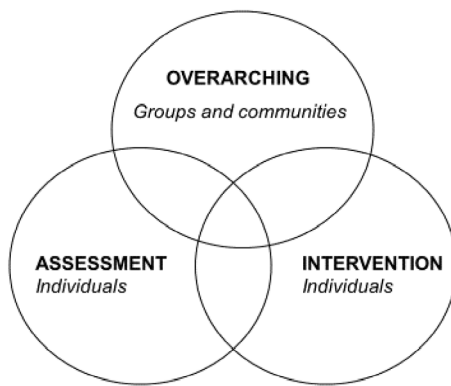
The Blended Contexts Theory Model

Figure: *1.2.*

This second iteration was subsequently agreed as the version of the Artefact to be assessed as part of this research project. In further preparation, the information from the draft article was also reconfigured into a website, with the article information broken down into discrete web pages to improve accessibility (Gardner, 2006; Biggs, 2013). The Artefact was developed with Freirean commitment to *conscientization* (critical consciousness) through praxis; to engage with cycles of education, action and reflection with a focus for inclusion (Freire, 2000). Participation was therefore considered essential to robustly assess the Artefact and led to involving research participants as cooperative researchers in assessing and developing the Artefact. Prior learning of Lewin's (1946) inclusive approach to involving persons *from* the workplace in identifying and implementing changes *for* the workplace, led to engaging with the field of Action research as a possible research method. Action research has a history of applications within workplace settings which aligns with involving exponents of theory with evaluating the merits and limitations of the Artefact (Kuhn, 1962; Orme & Shemmings, 2010).

A further benefit was noted in having expectations for examining the complexities of the researcher's position within the research, which would encourage a candid examination of my influences, biases and goals, as researcher, lecturer and practitioner (Winter, 2002; Kemmis, 2008). This, small-scale research project. therein comprised both pre and post-qualified learners, working together as a Focus Group to analyse participant questionnaires and determine the merits and limitations for the Artefact. Focus Group members agreed nine finding for the Artefact; two limitations and seven merits. The limitations were found to be with initially engaging the Artefact and transparently incorporating emotional experiences when applying the Artefact. Whilst merits (1-4) were found with *mapping, selecting, blending* and *applying* multiple theories; (merits 5, 6) with potential as a reflective/reflexive tool and framework for understanding other professions' theoretical underpinnings, and (merit 7) with opportunities for further research projects.

The Blended Theory Model: *A template for theories with social work*
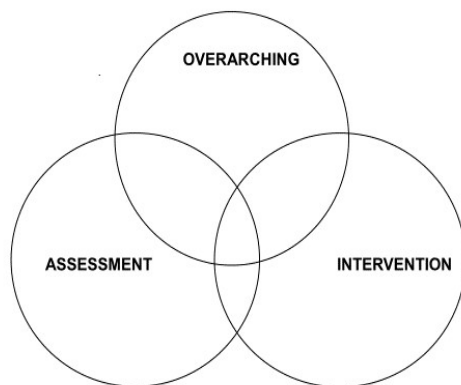
Figure: *1.3.*

Figure 1.3 (above) is the final template for the Artefact as agreed by the Focus Group (2019). The artefact was renamed the Blended Theory Model and the domain headings changed to simply Overarching, Assessment and Intervention.

1.4: *Political, regulatory and educational influences*

There is literature to suggest that Henry VIII's (16th century) dissolving of the monasteries, can be understood to have ignited a social responsibility in England, for persons at risk of dependence, exclusion and oppression (Bamford, 2015). The King's actions resulted in the removal of religious-based supports, which in turn raised concerns for social order, and ultimately to statutory responsibilities for the period equivalent of Local Authorities (parishes) (Bamford, 2015). Legislative underpinnings continue to underpin contemporary social care provision and contemporaneously, the development of the social work role (*Children and Social Work Act 2017*; *Social Workers Regulations 2018*; SWE, 2019).

Following the Seebohm Report (1968), the *Local Authority Social Services Act 1970* introduced changes for the education of social work, with previously specialist training councils (including the Central Training Council in Child Care and the Council for Training in Social Work) replaced by a generic social work programme (Bamford, 2015). The Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) began regulating social work education and training from 1971, before The Modernising Social Services (1998) agenda led to functions shifting to the General Social Care Council (GSCC) in 2001 (Cornes, et al., 2007). At the same time, the *Care Standards Act 2000*, led to the introduction of the National Care Standards Commission regulations in 2001. In 2005, the title *Social Worker* became a protected term, and all social workers were required to register with the GSCC, before registration functions were transferred to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) in 2012 (Furness, 2015). A Vision for Change (2016) issued by the Department of Education though laid foundations for the setting up of a new regulatory body for social work which was further mandated by the introduction of the *Children and Social Work Act 2017*. *The Social Workers Regulations 2018* followed as a means of implementing part 2 of the *Children and Social Work Act 2017,* before the registration of social workers was again transferred, to Social Work England in 2019; along with the introduction of new standards for professionalism, education and training (SWE, 2019).

Social work university education was introduced to England by London's School of Sociology in 1903 (Smith, 1975). In 1947, Younghusband advocated for generic training and introduced a two-year generic programme in 1955 (Burt, 2018). The requirement for more social workers led to more programmes becoming available throughout the 1960s (Lymbery, et al., 2000) and to the introduction of the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work, from 1975 (CQSW). The CQSW though was 'heavily influenced by critical sociological theories' which led to concerns from employers for the course content and to the introduction of the Diploma in Social Work in 1989 (Maglajlic Holicek, 2007). Maglajlic Holicek (2007) points to the new competency-based approach adopting behaviourist and functionalist underpinnings which reflected the economic shift towards a mixed economy of care (Social Care Institute for Excellence [SCIE], 2006). The academic shift to degree education in 2004, brought a further theorizing shift from sociological perspectives to direct case work as noted in point G of the Requirements for Social Work Training (2002), wherein educators are to: Ensure that the teaching of theoretical knowledge, skills and values is based on their application in practice (SCIE, 2002). Concurrently, high profile deaths including Victoria Climbie (2000) and Peter Connolly (2007) resulted in a series of government-commissioned inquiries and serious case reviews that highlighted shortcomings in social care provision and the education of social workers (Laming, 2003; Laming, 2009). In response, government initiated the Social Work Task Force (2009) and the Social Work Reform Board (2010), which alongside the also new College of Social Work (2012), introduced new standards (Professional Capabilities Framework) which was presented in the form of a rainbow-inspired artefact. The College's guidance on implementing the curriculum did not suggest any specific theories to know, teach or apply and instead referenced themes such as *Human growth and development*. The specific term *theory* was only used within one domain (Knowledge), and with generalised descriptors for qualifying degree programmes such as:

> *Demonstrate a critical understanding of the application to social work of research, theory and knowledge from sociology, social policy, psychology and health.*

The College of Social Work, 2012.

9

The reforms also led to significant changes for the practice education of students (on placements). Specifically, the College of Social Work introduced a staged timeframe for student social workers on placements only to be assessed by social work-trained practice educators: supported by revised learning outcomes and new standards (College of Social Work, 2013).

In 2014, two independently appointed, government inquiries offered further opinions for the future of social work education. Again though, there was discord as Croisdale-Appleby (2014) reported that education should continue to be offered on a generic basis, whilst Narey (2014) advocated for specialist routes in a shift from generic learning to discrete *Children & Families* and *Adult* pathways (although both inquiries were united in their commitments to embedding placement learning). In 2019, Social Work England introduced new standards which referred to 'theory' on four occasions (3.12; 3.13; 4.6; 6.2); in line with previous regulatory approaches, the standards discuss generic approaches to incorporating theory, rather than citing any specific theories to be taught or known; with a focus for integrating theory *with* practice (SWE, 2019).

1.5: *Academic context*

> *(W)hether we recognise it or not, theoryless practice does not exist; we cannot avoid looking for explanations to guide our actions, whilst research has shown that those agencies which profess not to use theory offer a non-problem solving, woolly and directionless service'*
>
> Coulshed, 1991 cited in Stepney, 2012, p.20.

Stepney's referencing of Coulshed (1991) and Thompson's (1995, p.29) referencing of Howe (1987) demonstrates an embedded and consistent academic dismissal of theoryless practice as unethical (Healy, 2014; Teater, 2014). Dickoff and James (1968) explain the term *theory* to have a broad, inclusive meaning incorporating 'a conceptual system or framework invented to some purpose' in their metatheoretical paper for Nursing. Whilst Birkenmaier, Dewees and Berg-Weger (2014) however, point to theories for social work as having 'clear principles and propositions that provide a framework for predicting events with a supporting body of empirically-based evidence' (2014, p.25).

The spectrum of definitions to explain what theory *is* and/or what theory *does*, is further complicated by a mixing of different terminologies such as frameworks, methods, models and systems (Thompson, 2010; Trevithick, 2012; MacLean, 2020). The potential benefits though for the discipline's transtheoretical epistemology are clearly in maximizing opportunities to identify and align theoretical underpinnings with positive outcomes for persons experiencing social work; through embedding professionalism with a focus for rights and wellbeing (Taylor, 2006; *Care Act 2014*). Conversely, awareness for an unknowable epistemology though can bring thoughts for how to choose specific theories, as well as how to combine, or blend and apply with practice (Munro, 2011; Payne, 2014; Stepney and Thompson, 2020).

> *Social workers have produced multiple, shifting images of the nature of their practice…*
> *(to) represent a way of functioning in situations of indeterminacy and value conflict, but*
> *the multiplicity of conflicting views poses a predicament for the practitioner who must*
> *choose among multiple approaches to practice or devise his*
> *own way of combining them.*

Schön, 1991, p.17.

Schön's comment that practitioners 'must choose' between different approaches or devise a means to 'combining them', relates to this research inquiry and transparently encouraging practitioners to choose specific theories they want to know, learn and apply with practice. Indeed, recognizing the element of choice for practitioners is also recognized as important and may, in part, explain why so many practitioners *choose* not to apply theories (Thompson, 2010). Thompson, highlights a 'long history' in social work of a 'tendency to reject theory and see it as unimportant' (2010, p.6), whilst Munro (2011) and Stepney (2012) have criticized the educators of social work: Stepney, for example, writes how the linking of theory with practice is a task that 'the vast majority of practitioners (not to mention academics) find difficult' (2012, p.21); whilst Munro (2011) discusses the 'failure to align what is taught with the realities of contemporary social work practice'. Payne highlights though that the embedding of theory with practice is 'an arena that sees perennial conflicts between the interests of agencies, education and practitioners in social work' (2014, p.66).

11

The inclusive approach to theory has also led to concerns for structure, reductionism, and for the misapplication theory (Thompson, 2010; Fook, 2012; Payne, 2014). Payne (1994) initially encouraged an embracing of the panoply of theories to advocate for an eclectic approach, with the caveat that each theory's distinct characteristics are upheld, for fear of reductionism and misapplication. Thompson (2010, p.16) though is disparaging of eclecticism, and asserts it to be no more than a broad umbrella term for an 'uncritical approach to theory', where two (or more), unrelated ideas are 'muddled' together. In 2014, Payne shifts to acknowledge that theories can be Selected, and Combined, especially to align with specific practice contexts, although adds this should be done in a 'planned way' (2014, p.40). Fook (2012) is resistant to structure generally with fears for practitioners minimizing their use of self in finding creative approaches to direct case work. Whilst Schön (1983), Hartman (1978) and Howe (1987) consider reconfiguring theoretical information into other formats (diagrams, mind maps, etc.) to be a natural human response, that can represent a professional process in the learning and sharing of complex information. Fook (2012) and Biggs (2013) though further advocate for a wider embracing of *language* to understand complexity rather than relying on taxonomies or the structured organization of information.

Teaching theory, within a generic social work qualifying programme in England, means sharing knowledge of theories that align with a broad range of different practice contexts. The statutory sector alone, for example, has a multitude of different specialist services within each of the dominant service contexts (Children & Families; Older people; Mental health; Addiction; and Disability). The different service contexts have different theoretical underpinnings: Mental health, for example, is underpinned with a focus for Recovery; whereas Children and Families services are often underpinned with Systems and/or Attachment underpinnings; and Disability and Older People services often prioritising a Person-centred approach (Howe, 2009; Starnino, 2009; Hall & Scragg, 2012). In summary, learning, teaching and applying theory *is* complex. It is a contested, holistic activity, that benefits from knowledge of theories and practice, with insights of self, alongside respect for legislation, policies and procedures (Cozolino, 2002; Fook, 2012; Healy, 2014).

The integration of these different aspects of the social worker role takes time to process and benefits from engaging with praxis to align thinking for direct case work with goals for independent learning and social inclusion (Freire, 2000; Biggs, 2013; Stepney and Thompson, 2018); whilst being mindful for reductionist understandings and over-simplification of complex information through rigid thinking structures that conflate, rather than understand (Fook, 2012; Biggs, 2013).

1.6: *Rationale for inquiry*

This inquiry acknowledges the merits of a transtheoretical epistemology for social work to be in maximizing the potentials for aligning specific theories with inclusive decision-making and actions (Cameron and Kennan, 2010). However, the inquiry also wrestles with the difficulties of making informed choices for specific theories from an unknowable epistemology (Bruno, 1936; Payne, 2014). Theory offers a diverse epistemology in itself (Dickoff & James, 1968; Birkenmaier, Dewees and Berg-Weger, 2014), whilst theory for social work is complicated by expectations to not only *understand* , but also *apply* theory *with* practice; and not just one theory, *multiple* theories *with* practice (Payne, 2014; Teater, 2014; Stepney and Thompson, 2018).

> *As learning progresses it becomes more complex. SOLO, an acronym for the Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome, is a means of classifying learning outcomes in terms of their complexity, enabling us to assess students' work in terms of its quality not of how many bits of this and of that they got right. At first we pick up only one or few aspects of the task (unistructural), then several aspects but they are unrelated (multistructural), then we learn how to integrate them into a whole (relational), and finally, we are able to generalise that whole to as yet untaught applications (extended abstract).*
>
> Biggs, 2013.

Biggs' suggests there are five stages in developing critical thinking skills: Prestructural; Unistructural; Multistructural; Relational; and Extended Abstract. A brief explanation of each stages is offered to align the five stages with comprehending the complexity of the discipline's transtheoretical epistemology.

Biggs (2013) explains the Prestructural stage is simply an unawareness of the specific subject area or a rudimentary understanding such as simply knowing that *theory* is part of social work. The Unistructural level represents the early formation of discrete strands of knowledge (specific theories) from anywhere within the subject area, and, at this stage, which are understood independently of each other. The Multistructural aligns with understanding different themes from within the knowledge base, which aligns with understanding discrete bodies of knowledge within the epistemology (for example, Health, Discourse Analysis and Legislation). At the Relational level though, Biggs asserts we begin to weave strands of information together and begin to construct a complex whole wherein the sum of the parts (the combination of specific theories) is recognized as a new idea, or theoretical construct, in itself. In time, this then enables thinking at the Extended Abstract level, where learners start 'to generalize that whole to as yet untaught applications', aligning with goals for developing Practice Wisdom and Theorizing Practice (Beckett, 2006; Biggs, 2013; Stepney and Thompson, 2020;): Practice wisdom is recognized as a body of knowledge that practitioners develop from reflective experiences of direct case work; although difficult to evidence and therefore considered *informal* theory (Beckett, 2006; Stepney and Ford, 2012); whilst Theorizing practice started with Thompson's (2010) introduction to Theorizing Social Work Practice and has since been developed with a call to embracing the approach as a means to overcoming the concerns for engaging with epistemology and promoting partnership working (Thompson, 2010; Stepney and Thompson, 2020). Biggs' Multistructural level can further be aligned with Payne's (1994) early attention to working eclectically and only applying theories independently of each other. Whereas the Relational level, reflects Schön's (1983) combining of theories in unconsciously conflating information to make sense of the abundance of information experienced. Biggs is clear that learning only at the Multistructural level though, cannot achieve Extended Abstract thinking. Extended Abstract thinking requires the combination of theories at the Multistructural level, to form a new complex whole (a new theory) that can now be applied to other contexts (for example, practice, self, or direct case work). Biggs states that without understanding the Relational level, it is unlikely the complex whole can be understood or applied.

14

I began therefore to question if exponents might draft working artefacts, populated with their different choice of theories, to build an evidence-base for sharing experiences of *how* and *why* multiple theories were being combined or blended (to include practice wisdom and experiences from practice). Biggs' taxonomy for critical thinking though was further realised to also align with the psychological learning theory of Constructivism; a transparent, building-block, approach to learning (von Glasersfeld, 1974; Piaget, 1977; Larochelle, 1998). which is discussed further in chapter three in considering different understandings of knowledge. Cozolino (2002) and Applegate and Shapiro (2005) meanwhile applied principles from neuroscience, to further link thinking with learning and the processing of information to physical brain construction (and reconstruction) in the creation, organization and reorganization of neural pathways. Cozolino (2002) and Applegate and Shapiro (2005) explain how evidence from neuroscience suggests neural pathways can form through repetition and/or heightened emotional engagement; linking ownership with motivation and engagement with complex thinking patterns and behaviours (Cozolino, 2002; Applegate and Shapiro, 2005; Biggs, 2013). I wanted therefore to promote transparency for understanding *why* specific theories were being applied and promote transparency for *how* they were being applied (Biggs, 2013). In summary, the Artefact was developed because I *needed* a visual tool that would promote discussions for understanding, selecting, blending and applying multiple theories with social work. I wanted to engage with Stepney's critique and promote ownership for the choice and application of multiple theories *with* learners, rather than *for* learners; whilst acknowledging Fook's (2012) concerns for structure and her advocacy for creativity with direct case work. The intention of this inquiry therefore is not to delve deeply into any specific theory, rather the purpose is to embrace metatheorizing, to understand the profusion of language and encourage confidence and ownership for working with different metatheoretical approaches. Although there is a consistent (academic) dismissal of theoryless practice (Stepney, 2012; Payne, 2014), there are different opinions for the application of specific, multiple theories with direct case work. The Artefact is therefore being researched in potentially offering an academic contribution to the learning and teaching of multiple theories for social work with an associated research project to align with Birkenmaier, Dewees and Berg-Weger's requirement for theoretical approaches to be offered with 'a supporting body of empirically-based evidence' (2014, p.25).

1.7: *Summary*

In summary, this first chapter has explained the personal and professional motivations, alongside academic, educational and political influences, for engaging in doctoral study. The research project offered an opportunity to engage with other learners and gather evidence for defining the merits and limitations of the Artefact and the merits and limitation with the learning and teaching of theory. The shared nature of the research project, including any agreed findings, is separate from the writing of the thesis. The thesis is entirely my own work and written with commitment to aligning language with Critical theory goals for emancipation and Freirean underpinnings for inclusion (Habermas, 1979; 1981; Freire, 2000).

The thesis is presented across six chapters. Following this introductory chapter, the second chapter offers a review of relevant literature and acknowledges a variety of metatheoretical approaches to applying theory with social work. Subsequent chapters review the methodology, findings and discussions, before a reflective conclusion. A brief synopsis of each chapter is provided below.

Chapter 1: *Introduction*

This first chapter situates the research inquiry and explains the personal and professional motivations, whilst acknowledging wider political, educational and academic influences. This chapter further explained the rationale for inquiry, and outlined research aims for improving theorising for social work by assessing the merits and limitations of the Artefact as a potential learning and teaching resource.

Chapter 2: *Literature review*

Chapter two reviews relevant literature. In brief, the findings from the literature review noted alternate mappings of theory with different rationales for the selection of specific and/or multiple theories. The findings from the review are subsequently aligned with the research project aims for improving theorizing as well as defining the merits and limitations of the Artefact with mapping, choosing, blending and applying multiple theories with direct case work and case studies.

16

Chapter 3: *Methodology*

The third chapter considers the methodological rationale for the research project. In brief, the research paradigm is reasoned to be underpinned with Critical theory as the research methodology and Participatory Action Research as the research method, to maximise involvement, critical examination, and align rigour with findings (McTaggart, 1997).

Chapter 4: *Findings*

This chapter articulates the findings agreed by the Participatory Action Research's Focus Group. In brief, there were nine findings. Specifically, limitations were agreed for difficulties with initially accessing the Artefact and transparently incorporating the emotional impact of applying the Artefact with direct case work. Merits were agreed for mapping, selecting, blending and applying multiple theories with direct case work. A further two findings were unexpected, firstly with the potential for the Artefact to be applied as a reflective/reflexive model, and secondly as a framework for critiquing other disciplines and professionals' theoretical underpinnings. The final finding of merit acknowledged further potential research opportunities which stemmed from the Focus Group's examination of the Artefact.

Chapter 5: *Discussion*

The findings from chapter four are discussed with findings from the literature review, participant questionnaire feedback, and the research inquiry contexts from this first chapter to promote critique with evidencing findings (Foldy, 2005; Schein, 2008).

Chapter 6: *Conclusions*

The final chapter takes a critical approach and applies Kolb's (1984) reflective model in exploring learning from conducting the research inquiry and considering future goals as educator, practitioner, and researcher.

Chapter 2: *Literature review*

2.1: *Introduction*

The previous chapter introduced the research inquiry with aims for improving the learning and teaching of theory for Social Work education in England; an inquiry which started from my early difficulties teaching theory. I had been searching for an artefact that aligned direct case work with the established Sociological and Psychological metatheorizing domains that are long-established and widely acknowledged across the discipline's transtheoretical epistemology (Bruno, 1936; Howe, 2009; Healy, 2014). Instead of finding such an artefact, I began to learn more about the in-house criticisms towards the education of theory and of the many different metatheoretical positions already present in the literature. The literature review therefore began with an initial, random search for a theory, model, method, framework or tool, that would promote transparency with linking and weaving the established domains of Sociological and Psychological theorizing with direct case work; to instead, becoming a review of different metatheoretical perspectives that respectfully acknowledges the complexities of metatheorizing the discipline's transtheoretical epistemology (Healy, 2014). This chapter shows how the literature was searched, and shares analyses to align findings for the literature review with the aims for the research project.

2.2: *Rationale*

> *Because of the limitless complexities of human behaviours, as well as an unbounded supply of social and personal problems, there is little value in general, cross-cutting theoretical frameworks. They are too abstract and involve too many simplifying assumptions to be relevant or useful, As opposed to a theory-based deductive approach to knowledge development, social work prefers research that is data-driven and problem-specific, or that is characterized by the direct involvement of participants in the complexities of the phenomenon under study. If theory is to be developed, it should be 'grounded' in empirical observations that pertain to the phenomenon at hand.*

> Tucker,1996.

Tucker's (1996) is also concerned though, that the lack of a common theory is impacting the epistemology's growth and compares social work with psychology in discussing the differences for epistemological growth with, and without, a common theory.

This literature review therefore identifies different metatheoretical approaches that engage with explaining theory for social work, to frame the research project and the aims for the research project with the established literature. The findings from the literature review are examined and made in section 2.4 (below).

2.2:1 *Literature search strategies*

Figure 2.1 (below) presents the initial search strategies accessing the ASSIA and Social Care Online databases. In this first search, the literature search focused on identifying literature that *synthesised* and/or *blended* theories. Initial searches identified 399 potential sources of information. However, after an initial random scanning of approximately 60 articles, it was clear that whilst synthesising theories was well documented across the literature, the process or rationales for choosing specific theories, was consistently under-discussed. Articles instead, were noted to focus on the outcomes for applying multiple theories, rather than examining *how* or *why* specific theories were identified in the first instance.

Search code	Search terms
1.	*("social work" AND (theor* OR framework* OR model*) AND (blend* OR synthesis* OR synthesiz*)) AND subt.exact("social work")*
2.	*"social work" AND (theor* OR framework* OR model*) AND (blend* OR synthesis* OR synthesiz* OR select* OR choos*) AND subt.exact("social work")*
3.	*"social work" AND (theor* OR framework* OR model*) AND (blend* OR synthesis* OR synthesiz* OR select* OR choos*)*
4.	*blend* OR synthesis* OR synthesiz* OR select* OR choos**
5.	*theor* OR framework* OR model**
6.	ti(theory OR theories) AND ti((social work))

Figure: *2.1.*

Additionally, although the practice of synthesising multiple theories was consistently found in the articles scanned, there was no consistency to the specific theories being synthesised, or alignment with the theories discussed in the mainstream educational, social work literature. The findings are summarised in figure 2.2 (below).

Number of articles	ASSIA	SOCIAL CARE ONLINE
Identified	212	188
Screened	35	25
Eligible	1	0
Articles included in meta-analysis	1	

Figure: *2.2.*

I have however chosen one article to explain in more detail why whilst this strategy was abandoned, this original search still adds value to the research inquiry. In the context of supporting and enabling persons experiencing mental health crises, Rapaport and Baiani (2017) recognize potential power imbalances between professionals and lay persons; specifically, for the Nearest Relative (*Mental Health Act 1983*. s.26.) role due to the complexity of language and legal responsibilities for *both* parties. They suggest respect and understanding can be improved between parties through a shared conceptualization for *Reciprocal Role Valorisation.* Rapaport and Baiani (2017) explain Reciprocal Role Valorisation as an innovative theoretical synthesis of Family Group Conferencing (Barn and Das, 2016), Role theory (Mead, 1934) and Social Role Valorisation (Wolfensberger, 1983).

21

In further explanation: Family Group Conferencing promotes care and inclusion for family members through professional interventions and actions that seek to widen participation and networks of care (Corwin, et al., 2010); Role theory explores the spectrum and importance of roles with exercising knowledge, skills and abilities, between professional and lay parties (Mead, 1934; Harnisch, 2011); and Wolfensberger advocated for *Social* Role Valorisation as a necessary change in terminology to overcome discriminatory labelling and institutionalization of persons experiencing intellectual disability (Wolfensberger, 1983; Mann and van Kraavenoord, 2011). Rapaport and Baiani's (2017) article is therefore relevant to contemporary issues for theorizing and demonstrates complex metatheorizing that combines or blends theories (Schön, 1983) to create a complex whole (Biggs, 2013), with aims for this new theory (Social Role Valorization) to transparently include Nearest Relatives in the shared promotion of wellbeing. However, the article does not align with this research project's goals for engaging with difficulties learning and teaching theory, and conversely expects an understanding of metatheorizing to comprehend their particular blending of specific theories. Additionally, the theories applied by Rapaport and Baiani are not discussed in the mainstream, educational literature which is instead designed to introduce and explain theories that are more-commonly disused in educational contexts. Article readers, it appeared, are expected to already have knowledge of theories and at least in this instance, be *ready* to metatheorize; whereas this research project is educationally based and focuses on being inclusive of learners at different points in their theoretical learning. The article's relevance remains though in demonstrating that social workers *are* already combining and blending theories from the discipline's wide epistemology, although not necessarily in a structured manner that promotes transparency with peers, managers or other professionals (Payne, 2014).

22

Articles were therefore removed from the next literature search as they were considered to be less relevant for this particular research inquiry. Instead, books were considered more relevant, as their larger word counts offered opportunities for writers to explain *why* theories are important, as well as opportunities to discuss *how* theories might be applied. Mainstream books were further considered to be inclusive of learners at different theorizing stages and with varying experiences of practice. Figure 2.3 (below) summarises the reviewed literature search criteria as well as the subsequently identified literature.

Number of books	**Source:** *University library (books only)*
University library	134
Duplicates removed	123
Screened	123
Ineligible	87
Eligible	36

Figure: *2.3.*

Evidence sources discussed in this literature review are therefore mainly derived from books, with further sources identified from reference lists and bibliographies, as well as legislation and local policy documentation. The literature was limited to publications in English, although incorporated national and international perspectives. The rationale for this search therefore reflected considerations for time, with a balance for promoting the learning and teaching of theory, and rigorously assessing the Artefact's merits and limitations for learning and teaching purposes (Glasziou, 2001).

Instead of a systematic approach to the literature, a more intuitive approach, including

'snowballing', led to identifying key texts (Aveyard, 2010, p.90). Google Scholar was also

identified as a potential source of literature relevant to the study, however, the review at the end

of library search alone was assessed to have already established a *saturation* of results for this

research inquiry. Saturation in research terms, defines the point when a researcher believes

they have identified sufficient literature for the research purposes (Fusch and Ness, 2015). In

further explanation, upon reviewing the majority of books available from the university's library, I

had already identified numerous metatheoretical approaches which suggested there was

potential merit in continuing to research the merits and limitations of the Artefact (Kuhn, 1962;

Orme and Shemmings, 2010).

Figure 2.4 (below) highlights how the reading was conducted across the research inquiry and

includes further reading already identified. At the same time as reviewing the literature, Focus

Group meetings were also being held, involving pre- and post-qualified social workers as

cooperative researchers to evaluate, and agree findings for the Artefact.

Assessment framework, 2000; Biggs, 2003; Bruno, 1936; Germain, 1970; Gilpin, 1963; Hartman, 1983; Lewin, 1946; Lee, 1929; Perlman, 1965; Schön, 1983; Stepney, 2012; Thompson, 2010; Social Work Reform Board, 2012	**Year**	

2017

Bailey & Brake, 1975; Hollis, 1972; Howe, 1987; Leskosek, 2009; Local Authority Social Services Act 1970; Nicolson & Bayne, 1984; Payne, 1991; Perlman, 1968; Sable, 1995; Stone, 1958; Roberts and Nee, 1970; Yelloly, 1980	

Focus Group meeting: *1*
31 August 2018

↓

Focus Group Meeting: *2*
24 October 2018

↓

2018

Beckett, 2006; Gray & Webb, 2012; Parrot and Maguinness, 2017; Stepney & Ford, 2012; Stepney and Thompson, 2018; Social Work England, 2019

Focus Group meeting: *3*
12 December 2018

↓

Focus Group meeting: *4*
30 January 2019

2019

Angioni, L., 2019. Aristotle's contrast between Episteme and Doxa in its context. *FapUNIFESP (SciELO) Manuscrito*. 42(4), p.157-210; Heslop and Meredith, 2019. *Social Work: From Assessment to Intervention*. London: Sage

Figure: *2.4*.

25

2.3: *Identifying different metatheoretical perspectives*

> *Any examination of the history of theoretical ideas in social work (Soydan 1999) must begin with the contributions of two classical theorists. Mary Richmond (1917) focuses on the: individual, his or her personality and unmet needs and the social environment upon which the individual depends for the satisfaction of needs…Thus social casework became the principal method for change. (Whereas) Jane Addams' theoretical focus (1902, 1960) …was basically on the structure and culture of society and their influence upon the individual and vice versa.*

> Staub-Bernasconi, 2009, pp.12-13.

This literature review follows Staub-Bernasconi's chronological approach to understanding theory and samples different metatheoretical approaches to learning and applying theories. Germain (1970, p.9) agrees that Richmond should be 'credited with laying the foundation for a scientific approach in casework' although also relays the dissonance between the early advocacy for Sociological (Addams) or Psychological (Richmond) perspectives which remains embedded within contemporaneous metatheorizing (Howe, 2009; Healy, 2014).

Other metatheoretical perspectives are widely available though. Porter Lee (1929) for example, drew distinctions with his early mapping of social workers as being either Causal or Functional: Causal Social Workers, she suggested being practitioners that focus on a particular cause or causes, such as disability and/or social justice, whereas Functional practitioners come with intentions to fulfil the duties and legislative responsibilities of the professional role.

Bruno (1936, p.4) added that social work though has different functions in different *contexts* as he advocated for subjective understandings of direct case work. Bruno, rooted in Psychiatric social work, went on to suggest the three key areas of theoretical should be biology, psychology, and sociology. Bruno was also clear though that his discussion on theories was only a 'starting point', towards the 'formulation of newer and better theories' as he had witnessed such developments within other disciplines, citing philosophy (1936, p.8).

Stone wrote of 'synthesising' teaching materials and methods, with a focus for teaching 'not subjects but a profession' (1958, p.1). She sought structure and bemoaned that 'still there are no full-blown social work theories on generic aspects of the five methods': the 'five methods' being the integration of casework, group work, community organizations, research, and administration (ibid). Stone metatheorizes *Concepts* for theories informing direct case work, and *Percepts* for a sociological framing of external influences and advocates the Percept should be a *Humanistic* lens, to promote a caring, problem-solving approach to case work.

A few years later, Gilpin also noted that social work had still not made a 'judgement as to which theory is best' and advocates for the education of social work to promote theory and practice as a 'single reality' to acknowledge difficulties in making associations between the two fields when learned separately (1963, p.3). She suggests (1963, p.6) that the term 'generative principle' is applied to embrace learning, discussion, and research, as all being necessary elements for developing theoretical knowledge and establishing links between continuous learning and professional development. Gilpin relates her preference for *Functionalism* to underpin (or overarch) her approach to direct case work, although importantly for this research, recognizes that other practitioners will want to frame their practice with their own choice of theories.

In 1975, Bailey and Brake advocated for a shift 'towards a paradigm for radical practice'. They were concerned that the capitalist push for production would result in legislation that requires social care and education to meet the needs of 'individual casualties', making social workers an instrument of social enforcement (1975, p.49). They argue a social welfare system designed to meet the needs of individuals is fundamentally flawed, when the complexities of disability, loss and lifespan are understood to be personal not social. They build on Freire's (2000) conceptualising of praxis, and point to Pincus and Minahan (1973), and Goldstein (1973), in advocating for an holistic approach to direct case work: to be achieved through engaging in dialogue between organizations and individuals that promote involvement, commitment and engagement, with cycles of education, action and reflection.

As one learns to "think systems", one tends to move to the use of metaphor and to the use of visual models in order to get beyond the constraints of linear thought and language. No matter how the eco-map is used, its primary value is in its visual impact and its ability to organize and present concurrently not only a great deal of factual information but also the relationships between variables in a situation.

Hartman, 1978.

Hartman (1978) advocates theorizing for direct case work to be underpinned with an holistic approach to understanding information and to systematically presenting information in promoting transparency for practice and decision-making. Hartman's metatheorizing led to her introducing Ecomaps to relate key family dynamics through pictorial representations. Hartman clearly demonstrated how the wealth of information, alongside the pressures for effective practice outcomes, can lead to reductionism and the superficial analysing of information, without an in-depth knowledge of key tenets and an inability to share complex information. Hartman's contribution continues to be widely applied across social work literature (Crawford, Grant and Crews, 2016; Dyke, 2019).

Curnock and Hardiker (1979) meanwhile metatheorized that practitioners rely on two types of theory and referenced Evans (1976) in classifying fields (or domains) for *Practice theory* and *Theory of practice*. Practice theory is from 'the practice theories social workers carry around in their head' which can provide an informal framework for interpreting the complexity of information relative to direct case work. They discuss how this informs practice wisdom and consider the skills necessary to discern informal practice theories from formal practice theories; highlighting a divide between academic theories that can be evidenced and explored, with informal knowledge and insights that result from anecdotal experiences of practice (1979, p5).

Bronfenbrenner introduced his ecological framework in 1979, developed from Lewin's *Vectors,* and the interconnecting fields of Macro; Exo; Miso; and Micro (later adding Chrono). A pictorial representation of Bronfenbrenner's theory may be considered widely recognised as a series of concentric circles, however there were no pictorial representations in the original book, and no clear history to where the pictorial representation came from.

Burrell and Morgan (1979) recognized Sociology's chief debates to be grappling with the boundaries of subjective and objective perspectives and critiquing control versus conflict, across societies (Goles and Hirschheim, 2000). They metatheorized however, that whilst these two concepts had been previously understood to be separate and unrelated, they could be combined together to inform a singular epistemology and offered the supporting diagrammatical representation of their metatheorizing as shown in figure 2.5 (below).

The sociology of radical change

Radical humanists	Radical structuralists
Interpretivists	Functionalists

Subjective   Objective

The sociology of regulation
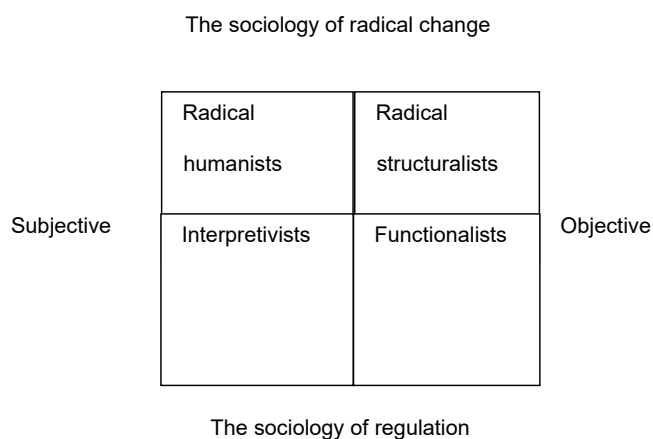
Burrell and Morgan, 1979.

Figure: *2.5.*

Howe recognized Burrell and Morgan's contribution as a paradigm shift, with 'potential to underpin a taxonomy of Social Work theory' (Howe, 1987, p.24).

> *(T)he task, then, is to unravel and order the ideas that underpin the welter of social work theories, derived, as they are, from sociology and psychology*

Howe, 1987, p.47.

Instead of Burrell and Morgan's (1979) Functionalists, Howe advocated for 'the fixers'; for Interpretivists, he chose 'the seekers after meaning'; Radical humanists become 'the raisers of consciousness; and Radical structuralists 'the revolutionaries'. Howe suggested that the 'paradigms are underpinned by a rationale that allows the social worker to choose her theories with an increased awareness of what each means for practice' (1987, p.50). He, further, goes on to agree with Whittaker (1974) that 'not only does theory inform practice, but also different theories offer contrasting views of human nature and ultimately the purpose of social work itself' (1987, p.22). Howe (1987, p.50) then offers his adapted version of Burrell and Morgan's four paradigms model for social work as shown in figure 2.6 (below).

The sociology of radical change

The raisers of consciousness	The revolutionaries
The seekers after meaning	The fixers

Subjective   Objective

The sociology of regulation
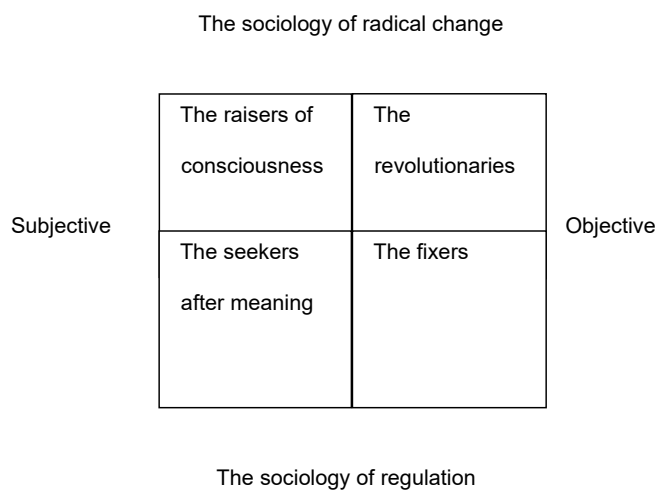
Howe,1987, p.50.

Figure: *2.6.*

In between Burrell and Morgan's metatheorizing and Howe's mapping, Nicolson and Bayne (1984) presented *Applied Psychology for Social Workers* as an introduction to psychological theorizing, and 'argue that social workers need to take the discipline of psychology seriously if they are going to find ways of improving their practice' (1984, p.X).

Nicolson and Bayne metatheorize a wider incorporation of *Psychological* perspectives (examples include Psychoanalytic, Behavioural, Social learning), with *Purpose* (examples include personality development, social inclusion, loss) and with *Context* (examples include field work, teamwork, residential care) to advance ethical practice (1984, p.63).

Sibeon (1991) metatheorizes a three-layered approach to organizing theory in aligning with practice goals for independence. Specifically, theories to be known that promote *Understanding* of the context for social work, and *Planning* theories for direct case work, and *Doing* theories for engaging in direct case work. Sociological theories are suggested to underpin understanding of context, with Psychosocial theories underpinning assessment, and Practice-based theories (Task-centred, Crisis intervention) applied to interventions (Sibeon, 1991; Parrot and Maguinness, 2017, pp.12-13).

Payne's *Modern Social Work Theory: A critical introduction* was first published in 1991, wherein he initially points to Sociological theories as explaining the purpose *of* social work, as opposed to theories *for* direct case work which he referred to as being in 'turmoil' (1994, p.2). Payne (1994, p.7) is clear that social work can 'only be understood in the social and cultural context of the participants' and acknowledges attempts to organize and discern theory with pragmatism, positivism, and eclecticism. He asserts though that there is no one framework for knowing and applying theories because of the range of interactions constantly influencing an amorphic social work landscape. Instead, he advocates for 'the panoply of theories… (to) be understood as part of an integrated area of knowledge, instead of competing perspectives' (1994, p.57). He concludes there to be Comprehensive theories which offer frameworks for practicing social work (for example, psychodynamic, behavioural, and systems); *Specific* theories, which he relates to all social work practice and cites communication as an example; *Perspective* theories, to enable insights through a common-social-work lens (philosophical, sociological and psychological); A*pplication* theories as flexible constructs (for example, Crisis intervention and Task-centred) which are matched with contexts for direct case work (1994, pp.236-237).

Thompson's first edition of *Anti-discriminatory practice* in 1992, introduced, explained and advocated for applying the Personal Cultural and Structural (PCS) model. The PCS model was presented as three nested circles (circles within circles) which he suggested could underpin discussions, and understanding, of the interconnectedness of Personal, Cultural and Structural, influences. Thompson also advocated for Existentialism as an ethical underpinning for social work and offers eight principles for practice, not as a method for rote application he insisted, but instead to promote critical thinking and confidence in working with complexity. Thompson writes about narrowing the practice-theory 'gap' through investing time, commitment, and engagement with reflective practices (1993, p.89).

Watson, Burrows and Player's (2002) *Integrating Theory and Practice in Social Work Education* further advocates for combining themes of communication, Psychology, Sociology and Anti-Discriminatory Practice to form an ethical epistemology for social work (2002, p.31). Houston and Campbell (2001) discuss a framework for social work practice based on the work of Habermas and Critical theory; emphasizing the importance of Discourse ethics for direct case work with attention to language and actions that promote emancipation. In further explanation, their article discusses philosophical perspectives in advocating for a Critical theory underpinning to promote open dialogue and minimise power imbalances, whilst maximizing inclusive practices. Houston and Campbell (2001) frame Critical theory and Discourse ethics as a Sociological approach to Psychological Social Work practices, that can underpin ethical practice.

> *(T)here is value in a guide to action' because a theory that is 'explicit and well-developed contributes to its validity and helps to convince practitioners and the people they are accountable for that it is appropriate to use.*

> Payne, 2012, p.46.

Payne's third edition of Modern Social Work Theory was first published in 2005, wherein he revisits the wealth of social work theory and states there 'are many theories…so you cannot know and understand them all in detail' (2012, p.37).

Payne suggests a 5-questions approach to deciding upon which theories to invest with learning and briefly discusses combining theories although uses the term 'adapt' in maintaining his earlier objections to synthesising theories (2012, p.47). He considers theories as representative of formal and informal experiences and acknowledges Sociological and Psychological domains to underpin contemporary theorizing whilst advocating that our interest in discerning and applying theories, should be reflective of the context of practice and the use of self.

O'Conner, et al., (2008) wrote *Social Work and Human Service Practice* to 'broadly classify social work theories as falling into the categories of *Problem-solving* theories, *Systems* theories, *Critical* and *Post-modern*ism (Hodgson, 2017, p.20). In 2009, Leskosek edited an international perspective of *Theories and Methods of Social Work* in which Staub-Bernasconi writing about the pluralist nature of theoretical perspectives which she suggests can be represented by four groups, Individual, Intersectional, Societal, and Systemic (2009, p.9). Leskosek herself points to contemporary social work being far removed from its origins and requiring a review of the theories to debate what it means to be a professional practitioner in different contexts (Leskosek 2009, p.2). Howe (2009), whilst comprehensively revisiting his previous (1987) work, maintained that theories can still be split between Sociological and Psychological perspectives:

> *It is possible, even at this early stage, to see a parting of the social work ways. Applied sociology suggested social action and political reform. Applied psychology was seeking ways to help the individual function better and be a productive, trouble-free member of society. These tensions and splits in social work's theoretical makeup – between social medium and individual change – are still present today.*

> Howe, 2009, p.11.

However, Howe discards his previous taxonomy chapter, and indeed any other structured approach to knowing and applying theories. He explains instead that there 'is no consensus on how to make sense of these things' (2009, p.205) and proceeds instead to examine a range of Sociological and Psychological theories.

Thompson transparently advocates for theory and practice to be considered as a single epistemology, titling his 2010 book, *Theorizing Social Work Practice*. He considers the divisions and overlap between formal and informal theory, and suggests that understanding dynamics of power, empowerment and language, are also key aspects to understanding, and applying, theory with practice. He goes on to suggest that whilst theories can be drawn from Sociology and Psychology, the approach is flawed compared with understanding the whole. He, revisits Sibeon and the requirement for, at least, one Philosophical theory to transparently frame practice and offers a rationale for Existentialism. Thompson is cautious of tools, models and frameworks and expresses a necessity for exponents to have a clear understanding of the merits and limitations of any identified artefacts before attempting applications with practice.

Stepney and Ford (2012) edited a collection of material aimed at understanding the role of models, methods and theories in offering a framework for practice. They define theory 'as a framework of understanding or cluster of ideas which attempt to explain reality' (2012, p.XI). As per Curnock and Hardiker in 1979, they also acknowledge formal and informal theories, before revisiting practice wisdom as an informal theory derived from practice experiences.

Stepney also recognises two forms of social worker with his conceptualizing of *Mechanics* and the *Gardeners*; similar to the Lee's (1929) conceptualizing of *Causal* and *Functional* practitioners, which was discussed earlier in this section. Mechanics, he explains, exercise functions in line with legislation and policy, as opposed to Gardeners who are radical and organic in recognising wider issues and are actively responsive to new information with a focus for ethical practice.

Fook (2012, p.9) aligns her rejection of the 'commodification' of theories with Freire's rejection of the banking model of education to suggest a healthy scepticism of structured thinking that otherwise can potentially limit creative abilities and increase assumptions from a limited, reductionist, understanding of the knowledge base. Fook offers her colleagues and students 'uncritical' approach to micro and macro perspectives as an example (2012, p.8) and further suggests that a structural perspective of theories implies a male domain for theoretical thinking; with women expected to action the micro aspect, whilst men dominate the macro. Fook, instead advocates for Radical and Sociological theorising to overcome the 'devaluing' of structural thinking and promote the Sociological perspectives of Postmodernism 'with its emphasis on fragmentation, multiplicity, diversity, and contextuality' as the 'desirable' underpinning principles for practitioners. Fook acknowledges though that ultimately Postmodernism lacks the benign political position necessary for social work practice to be based on this one perspective alone (2012, p16). Fook points consistently to the importance of working with many strands of information, theories, and/or political influences, and without the limiting factor of any dogmatic theoretical underpinning, as necessary to identifying creative solutions for direct case work. Fook also discusses the importance of context, although insists that underpinnings to social work should remain generic, and emphasize an holistic approach to practice.

Gray and Webb (2012) advocate for Critical Social Work to offer 'greater social and economic justice through transformational change' (2012, p.257). Critical Social Work, they write, draws from Critical theory and the promotion of emancipatory, right's-based approaches, to address oppressive structures and government policies. They want social work to be underpinned with a focus for emancipatory language to challenge oppressive structures and promote an embracing of interdependence as central to the ethical applications of theory with practice.

In 2014, Payne's fourth edition was released, wherein he shifts to now incorporate that theories can be 'Selected' and 'Combined' in a 'planned way' to reflect specific practice contexts. (2014, p.40). Healy (2014) also stresses the importance of *Context when* revisiting the domains of Psychological and Sociological theories and recognizes other alternative frameworks such as religious underpinnings, before revisiting mainstream staples of social work theory (for example, Task-centred, Strengths-based, and Anti-Oppressive Practice). Likewise, Parrott and Maguinness again bring contexts to the fore, naming their (2017) publication *Social Work in Context: Theories and Concepts*. They bring together theories and concepts to suggest a widening landscape for theory, with a focus for shrinking the divide between theory and practice. They agree that theories may be classed as formal and informal and explain that only through reflection and understanding of the concepts and interactions between ideology and discourse, can social work activities become genuinely transformative. Musson (2017) metatheorizes for *theories of explanation* and *theories of approaches*. Specifically, he considers four theories of explanation, to include psychodynamic, behavioural, systems and radical; and four theoretical approaches, to include strengths-based, existential, humanistic and problem-solving. In 2017, Hodgson and Watts published *Key Concepts and Theory in Social Work* in which they align the role of social work with addressing the causes of social injustice. They suggest social work theories to be from four specific disciplines, Anthropology, Political science, Sociology and Psychology (2017, p.7). They further point to theorising, as having distinctly different contexts that are worthy of exploration and explanation and suggest *theory* as a model or concept for offering explanations, whereas practitioner *theorising* relates to the act of thinking and linking known theories with experiences from practice.

Finally, for the purposes of this review, two timely publications arrived from Stepney and Thompson (2018) and Stepney and Thompson (2020). In 2018, Stepney and Thompson advocated for a shared commitment to theory and practice being taught, understood and researched, as one activity (2018, pp.26-37); which Stepney and Thompson (2020) further suggested can be achieved by *Theorizing Practice* with a focus for developing Critical Incidents and direct case work applications as the narrative for underpinning the single activity.

2.4: *Aligning the research inquiry with the reviewed literature*

This section reframes the literature reviewed to align with goals for the research inquiry and the advancement of theoretical learning and applications with practice. The initial mapping of the literature highlighted a spectrum of different metatheoretical approaches.
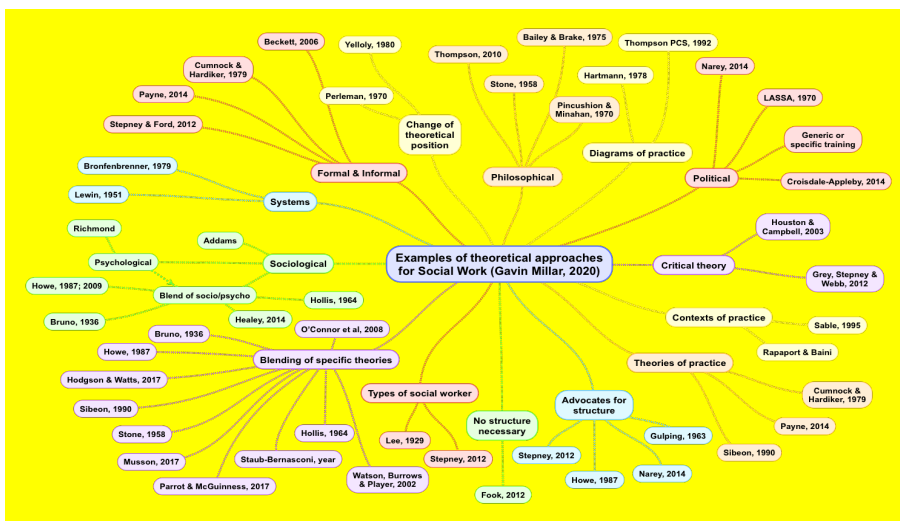
Figure: *2.7.*

The above spider-gram (figure 2.7) represents this initial mapping of findings from the literature with different metatheoretical approaches to understanding and applying the discipline's transtheoretical epistemology. The review acknowledges there to have been certain periods where certain theories have dominated writings. For example, psychoanalysis initially appears to have dominated psychological insights from the early 1920s through to Yelloly's (1980) critique (Payne, 2014). Whilst Stepney and Thompson (2018) further discuss how the trends for specific theories can be linked to wider developments across the transtheoretical literature and cite the influence of key figures such as Pavlov, Bandura and Beck.

Lewin, Hartman and Bronfenbrenner, all further advocated for systems' approaches, which

ultimately informed the Assessment Framework (2000) and have become entrenched within

contemporary literature and practice (Munro, 2011; Healy, 2014; Payne, 2014; Teater, 2014).

Task-centred and solution-focused approaches, although emerging in the 1970s, are also now

more-prominent than ever (Howe, 2009; Myers, 2008; Stepney and Thompson, 2018).

Therefore, whilst the mapping of figure is useful in understanding the literature sampled, it is

necessary to realign findings with researching the values and limitations of the Artefact.
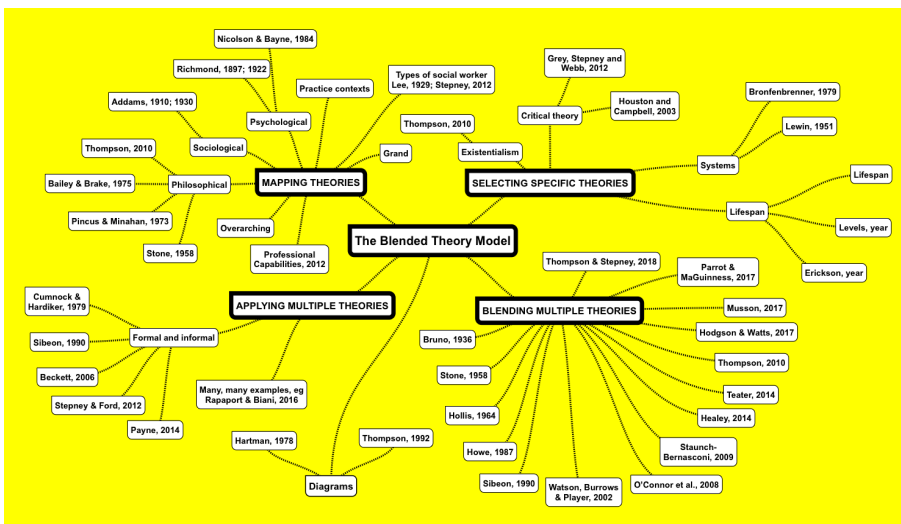
Figure: *2.8.*

Figure 2.8 (above) represents the remapping of the theoretical themes to align with establishing

rigour for assessing the merits and limitations of the Artefact, and specifically aligns the

literature with mapping, selecting, blending and applying multiple theories with practice.

2.4.1: *A foundational approach to mapping theories*

Figure 2.8 (above) realigns the findings from the literature with research aims for assessing the values and limitations of the Artefact in choosing, learning and applying specific theories with contexts of practice. The mapping acknowledges different metatheoretical approaches to include, for example, theories *for* social work, as opposed to theories *of* social work (Payne, 2014); *informal* and *formal* theories (Beckett, 2006); different types of social workers (Lee, 1929; Stepney 2012); and arguments for and against structure (Thompson, 2010; Fook, 2012; Stepney and Thompson, 2018).

Literature findings: *Concerns for mapping theories*	
Literature review	**Concerns**
Howe (2009); Payne (2014)	No single framework for Social Work
Fook (2012)	Against the 'commodification' of theories
Thompson (2010)	Wary of frameworks exponents do not understand

Figure: *2.9.*

Figure 2.9 (above) though tables initial concerns from the literature with attempts to organize theories in the first instance. Payne wants 'the panoply of theories… (to) be understood as part of an integrated area of knowledge, instead of competing perspectives' (1994, p.57).

Payne (2014) agrees with Howe (2009) that there 'is no consensus on how to make sense of these things. Thompson (2010) further states his wariness of frameworks that might be misunderstood, and his disfavour for the muddiness of the eclectic approach.

Fook (2012) stands out with her reasoned disapproval and clear rejection of any 'commodification' of theories; in particular her concerns are that a structured approach might stunt creativity with direct case work and for reductionism in conflating complex theoretical epistemologies. The review of the literature though was also noted to highlight an array of different approaches *for* structuring theoretical engagement with ethical practice outcomes (Birkenmaier, Dewees and Berg-Weger, 2014; Rapaport and Baiani, 2017). For example, there was evidence of proponents advocating specific structures to entrench links with practice (Munro, 2011; Rapaport and Baiani, 2017; Stepney and Thompson, 2020); as well as engage with the potential subjectivity associated when choosing specific theories to learn, know and apply in the first instance (Schön, 1983; Cozolino, 2002; Biggs, 2013). The review further highlighted, for example, that certain writers might advocate for specific theoretical combinations to be applied within specific contexts of practice (Healy, 2014; Parrott and Maguinness, 2017; Stepney and Thompson, 2020) and highlighted previous attempts to metatheorize the discipline's transtheoretical epistemology (Howe, 1987; 2009; Healy, 2014; Payne, 1994; 2014). The original Artefact (figure 1.1) was derived from the historical mapping of theories with the domains of Sociology and Psychology (Bruno, 1936; Howe, 1987; 2009; Healy, 2014) and was further developed through feedback from mental health practice, as well as classroom and placement experiences; to embrace the ever-expanding transtheoretical knowledge base, without advocating for any particular theory or theoretical approach.

Instead, applying the Artefact is intended to promote subjective understandings of metatheoretical approaches that prompt professional ownership and accountability for theorizing.

The Artefact though is intended to offer dynamic potential with three specific functions. Firstly, to enable a foundational mapping of theories with three domains specific to practice (Overarching, Assessment and Intervention) and secondly, to offer a framework from which exponents can begin to populate working artefacts; and thirdly, to offer prepopulated artefacts for learning and teaching purposes.

40

2.4.2: *Overarching theories*

This section offers the rationale for the Overarching domain of the Artefact. Beckett (2006) and

Evans and Huxley (2012) write about the limitations of working with a single theoretical

perspective and stress the importance of 'identifying overarching themes' to integrate the

psychological self with wider social networks (2012, p.136). Thompson (2010, p.175) and Parker

(2012, p.286) recognise the complexities, and limitations, of language in categorising theories

and apply the term *Grand* theories to acknowledge and incorporate theories from the wider,

philosophical and economic perspectives.

Crawford and Walker (2008, p.64) further point out that in preparing for contemporary practice

applications of theory, even the Person-centred approach benefits from being understood as an

'overarching' term rather than a straightforward, unequivocal approach to ethical practice.

Although initially their statements may appear at odds with the original therapeutic conceptions

and intentions for person-centred practice, they are clear that contemporary practice involves a

complex mix of rights and risks, with a wider duty for the protection of others that requires

assessment and interventions to be tailored to specific persons, rather than understood as a

dogmatic and uncritical approach to practice.

Literature findings: *Evidencing the Overarching domain*	
Crawford & Walker (2008)	Overarching
Evans and Huxley (2012)	Overarching
Thompson (2010)	Grand theories
Parker (2012)	Grand theories

Figure: *2.10.*

Given the potential limitations for understanding the discipline's transtheoretical epistemology in

terms of Sociological and Psychological perspectives, it was reasoned therefore, that one of the

precedents detailed in figure 2.10 (Overarching or Grand) could be applied instead as the titular

heading to transparently include theories from other disciplines.

41

In listening and engaging with feedback from other learners, the term *Grand* was consistently understood to suggest a large body of study, rather than simply *any* theoretical knowledge that might be broadly considered dissimilar to theories for direct case work. Therefore, instead of Sociological theories, the domain was reframed as *Overarching*. Reframing Sociological to Overarching aligns with an inclusive approach for the discipline's transtheoretical epistemology, and to the continued embracing of theories from across disciplines.

The Blended Theory Model extends the initial mapping of Sociological theories to transparently include other theories that also contribute to insights of *the social work context* and/or *population* (and as opposed to any specific *person or individual*).

For example theories for Philosophy, Human Growth and Development (as well as Sociology) are all embraced through the term Overarching.

Overarching

Sociological

Philosophy

Human Growth & Development

Figure: *2.11.*

Figure 2.11 (above) was developed from Focus Group discussions examining the values and limitations of the Artefact in recognizing the requirement for a visual representation to transparently explain the conceptualizing of the Overarching domain. For example, sociology, human growth and development, ecological and systems, are all theoretical perspectives that can be incorporated within the broad intentions of the Overarching domain. The term Overarching is therefore intended to specifically promote clarity for mapping theories from other disciplines that offer knowledge and insights of specific *contexts* and/or *populations*; theories that are consistently identifiable as broadly distinct from those necessary for direct case work (Hartman, 1978; Nicolson and Bayne, 1984; Payne, 2014).

2.4.3. *Assessment and Intervention theories*

This section offers the rationale for the Assessment and Intervention domains of the Artefact. In originally developing the Artefact, it was reflected that *if* Overarching might be an effective reframing of Sociological theorizing for social work, then there may also be merit in closely inspecting the other established domain of Psychological theorizing (Nicolson and Bayne, 1984; Sibeon, 1991; Healy, 2014). Reflections from practice had brought thoughts for engaging learners with the complexity of the enmeshed crossover between statutory and non-statutory roles and to therefore embed *Assessment and Intervention* as already-established terminology that broadly explains the roles, duties and functions of a social worker (Milner and O'Byrne, 1998; Barcham, 2016; Heslop and Meredith, 2019).

The Blended Theory Model revisits the categorisation of Psychological theories to promote theoretical alignment with the social work tasks of assessment and intervention.
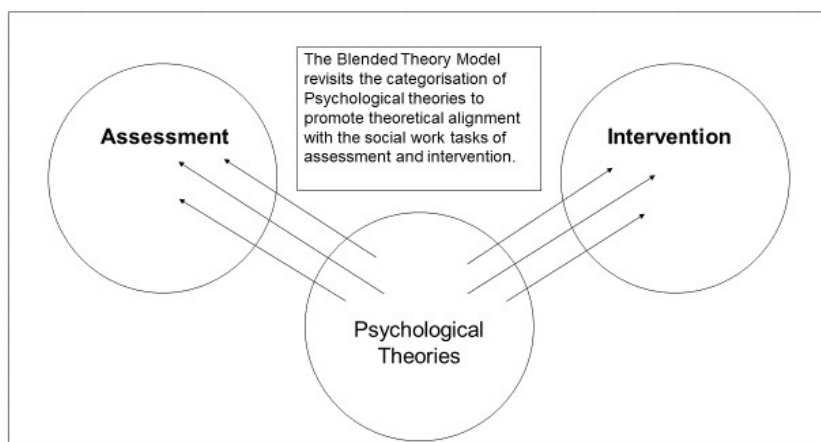
Figure: *2.12.*

Figure 2.12 (above) therefore represents the extricating of Assessment and Intervention domains from the long-established Psychological domain. *Assessment* is applied to promote a transparent focus for identifying and applying specific theories that promote professional engagement with authentically assessing insight, capacity and capabilities; whilst Intervention is applied to promote transparency with identifying and applying specific theories that underpin professional actions for independence and inclusion.

43

In further explanation, I had learned to approach all assessments, in the first instance, from a Solution-focused position; to demonstrate an authentic, Person-centred approach, which acknowledged rights and assumed capacity, insight and motivation for inclusive decision-making and actions. However, in fulfilling the spectrum of tasks and duties associated with statutory practices, a Solution-focused approach cannot always be maintained, and a shift to a Task-centred approach can often be beneficial when working with persons who are unable to engage with finding solutions at the point of assessment. A Task-centred approach can therein enable a transition in communications to more-effectively discuss and where possible, agree tasks that minimize risk and maximize wellbeing. The two theories offer merits and limitations and can be understood to cross over the boundaries suggested by Assessment and Intervention theorizing which engages learners with understanding Fook's concerns for being overly structured and rigid of thought. In brief, the Psychological domain was therefore reframed to promote transparency with a focus for Psychological theorizing that focuses on identifying specific theories that can underpin ethical direct case work and engage with the entrenched Assessment and Intervention roles, tasks and duties that are embedded in the profession.

2.4.4: *Selecting theories to learn, know and apply*

The Artefact is intended to encourage exponents to identify specific theories to learn and apply with their practice, to promote insights of self with metatheorizing that can evidence critical thinking. My reflections of learning theory were firstly of the shock at the academic discord, which although initially leading to doubts about the authenticity of professional underpinnings, ultimately led to considerations for actions that might engage with adding to the epistemology. Figure 2.13 (below) offers an example of my experiences of academic discord and indicates how different writers have advocated for different philosophical perspectives that social workers should learn, know and apply with their practice.

Literature findings: *Advocates for different philosophical underpinnings to Social Work*	
Stone (1958)	Humanism
Gilpin (1963)	Functionalism
Bailey and Brake (1975)	Freire
Houston & Campbell (2001)	Critical theory
Thompson (2010)	Existentialism
Gray & Webb (2012)	Critical theory
Fook (2012)	Feminism

Figure: *2.13.*

Further to the different philosophical positions advocated was the widely agreed concern though for reductionism wherein a superficial understanding of a subject is considered knowing (Hartman, 1978; Fook, 2012). As a learner of theories, it had been unclear which writers to align with in choosing which theory to learn, know and apply, and/or risk a reductionist understanding in attempting to know and apply more than a few. From initial mappings of different theoretical perspectives with the Overarching, Assessment and Intervention domains, exponents can begin to identify and choose the specific theories they want to learn, know and apply; promoting engagement and ownership for theorizing with accountability for the choice of theories selected (Cozolino, 2002; Applegate and Shapiro, 2005). Following the selection of at least one theory for each domain, exponents will have a draft, or *working* artefact, to reflect their current metatheorizing. Their working Artefacts can be further built upon, with the potential for populating the overlapping domains and introducing other factors such as legislation and informal theories such as practice wisdom. Working Artefacts may also be considered to offer a recognizable complex whole (Biggs,2013), wherein the sum of the parts are further recognized as an additional theoretical construct in its own right.
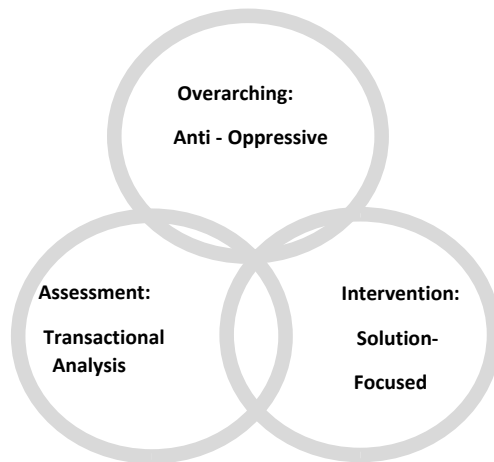
Figure: *2.14.*

Figure 2.17 (above) was my first *working* Artefact wherein I began to populate the Overarching, Assessment and Intervention domains with specific theories relating to my mental health practice. I selected theories to transparently share thinking with peers, learners and educators/managers and to inform supervision and teaching discussions. The initial selection of theories promoted ownership for a more in-depth knowledge of those specific theories and subsequently to integration of other, previously unknown-to-me at that time, theories (for example, Critical theory). Gilpin's (1963) preference for Functionalism, Thompson's (2010) for Existentialism, and Fook (2012) for Feminism, highlighted how different academics will prioritise and advocate for different theories to be known, taught and applied. Similarly, Lee (1929) and Stepney (2012) further advocate for acknowledging different types of social workers, to suggest theories may also be aligned with self, instead of the practice population or agency context.

The Artefact is therefore intended to be inclusive of life experiences and value reflections of self as central to understanding how we each individually, process internal and external stimuli; further linking the rationale for applying the Artefact with insights from neuroscience wherein physical brain architecture is understood to develop in line with cognitive and emotive processes to inform states of *being* (Cozolino, 2002).

46

For example, *being* motivated can promote ownership for learning, and accountability for actions through recognition, internalisation and reflection of the overlap and conflict between personal values and professional ethics (Cozolino 2002; Applegate and Shapiro, 2005). Whilst Fook (2012) does not require or advocate for structure; Munro (2011), Stepney (2012), Croisdale-Appleby (2014) and Narey (2014) all believe that changes are required to the education of theory for social work whilst offering different theoretical approaches. Hartman (1978) was clear that data had to be selected from an ordered choice, whilst Nicolson and Bayne (1984) argued Psychology as necessary to improve the profession. Thompson's (2010) advocating for Existentialism as the appropriate philosophical base for social work practice, alongside his eight 'Principles for practice' (1993), further suggests that whilst he is wary of frameworks, there are benefits to structuring and organizing thoughts when applying theory. Payne (2012, p.37) also revisits the wealth of theory and offers a five-questions approach to selecting theories in the first instance: whereas Gray and Webb argue for Critical Social Work to offer 'greater social and economic justice through transformational change' (2012, p.257). Therefore, there is a consistent message from the literature, for the incorporation of specific, multiple theories for social work. It is though, currently without the agreement that Tucker (1996) suggests is necessary for the profession's epistemology to develop, which requires agreement for the incorporation of a key theory or theories to develop an epistemology with a shared focus.

2.4.5. *Combining theories*
Figure 2.15 (below) presents a table of writers, identified from the literature, who advocate for different, but specific, multiple theoretical approaches. The professional standards in England have consistently <u>not</u> incorporated directions for any one specific theory to be taught, known or applied to practice; recognizing the academic literature perhaps which widely agrees with this position (Fook, 2012; Payne, 2014; MacLean and Harrison, 2015).

Literature findings: *Combining theories*	
Birkenmaier Dewees and Berg-Weger (2014)	Generic blending of theories
Schön (1983)	Biology, Psychology, Sociology
Bruno (1936)	Psychology, Sociology,
Howe (2009)	Psychology, Sociology, Holistic
Thompson & Stepney (2018)	Attachment & Loss, systems' approaches
Professional standards (2013)	Generic training
Croisdale-Appleby (2014)	Research, theories and frameworks
Professional standards (2019)	Biology, Psychology, Sociology

Figure: *2.15.*

The questions then arise though as to how to apply these different theories, and what might be understood as a reductionist or competent knowledge of theories given the dichotomy of an unknowable epistemology and the antithetical potential for reductionism. Payne (1994) initially advocated an eclectic approach to embrace the panoply of theories available, whereas Thompson (2010, p.16) was sceptical of the transparency of this approach, and suggested eclecticism was a 'muddled' approach. Payne (2014) shifted to embrace the Selection and Combining of theories when aligned to contexts in a structured manner; although Schön had previously pointed to social workers already doing this via the innate requirement to process and organize overwhelming amounts of information (1983, p.17). Houston and Campbell (2001) instead advocated that specifically Critical theory and Discourse ethics, should be endorsed by the profession to promote transparency with ethical decision-making and attention to language and actions that promote emancipation. Exponents of the Artefact are therefore encouraged to engage with these key tenets and confront the language applied across the epistemology in defining their own rationale for theorizing and ethical selection, blending and application of multiple theories with practice contexts.

Social Work has a history of adopting, adapting, formulating, and integrating various theoretical perspectives.

Birkenmaier, Dewees and Berg-Weger, 2014, p.25.
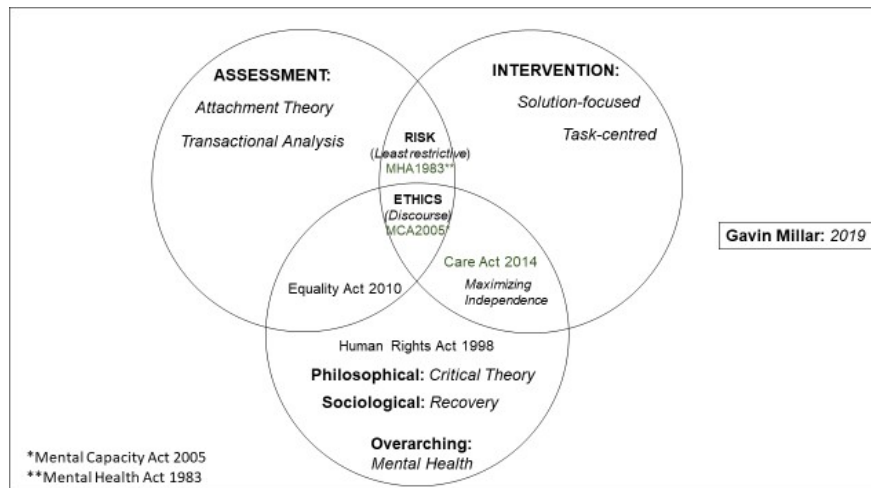
Figure: *2.16.*

Figure 2.16 (above) is my revised, working Artefact which further acknowledges Schön and

Birkenmaier, Dewees and Berg-Weger's (2014) practical approach to integrating different, but

specific, theories with practice. The revised Artefact reflecting ownership for a structured

approach to embedding and transparently blending, specific theories with ethical practice

(Cozolino, 2002; Rutter, 2012). The drafting of an artefact further enabled discussion of the draft

artefact itself. For example, how the combination of theories within any artefact can be

considered in terms of wider concepts, such as Biggs' (2013) complex whole and the sum of

theoretical perspectives being considered a theoretical stance in its own right.

Practice wisdom may be considered another example of a complex whole, wherein experiences from practice are understood to reflect, and inform, our use of self in the application of theories with practice (Beckett, 2006; Biggs, 2013). Beckett (2006) and Teater (2014) further acknowledge the benefits from identifying specific theories in avoiding drift and fleeting from one theory to the next (in justifying decision-making rather than demonstrating theorizing), and instead encourage development of an in-depth knowledge of specific theories related to the practice context. In summary, there are clearly already a number of different metatheoretical approaches to combining theories within the literature. Examples, such as Sibeon's (1991) framework and Houston and Campbell's (2001) application of Critical theory and Critical Discourse are approaches I particularly valued and benefited from learning more about whilst preparing this review. However, ultimately, neither had the visual representation I wanted to promote transparency with blending different theories or transparently embraced the inclusion of other structured (and unstructured) approaches to theories (Houston and Campbell, 2001; Fook, 2012; Payne, 2014; Rapaport and Baiani, 2017; Stepney and Thompson, 2020).

2.4.6: *Applying theories*

Literature findings: *Applying theories*	
MacLean & Harrison (2015)	Numerous specific theories
Rapaport & Baiani (2017)	Reciprocal Role Valorisation; Role theory; Social Role Valorisation
Thompson (2010)	Theorizing Practice
Social Work England (2019)	Non-specific

Figure: *2.17.*

Figure 2.17 (above) represents a small sample from the literature to demonstrate some of the complexities associated with understanding the expectations for social workers to apply theory with their practice. Social Work England, as mentioned earlier, appear respectful of the literature, and consistent with previous professional bodies, in not identifying any specific theories to be known, taught or applied. MacLean and Harrison (2015) though offer a different perspective and embrace a panoply of theories with a focus for effective practice, whilst Rapaport and Baiani (2017) offer a complex whole approach to blending specific theoretical perspectives with a focus for achieving a specific outcome. Stepney and Thompson (2020) advocate for Theorizing Practice, embracing historical concerns for learning theory separate to practice, which may, in part, explain Thompson's concerns for the 'tendency to reject theory and see it as unimportant' (2010, p.6).

2.5: *Summary*

In summary, selecting and transparently working with multiple theories, is consistently under-discussed and the Artefact therefore offers a novel opportunity for researching a specific metatheoretical approach to working with multiple theoretical perspectives whilst acknowledging the caveats of Hartman (1978), Fook (2012), Thompson (2010) and Payne (2014).

The Artefact was developed with learners and aligns with Biggs (2013) concept for blending specific theories at the Relational level to form a complex whole with opportunities for Extended Abstract thinking; that aligns with Stepney and Thompson's goals for Theorizing Practice whilst also offering opportunities to discuss other metatheoretical conceptualizations such as practice wisdom and/or individualized approaches to practice (Biggs, 2013; Rapaport and Baiani, 2017; Stepney and Thompson, 2020). The wealth of theories available to social work has already led to a diverse epistemology of specific and different metatheoretical approaches with aims to promote the integration of theory with practice (Sibeon, 1991; Houston and Campbell, 2001; Rapaport and Baiani, 2017). The wealth of literature however may also be understood to be overwhelming, confusing, difficult to understand, and even more difficult to apply with practice; meaning that too many practitioners denounce theory (Thompson, 2010; Stepney, 2012).

51

Although there is a consistent (academic) dismissal of theoryless practice, there are also different opinions at to *which* specific theories should be known and applied, and *how* they should be applied. The Artefact embraces the panoply of theories, although adds structure through associations with Overarching, Assessment and Intervention domains, to educationally filter and map theories in the first instance; simultaneously addressing Thompson's concerns for an otherwise muddled approach to eclecticism. From initial mappings of theories, exponents can choose specific theories to align with self, ethical practice and direct case work, embedding a focused approach to developing theoretical underpinnings, alongside options to draft working artefacts to further promote transparency with theorizing and critical thinking (Thompson, 2010; Fook, 2012; Biggs, 2013). Leskosek points to contemporary social work being far removed from its origins and requiring a review of the theories being applied to promote focused research and contribute to the debate about what it means to be a professional practitioner (Leskosek 2009, p.2). Tucker (1996) points out that psychology has a specific research epistemology as the discipline has embraced Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) as its benchmark whilst social work has no agreed theoretical epistemology which is therefore holding back the profession's advancement. This research project aligns with Leskosek's (2009) request to revisit theories and considers mapping, selecting, blending and applying of specific, multiple theories with practice contexts. Thompson (2010), Fook (2012) and Payne's (2014) further concerns for metatheoretical structure are noted and embraced to offer rich discussion opportunities with the research project in rigorously assessing the merits and limitations of the Artefact. In conclusion, the literature review has demonstrated there are already different metatheoretical interpretations of and for social work which the research project can draw upon in promoting a critical appraisal of the Artefact's merits and limitations specific to the learning and teaching of theory for social work (Freire, 2000; Biggs, 2013; SWE, 2019).

Chapter 3: *Methodology*

3.1: *Introduction*

Chapter one introduced the research inquiry and explained the educational aims for promoting the learning and teaching of theory for Social Work education. Chapter two presented a review of relevant literature, which highlighted concerns for the misapplication of theory and sampled different metatheoretical approaches to organizing and applying theory with social work (Schön, 1983; Thompson, 2010; Fook, 2012; Payne, 2012; 2014; Biggs, 2013; Birkenmaier, Dewees and Berg-Weger, 2014). This chapter offers the rationale for identifying the specific research paradigm which offers the most-rigorous approach to aligning the research project with established research protocols (Kuhn, 1962; Kemmis, 2008; Langlois, Goudreau, and Lalonde, 2014). In brief, this chapter begins with an overview of the Artefact to promote transparency with goals for researching the Artefact in the context of improving the learning and teaching of theory for social work. The rationale for researching the values and limitations of the Artefact is subsequently aligned with the choice of Critical theory as the underpinning methodology, and Participatory Action Research as the research method (Kuhn, 1962; Orme and Shemmings, 2010). Following this chapter, the research findings are shared, and then discussed, with reference to the literature and the wider socio-political and educational influences before the thesis concludes with personal and professional reflections in chapter six.

3.2: *What is the Artefact being researched?*

The Artefact developed from supervisory placement experiences and searching for a visual representation of Sociological and Psychological perspectives that might prompt wider metatheoretical engagement with the transtheoretical epistemology. In prioritizing placement engagement with theories for direct case work, I wanted to share different theoretical underpinnings whilst maintaining a focus for direct case work and maximizing effective communications across assessment and intervention duties (Milner and O'Byrne, 1998; Milner, and Myers, 2017).

53

In the absence of finding an artefact, I began drawing simple diagrams to promote awareness for the discipline's wider, transtheoretical epistemology and found merits with aligning discussions of different theories, and metatheoretical approaches, to a framework of Overarching, Assessment and Intervention domains. The domains promoted transparency with, in the first instance, promoting a broad distinction of theories for direct case work from other theories that can be applied to social work.

The Blended Theory Model: *A template for theories with social work*

OVERARCHING

ASSESSMENT   INTERVENTION
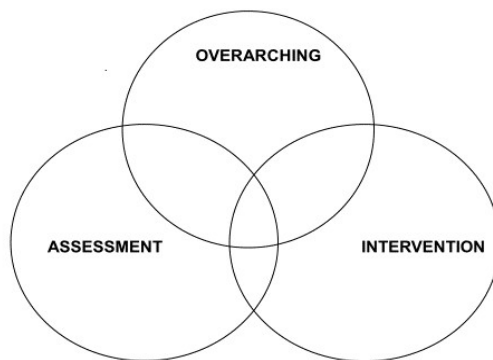
Figure: *3.1.*

Figure 3.1 (above) shows the Artefact template with the three headings, Overarching, Assessment and Intervention. The Artefact does not advocate for any particular theory, or combination of theories, to be known or applied. Instead, the Artefact is pre-populated with only the three headings to maximize metatheorizing with a focus for ethical case work that evidences the promotion of rights, insight, choice and capacity (Assessment and Intervention domains); aligned to a specific context of practice (Overarching domain).

The term Overarching has precedents in the literature and is applied to promote transparency with a metatheoretical shift from understanding theories in terms of Sociological and Psychological, to understanding theories outside direct case work as Overarching; thus the Overarching domain continues to embrace sociology, whilst transparently including theories from other fields such as ecology, philosophy and human growth and development.

Psychological theories are then intentionally broken down to align specific theories with the Assessment and Intervention domains to promote exponents' authentic engagement with theories for direct case work with tenets (assessment and intervention) already embedded in the literature and relevant to the role of many practitioners (Walker and Beckett, 2010; Heslop and Meredith, 2019). From an initial mapping of theories, the Artefact is further intended to offer a dynamic framework that can facilitate discussions for selecting and blending *specific* theories, in preparing for applications for theorizing direct case work and case studies (Stepney and Thompson, 2020). Payne's (2014) shift to accommodating the Selection and Combining of theories was considered important in recognizing how an epistemology can change in recognizing new research and/or new knowledge as valid. A combination of Munro (2011) and Stepney's (2012) requirement for better teaching of theory, with academic expectations to apply multiple theories in a structured manner (Thompson, 2010; Payne, 2012; 2014; Rappaport and Baiani, 2017) led to building a credible rationale with aims for potentially validating the Artefact as a learning and teaching resource. Specifically, the Artefact offers a 'planned way' (Payne, 2014) to select and combine theories, with aims to offer authentic research study findings in promoting the authenticity for the Artefact as an additional learning and teaching resource. In summary, the Artefact was developed with the intention to improve my teaching of theory in the first instance, and whilst I now have aspirations for the Artefact to be recognized as a learning and teaching resource, there is no suggestion for displacing or rejecting other, peer-reviewed, metatheoretical approaches, methods, models, and/or frameworks. Indeed, the Artefact is intended to be applied in understanding and embracing different metatheoretical perspectives rather than suggesting there is one framework for Social Work (Payne, 2014).

55

3.3: *Why is the Artefact being researched?*

Anecdotal feedback for the Artefact was consistently positive in considering why and how to map, select, blend and apply specific theories for direct case work within specific practice contexts. Feedback was also consistent though for exponents relating difficulties when first engaging with the Artefact, particularly conceptualizing the Overarching domain. The difficulties brought thoughts for researching the Artefact and to the value of involving other learners, as cooperative researchers, in reviewing and further developing the Artefact (Kemmis, 2008). Involving other learners with assessing and developing the Artefact was also considered beneficial, and necessary to critically engaging with my entrenched biases and roles of researcher, educator and practitioner (Winter, 2002). I further acknowledged that rigorous evaluation of the Artefact required engagement with in-house criticisms (Munro, 2011; Stepney, 2012), and wider socio-political influences, as well as academic concerns for structured approaches and the misapplication of theories (Fook, 2012; Payne, 2014). In summary, the research inquiry goals were to promote the ethical learning, teaching and application of multiple theories and agree findings for the merits and limitations of the Artefact through participatory examination of (anonymised) research questionnaires and Focus Group experiences.

3.4: *The Research paradigm*

Kuhn (1962) points to the importance of valuing experienced researchers' opinions and encourages researchers to demonstrate insight by aligning the research paradigm with a clear trail of reasoning (Kuhn, 1962). The research paradigm is the framework, chosen by the researcher, with ethical goals for maximizing rigour and authentically evidencing findings, for consideration as valid by the research community (Orme and Shemmings, 2010). This section therefore addresses the research paradigm and explores different ontological and epistemological understandings in determining the research methodology (Critical theory) and the research method (Participatory Action Research).

Philosophical Paradigms
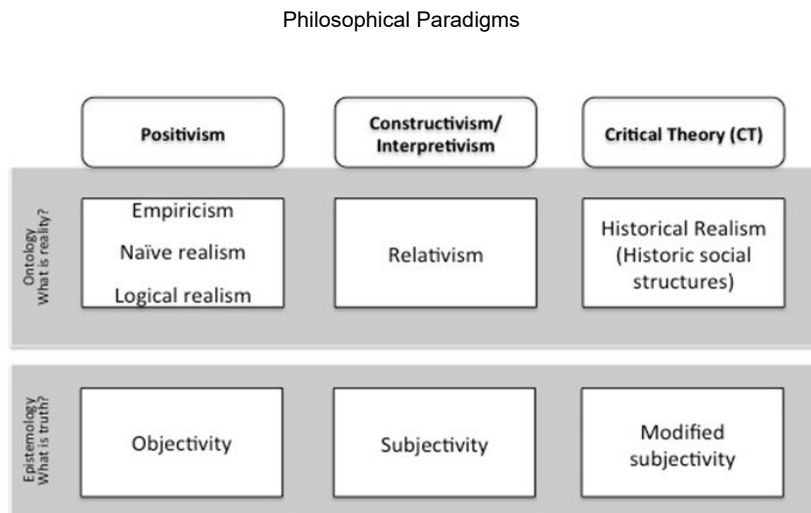
Ryan, 2018.

Figure: *3.2*.

Ryan (2018) highlights the three philosophical underpinnings currently dominating research as Positivism, Constructivism/Interpretivism and Critical Theory. In figure 3.2 (above) she further aligns each philosophy with the related ontological and epistemological positions. The decision to embrace Critical theory as the research methodology required considering the potential epistemological and ontological options which for clarity, are now outlined.

Positivism is the philosophy of understanding knowledge as verifiable only by scientific and mathematical methods (CED, 2020). The Sophists of ancient Greece are understood to have recognised knowledge *proved* to be true as *episteme*, and knowledge *hypothesised* to be true, as *dox;*, with *science* understood to be the use of experiments in testing doxa as potentially episteme (Crombie, 2013; Angioni, 2019). Prominent scientists of the 17th century built on these principles and advocated that only through observation and experimentation was proof of the world possible aligning the empiricist epistemology with the irrelevance of researchers' perspectives to predictable results (Ryan, 2018).

In the 18th century though, Kant was resolute that the empiricist epistemology was limited to the natural world and mathematics; reasoning that subjective views of the social world cannot be conflated to establish a single perception or epistemology of truth (May and Williams, 2002). From Kant's work, Interpretivism grew to contest Positivism as the dominant research approach, and the empirical epistemology as the only epistemology worthy of recognition. In opposing Positivism's Realist perspectives, Interpretivism's Relativists, valued subjective approaches and the development of the Subjective epistemology (Magrini, 2010). Although perhaps initially appearing opposites, both Realist and Relativist ontologies share the same ontological position that a single truth *exists*; with the difference being that the truth can either be observed (Realist) or experienced (Relativist) (Otero-Cerdeira, Rodríguez-Martínez, and Gómez-Rodríguez, 2015). Realist perspectives of the world therefore aligning with a singular truth that can only be verified by experiment or observation (Gilbert, 2008, p.35), whilst Relativists believe there are many different interpretations of the single reality (Magrini, 2010).

Constructivism (Dewey, 1916; 1933; Piaget, 1977) is an example of an Interpretivist approach though that offers a different understanding of how knowledge can be understood and uncovered. Constructivism, suggests learning and the development of knowledge, is an innate process, wherein cognitive processes combine (often unrelated) information in *constructing* and *reconstructing* knowledge, which requires interpretation and therefore continues to align with the Subjective epistemology (Reich, Neubert and Hickman, 2009).

There are other, different, Interpretivist approaches though, Husserl (2013), for example, wanted research to be conducted without presupposition, and developed *Phenomenology* to value, and interpret, individual experiences between *self* and *objects* (anything other than self), which he advocated as *preferable* to searching for an *objective* reality (Morrow, 1994; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). Whilst Morgan (2007) advocates that a Pragmatic approach encourages research to be conducted outside established epistemological boundaries in promoting engagement with specific problems, as necessary, in the pursuit of relevant data (and collection methods) that promote insight, understanding and change.

> *(T)he researcher and society are influenced by their own perceptions and experiences, which are manipulated by power structures such as culture, politics, race, gender, class and the mass media(.)*
>
> Ryan, 2018.

Ryan, however, explains Critical theory to have a *Modified* Subjective epistemology, because although rooted in the Interpretivist approach, the epistemology requires Critical theorists to engage with the centrality of language in understanding structural oppression, and to consistently demonstrate the realigning of language, with emancipatory goals and actions (Morrow, 1994). Understanding language as socially constructed, is to engage with the complexities of understanding how information can be understood in the first instance, alongside the potential difficulties with subsequently sharing and interpreting information; to acknowledge the potential for limited understanding in the first instance, as well as the potential for reductionist explanations, and (mis)interpretations, of discourse. This constant interrogation of language, led to questioning the conceptualization of Positivist and Interpretivist epistemologies as separate entities, and to instead recognize the polarizing of both fields as an over-simplification of two complex research paradigms (Held, 1980). Critical theory underpins subjective interpretations with an historical understanding for how the subject has come to be understood, and promotes recognition of multiple perspectives as multiple realities, rather than simply different expressions of a singular truth (Drew, 1989). Therefore, in aligning the research inquiry with a focus for rigour of evidence, a Modified subjective epistemology is identified firstly, because Critical theory aligns with social work goals for emancipation and the pursuit of social justice (SWE, 2019); whilst, secondly, it recognizes ontologically that there are different views constituting what reality might be, and encourages critical engagement with multiple realities rather than encouraging the search for a single, although likely, contested (Habermas, 1979; 1981; Morrow, 1994).

In further explanation, Critical theory requires researchers to embrace goals for emancipation within their thinking and in their planning for research activities, to promote accountability and demonstrate their responsibilities for considering internal bias and external influences with emancipatory decision-making and actions (Habermas, 1979; 1981; Ryan, 2018). Critical theorists are expected to present information with a focus for emancipation and to actively search for, and address, language that is oppressive or discriminatory and redress with emancipatory goals (Geuss, 1981). This approach parallels the profession's expectation for social justice through the ethical promotion of inclusion and independence (SWE, 2019) and engages with identifying and taking actions against oppression (Dalrymple and Burke, 1995). Critical theory is rooted in critiquing Marxist philosophy, and the social construction of Oppressor and Oppressed as dominant groups within contemporary societies. Freire (2000) contests the idea of Oppressed groups rising up and overcoming Oppressors as the end of oppressive structures and suggests instead this can only be a cyclical activity; wherein the newly Oppressed simply striving to overcome their now new Oppressors (McCumber, 2000; Freire, 2000). Freire advocates for conscientization (critical consciousness) to enable an end to cycles of inequity, exclusion and oppression; achievable through committed engagement with praxis (Freire, 2000). For Freire, praxis is to committedly engage with cycles of education, action and reflection, with a resolute underpinning for inclusion.

The Artefact is intended to transparently advocate emancipatory principles by aligning social work practice with an ethical focus for emancipation and inclusion within communities and across structures (Habermas, 1981; Houston and Campbell, 2001; Freire, 2000). This research inquiry therefore embraces Critical theory to align the research with the committed engagement to overcoming structural oppression through persistent examination of language and the necessary realigning of structures with goals for emancipation. Further, the research inquiry embraces ambitions for personal growth to align with a committed engagement to Freirean (2000) principles for individual enlightenment through engagement with cycles of education, actions, and reflection, which is consistently focused on promoting independence and inclusion.

3.5: *The research method*

> *…more recently social work scholars have expanded the development of the*
> *profession's own understandings of practice to create theories specific to the provision*
> *of social work services*

Birkenmaier, Dewees and Berg-Weger, 2014, p.25.

This research project offered a small-scale doctoral study opportunity with goals for promoting

the learning and teaching of theory through rigorous application and examination of a novel

metatheoretical artefact (the Artefact). The Artefact developed from practice experiences and an

initial engagement with secondary data. Secondary data is information that already exists, and

in this instance was drawn from educational books that promote theoretical learning with

applications for practice to align with demonstrating rigour for the research project by

highlighting key themes and discussion points. Primary data, for this project, involved a focus

group of student social workers, practice educators, practitioners and academics, as

cooperative researchers, to critique research participant questionnaires and establish the values

and limitations of the Artefact as an additional learning and teaching resource (Crabtree and

Miller, 1999). Different methods were considered in maximizing rigour for the gathering of data

for analysis (Crabtree and Miller, 1999). For example, Husserl's phenomenological approach

was considered given the Artefact's clear potential to be recognized as a phenomenon that

could be investigated. Moran describes phenomenology as a 'radical' approach to philosophy

and more of a 'practice' than a system or framework (2000, p.4). Connelly (2010) points to two

different forms of phenomenology, descriptive and interpretive, with Husserl the originator of the

former and his student, Heidegger, the latter. A phenomenological approach to investigating the

Artefact was recognised as potentially appropriate given the underpinning focus to critique

conscious experiences of applying and evaluating the Artefact within an established

epistemology that includes validation from research projects that have a small numbers of

research participants.

61

However, Armour, Rivaux and Bell (2009), concluded from their two hermeneutic studies, that the focus for rigour is entirely dependent on the neutrality of the researcher and I considered the approach therefore to be incongruent with my transparent investment in developing the Artefact and began to consider other options. Glaser and Strauss (1965) introduced grounded theory, which Bryant and Charmaz went on to describe as, the 'pre-eminent' approach to research (2007, p.1). Smith (2015) explains grounded theory as qualitative in nature, although also appropriate to research with quantitative data, as researchers determine themes from different sources and hypothesise further actions. In the context of this research project though, a grounded theory approach would more commonly be applied *before* identifying any particular artefact, and indeed question if a visual artefact was necessary. I questioned whether a grounded approach might be a more inclusive approach to researching the Artefact, although concluded there was still merit in researching the Artefact because the Artefact can be researched now whereas a Grounded theory approach was likely to generate different approaches that would benefit from further research before validating/invalidating the ideas generated. I reflected that the Artefact had already met with positive feedback and, at the very least, had already improved my teaching of theory. Grounded theory was noteworthy in preparing for this research project, although ultimately rejected because, like phenomenology, I wanted to work *alongside* research participants and engage with feedback in agreeing further amendments to improve accessibility and applications for the Artefact.

Constructionism, as a learning theory, applies Constructivist underpinnings to engage learners with *building* knowledge through the active *making* of subject-related artefacts (Noss and Hoyle, 1996). Papert (1980) recognized psychological insights for goal-orientated functions, tasks and actions that promote deep learning (Biggs, 2013) with opportunities for learners to develop, and demonstrate, knowledge' via the building of artefacts which are subsequently acknowledge and critiqued by peers and assessors. Although Papert's (1980) early work related to children developing their own artefacts for mathematical learning, the theory aligns with exponents developing working Artefacts to develop and evidence their learning and application of theory.

Papert's constructionism embodies Piaget's (1977) innate processing of *new* information through associations with already *known* information to embrace learning as reflections of individual thoughts, emotions, memories, biases, experiences and culture (Richardson, 1997; Rogers, 2002; Biggs, 2003). Constructionism similarly promotes ownership for developing the knowledge and skills to critically defend artefacts (Papert, 1980), which aligns with this inquiry where exponents of the Artefact are developing their skills to embrace problem-solving approaches and update working artefacts. However, in the search for aligning the literature with rigorous evidence, and recognizing difficulties already aired with first accessing the Artefact, it was considered unlikely that research participants would develop fully working artefacts within the research project timeframe. Constructionism was therefore rejected as the research method for this research project. Constructionism is still considered a potential research method for further research relating to the Artefact, although it is acknowledged that constructionism is problematic considering concerns for the mixing of epistemologies and/or ontologies (Payne, 2014; Stepney and Thompson, 2018). Specifically, Constructionism aligns with Constructivism and therefore offers a Subjective epistemology with a research focus for understanding a single truth; as opposed to the multiple realities recognized by Critical theory and the associated Modified subjective epistemology. Payne's (2014) and Stepney and Thompson's (2018) concerns for mixing epistemological and ontological positions are therefore discussed further in chapter 5.

> *(Action research) is not so much a methodology as an orientation to inquiry that seeks to create participative communities of inquiry in which qualities of engagement, curiosity and question posing are brought to bear on significant practical issues.*

Reason and Bradbury, 2008, p.1.

Lewin (1946) introduced the term Action Research to promote involvement of persons *from* the workforce, influencing change *in* the workplace and to involve all parties in ongoing cycles of reflective behaviours, underpinned with a focus for evolution and efficiency (Bargal, 2006).

Participatory Action Research is a research method dedicated to involving participants in generating data and contributing as cooperative researchers (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001; Winter, 2002; Kemmis, 2008). Swantz (2008, p.31) further writes that Participatory Action Research is 'multi-disciplinary and multiform' where 'adherents agree that it breaks from the positivist and empiricist science' to align with critical theory in embracing wider frameworks for understanding complex knowledge (Morrow, 1994; Kemmis, 2008). Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001) further reflect on the potential benefits in working with competing perspectives by authentically applying an action research focus for research inquiry findings, to be agreed as a shared voice (Silver, 2008). Vigilance for identifying evidence of theoretical learning beyond the Artefact was also considered more likely by involving more participants with different knowledge, skills and perspectives, to reflect on different experiences of applying the Artefact and the wider aims for learning and teaching theory (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001; Winter, 2002). Action research brings a 'culture of inquiry' (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001, p.9) to the research and encourages participants to become exponents of the Artefact in generating data, evaluating anonymised data, and agreeing findings for the research project. Participatory Action Research 'emphasises both participation and action' (Silver, 2008, p.103) which aligns with goals for evaluating, amending, or potentially discarding the Artefact in response to feedback. Ison (2013, p.147) further advocates the use of triangulation to promote rigour for educational learning. Triangulation 'involves measuring a phenomenon in two or three or more different ways in order to generate a more accurate measure of it' (Alexander et al., 2008, p.128). Green and Thorogood (2018, p.388) further add that opportunities for triangulation can emerge from aligning multiple data both with each other and with the literature. Triangulation therefore offers opportunities to demonstrate a rigorous approach and is therefore reflected in the research design by incorporating a small number of different ways to engage with the research project. Specifically, participants can choose to complete the questionnaire anonymously, and/or attend face-to-face Focus Group meetings, and/or engage with a face-to-face review of the questionnaire with the aim of identifying oppressive structures and emancipatory language.

Whilst Participatory Action Research aligned with underpinnings for the research project, the progression of the research project did not neatly align with Participatory Action Research principles. Specifically, because the first cycle of participation was unplanned and developed from practice experiences, it was necessary to consider any potential concerns the research community might have with endorsing this particular research project as Participatory Action Research (Kuhn, 1962; Kemmis, 2008). The three areas of possible discord are therefore set out briefly below before a response, applying McTaggart's (1997, p.26) *Guiding Principles for Participatory Action Research*.

1: *Participatory Action Research traditionally starts with all participants on an equal footing (Winer and Munn-Giddings, 2001); whereas my involvement in this research project was informed by teaching and practice experiences and warrants consideration for expert in the context of this research project (Silver, 2008).*

2: *Bringing a previously conceived artefact (the Artefact) to the research project is similarly out-of-step as more-often artefacts will emerge from the study, rather than be offered in advance of the study (McTaggart, 1997).*

3: *Decisions should be made together with participants for planning the research; whereas initial decisions had already been made with regards to certain aspects of the research design given my actions to engage with feedback at the earliest opportunities and the limitations of timeframes associated with doctoral study (Punch, 1998).*

McTaggart asks researchers to consider three questions prior to embedding a Participatory Action Research underpinning within their research. McTaggart's questions are therefore explored in considering the implications for this research project.

65

Question 1: *How is this example Participatory Action Research?*

This research study applies a critical theory paradigm and promotes participation and inclusion by involving research participants as cooperative researchers in generating and evaluating data with a focus for improving the learning and teaching of theory to align with practice goals for promoting independence and inclusion (Lewin, 1946; Habermas, 1981; Freire, 2000). This research project asks to be considered as Participatory Action Research because it involves key stakeholders in promoting effective learning and teaching of theory by actively engaging with the learning and teaching of theory. The research project will agree all findings as a focus group and the focus group will be recognized at all times as the expert voice (Silver, 2008). Other views will be discussed in highlighting the weight of debate and any disagreements will be discussed in chapter four of the thesis. In summary, the research project embraces the ethos of participation as central to education, social work and research and strives to promote emancipation through a shared social work focus on independence and inclusion (Lewin, 1946; Kemmis, 2008; Freire, 2000).

Question 2: *What does this example tell us about the criteria we might use to judge claims that an endeavour is Participatory Action Research (to test our theory of what participatory action research is)?*

Although the Artefact was developed previously, and I have found benefits in applying the Artefact, it is necessary to involve student social workers, practitioners, educators, and persons with lived experience in authentically assessing the values and limitations of the Artefact as a learning and teaching resource. It is acknowledged that the research project could have started without the Artefact and taken a grounded theory approach to participation in developing an artefact, however, this would be to deny the Artefact had previously been developed with participation and through feedback received and that it was also well-received when understood.

With an emphasis on participation and sharing findings as one voice, learners and teachers of theory can apply and inspect the Artefact with a focus for amending or discarding in line with any necessary actions to further develop the learning and teaching of theory. Without participation and engagement from exponents of the Artefact, analysis of the Artefact would be limited to the views of myself which may limit rigour and risks a potential under/over valuing of findings for the research project. This rationale therefore asks for Participatory Action Research to incorporate experts and include previously developed artefacts where necessary to the research process, underpinned with emancipatory goals and actions for participants' shared voice.

Question 3: *What contribution has this example made to the improvement of the understanding, practice, and social situation of participants and others in the context described?*

The research inquiry aims to work with learners of theory and promote understanding, and engagement with social work's transtheoretical epistemology. The research project offers a small number of different opportunities to engage with primary research and feedback on applications of a novel metatheoretical artefact with goals for selecting and combining specific theories in a planned and transparent framework (Thompson, 2010; Payne, 2014). In summary, this research study is first and foremost about improving outcomes for direct case work through enhancing practitioners' theoretical underpinnings. The research project encourages participants to rigorously assess and agree merits and limitations for the Artefact and develop skills, knowledge and abilities for applying specific theories with practice. Therefore, and with specific regard for McTaggart's concern for inclusive actions, this research project seeks to improve learners' understanding of specific theories and the combined applications of specific theories within direct case work in order to maximise ethical decision-making with actions focused on inclusion and independence.

3.6: *The research design*

Praxis	Cycle 1
Education	*Engaging the literature; practice educator roles with student social workers on placement; supervision with qualified practitioners in mental health practice; teaching theory experiences (BA year 1); and Practice Educator (CPD) candidates*
Action	*Development of the Blended Theory Model; drafting of an article to discuss rationale and purpose*
Reflection	*Draft article to be replaced with website to promote sharing of information in discrete amounts and improve accessibility. Redrafting of information key to transparently responding to feedback in redeveloping the Artefact.*

Praxis	Cycle 2
Education	*to engage with identifying and reviewing, relevant literature*
Action	*Focus Group meeting 1:* *Website and questionnaire to be reviewed and approved* *Research participant questionnaires anonymized in preparation for cycle three*
Reflection	*To keep a research diary for incorporating reflections within the thesis*

Praxis	Cycle 3
Education	*Focus Group meetings: 2 & 3 (a 4th meeting would later be added and is explained in chapter 4)* *Data evaluation and agree findings* *Continue to engage with the literature, review questionnaires and review minutes for any themes not discussed in the Focus Group meetings*
Action	*Review the Blended Theory Model with update as agreed by the Focus Group* *Reflect on participation and Focus Group agreement of findings; prepare discussion chapter (5) and prepare thesis for submission* *To continue to monitor completed questionnaires and share anonymised data*
Reflection	*Reflections to inform thesis writing*

Figure: *3.3.*

The research design (figure, 3.3) further highlights the embedded approach to participation, with even the first (unplanned) cycle demonstrating an inclusive approach to developing the Artefact in the first instance. Specifically, the Artefact's layout and domain headings were developed and amended, and information explaining the Artefact was drafted and reconfigured to maximize engagement and demonstrate rigour for the research project. Focus Groups are an established vehicle for Participatory Action Research projects and transparently and meaningfully involve participants in a wide range of research contexts (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001; Kemmis, 2008). Focus Group members will be consistently encouraged to be vigilant in recognising potential learning beyond the Artefact and highlighting opportunities for triangulation in the constant promotion of rigour with a comprehensive appraisal of the Artefact. I further decided not to invite student social workers or persons with lived experience to the first focus group meeting, but rather to involve other Focus Group members in making such an important decision (even though ethical approval was already in place). The first Focus Group meeting was therefore a mix of educators and practitioners wherein it was unanimously agreed at the that student social workers, and people with lived experience, should all be invited to participate in the research project, and have the option to become focus group members.

3.7: *Website rationale*

Developing the website was important to demonstrating my commitment to engaging with, and acting upon, feedback. Classroom feedback had been that the draft article introducing the Artefact was too dense for classroom timeframes. Instead, presentation of the information was therefore reconfigured and presented as discrete webpages on a dedicated website which also hosted the research questionnaire. Research participants were able to access the information through dedicated pages and complete a questionnaire in their own timeframes. The website was favourably reviewed by supervisors in the first instance, and subsequently made available to focus group members at the first focus group meeting.

Members reviewed the website, the research questionnaire and the Artefact and agreed the project as ethical and valid in promoting the learning and teaching of theory for Social Work education. Following publication of the website, all current learners, and the university's Service User and Carer Involvement group, were forwarded an email link with access to the website and the research options in completing, and potentially evaluating, research questionnaires.

3.8: *Research design summary*

In summary, this research inquiry acknowledges different ontological and epistemological concepts and values the academic discourse in developing the epistemology specific to social work. This research inquiry embraces different paradigms, epistemologies and ontological perspectives as currently valid, whilst recognizing conflict and the potential for change through new research knowledge, practice experiences and new theories emerging with how to prepare learners for theorizing and metatheorizing the discipline's transtheoretical epistemology. There is pressure (Munro, 2011; Stepney, 2012) for education to respond to in-house criticisms and invest in the promotion of theory for effective, ethical practice. There is evidence that a shared structure for theories is overdue (Howe, 1987; Stepney, 2012; Healy, 2014), whilst Payne (1996), Thompson (2010) and Fook (2012) share concerns for frameworks and models that might limit thinking, and/or promote reductionism, and/or the misapplication of theory. Participation therefore underpins the research design, with intentions to promote transparency for shared views to be considered as trustworthy and reliable, and critical theory to relentlessly demonstrate focus for language and actions that promote emancipation, independence and inclusion (Habermas, 1979; Freire, 2000; Biggs, 2013).

3.9: *The research questionnaire*

The website also hosted the research questionnaire which was intended to encourage participants to engage with the discrete web pages before completing the questionnaire. Participation was requested at all levels of the research study to promote triangulation of evidence and provide data for critical appraisal.

The research questionnaire was prepared with care for language consistent with critical theory underpinnings (for emancipation) and with an option for research participants to meet and discuss the language applied in the questionnaire. Two participants chose this option, and their feedback is discussed in chapters four and five. As the organizer of the research project, I further acknowledged full and final responsibility for protecting the confidentiality of all completed research questionnaires.

3.10: *Data evaluation*

Day and Townsend (2007) relate the need for trust in research to be 'rooted in core principles or ethical virtues if the core emancipatory and democratic purposes of action research are to be realised' (2007, p.59). Langlois, Goudreau and Lalonde (2014) build on Kemmis and McTaggart's Participatory Action Research principles to offer a transparent structure for focus group discussions in an article that was shared with all focus group members in advance of focus group meetings. All research participants, and all focus group members, were respectfully asked for their time without any financial remuneration being available, and with regular reminders of their rights to withdraw from the research study at any point, without reason or prejudice. The functions of the Focus Group were agreed as:

> 1: *To remain resolute in the pursuit of any knowledge that might promote the learning and teaching of theory*
> 2: *contribute to generating and appraising research data*
> 3: *contribute to discussions and agree findings for the research project*

The nine completed research questionnaires were screened by the writer in the first instance to anonymise before sharing with other Focus Group members. A minimum of three focus group meetings were agreed as necessary to review data, with a minimum quorum of three persons to discuss applications for the learning and teaching of theory and agree findings. The discussions and findings are explored in detail across the next two chapters.

In further preparing for a positive experience for all members, I acknowledged the potential for power dynamics to exist within all groups and promoted respect in recognising my central responsibility to facilitate discussions on power and agree mechanisms for facilitating any necessary resolutions (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001; Day and Townsend, 2007). Examples of such discussions included suggestions for ground rules, meeting attendance, conduct and conflict resolution. In summarising, I consistently acknowledged full responsibility for considering potential areas of conflict within the group, whilst acknowledging and considering how the group wanted to address and resolve conflict and effectively evaluate the research data. This responsibility remained throughout all aspects of the research project and remains until completion of the research project.

3.11: *Ethics*

> *High quality close-to-practice research requires the robust use of research design, theory and methods to address clearly defined research questions, through an iterative process of research and application. The research process will be well documented and the conclusions that are drawn will be appropriate to the strengths and weaknesses of the design, theory and methods used. Such research will draw upon practitioners' and researchers' reflections on both practice and context.*

> ___British Educational Research Association, 2018.

The quote from BERA's website points to the importance of planning for effective research outcomes with the first application for ethics approval considered as an early opportunity to engage with feedback from an expert member of the research community (Kuhn, 1962; Orme and Shemmings, 2010). BERA published the third version of their Charter in 2012 before adding their Statement on Close-to-Practice Research, and Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, in 2018. Alongside a strong ethos for design, the guidelines and charter promote and require consistent attention to researchers' responsibilities for participants and transparency of information.

72

The Advance HE's (2011) UK Professional Standards Framework also presents an ethical position that promotes transparency with valuing education and professional roles (Aim 3, 2019) as well as charters for gender and race equality. Social Work England's (2019) standards (one and six) further align goals for transparency with actions and decision-making that promote participation at every opportunity and align with legislation for equality and inclusion (Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001; Equality Act 2010). The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) introduced their Code of Ethics in 1975, which was updated in 2014, although there is no legal or professional requirement to register with BASW, which may negatively impact on awareness and uptake of their code. Ethics in Practice: Promoting Ethical Conduct in Public Life (2014) further sets out seven expected principles to reinforce selfless aims for persons providing public services through meeting similar aims for objectivity and transparency. In summarising, the ethical issues associated with this research project have been considered in detail throughout this thesis (Banks, 2016). I acknowledge and welcome the raft of legislation, ethical codes and policies for inclusive actions and embrace critical theory and Freirean underpinnings in fulfilling ethical duties and responsibilities for this, and any future, research activity.

3.12: *Summary*

The Artefact was developed from strands of frustration associated with learning and teaching theory and subsequently from potentially making an academic contribution in response, and with respect, to the in-house criticisms of Thompson (2010), Munro (2011) and Stepney (2012). The criticisms, alongside positive classroom experiences applying draft artefacts, sparked much reflection and led to actions engaging with the promotion of positive change. The actions have consistently been participative and have rejected a hierarchical, or banking (education through instruction) approach to learning and sharing knowledge (Freire, 2000; Fook, 2012).

Croisdale-Appleby's (2014) Independent Review of Social Work Education reflected that educators should promote reflection with students on ontological and epistemological issues and proposed that education should foster students in adopting three specific roles '*professional, practitioner and social scientist'*. The aims of this research project are consistent with the roles Croisdale-Appleby ascribes in promoting knowledge, skills and abilities for critical decision-making that is transparently underpinned by the ethical application of theory with a focus for independence and inclusion (Mathias, 2015; Rutter and Brown, 2015). The Artefact is intended to be a resource that promoting the learning, teaching and application of theory by scaffolding theoretical integrations with practice (Vygotsky, 1962; Nesbit and Adesope, 2013; Payne, 2014). This research project therefore adopts Participatory Action Research as the research *method,* to align with Critical theory as the research methodology (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001; Kemmis, 2008). The next chapter details focus group discussions, including focus group findings for the research project in examining the values and limitations of the Artefact.

Chapter 4: *Findings*

4.1: *Introduction*

The previous chapters introduced the research inquiry, identified and reviewed relevant

literature, and provided a rationale for Critical theory as the research methodology and

Participatory Action Research as the research method. The next chapter discusses the findings

from this chapter with reference to the literature reviewed in chapter two, and the educational,

political and regulatory influences from chapter one. The thesis concludes with reflections in the

final chapter. The research project was facilitated with intentions to promote the learning,

teaching and application of theory through rigorous assessment of a metatheoretical artefact

(the Blended Theory Model). The Blended Theory Model (the Artefact) was drafted by the

writer, with feedback from student social workers on practice learning placements, aiming to

promote the ethical mapping, selecting, blending and application of multiple theories with

practice and case studies. This chapter reviews the research processes and explains the

workings and findings of the Focus Group. In concluding the research project, the Focus Group

made a total of nine findings for the Artefact. Figure 4.1 (below) briefly outlines the two

limitations and 4.2 (below) details the seven merits.

Focus Group Findings:	Limitations	Brief explanation
1.	*Initially engaging with the Artefact*	*The Focus Group identified potential for misunderstanding the purpose and potential dynamic applications of the Artefact at first introduction*
2.	*Emotional transparency applying theories*	*The Focus Group drew attention to the limitation of the Artefact in transparently incorporating the potential for emotional influences when applying the Artefact to practice and/or with case studies*

Figure: *4.1.*

75

Figure 4.2 (below) briefly outlines the seven merits agreed by the Focus Group.

Focus Group Finding:	Merits	Brief explanation
3.	*Mapping theories*	*The Artefact offers a consistent approach to mapping theories from the diverse transtheoretical epistemology with 3 domains specific to social work practices*
4.	*Selecting theories*	*The Artefact offers a consistent approach to selecting specific, and multiple, theories in preparing to engage theoretically with practice and/or case studies*
5.	*Blending theories*	*The Artefact can be applied as a foundational approach to theorizing practice with multiple theoretical perspectives*
6.	*Applying multiple theories with practice as a model for practice*	*The Artefact offers the opportunity to engage with Bigg's (2013) concept of the complex whole; wherein the application of specific, multiple theories, can in itself represents a theoretical perspective*
7.	*Potential reflective and/or reflexive model*	*An unexpected finding was in the potential for the Artefact to be applied as a reflective and/or reflexive model*
8.	*Potential applications with other professions*	*Another unexpected finding was in the potential for the Artefact to be applied to understand other professions' theoretical underpinnings*
9.	*Other research opportunities*	*A number of potential research opportunities related to the Artefact were further identified by Focus Group members*

Figure: *4.2.*

76

Further to agreeing the merits and limitations of the Artefact, the Focus Group also renamed the Artefact as the *Blended Theory Model* and revised the Artefact's template as shown in figure 4.3 (below).

The Blended Theory Model: *A template for theories with social work*
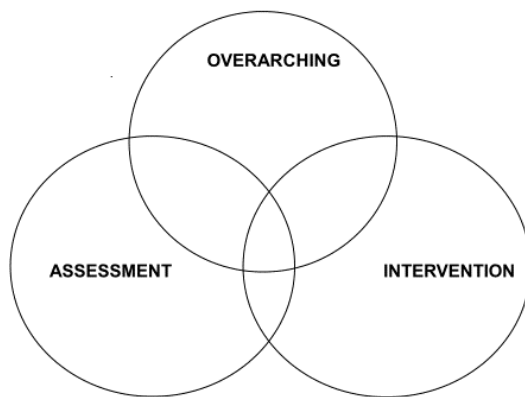
Figure: *4.3.*

4.2: *How did participation inform findings?*

Langlois, Goudreau & Lalonde (2014) suggest Participatory Action Research requires a minimum of three cycles. In this research project, the first cycle started without any planning and instead developed from frustrated teaching experiences as discussed in chapter one. In practice, and in had started drawing simple artefacts to add to an explanation, or question boundaries or ethical dilemmas that arose from practice. Feedback was positive that drawings were enabling learning and teaching and so I began to formalize the Artefact. In addition, I had the opportunity to undertake doctoral inquiry and started thinking about a research project that could formally assess the merits and limitations of the Artefact and made an application of ethical approval. Lastly, I also drafted an article to explain the Artefact for use in the classroom to encourage awareness of the discipline's transtheoretical epistemology and engagement with theoretical learning and applications to contexts of practice.

A Blended Context Theory Model for Social Work

Overarching

(Generic; applicable to groups & communities)

Examples might include:

Anti-Oppressive Practice;

Person-Centred; Systems theories;

Medical & Social models; Sociological theories

(Includes research)

Assessment

(Applicable with individuals)

Examples might include:

Attachment theory

Strengths Perspective

Systems theories

Motivational Interviewing

Intervention

(Applicable with individuals)

Examples might include:

Solution-focused

Task-centred

Transactional Analysis

Figure: *4.4.*

4.3: *Cycle one; participation prior to the first Focus Group meeting*

Figure 4.4 (above) was the first iteration of the Artefact for research purposes. Following ethical approval, I began using the Artefact and draft article in the classroom. This first iteration of the Artefact incorporated examples of specific theories for each domain which was intended to hint at the possibility of different theory combinations and promote ownership for exponents' selection and application of multiple theories. In preparing for the first Focus Group meeting, I further met with doctoral supervisors, two academic colleagues and completed two face-to-face questionnaires with experienced practitioners. Whilst no language or power concerns were raised for the questionnaire (or the article draft), consistent difficulties were highlighted with initially engaging the Artefact. Feedback suggested that the Artefact contained too much information, which made it confusing and difficult to process, and required a verbal explanation to understand as the article was also too long and dense for classroom applications. I also recognised though that I was unable to answer some of the questions posed, or clearly explain the rationale for the Artefact with reference to underpinning literature. I realized it was necessary to revisit the literature in further preparing for the research project (BERA, 2018a) and closer align the quest for rigour (Orme and Shemmings, 2010). The feedback, and my reflections of these preparatory meetings, is acknowledged as a significant step in my development to becoming an authentic researcher. However, feedback was also positive once the Artefact was explained, which led to prioritizing efforts to overcome the difficulties initially engaging the Artefact. In response to the feedback, I redeveloped the Artefact 's template with much less embedded information to process in the first instance. In addition to the Artefact's template, I also began developing exemplar artefacts which aligned to specific practice contexts (for example, Mental Health and Children & Families) and drafted my own working artefacts, to a) share a focus for exponents' developing their own working artefacts and b) offer visual representations of the different potential applications for the Artefact. Additionally, I also reformulated the information from the article to a website and completed the amendments for discussion at the first Focus Group meeting.

4.4: *Cycle two; Focus Group meeting 1*

Cycle two began, and was completed, at the first Focus group meeting which was attended by a small representation of practitioners and educators to address the following agenda items.

Agenda item 1: *Langlois, Goudreau & Lalonde's (2014) article*

Langlois, Goudreau & Lalonde's (2014) article was forwarded in advance of the meeting to promote a group ethos and a shared platform from which to begin discussions for the research project. At the meeting, all members agreed the article was useful in framing the purpose of the research project and clarified Focus Group members' roles in the promotion of rigour. Members further agreed that the article aligned with social work values and exampled parallels with ethical assessment and court report writing. We further discussed the potential for conflict and resolution within the group, as well as our responsibilities for confidentiality of information, and the right for all participants to withdraw from the research without reason or prejudice.

Agenda item 2: *To review the term Cooperative Researchers*

The Focus Group discussed, and agreed, the role and boundaries of members as Cooperative Researchers, with attention to ownerships for the research project, data and thesis. Specifically, Focus Group members discussed the tensions of the research project findings with the thesis and inquiry outcomes. We agreed that findings from the research project would be agreed as a Focus Group, whilst the thesis would be entirely my own work; this decision aligned with meeting ethical expectations for academic regulations for doctoral study (Anglia Ruskin University, 2013). Focus Group members further united through a shared consensus for their role as Cooperative Researchers to include sharing findings from the research project with the wish to embed research in their future working practices.

Agenda item 3: *To agree principles underpinning the research project*

Upon explanation and discussion, Focus Group members further stated their commitment to engaging with Critical theory as the methodology, and to research and practice that aligns with ethical principles in the promotion of inclusion and independence (Advance HE [AHE], 2011; BASW, 2014; BERA, 2018b; SWE, 2019;). All members embraced, and expressed their commitment, to respecting the views of others in maximizing engagement, debate and decision-making.

Agenda item 4: *To agree the venue and frequency of Focus Group meetings*

Focus Group members promoted inclusion and participation through positive discrimination for enabling attendance of all persons disclosing needs resulting from disability, and/or caring responsibilities. No fees, or incentives were offered for participation in the research and we agreed expectations for balancing rigour with members' time and expenses. Specifically, two more meetings (up to two hours in duration) were agreed, as the likely requirements for maximizing rigour in assessing the merits and limitations of the Artefact.

Agenda item 5: *The selection of Research Participants and Focus Group members*

The boundaries and limitations of ethical approval were discussed in determining exactly how future Focus Group members and research participants were to be invited to engage with the research questionnaire. Specifically, the Focus Group unanimously agreed that student social workers and persons with lived experience of social work services (including carers), should all be invited as both research participants and to become Focus Group members. The confidentiality of participants, alongside the secure arrangements for storing research data, were revisited and acknowledged to be everyone's responsibility (*Data Protection Act 2018).* Also revisited, was the ethical responsibility (BERA, 2018b) to promote transparency with the right to withdraw from the research project at any point, and without reason or prejudice.

Agenda item 6: *To agree suitability of website and research questionnaire*

Although ethical approval was already in place, this agenda item asked Focus Group members to examine and agree any necessary amendments to the website and/or questionnaire. This was discussed to promote alignment with Silver (2008) and the group voice becoming the expert voice for the research project. The Focus Group started with the research questionnaire, to which I also fed back from the two completed face-to-face questionnaires. We discussed intentions for consistently critiquing language across the research project to transparently align with Critical theory goals to engage with (and realign) any structurally oppressive and/or discriminatory language, in the promotion of personal enlightenment (conscientization) and committed engagement with praxis (Habermas, 1979; Freire, 2000).

4.4.1: *The website and the revised Artefact*
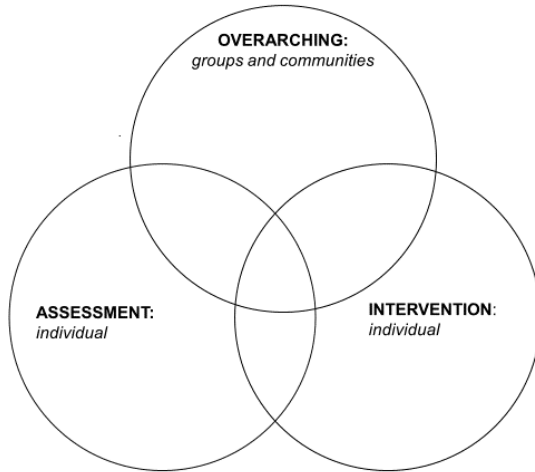
The Blended Contexts Theory Model

Figure: *4.5.*

With ground rules, ethical underpinnings and goals agreed, the Focus Group began to review

the website and the now-revised Artefact; as shown in figure 4.5 (above). I shared that

feedback from the classroom had been that the draft article was too long for a teaching session

(and too densely presented) which was why I had broken the information down to make it

easier to access and understand. Members were also shown the first iteration and whilst they

agreed the revised Artefact was clearer, also discussed whether the annotations of *groups and*

communities and *individuals* made any significant difference in understanding the domain

headings. We agreed to pilot this latest version of the Artefact though, with regular reviews of

the domain headings at Focus Group meetings, to further consider options for updating or even

discarding. We then progressed to discussing figure 4.6 (below) which is intended to

encourage theorizing for the overlapping domains of the Artefact.

The Blended Theory Model: *Overlapping domains (2014)*
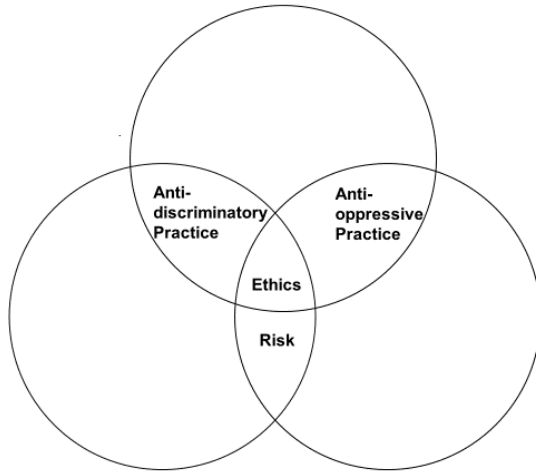
Whilst members agreed it was a useful diagram and indeed encouraged a step-by-step approach to applying the Artefact, the discussion quickly drifted back to understanding the Overarching domain. One member (practitioner and practice educator) commented how they could easily grasp the Assessment and Intervention headings but remained unclear what Overarching meant in this context; the point was validated by other members and formed a key finding for the research project and my learning as a researcher and educator. In response, figure 4.7 (below) was sketched to explain in a pictorial format, the profusion of theories available from the transtheoretical epistemology, which can (and are) applied to *overarch* (or indeed *underpin*) contemporary practice. In further explanation, it was discussed how overarching theories can be understood as theories which are broadly distinct from the psychological theories that are advocated when assessing individual needs and/or risk. The draft diagram was agreed by members to be beneficial to understanding the distinction being made and offer an intermediate step to understanding the purpose and validity of the Artefact.

Figure 4.7 (below) was therefore formalized after the meeting to promote comprehension for the Overarching domain as an initial mapping opportunity which separates specific theories relating to practice contexts from the psychological theories informing direct case work.

The Blended Theory Model extends the initial mapping of Sociological theories to transparently include other theories that also contribute to insights of *the social work* **context** and/or **population** (and as opposed to any specific *person or individual*).

For example theories for Philosophy, Human Growth and Development (as well as Sociology) are all embraced through the term Overarching.

Overarching

Sociological

Philosophy

Human Growth & Development

Figure: *4.7.*

Within the first Focus Group meeting though, we moved on to discuss the draft exemplars (figures 4.8 and 4.9 below). The exemplars were prepared with intentions to be considered as *working* models; meaning they were intended as dynamic frameworks which are flexible to integrating exponents' reflections and/or changing of specific theories to promote ownership and alignment with different practice contexts. In further explanation, Bowlby's (1969) conceptualising of internal working models, Schore's (2000) neuroscientific explanation for physical brain construction, and Schön's (1983) innate reactions to stimuli, were all discussed to engage with the fluid nature of learning, processing and applying theoretical concepts. We agreed therefore on the intended meaning for a *working* artefact, in this context, to mean artefacts that exponents are currently applying with direct case work and case studies; but, are artefacts that are subject to change, given new information and reflections (Schön, 1983; Cozolino, 2002; Freire, 2000).

THE BLENDED CONTEXTS THEORY MODEL: *Children & Families*

This Model is being constructed for: 'Children & Families'.

The Overarching context therefore requires a theory that promotes a critical understanding of the family as a unit

The Assessment and Intervention contexts require theories that enable an understanding of each family member; as an individual.

OVERARCHING:
Children & Families

ASSESSMENT:
Individual family members

INTERVENTION:
Individual family members

Firstly, learners might consider the area of practice within which they intend to apply their Model.

What theories might you think of applying within each of the contexts?

The 'Draft working models' webpage offers an example of theories you might consider for a Children & Families Model.

Figure: *4.8.*

Immediately on seeing figures 4.8 (above) and 4.9 (above), the same Focus Group member (practitioner and practice educator) who had earlier commented about still not understanding the context of the Overarching domain, commented 'now it makes sense' and 'this is really about separating assessment from everything else' which they had not thought about before.

THE BLENDED CONTEXTS THEORY MODEL: *Jones family*

To theorize practice with families, an example of a potential Overarching context might be Systems Theory.

To ethically assess individual family members however, it is likely that other theories are more suited to such theorizing, for example Attachment Theory.

OVERARCHING:
Children & Families
(Jones family)
Systems Theory

ASSESSMENT:
Ann, Laura, Jim
Attachment Theory

INTERVENTION:
Ann, Laura, Jim
Solution-focused

Case Study: Jones family

Single mother (Ann) (White British; 21 years of age)

Child: Laura (White British; 4 years of age

Child: Jim (Mixed heritage Asian/White British; 8 months of age)

In this Model, Attachment Theory is being used to promote a critical Assessment of each individual within the system (family).

And, solution-focused practice is the theory underpinning the Interventions for each family member in promoting positive (service-user-led) outcomes for the family.

Figure: *4.9.*

85

Figures 4.8 and 4.9 were discussed as potential frameworks for Theorizing Practice with Children and Families (Hartman, 1978; Thompson, 2010; Stepney and Thompson, 2020); with supplementary considerations for how exemplars might be developed further with specialist input from practitioners and academics. Members agreed therefore that exemplars offered an additional entry point to first understanding and engaging with the Artefact; the feedback was encouraging and also validated the participatory approach to researching and developing the Artefact. Members shared they could now begin to think in terms of student social workers undertaking placements and applying the Artefact as 'a mirror' (practitioner, practice educator and associate lecturer) for reflecting on the wealth of theories and the opportunities (as well as the necessity) to select specific theories to apply with practice and case scenarios. Exemplars were understood to offer a clearer understanding for why certain theories might be preferred by some practitioners, whilst others choose different theories; for example, sometimes to reflect the context of practice or sometimes just because some theories make more sense to apply for some practitioners. Although my thinking for the website had been to encourage exponents with developing their own working artefacts, I began to understand from the feedback that exponents were, at least just as likely, if not indeed *more* likely, to engage with prepopulated artefacts (at least) in the first instance. The template and the exemplars therein offered two different entry points, which were both agreed to offer an inclusive approach to working with multiple theories. One member (practitioner and practice educator) asked if there was a *method* to applying the different theories, which led to discussions of Payne (1994; 2012; 2014) and Thompson's (2010) different perspectives for engaging with multiple theories. One member (academic and practitioner) offered that in absence of a single approach for social work, the question was ultimately one for the group to consider; juxtaposed further with the introduction of Schön's (1983) professionalism in combining theories and Biggs' (2013) concept of the complex whole for applying a combination of theories.

Whilst members had previously agreed the working Children & Families artefact would probably benefit from practitioners' input, it was now further recognized however that different fields of Children & Families practice (for example Emergency duty, Kinship and 'Looked after' teams) were also likely to populate artefacts differently, reflecting theorizing specific to each practitioner and the specific context of practice (Cozolino, 2003; Beckett, 2006). One member (practice educator and associate lecturer) reiterated how exponents will also require time to process such complex information and how this aspect was not necessarily pronounced within the literature. On reflection, I realised that one of my aims for the Artefact had been to offer a framework for other learners to devise their own structured approach to integrating specific theories with practice, whereas Focus Group discussions consistently pointed to the benefits for including an interim stage. Specifically, to overcome difficulties initially engaging with the Artefact, was perhaps to offer a range of entry points for exponents to trial the Artefact, to test how the Artefact might work for with different theories and/or in different practice contexts (and case studies) *before* theorizing about amending and developing working artefacts.

We moved on to discuss the working artefact for mental health, as presented in figure 4.10 (below). Members acknowledged that the current, dominant sociological perspective to practice in mental health services was the Recovery model. Recovery perspectives can offer insights to working with key issues in mental health, such as wellbeing, risk, illness and treatment, power and control. However, in addition to these key structural (or overarching) tenets, it is beneficial to consider the differences and overlaps with the theorizing required to engage ethically with direct case work and the assessment tasks and intervention duties (Thompson, 2010; Healy, 2014; Barcham, 2016). For example, we discussed the limitations of Recovery as a sociological concept, particularly given the common noun understanding for *recovery* as being potentially discriminatory towards persons who cannot recover, perhaps due to the irreversible and degenerative nature of specific mental disorders, such as Dementia (Leah, 2012).
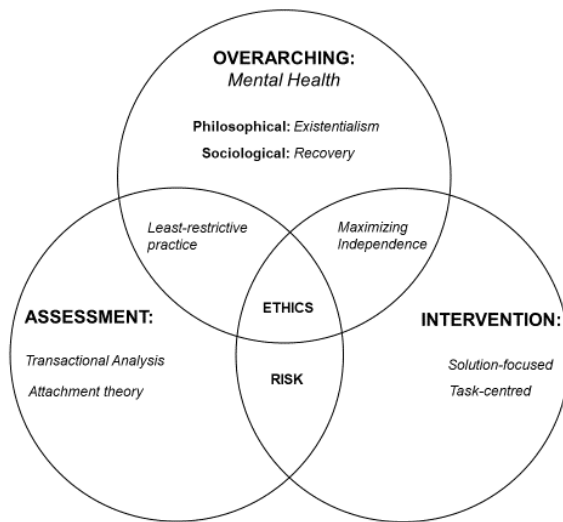
Figure: *4.10.*

One member (academic and practitioner) aired Thompson's (2010) recommendation for
Existentialism to underpin a social worker's practice; although also expressing their individual
preference for Critical theory, as it offers clear direction and expectations to engage with
structures and actions that are focused on inclusion (Habermas, 1979; Morrow, 1994). We
discussed Freire and his promotion of critical consciousness through praxis with a focus for
inclusion. We discussed Berne's (1961; 1964) Transactional Analysis as the Assessment
theory within the exemplar and I explained my choice was originally based on the practical
applications of the theory and the endless opportunities for theorizing and recognising myself
and others' presentations as consistent/inconsistent with Berne's ego states of Parent, Child,
and Adult (Berne, 1964). We subsequently discussed Biggs (2013) taxonomy of critical thinking
and reflected on examples of how new theories had emerged from a blending of other,
established theories.

Specifically, we discussed Attachment theory, and how Bowlby (1969) had developed his theory from amalgamating elements from psychology, ethnography, psychodynamic and cybernetic theories (among others) (Howe, 2009); to include Main and Solomon's (1986) addition of 'Disorganized' states; through to Shemmings' (2011; 2014) focus for adult attachments and in particular the transformational approach of Crittenden's (2006) Dynamic Maturational Model. We discussed how Attachment theory has continued to be defined and redefined from Bowlby's initial categorisations and realized (educator and practitioner) that we had applied the Artefact back to front in this instance. Specifically, how we had unpicked Attachment theory as a complex whole by separating the different theoretical strands that combined to form Attachment theory (Schön, 1983; Biggs, 2013). One member (practice educator and associate lecturer) asked if I was advocating for only teaching and applying those theories, to which I aimed to be clear in flatly rejecting the notion. Indeed, the concept of the Artefact, was to instead promote transparency with the application of different theories through offering a common framework for discussion (Tucker, 1996) and peer learning to involve exponents in offering a rationale for their specific selection of theories to blend and apply with *their* practice.

On the page below, diagrams for blending specific, multiple theories, are mapped with those identified in each domain of the mental health artefact (figure 4.10) to further explore the blending of theories across three phases. Specifically, the blending of Assessment theories is the focus of figure 4.11, whilst the blending of Intervention theories is in 4.12, and the blending of both Assessment and Intervention theories, in 4.13. Figures 4.11/12/13 are intended to offer transparency with a consistent approach to the blending of theories and align with the Artefact's underpinning for maximizing independence and inclusion; through the promotion of a rights-based approach to practice, with a focus for inclusive decision-making and actions.

Blending of social work assessment theories: *Attachment Theory & Transactional Analysis*

Independence from services

Transactional
Analysis   &   *Attachment*

Adult   Child
Secure   Parent
                                              Avoidant
                                              Ambivalent

Legislation informs
Social Work Power, Duties & Accountability

Blended assessment theories: *Gavin Millar, 2018.*

Figure: *4.11***.**

Blending of social work intervention theories: *solution-focused & task-centred*

Independence from services

solution -   task-
focused   centred
practice   practice

Legislation informs
Social Work Power, Duties & Accountability

Blended intervention theories: *Gavin Millar, 2018*

Figure: *4.12.*

Blending of theories: *Recovery, Attachment Theory; Transactional Analysis; Solution-focused & Task-centred*

Recovery: Independence from services

Transactional   Attachment
Analysis   Theory

Adult   Child
Secure   solution -   Parent
             focused   task-   *Avoidant*
             practice   centred   *Ambivalent*
                             practice

Power, Duties & Accountability

Blended assessment theories: *Gavin Millar, 2018*

Figure: *4.13.*

90

All three figures frame the blending of theories with a rainbow-shape at the top to represent the potential for a spectrum of applications for applying specific theories. At the base of each diagram is a directional arrow to acknowledge that social work duties are also undertaken across a spectrum, from initial assessment and signposting roles, to working with conflict, complex risk, and statutory duties. Figure 4.11, correlates Bowlby's (1969) Secure attachment profile, with Berne's Parent ego state, at the left-hand side of the directional arrow to suggest the likelihood for persons who are able to make informed, capacitous decisions, as unlikely to require invoking statutory duties to promote change. On the right-hand side, the complexity of entrenched Adult and Child ego states (Berne, 1964), and Ambivalent and Avoidant working models (Bowlby, 1969), may be considered to raise attention for decision-making and actions that require statutory considerations. Similarly, figure 4.12 develops the same themes to incorporate decisions and actions that are led by the person being assessed (Solution-focused), across a spectrum for partnership working practices focused on maximizing insight and ownership (Task-centred), with considerations for a twin-track (or parallel planning) approach to statutory responsibilities and duties. In figure 4.13, the themes from 4.11 and 4.12 are further mapped with each other to enable a potential new, complex whole (Biggs, 2013), that may be further aligned with other theories such as Existentialism and/or the Recovery model, as previously identified in the Overarching domain of figure 4.10. Members reviewed figures 4.11/12/13 with enthusiasm for the transparency and ease of understanding. We spoke of Hartman (1978) and Fook's (2012) concerns for reductionism and Piaget's (1977) constructivist approach to ask if we were being either reductionist or constructivist (Piaget, 1977; Biggs, Tang & Chow, 2011) as well as transparently ethical (Schön, 1983; SWE, 2019). As a group, we agreed that we were working, earnestly, to understand theories *with* social work, and that our research actions were consistent with ethical expectations across the three professions. We agreed to continue to engage with this question though rather than attempt a definitive position at this early stage.

In summary, the Focus Group agreed the research design and the suitability of the website as a learning and teaching resource in striving to promote understanding with the application of theory for social work. This meeting represented the second cycle of the research project as it was key in shifting the direction of the research project from the first cycle of developing an artefact for teaching and research purposes, to working as a group in amending, agreeing and endorsing the new representation of the Artefact for learning, teaching and research purposes. The research project therefore now entered the third and final cycle to critically determine, and evidence findings for the merits and limitations of the Artefact.

4.5: *Cycle three; Focus Group meeting 2*

Cycle three began with the second Focus Group meeting which was attended by undergraduate and postgraduate learners, educators and practitioners. After welcoming new members, the meeting was again started with a review of Langlois, Goudreau & Lalonde's (2014) article, with all members agreeing the article to align with ethical expectations for social work, education and research purposes. It was further agreed that any disagreements 'should now be negotiated as a group' (practitioner and practice educator), although I restated my overall responsibilities as the research coordinator and reiterated members' rights to withdraw from the research project at any time, without reason or prejudice. The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed before revisiting the aims of the research project and revisiting the potential for overlap and difference between the research project findings and the thesis outcomes. We again confirmed that findings for the project were to be made as a group, alongside the potential to share findings as a group, in agreeing the ultimate goal for the research project was to improve outcomes for direct case work (BERA, 2018b; SWE, 2019). I then shared the website amendments tasked from our previous meeting. One new member (student social worker) shared that they had already been party to lectures introducing and applying the Artefact and were joining the Focus Group because they had found it useful and wanted to be party to further developing the Artefact. The member further explained they wanted to apply the Artefact within their placement and aligned their attendance at Focus Group meetings with PCF 9 (Leadership) with developing applications of theories for practice.

Another member (practitioner, practice educator and associate lecturer) aligned the new member's contribution with Langlois, Goudreau & Lalonde's (2014) article, citing the benefits in considering 'knowledge from different perspectives' and to the 'resetting of goals' as evidence of the research project being *participatory*. We further discussed the importance for regularly reviewing the participatory nature of the research project as, more commonly, such research would have started without an artefact, research design, or any members with expert status. One member (practitioner and practice educator) commented they had been reflecting on this point from the first meeting though, and that without the Artefact, whilst we 'might' be looking at many different possibilities for teaching theory 'we would still be no further forward to agreeing which way was best or useful'. Another Focus Group member (student social worker) added that 'rather than instigating a new approach, this is participatory because it's about *steering*, it's *in*-action research'. Another member (practitioner, practice educator and associate lecturer) agreed, saying the Artefact offers 'a useful starting point, from which the group decides where we go; surely, that *is* PAR'. We agreed and moved on to reviewing the website and questionnaire amendments. Almost instantly, one member (practitioner and practice educator) commented 'can I bring up the term *service user*?'. The group acknowledged the question to align with the project's underpinning principle to align with Critical theory and authentically attend to language that may oppress and/or discriminate. The group discussed the potentially exclusive and oppressive nature of the term (Habermas, 1979; Freire, 2000; Beresford, 2005), in particular, the *user* element which was observed to hold structural connotations for discrimination through an inherent imbalance of power, as well as the potential overlap with user/abuser. One member summarised 'well, we should always be striving for inclusive language – what is more inclusive though?' (student social worker). Different terminology was considered, although we agreed to think about it further in the absence of a more inclusive word being identified at the meeting. All parties agreed this was an important contribution to recognizing and addressing entrenched language that can oppress and discriminate and we agreed to continue to revisit terminology within Focus Group meetings and across the research project.

93

In further acknowledging the point, I committed to not using the term 'service user' in the thesis wherever possible and to instead either discuss *persons with experience* or, whenever possible, *direct case work* to avoid labelling. The group moved on to discuss whether the Artefact was only intended for statutory purposes, or had potential to be applied within private, voluntary and independent settings as well. The group quickly agreed the potential for the Artefact to be applicable outside statutory social work settings and even (student social worker) to offer potential applications with other professions; although populating an exemplar for other professions and professionals was recognized to likely to benefit from representation from experienced practitioners in their fields. The discussion led to further debate on which specific theories might align with non-statutory contexts and to student social workers being involved in drafting exemplars as part of placement learning. The debate morphed to members' experiences of applying the Artefact and to discussion of working with *competing* theoretical perspectives such as Medical versus Social models. We discussed if we should be learning and teaching Attachment theory and/or Erikson, and/or Levinson developmental stages, which led to debates for merits and limitations for each theory and to considerations for *blending* theories. One member (student social worker) commented that from an initial populating of theories within an artefact there was also potential to align academic and professional progression with the dynamic intentions of the PCF: specifically, to work with the PCF expectations for practitioners at different stages in their development to continue demonstrating further learning as part of their committed engagement with continuous professional development. One member (practitioner, practice educator and associate lecturer) agreed and fed back how useful they found the working artefacts (figures 4.9/10) as a 'pathway through practice' and to accommodating a structured approach to integrating theoretical learning with their practice as a practice educator. Another member (practitioner and practice educator) agreed, although added that the additional 'rainbow' diagrams (Figures 4.11/12/13) had been even more useful in being able to actually *see* theories being blended. In particular, they shared their valuing of the visual representation for a fluid crossover between Solution-focused to Task-centred practices, which they had not previously recognized or considered.

94

All members related they found figure 4.13's blending of all four different theories (Attachment, Transactional Analysis, Solution-focused and Task-centred) to offer an instantly improved understanding of inter-relations between those theories. One member (student social worker) commented 'however, this looks like a one-way process, what about the impact on the social worker – you could do a mirror image below, to think about the emotional impact (on practitioners) as they move along the base dynamic (Power, Duties and Accountability)'. The comment was met with enthusiasm and brought discussions of Cameron and McDermott (2007) and Ingram's (2015) literature regarding the physical body and emotions, to discussion of professionalism and wellbeing with insights for the complexities of illness (mental and physical), disability, workload, resilience, stress and ethics. The same member further cited Ferguson's (2009) work and suggested the potential for overwhelming emotions to impact on reflection, reflexivity, and decision-making. Other members were quick to agree this was an important dynamic and actually one which the Artefact could add to by considering the Artefact as a potential reflexive model: aligning with Schön's (1983) underpinning for developing reflexive thinking as a structured activity in the promotion of ethical decision-making. Members agreed this was an exciting development that further added to the Artefact's potential applications. This, in turn, led back to discussions of the original and revised artefact templates and to the potential for aligning with theories from other factors that impact social work practices. For example, the impact of austerity and culture with direct case work led to considerations for exemplar artefacts and critical incidents bespoke to people with lived experience of services and back to the earlier possibilities with recognizing other professions' theoretical underpinnings. Before the session ended, we reviewed the current name of the Artefact and explored opportunities for renaming the Artefact. I offered a brief rationale for the naming of the Artefact previously, starting with the ABC model through to the Blended Contexts Theory Model, in response to feedback from students, practitioners, supervisors, and other educators. The group had no strong concerns for the name, with the current name reflecting the 'connectedness' of theories (student social worker) although the *Contexts* element was suggested to perhaps add an unnecessary complexity when initially engaging the Artefact.

95

The group discussed plans for our next meeting and briefly revisited (Langlois, Goudreau & Lalonde, (2014) cycles of participation before ending the session. The group agreed the research continued to 'feel participatory' (practitioner and practice educator) although holding an additional fourth meeting was raised (student social worker) to build on the learning from Focus Group meetings and rigorously integrate feedback and learning from participant questionnaires. It was agreed that all members would benefit from further time to reflect before agreeing findings and a fourth meeting was therefore unanimously agreed. As a group, we discussed that although we had originally come from different understandings of theories and their potential applications, we now had a common goal to engage with theories, as both a language and as an epistemology (Fook, 2012; Biggs, 2013).

4.5.1: *Focus Group meeting 3*

Cycle three continued with the third Focus Group meeting which was started with an exercise to promote discussions on thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Specifically, members were asked to choose 10 items of their choice from a box of chocolates that contained individually wrapped sweets of different flavours. Members were asked to choose to promote a deductive approach to identifying themes from the analysis; to align with the research aims for determining the merits and limitations of the Artefact (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). The goal for the exercise was to prompt discussions on the human activity for categorising information (Schön, 1983; Biggs, 2013) whilst embracing Fook's (2012, p.9) resistance to the 'commodification' of theories. The first member (practitioner, practice educator and associate lecturer) explained their choice reflected being adventurous and 'taking a chance' whilst the other chocolates were *known* favourites 'that you know you can go back to time-after-time'. We agreed that the learning was not necessarily looking for previously known patterns or information that fitted with preconceived ideas. Instead, learning would benefit from being open to questionnaire feedback, and to the views of Focus Group members, in comparing responses with the literature and practice experiences.

We agreed to engage with all participant questionnaires with a focus for participation and inclusion, which prompted our regular revisiting of participation to ask whether our meetings were participatory. One member (student social worker) was quick to respond saying, 'depends on what happens next'. In further explanation, they went on to explain how they considered research to be both educational and political, and that the research should continue beyond this project if the value of working together was to be truly recognised. All members were in agreement that this project could, and should, therefore be considered a beginning, rather than a one-off, and that there were further contributions we might make in promoting theoretical underpinnings with effective outcomes for direct case work. Another member (practitioner and Lecturer) commented that the group had 'felt' authentically participatory and shared their belief that we had an established, group dynamic 'with a shared lens'. One member (practitioner and practice educator) further offered that it was for all members to *be* participatory and to remain open in accepting our roles in the promotion of positive outcomes. All members agreed the research was participatory and held aspirations for role-modelling emancipatory practices. As a group, we discussed that although we had all come from different understandings of theories and their potential applications, we now had a common goal to engage with theories as a both a language and as an epistemology (Fook, 2012; Biggs, 2013). In preparing to discuss the anonymized questionnaires, I reintroduced Stepney's (2012) concern for considering all theories as equally valid, as the rationale for mapping theories in the first instance. We agreed there were already numerous metatheoretical approaches which reflected different approaches to engaging with the epistemology and prioritized examination of the questionnaires with a view to overcoming initial difficulties engaging with the Artefact. In the first instance though, we noted our surprise that there were positive comments, as well as limitations experienced, when first engaging with the Artefact.

Figures 4.14/15 (below) list a sample of questionnaire feedback for both merits and limitations.

Focus Group Merits: *Initially engaging with the Artefact*	
Questionnaire:	**Brief description**
A.	*It is a model that makes sense and in many ways is surprising that it hasn't already been developed. It makes it clearer and more transparent as to how theory interacts in each area (overarching, assessment and intervention) and gives a clear, visual, demonstration of their role, which I find promotes my ability to see and visualise how they fit in practice*
B.	*I like the idea of breaking down the theories into different segments as I find it easier to hold knowledge chunks or once it has been broken down*
C.	*I like the idea of a simple framework combining all key aspects of learning and practicing social work. It appears to reflect the multi-dimensional nature of social work, which is not something I have come across before.*

Figure: *4.14.*

Focus Group Limitations: *Initially engaging with the Artefact*	
Questionnaire:	**Brief description**
D.	*I totally appreciate that numerous theories can be applied to an individual, group and society. I would benefit from prompts, to help me think what theory would apply to where.*
E.	*It took a bit of understanding however, it is a logical approach*
F.	*My initial thoughts are of great interest and am very supportive of any progress that supports students' grasp of abstract theories.*

Figure: *4.15.*

Discussing the questionnaires led to suggestions for practically addressing the difficulties, such as annotated slides, short video introductions, and even interactive models, which might enhance learners' and exponents' first engagement with the Artefact.

The suggestions were all acknowledged as excellent ideas; although with some trepidation on my part, given concerns for the necessary technical skills to develop an interactive model. On further discussion of the questionnaires, the group decided that members should try constructing their own working artefacts, to engage with understanding the intellectual and practical difficulties initially engaging and preparing a working artefact. Members agreed that working with a transtheoretical epistemology requires theorizing that is likely to present difficulties with initially understanding 'what it means , let alone, what it might *look* like' (practitioner and practice educator). The group moved on to discussing the relative paucity of assessment and intervention theories for social work, although members were encouraged by anecdotal experiences of increased collaboration between agencies at a local level. Solution and Task-centred theorizing stood out from a small, limited number of psychologically underpinned intervention theories, as very different from the unknowable wealth of Overarching theories. Motivational Interviewing was also discussed as a potential assessment/intervention theory, although the name of the theory raised discussion of inherent power imbalances between persons in the roles of Motivated and Motivator. We asked whether our approach to applying multiple theories was eclectic, systematic or constructivist. One member (practitioner, practice educator and associate lecturer) commented how Attachment theory is 'different theories put together'. The group agreed Bowlby (1969) had been open about his combining of different theoretical perspectives to include elements from biology, ethology, psychoanalysis, and systems. The group remained respectful of Payne's (1994; 2012) concern for combining theories, although questioned if such an approach was 'too purist for practice (student social worker) and advocated that the Artefact 'should be in the curriculum, other universities will want to use this as it offers structure and boundaries to working eclectically'. I asked one more if the research was emancipatory, to which one member (associate lecturer) commented 'well it's empowering me. I have another way to teach, and by being here, can make a contribution beyond myself'.

99

Another member (student social worker) posited that there might also be a wider potential for the Artefact to be applied as a reflective model as they could now *see* theories in context of Overarching, Assessment and Intervention. The simplicity of the framework meaning 'you can practice, what it preaches' and apply the framework even as a reflexive tool for *in-action* reflections that promote ownership and accountability for decision-making and actions Schön, 1983). Discussions of reflection and reflexivity led to revisiting our conversation from the previous meeting and how to transparently represent *self* within the Artefact. One member (student social worker) had previously raised the potential for adapting the Artefact to incorporate self, had kindly drafted a working artefact for discussion at the meeting. The member shared their artefact was mapped to their placement and local authority child safeguarding guidance. Other members immediately commented on the clear alignment of theoretical thinking with the practice context. The diagram was presented as a horizontal mirror to the Artefact; with an inverted rainbow to represent a continuum from low-to-high risk that acknowledged the potential for additional cognitive stressors, such as caseload and physical health. The artefact was well-received, and critically endorsed, by the Focus Group. In the first instance, the artefact offered transparent evidence for confidence working with theories and to a strong embracing of theory as a means to expressing self, and the ethical dimensions of the role. All members shared how they had learned something new from engaging with the artefact and the associated discussions. We acknowledged the importance of opportunities to discuss theory in developing an understanding for the accurate sharing of information (Nietzsche, 2003). Members agreed that developing working artefacts was key to promoting participation with the Artefact and that the website should also become a depository for sharing working artefacts to further encourage the developing of new artefacts and the sharing of different metatheoretical approaches but within a common framework of shared understanding (Tucker, 1996).

In ending the meeting, we prepared the following tasks and agenda for our final meeting:

1: *Gavin to prepare findings for the group to discuss, amend and agree*

2: *Gavin to prepare a final version of the Artefact and domain headings; reflecting Focus Group discussions and participant questionnaire feedback. '*

3: *Gavin to draft findings for the Focus Group to discuss at the final meeting.*

We then agreed the merits and limitations for the Artefact.

Limitations were found with initially engaging the artefact, although this was to be countenanced with authentically embracing the discipline's transtheoretical epistemology. We further agreed the Artefact was perhaps 'outward-facing', to mean it did not transparently incorporate the emotions of the exponent in their application of theories with direct case work. The group agreed this should be tackled via exemplars and the website, rather than adding information to the Artefact's template. Members further agreed that the annotations within the domain headings of 'for groups and communities' and 'for individuals' was to be removed to further simplify the appearance of the Artefact. The new domain headings to be simply Overarching, Assessment and Intervention. We further agreed I was to also draft merits for the Artefact that reflected our discussions and questionnaire feedback and specifically incorporated the unexpected findings for the Artefact as a potential supervision and reflective tool, and with metatheorizing other disciplines.

4: *Gavin to offer a rationale for the Overarching domain and explain with an updated diagram based on the draft discussed in the second meeting.*

5: *Members to consider drafting working artefacts to share learning from engaging with the process of preparing an artefact*

6: Members to consider any future research opportunities they would like to engage with

In summary, members agreed the final Focus Group meeting would review a draft presentation of findings for the research project, with a view to discussing and agreeing findings with which to conclude the research project.

4.6: *Focus Group meeting 4; agreeing findings for the Artefact*

The final meeting of the Focus Group concluded the third cycle of this research project and agreed the nine findings as shown in Figure 4.16 (below); each finding is aligned with the headings for either Limitation or Merit and discussed separately in the following sections.

Finding	Focus Group finding	Brief explanation
1. Limitation:	*Initially engaging with the Artefact*	*The Focus Group identified potential for misunderstanding the purpose and potential dynamic applications of the Artefact at first introduction*
2. Limitation:	*Emotional transparency*	*The Focus Group drew attention to the limitation of the Artefact in transparently incorporating the potential for emotional influences when applying the Artefact to practice and/or with case studies*
3. Merit:	*Mapping theories*	*The Artefact offers a consistent approach to mapping theories from the diverse transtheoretical epistemology; with 3 domains specific to social work practices*
4. Merit:	*Selecting theories*	*The Artefact offers a consistent approach to selecting specific, and multiple, theories in preparing to engage theoretically with practice and/or case studies*
5. Merit:	*Blending theories*	*The Artefact can be applied as a foundational approach to theorizing practice with multiple theoretical perspectives*
6. Merit:	*Applying multiple theories with practice as a model for practice*	*The Artefact offers the opportunity to engage with Bigg's (2013) concept of the complex whole; wherein the application of specific, multiple theories, can in itself represents a theoretical perspective*
7. Merit:	*Potential reflective and/or reflexive model*	*An unexpected finding was in the potential for the Artefact to be applied as a reflective and/or reflexive model*
8. Merit:	*Potential applications with other professions*	*Another unexpected finding was in the potential for the Artefact to be applied to understand other professions theoretical underpinnings; and perhaps even for application by other professions*
9. Merit:	*Other research opportunities*	*A number of potential research opportunities related to the Artefact were further identified by Focus Group members*

Figure: *4.16.*

4.6.1: *Finding 1; Limitations initially engaging the Artefact*

The Focus Group suggested, that once understood, there were few limitations to understanding and applying the Artefact. However, two specific limitations were identified and are herein discussed with intentions for demonstrating a rigorous examination for articulating the merits and limitations of the Artefact. First and foremost, with regard to limitations of the Artefact, the Focus Group agreed that initially engaging with the Artefact was the greatest limitation of the Artefact, whilst at the same time, acknowledging the complexity of learning and teaching a transtheoretical epistemology. The Focus Group reflected on Thompson's (2010), Fook (2012) and Payne's (2014) wariness of theoretical approaches that can be difficult to understand and have sought to minimize the complexity of the Artefact by aligning with artefacts already recognized in the literature: specifically, Thompson's Personal, Cultural and Structural, and to a lesser extent, with Bronfenbrenner's tenets for Macro, Micro and Miso domains. In addition, there are different entry points to maximize engagement with the Artefact. For example, there is the template (figure 1.3), exemplars (figures 4.10; 4.11), critical incidents (pp.126-138), working artefacts (figure 4.45; 6.10) already available, and future ideas for a video introduction to be added to the website.

4.6.2: *Finding 2; Limitations with emotional transparency*

The second limitation of the artefact was identified as a lack of transparency with representing exponents' emotions when applying the Artefact with direct case work and case studies. The discussion acknowledged the member's adapted artefact from meeting three and encouraged the website be available to host exemplar artefacts to share different approaches and encourage discussions of different approaches. Members further agreed that considering the Artefact as a reflective (on-action) and reflexive (in-action) model offered further potential to promote insight in this regard.

4.6.3: *Finding 3; Merits for mapping theories*

The Blended Theory Model recognises Howe (1987) and Healey (2014) in broadly separating theories for social work into categories of sociological and psychological.

Sociological

Psychological
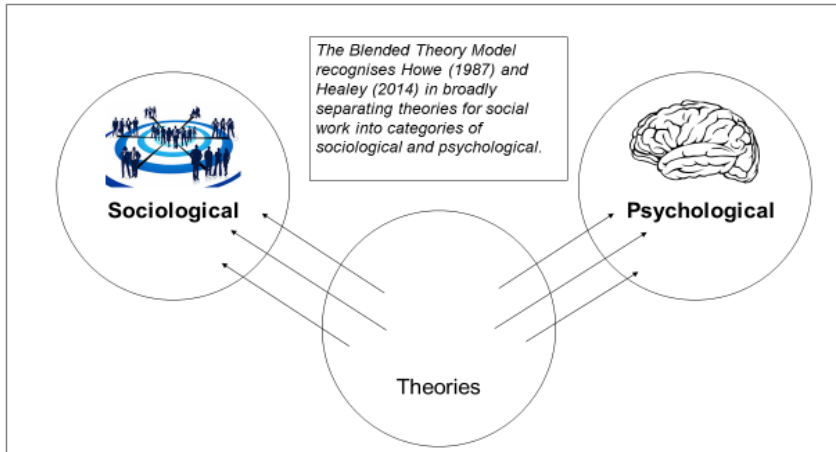
Theories

Figure: *4.17.*

Figure 4.17 (above) offers a visual representation of the traditional early mapping of social work theories, separated into the two theoretical fields of Sociological and Psychological (Bruno, 1936; Howe 2009; Healy 2014). The Focus Group agreed with Cameron and Kennan's (2010) defining of a transtheoretical epistemology and with Payne's (2014) recognition that the epistemology is too vast a knowledge base to be known, taught or applied. The Focus Group agreed the term *Sociological* was potentially limiting and exclusive of other perspectives (for example, philosophical, ecological and/or biological) that might also be considered influential to maximizing outcomes for social work. Further, the Focus Group agreed that the term *Overarching* was beneficial to improving transparency with incorporating theories from wider afield. Figure 4.18 (below) was drafted at the Focus Group's request for a visual representation of the shift from Sociology to also including other, different theoretical perspectives. One member (associate lecturer) commented 'it makes it more-manageable - you simply can't *know* them all. We have to make choices'.

The Blended Theory Model extends the initial mapping of Sociological theories to transparently include other theories that also contribute to insights of *the social work context* and/or *population* (and as opposed to any specific *person or individual*).

For example theories for Philosophy, Human Growth and Development (as well as Sociology) are all embraced through the term Overarching.

Overarching

Sociological

Philosophy

Human Growth & Development

Figure: *4.18.*

Contrary to suggesting the Sociological perspective as too narrow for the wide-ranging purposes of social work, the term Psychological was subsequently agreed to be too broad a term. The Focus Group agreed *Psychological* did not capture the nuances of theorizing necessary in distinguishing theories for assessment from intervention, which the literature acknowledges as key to understanding the roles and functions for effective practice (Walker and Beckett, 2011; Parker, 2012). Specifically, members discussed and agreed how, and why, different psychological theories can be beneficial at different points when engaging with direct case work, and also that theories outside psychology are also useful for direct case work; citing examples of psychodynamic and psychoanalysis. The benefits of professional curiosity, empathy and analysis of discourse were all highlighted as beneficial to unpicking and understanding complex situations and effectively assessing a person's motivation, insight and capability for change. Whereas, when intervening, practitioners can benefit from shifting to, or adding, specific psychological theories that promote rights, insight, knowledge, skills and/or abilities aligned with encouraging, enabling and supporting people in times of crisis (for example Solution-focused, or Task-centred practice).

The Blended Theory Model revisits the categorisation of Psychological theories to promote theoretical alignment with the social work tasks of assessment and intervention.
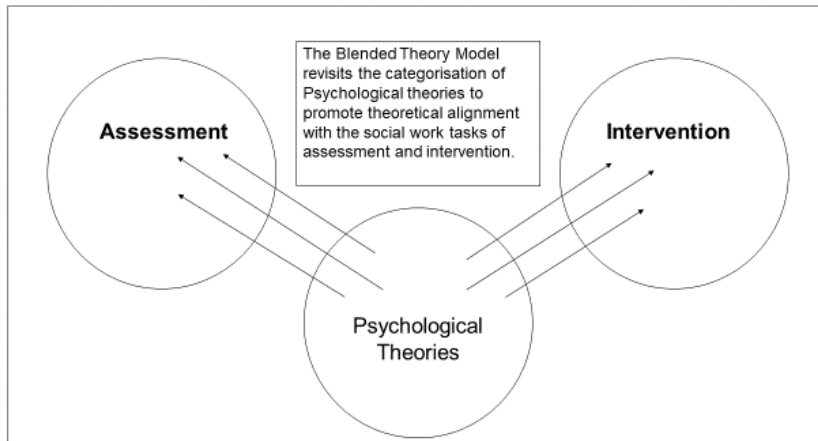
Figure: *4.19*.

Figure 4.19 (above) was again developed at the Focus Group's request; this time to represent

this narrowing of theoretical underpinnings with a focus for identifying and applying theories

that align practice tenets (assessment and intervention) with the Artefact's domains

(Assessment and Intervention). Members agreed, Focus Group discussions had benefited from

teasing the two roles apart as this had led to informed, in-depth theorizing with the complex

spectrum of assessment and intervention roles and duties. The Focus Group further agreed

that promoting exponents' choice of theories was therefore also important, because to do so

was to mirror the importance of promoting choice with direct case work and ethical

expectations for the profession (BASW, 2014; Care Act, 2014; SWE, 2019). Therein, the

promotion of choice in the selection of specific theories, was agreed as central to the Artefact's

application as a framework for promoting exponents' critical engagement with theories at both

structural and personal levels.

4.6.4: *Finding 4; Merits for selecting theories*

Choice was acknowledged by the Focus Group to promote an innate sense of ownership for engaging with theories for social work. In further explanation, the ability to make choices was understood to be innate in developing an understanding of the options available and embedding the *right* to make choices. From making choices, we develop ownership for our choice (decisions) and develop rationales to explain why certain choices (and decisions) were made (Argyris & Schön, 1992; Freire, 2000). Constructive alignment is example of an educational tenet that promotes the planning of teaching modules to align taught sessions and module content with specific learning outcomes (Biggs & Collis, 1982; Biggs, 2003; Biggs & Tang, 2007). This focused approach can be mapped with educational goals for social work, and ultimately outcome measures for people experiencing social work services, through promoting practices that aligned with the standards for social work practice (SWE, 2019). The concept of constructive alignment was in-turn agreed by the Focus Group to represent an evidence-based approach to the choice of theories that might ethically be applied within each domain of the Artefact. In further explanation, exponents of the Artefact can begin to consider the Overarching theoretical position of the agency and apply the theory espoused by the agency, or indeed they may instead choose to ask about the theoretical position to promote critical reasoning with goals for inclusive outcomes. In summary, the Focus Group acknowledged Thompson's (2010) concerns for the eclectic approach, and Payne's (2014) advocacy for a structured approach, by advocating for a metatheoretical approach to working rigorously with a small number of theories (three to six) in the first instance. From these initial choices, exponents will have working artefacts that they can apply with practice and case studies to develop an in-depth knowledge of those specific theories, and the merits and limitations for their choice of theories. Exponents can, of course, review their choice of theories and update their working artefacts to promote transparency with their choice of theories to, for example, Theorize Practice (Stepney and Thompson, 2012). The Focus Group also revisited Fook's (2012) concern for structure generally and her concern for a dogmatic approach to theories.

Members welcomed Fook's concerns and agreed that a robotic approach to the application of theories would not only minimize creativity but was also likely to be uncaring and unprofessional. The Artefact though does not advocate for any specific theory to be learned or applied, which may be considered as an even less-structured approach than Fook's direction for practitioners to have Feminist, Sociological and Radical underpinnings, although both approaches have a strong underpinning   for maximizing outcomes that promote independence and inclusion.

4.6.5: *Finding 5; Merits blending theories*

The review of the literature evidenced different opinions and guidance for applying specific, multiple theories with social work. Payne (2014) and Stepney and Thompson (2018), raise concerns for mixing theories from different epistemologies and ontological perspectives (which is discussed further in chapter 5), whilst Schön (1983) and Biggs (2013) contest that innate processes drive the resolution of information as we taxonomize and structure critical thinking processes. The Focus Group's view was they had consistently found merit for the Artefact with developing insights for direct case work. The aligning of theories with Assessment and Intervention domains had brought a fresh focus for direct case work that aligned with practice contexts (Overarching domain). The Artefact though, was also recognized to offer a complex whole, which was discussed in terms of 'a professional sense of self' (practitioner and academic) which a novel realization for all members. The Focus Group noted, how the pictorializing of theoretical information had added to their creative engagement with theory for social work and their blending of theory with self to further consider practice wisdom (Beckett, 2006; Fook, 2012). The inclusion of different exemplars and the blending of theories (figures 4.11/12/13) was observed to further embrace a commitment to working with theories as an inclusive epistemology focused on positive outcomes for direct case work, rather than observing epistemological and ontological concerns (Morgan, 2007; Stepney and Thompson, 2018). The Focus Group further noted working artefacts, along with critical incidents, and the *rainbow* models (figures 4.11/12/13) to further encourage engagement at different entry points.

Exponents, for example, can choose from applying the template (figure 4.1) to develop their own working artefacts, or engage with exemplars and critical incidents to align with specific contexts of practice or direct case work scenarios (figures 4.7/8). The Focus Group further discussed the potential for the Artefact as a future framework for transparently theorizing the blending of specific theories within external and peer reviews and/or evidence of continuous professional development (SWE, 2019). In further embracing the potential for the Artefact with the blending of theories, it had been suggested (student social worker) that Focus Group members consider preparing their own working artefacts, to learn from the critical, and emotional, processes in preparing a working artefact. Although all members had agreed to engage with the task, not all members had completed the task. The related discussions highlighted that exponents were accessing different theories, in different ways and at different times and/or different levels. We recognized there was different levels of confidence working with theory and in preparing to draft a working artefact, which required time, and often (re)accessing literature, to be a meaningful exercise. We discussed that some members preferred to work with the exemplars than the template, as they were undecided about populating their own Artefact. The discussion led to further recognizing the importance for presenting information in a professional and thorough manner and aligning information with ethical underpinnings (Stepney and Thompson, 2018; Payne, 2014).

4.6.6: *Finding 6; Merits for applying theories*

Focus Group members agreed the Artefact to have merit with the ethical application of specific and multiple theories for social work. In the first instance, it offers a structured approach that aligns with the context of practice and the literature reviewed (Healy, 2014; Payne, 2014). Stepney and Thompson (2018) further promote the integrated learning and application of theory, with reflective practice, as an activity to be engaged with as a whole; to promote engagement with the inseparable and enmeshed fields of academe and practice that comprise contemporary social work practice.

The Focus Group also recognised there are many different ways to understand and apply theory with social work amid a complex mix of potential subjective and objective perspectives (Payne, 2014; Rapaport & Baiani, 2017; Stepney and Thompson, 2018). Focus Group members were unanimous that their application of theories had certainly developed from the discussions at the Focus Group meetings and their reflections on direct case work and case scenarios. The Focus Group consistently acknowledged academic concerns for structure and theories for social work, whilst also acknowledging benefits with knowing and applying theories with social work (Fook, 2012; Thompson, 2010; Payne, 2014). Members advocated for the Artefact to be acknowledged as promoting an in-depth knowledge of *specific* theories with which to practice, or Theorize Practice (Stepney and Thompson, 2018); aware of the concerns for a reductionist knowledge of *many* theories (Hartman, 1978; Fook, 2012). Applying and blending different theories was further agreed to be an ethical approach to direct case work when clearly underpinned with goals for maximizing independence and inclusion.

The importance of Overarching theories was initially understood to be in developing an understanding for structural influences generally. However, through discussion and blending with Assessment and Intervention theories, working Artefacts were now also understood to offer a pictorial representation of the complex whole in evidencing exponents' theoretical underpinnings with practice and self (Biggs, 2013; SWE, 2019). The Focus Group further pointed to the Artefact's related diagrams and exemplars as offering a variety of visual representations from which to debate the ethical application of multiple theories with direct case work and case studies. The Focus Group discussed how the Artefact could be understood as a visual representation of Thompson's (2010) Theorizing Social Work Practice; meaning the Artefact offered a picture of the theories that you can apply reflexively within direct case work. The Artefact offers a structured approach that aligns with Payne's (2014) requirement to align theorizing with the practice context and Coady and Lehmann's (*2016*) focus for multiple theories in maximizing for direct case work. Working artefacts were therefore considered to promote transparency with how practitioners can understand and demonstrate *how* they are Theorizing Social Work Practice (Thompson, 2010; Stepney and Thompson, 2020).

4.6.7: *Finding 7; Merits for potential application as a reflective model*

The origins of the Artefact are deeply rooted within supervision and placement experiences. The Artefact was always intended to offer a visual framework for theorizing with practice and case studies; a tool that exponents could apply in developing confidence with theories in the first instance and then extrapolate with ethical processes for direct case work. The visual simplicity of a Venn diagram was applied as it offered opportunities to further develop complex understandings from engaging with the overlapping domains and to incorporating legislation and the use of self. The Focus Group agreed that the Artefact is well-suited to supervision discussions and potentially to underpin ethical, reflexive underpinnings for direct practice.

4.6.8: *Finding 8; Merits for potential applications in the critique of other disciplines*

Building on discussions for the potential application of the Artefact as a reflective and reflexive tool the Focus Group suggested the framework may also be applied to understanding other disciplines' theoretical underpinnings. In further explanation, initial discussions for devising and sharing working artefacts led to debate for the Artefact to be used by other, related disciplines such as nursing, medicine and education. "I want to see one for nurses or teachers to help me understand how they think' said one member (practitioner and practice educator). 'I think it might even be a model that other disciplines *adopt* to promote *their* understanding of what *they* do' (student social worker).

4.6.9: *Finding 9; Merits with recognizing further research opportunities*

At the final Focus Group meeting, members agreed that theoretical discussions, and participant questionnaires, had greatly developed everyone's confidence for research; and that the Focus Group should continue to meet with a view to identifying further discrete research projects relating to the Artefact.

111

Specifically, members suggested the following research projects:

> **1:** *A Participatory Action Research project with learners examining different experiences of learning theory; sharing findings via a draft article*
>
> **2:** *A case study approach to assessing a single learners experiences applying the Artefact on placement; sharing findings via a draft article*
>
> **3:** *A participatory approach to encourage the drafting of working artefacts with Practice Educator candidates*
>
> **4:** *Two members tentatively discussed applying the Artefact as a means to researching emotional dysregulation and ethical decision-making.*
>
> **5:** *To explore the Artefact's potential as a mental map for reflexive thinking and actions; in line with Schön's (1983) idea of mental maps to explore what it is that practitioners see when they begin to think of Theorizing Practice (Stepney and Thompson, 2018).*

4.7: *Summary*

The most-effective means to introducing the Artefact is still to be resolved. The first attempt to introduce the Artefact was by way of a draft article. However, following classroom and expert feedback, the approach was quickly acknowledged as too long and complex for the classroom. Instead, and underpinned by a constructivist approach to the learning and teaching of complex information, I re-presented the information across numerous pages of a dedicated website. The website approach offering potential for breaking down the information and improving accessibility. Alongside the Artefact's template, working models were drafted od my own practice and exemplars prepared to demonstrate how theories can be aligned with practice contexts. At completion of the research project, the Focus Group suggested the website remain open to provide access to the template Artefact and as a repository for working artefacts prepared by exponents of the Artefact. It was understood though, that the website had been prepared for research purposes and would only be made available subject to the research inquiry being validated. The original article has also been rewritten in response to editorial feedback, and a shorter, written introduction is also being prepared subject to the research being validated.

Given research reservations that the project was untypically Participatory Action Research, the Focus Group discussed the participatory underpinnings at every meeting. This was a key discussion topic as the Artefact template had been drafted in advance of the first Focus Group meeting (Winter, 2002). However, the template was drafted with feedback, and participation, with student social workers in the classroom and on placement. In addition, the research transparently embraced the potential for amending, and even discarding, the Artefact. The Focus Group consistently stated, in their opinion, that the project was aligned to, and valued, participation, and repeatedly advocated for the project to continue with a focus for rigorous assessment of the Artefact. Rigour is defined as 'done in a strict, thorough way' (Collins English Dictionary, 2019). The Focus Group visited rigour at every meeting and repeatedly stated, with conviction, that everything possible (to the knowledge, skills and abilities available of the Focus Group) was done in the promotion of rigour and ethical social work practice.

We consistently, and thoroughly, thought about how the Artefact might impact with persons experiencing disadvantage, exclusion, and/or dependency. We theorized with a focus for independence, inclusion and emancipation and also considered the impact on self with a focus for promoting longevity of career.

Chapter 5: *Discussion*

5.1: *Introduction*

The previous chapter appraised Focus Group participation in determining findings of merit and

limitation for the Artefact. This chapter discusses those findings, with the academic,

educational, political and regulatory contexts from chapter one, literature review findings from

chapter two, and incorporates specific examples from anonymised participant questionnaires.

Following this chapter, the thesis ends with reflections and conclusions for the research inquiry.
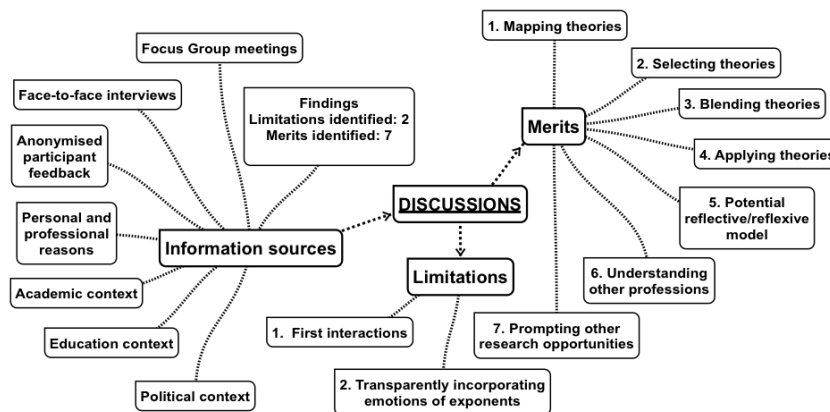
Figure: *5.1.*

Figure 5.1 (above) offers a visual summary of the different strands of information referred to in

this chapter to promote transparency with the sources of information to be discussed (Kuhn,

1962; O'Donoghue & Punch, 2003; Orme & Shemmings, 2010). The discussion begins with the

Focus Group's identified limitations of the Artefact with a view to identifying and prioritizing

actions to address those findings (which includes the introduction of Critical Incidents to

demonstrate practical applications of the Artefact), before discussing the merits identified by

the Focus Group.

5.2: *Focus Group Findings 1-2*

Focus Group Finding:	Limitation	In brief explanation:
1:	*Initially engaging with the Artefact*	*The Focus Group identified potential for misunderstanding the purpose and potential dynamic applications of the Artefact at first introduction*
2:	*Emotions and decision-making*	*The Focus Group drew attention to the limitation of the Artefact in transparently incorporating the potential for emotional influences when applying the Artefact to practice and/or with case studies*

Figure: *5.2.*

Figure 5.2 (above) tables the two limitations identified by the Focus Group. The first limitation was with initially engaging the Artefact and the second with transparently incorporating exponents' emotional experiences when applying the Artefact.

Focus Group Finding 1: *Initially engaging with the Artefact*	
Literature reviewed:	**Concerns identified:**
Howe (2009); Payne (2014)	*No single framework for Social Work*
Hartman (1978); Fook (2012)	*Reductionism and the commodification of theories*
Thompson (2010)	*Wary of frameworks exponents do not understand*

Figure: *5.3.*

The two limitations are discussed separately but incorporate concerns from the literature review as summarized in figure 5.3 (above) and examples from participants' feedback as summarized in figure 5.4 (below).

116

Focus Group Finding 1: *Initially engaging with the Artefact*	
Participant questionnaires	**Merit**
A:	*It is a model that makes sense and in many ways is surprising that it hasn't already been developed. It makes it clearer and more transparent as to how theory interacts in each area (overarching, assessment and intervention) and gives a clear, visual, demonstration of their role, which I find promotes my ability to see and visualise how they fit in practice*
B:	*I like the idea of breaking down the theories into different segments as I find it easier to hold knowledge chunks or once it has been broken down*
C:	*I like the idea of a simple framework combining all key aspects of learning and practicing social work. It appears to reflect the multidimensional nature of social work, which is not something I have come across before.*

Figure: *5.4.*

5.3: *Initially engaging with the Artefact*

The Focus Group embraced findings from the literature review as key points from which to engage with rigorously debating the merits and limitations of the Artefact. Specifically, Howe's (2009) and Payne's (2014) assertion that there is no single framework or model that can be applied to all social work contexts; Fook's (2012) concerns for reductionism, and the commodification of theories; and Thompson's (2010) wariness of theoretical models that exponents do not understand. These concerns share a common thread for the misapplication of theory, whilst Fook's further concern for structured theorizing as potentially negatively impacting on creative approaches to direct case work, were all embraced by the group as a potential limitation of the Artefact.

5.3.1: *No single theory or artefact for Social Work*

Focus Group members agreed with Howe and Payne that there is no single theoretical structure for social work, although members were also clear that no such claim was being made for the Artefact. The discussion recognized though that this was a potential misunderstanding for exponents first engaging with the Artefact. In promoting clarity, it is therefore important to briefly restate that the Artefact was introduced in response to reasoned criticisms of the teaching of theory for social work, and with aspirations to be validated as an *additional* learning resource; a resource that recognizes the complexities of working with a transtheoretical epistemology and embraces the spectrum of knowledge, skills and abilities between learners and educators of theory, although likely to be applied with other theoretical approaches to practice.

5.3.2: *Concerns for reductionism*

Fook's (2012) and Hartman's (1978) concerns for reductionism were acknowledged as views widely shared across the literature (Thompson, 2010; Payne, 2014). In discussion though, Fook's recommendation for a Feminist underpinning, or Thompson's (2010) advocating for an Existentialist underpinning, raised issues of dissonance between reductionist, and deep learning (Biggs, 2013) approaches to theory. For example, Stone (1958) had previously advocated for Humanism, Gilpin (1963) for Functionalism, and Bailey and Brake (1975) for Critical theory. Therefore, if social workers are to practice authentically aligned to the guidance of experts and at the same time address Fook's concern for reductionism, is the expectation that social workers will have in-depth knowledge of *all* of these theories? Or, if Bruno (1936) and Payne's (2014) recognition of the theoretical epistemology as unknowable is uncontested, then how are social workers expected to choose which theories to learn from Feminism, Existentialism, Humanism, Functionalism or Critical theory?

Each of these theories are akin to matryoshka (commonly referred to as Russian Dolls) with many different theoretical positions to be further found within each of the headings. Maynard (1995) for example, suggests Feminism has three major fields of study, Liberal, Socialist and Radical, whilst Critical theory has further theoretical links to Critical Race theory and Intersectionality. Fook advocates Feminism *with* Radical *and* Sociological theorizing; opening more doors to other overarching theoretical perspectives which are to be known and applied, and yet again, with each heading, there are numerous other theoretical positions contained within. These particular philosophical and sociological theories though are only a sample from the literature available, and do not include other theoretical fields of study which are also recommended, such as human growth and development, ecology, and psychodynamic approaches. Further, these theories are not yet inclusive of the psychological (and perhaps the Psychodynamic matryoshka of Transactional Analysis, Attachment theory and Relationship-based) theories required for direct case work and the ethical assessment of individual risk, authenticity and capacity.

5.3.3: *Choice and ownership*

Instead, Constructivist approaches to learning suggest that concerns for reductionism can be lessened when exponents are involved in *choosing* what they want to know and learn (Piaget, 1977; Cozolino, 2002; Applegate & Shapiro, 2005). Choice is a key tenet for both social work and education, and brings additional considerations for ownership with learning, and embracing alternative approaches to maximize inclusive engagement (Freire, 2000; Biggs, Tang & Chow, 2011). Choice was noted to promote engagement for learning generally, and to encourage both goal setting and goal-achievement, which can be further aligned with effective practices in direct case work and expectations for continuous professional development (Cozolino, 2002; Applegate & Shapiro, 2005; Kahneman, 2011; SWE, 2019).

119

5.3.4: *Structure <u>and</u> creativity*

This discussion acknowledges Fook's (2012) advocating for a Feminist, Radical and Sociological approach as an ethical approach, with a focus for creative thinking and approaches to direct case work. It is considered though that many learners will also benefit from access and consideration of other perspectives. For example, Stepney and Thompson's (2020) Theorizing Practice, McLean's (2020) Theory Cards, and Rapaport and Baiani's (2017) Reciprocal Role Valorisation, all offer different, peer-reviewed approaches, to applying multiple theories with social work practices. Therefore, whilst acknowledging the merits of Fook's position, it is suggested as one of many different ways that have merit in the effective learning, teaching and application, of theory. Indeed, there is literature wherein experts advocate *for* structure in promoting ethical theorizing (Stepney, 2012; Birkenmaier, Dewees & Berg-Weger, 2014; Croisdale-Appleby, 2014). Additionally, there is literature that suggests structuring one's thoughts is an innate process; as human beings prioritise, taxonomize, and process information in a structured manner to cope with the vast amount of information encountered (Schön, 1983; Kahneman, 2011; Biggs, 2013). The epistemology for reflection and self-assessment for example, consistently points to the benefits of repetition in suggesting the more we engage, act and reflect, as a structured activity, the more our brains actually *physically* change structure; constructing and reconstructing neural networks that align thoughts with actions and goals (Cozolino, 2002; Cacioppo, Visser & Pickett, 2006). Fook's further concern for a structured approach to theorizing as potentially leading to a lack of creativity, whilst acknowledged by the Focus Group as a valid concern, was not found to reflect members' experiences of applying the Artefact. Instead, the Artefact's structure was considered as key to enabling more-complex theorizing and to engaging with wider conceptual frameworks such as Biggs' (2013) complex whole. The Artefact was instead found to align with Hartman's (1978) innovative actions (introducing ecomaps) in addressing reductionist concerns by offering a visual representation to promote creative engagement with theoretical complexity.

5.3.5: *Wariness of artefacts that can be misunderstood or misapplied*

Thompson's (2010) wariness of theoretical frameworks/models that exponents do not understand was another cornerstone discussion; reflected in chapter four and ultimately with the finding for potential difficulties with initially engaging the Artefact. To the Focus Group's surprise, participant questionnaires though actually offered an encouraging mix of views, including positive experiences. Figure 5.4 for example, offers positive participant feedback, with some exponents appearing to have had little, or no, difficulty with initially engaging the Artefact; although, on reflection, this is likely to have been feedback from participants previously introduced to the Artefact in the classroom. Nevertheless, respondent A feeds back the participant's surprise that the Artefact is not already an established framework. Whilst respondents B and C refer positively to first engaging with the Artefact in 'liking' the mapping of theories with 'different segments', and with considerations for a metatheoretical approach to theories as 'not something I have come across before'. There was also questionnaire feedback consistent with the concerns though, a sample of which are presented in figure 5.5 (below).

Focus Group Finding 1: *Initially engaging with the Artefact*	
Participant questionnaires	**Limitation**
B:	*It took a bit of understanding however, it is a logical approach*
C:	*I totally appreciate that numerous theories can be applied to an individual, group and society. I would benefit from prompts, to help me think what theory would apply to where.*
F:	*My initial thoughts are of great interest and am very supportive of any progress that supports students' grasp of abstract theories.*

Figure: *5.5.*

121

5.3.6: *Domain headings*

Respondent B recognizes the complex practicalities of human learning, with time highlighted as beneficial and necessary to processing complex information; although this feedback also contained a positive element in suggesting the Artefact offered a 'logical approach' (Cozolino, 2002; Biggs, 2013). Respondent C requests exemplars, to promote understanding for the Artefact's applications in selecting, blending and applying specific theories. Respondent F further suggests that the research project, and the rigorous critiquing of the Artefact, is a valid activity because it engages with a problem that other educators are also experiencing. In further engaging with understanding the initial difficulties engaging with the Artefact, the questionnaires also asked for participants' views on the domain headings, **Overarching:** *groups and communities;* **Assessment:** *individuals* and **Intervention:** *individuals.*

Figure 5.6 (below) feeds back merits with the domain headings for mapping and blending theories, whilst figure 5.7 (also below) suggests there is still more actions required to promote clarity regarding the intended purposes of the Artefact.

Focus Group Finding 1: *Initially engaging with the Artefact*	
Participant questionnaires	**Overarching, Assessment and Intervention:** *Merit*
A:	*It enables me to reflect on any gaps and provides an alternative way of considering the interaction of theory. I find it useful.*
B:	*They are practical and make sense for both teacher and learner.*
E:	*I like the way that the Venn diagram allows students to place all factors into one diagram, from there I found it much simpler to link in further legislation and theories that connect with the same factors identified, not only for an individual but as a community as a whole.*

Figure: *5.6.*

Focus Group Finding 1: *Initially engaging with the Artefact*	
Participant questionnaires	**Overarching, Assessment and Intervention:** *Limitation*
B:	*For me, the terms could be more clearly defined, particularly the term 'overarching'. Overall, however I think it is a simple way to consider the key domains of informed social work practice.*
C:	*Absolutely yes to the 'overarching' themes, underpinning values, ethics and principles. Assessment and intervention work but I am just left thinking about contemporary social work practice where someone could be left 'sitting on a waiting list'. How would that be examined in this framework?*
F:	*For me this has felt a bit confusing, although with some more thought this may be useful.*

Figure: *5.7.*

The Focus Group were keen to acknowledge, and act upon, participants' feedback and, at the final meeting, revised the domains to simply, **Overarching**, **Assessment** and **Intervention**. The revised Artefact's headings were noted to then share similarities with Thompson's (1993) titular headings of Personal, Cultural and Structural, as applied to the PCS model. The Focus Group discussed that simplifying the domain headings could, in part, also address Thompson's concerns that frameworks should be understood, as it shared his precedent for a model of three domains to embrace complex interactions between different domains. In discussion, figure 5.8 (below) shows how the Artefact can also be applied with theorizing relating to Thompson's PCS. The Cultural and Structural heading of the PCS model are aligned with the Overarching domain to promote debate of sociological and legislative contexts, whilst the Personal heading is linked with further theorizing relevant to direct case work in both the Assessment and Intervention domains of the Artefact.
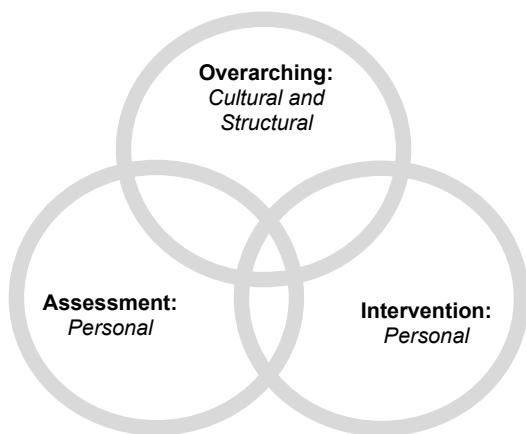
Figure: *5.8.*

5.3.7: *Improving the Artefact*

Finally, in relation to difficulties first engaging with the Artefact, participants were asked for their

suggestions on how to improve the Artefact. Figure 5.9 (below) offers examples of the

suggestions received for improving initial engagement with the Artefact.

Focus Group Finding 1: *Initially engaging with the Artefact*	
Questionnaires	**How to improve participation and engagement with the Artefact?**
B:	*Show the theories being 'blended' on the Venn diagram as this will allow a visual interpretation.*
C:	*Perhaps an interactive map – whereby you select one theory and access a 'map' which directs you to related/complimentary or even contradictory theories.*
F:	*A video with an explanation might be helpful, to support the information in the text. The draft working models could be more in-depth and have comments and ideas attached to them as to how the theories would support/influence each other.*

Figure: *5.9.*

Whilst members welcomed the suggestions for a video and/or interactive map (respondents C and F), it was acknowledged that both approaches had merits and limitations. Merits for an interactive map, that would perhaps ask exponents to pick one theory and then automatically populate the other domains with suggestions for complimentary theories, signalled a fun and interesting way to learn theory. However, there were further reservations that this was also potentially unethical and more likely to stifle creativity, rather than promote ownership for exponents with identifying (and offering a rationale for) their own choice of theories. A video introduction meanwhile has merits with sharing information on the website, although does not resolve the wider issue of being able to promote the Artefact as a standalone academic resource.

Therefore, the focus remains on drafting an article for publication which would not only acknowledge the Artefact as an academic resource, but increase access, and potential applications of the Artefact with other research projects. Respondent B's request for examples of different exemplars *blending* theories led to Focus Group discussions and subsequently to the 'rainbow' diagrams (4.11/12/13) in chapter four. The request for a repository of exponents' working (and amended) artefacts on the website will also add further to the different entry points to first engaging with the Artefact. In response to thesis feedback, this discussion will also now include three Critical Incidents in offering further examples of how the Artefact might be applied in supervisory settings with direct case work and case studies.

5.4: *Critical incident 1; Children and Families context*

Eric (student social worker) has been asked by Wabeka (Practice Educator) to consider the Blended Theory Model in preparing to meet with Marie. Marie (not her real name) was unknown to social care services before recently being referred by the local primary school. The referral followed Marie's attendance at a review meeting which was convened in response to her two children asking teachers for food. Staff referred Marie as she had been verbally abusive towards staff and appeared intoxicated, slurring her words and wearing heavily soiled clothes with a pervading smell of alcohol. Eric shared with Wabeka that he had always wanted to work with children and families and had been introduced to a number of different theoretical approaches in the classroom. Prior to his professional learning, Eric considered himself to be a pragmatic person, basing his understanding and decision-making on practical, rather than theoretical, considerations. However, upon reading Beckett (2006) and Munro (2011), Eric had found value in a System's approach to understanding the interconnectedness of direct case work with local community agendas and the expectations for ethical practice. Eric explained his preference was therefore to continue to develop his knowledge and application of a Systems' approach, as shown in his working artefact, figure 5.10 (below).
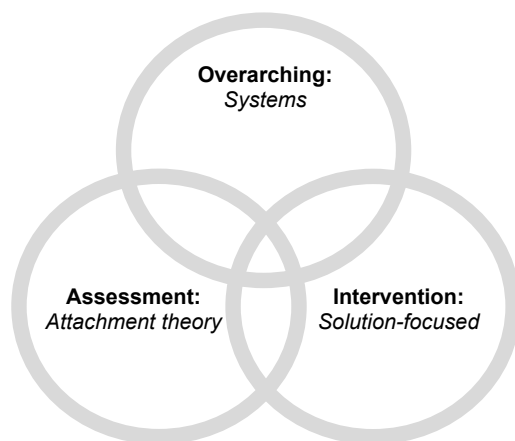
Figure: *5.10.*

Wabeka agreed, whilst also asking Eric what he considered might be some of the differences between Assessment and Intervention theories, and to share the rationale for his choice of theories in the related domains of the Blended Theory Model. Eric shared his understanding that Assessment theories offer a potential means to hearing different perspectives whilst also considering any risks that arise; rather than him otherwise relying, solely, on his own subjective interpretation of Marie's situation. Whereas he thought theories for Intervention were linked with decision-making and recording a transparent rationale for the provision (or not) of services to meet any needs identified. Eric explained his preference was therefore to apply Attachment theory as his underpinning Assessment theory, given his familiarity with Bowlby, Howe and Crittenden. He further believed that hearing Marie's perspective, with a focus for identifying the merits and limitations of her relationships with both children and staff at the school, would enable a robust professional understanding of their current situation and circumstances. Whilst, in being careful not to prejudge the initial meeting with Marie, Eric further advocated for a Solution-focused approach as his preferred Intervention theory. Eric explained there was merit in starting from the perspective that assumed Marie would have the necessary ability, insight and capacity to overcome her predicament, with the absolute minimum of external intervention or support. He acknowledged that Marie may, of course, also not be able to identify solutions at their first meeting and therefore also considered a Task-centred approach as necessary to comprehensively prepare for supporting and enabling Marie. Eric asked Wabeka for feedback on his theorizing and asked which theories she might apply. Wabeka shared the Blended Theory Model as shown in figure 5.11 (below).
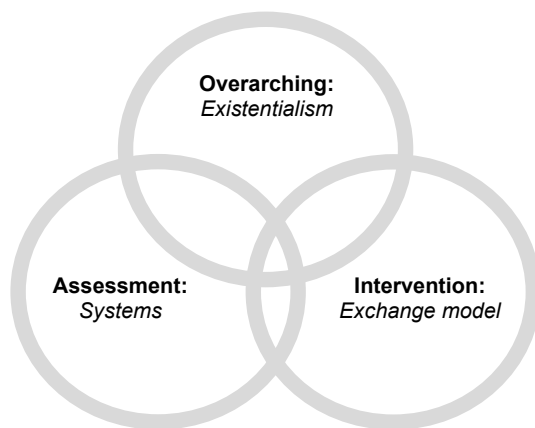
Figure: *5.11.*

Whilst Wabeka acknowledged Eric's embracing of a Systems approaches as valid and indeed widely applied across Children's services, she stated her preference for Existentialism as her Overarching theory. Wabeka related that her reading, and interpretation, of Schön (1983), Thompson (2010) and Fook (2012) had all benefited her professional growth through an informed application of self with direct case work. In particular, Wabeka related the benefits she gained for acknowledging cognitive biases and engaging with a commitment to overcoming reductionist understandings. Instead, she sought to apply Systems theory as her primary Assessment theory, in order to avoid potentially reductionist understandings of the complex relations that Marie might be engaged in at this time. Wabeka went on to share her preference for Smale and Tuson's (1993) Exchange model as her Intervention theory and discussed the recent (2015) revisioning by Miller and Barrie. Specifically, Wabeka emphasised Miller and Barrie's promotion of transparency with the sharing of different perspectives in developing a consistent and transparent partnership approach to direct case work (Miller and Barrie, 2015).

128

Eric and Wabeka agreed there was merit in both their theoretical approaches and that from sharing their theoretical underpinnings they had both learned further from each other about different theoretical approaches. However, Wabeka and Eric also discussed that both theoretical models were potentially limited to theorizing with a focus for a successful resolution for Marie, her children, and the school. In further explanation, Wabeka asked if the theories embraced, encouraged, or enabled 'thinking the unthinkable?'. They discussed how focusing on positive outcomes is ethical and foremost to achieving positive outcomes, but that to do so solely, risks not transparently incorporating professional duties to also engage with constantly screening for abuse, minimizing harm and maximizing paramountcy for the welfare of both children (Children Act 1989; Cleaver, Wattam and Cawson, 1998).

At their next supervision, Eric updated Wabeka to explain that Marie's meeting had, unexpectedly, also been attended by her mother and GP. Eric asked Marie if she could explain what might have changed for her recently and if she understood why people were concerned for her children and her wellbeing. Marie explained, with support from her GP, that she had miscarried 4 days ago which had left her devastated and hopeless. Marie's mother was visiting relatives and because she didn't want to ruin her break, Marie had started drinking to stop 'the hurting'. It was only when she came back from the meeting with the school yesterday that Marie realized her life had completely spiralled and contacted her mother. Marie's mother made arrangements to return immediately and encouraged Marie to contact her GP. Marie called her GP, but was so distressed, that the GP attended her home. Marie's mother had then arrived whilst the GP was present and attended to the children so the GP could focus on Marie's needs. Marie asked they both attend the meeting with Social Care which was agreed.

Eric's reflections were that he had been able to maintain a Solution-focused approach because Marie had the insight, and found strength, to stop drinking and ask for support. The interventions that Marie instigated, were continued with a shared focus from all parties to enable and empower Marie to, once again, provide for her children whilst overcoming her experience of trauma. Wabeka and Eric agreed to continue theorizing with their models at the next supervision session which would take place after Eric's initial meeting with Marie. Eric asked if they could perhaps consider the overlapping areas between the three main domains, with a view to incorporating ethics and standards, and perhaps any legislation pertinent to Marie's case at that point. Wabeka agreed, adding 'ethics surely has to be in the middle though, underpinning our every thought and action?' to which Eric replied, 'you'd think so, but reading about the recent fitness to practice issues in Community Care, you do wonder sometimes!'.

5.5: *Critical incident 2; Secure hospital context*

Newly qualified social worker (Lucy) has been asked by her supervisor and Practice Educator (Pat) to consider the Blended Theory Model in preparing to write a court report for Ava. Ava is a hypothetical person with a diagnosed mental disorder who killed her baby five years ago in a tragic event resulting from entrenched psychosis. In recognition of her mental disorder at the time of the event, the court detained Ava to a secure hospital for assessment and treatment. Ava is now applying for discharge from hospital. Lucy has been working with Ava for 3 months and is preparing to write the Social Circumstances report (the court report required by the court for their consideration of Ava's readiness to be discharged, or not, from hospital). In preparation for their supervision session, Lucy drafted the Blended Theory Model shown in figure 5.12 (below).
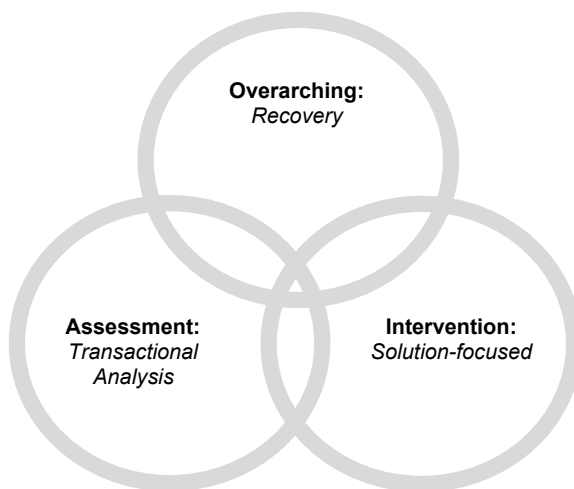
Figure: *5.12.*

In supervision, Pat asked Lucy to explain her choice of theories. Lucy explained her choice of theories related to her life experiences and how she had originally wanted to work with children with disabilities given the loss of her brother at 12 years of age.

Following placement experiences though, Lucy had chosen to work in mental health instead, to still channel her empathy for persons in crises, but without the potential for blurring of prior personal experiences. Crossing over to mental health, Lucy understood the prevalent sociological underpinning to be Recovery. Lucy explained this was therefore her rationale for choosing Recovery as her Overarching theory; in truth, because she thought it simply another form of a Systems approach. In further explanation, Lucy shared her Relational understanding (Biggs, 2013) between the two theories, and their shared importance for working together, across micro, meso and macro levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Although Lucy had not previously come across the Blended Theory Model, she found the idea of Recovery as an Overarching concept useful in contemplating the diverse forms of recovery for persons in secure hospital settings, which she related to Ava's recovery goals; although she also thought that she was unsure what recovery really meant for Ava, given the impact of her mental disorder and the death of her baby. Lucy went on to explain that she was already familiar with the concept of Assessment and Intervention as key social work tenets (Walker and Beckett, 2010; McClennen, 2010; Parker, 2012) and welcomed the opportunity to focus on assessing Ava's right, and preparedness, for discharge.

Lucy reasoned that ultimately Ava's recovery was, of course, most likely to be an ongoing process, rather than a fixed position that merited discharge, or if not achieved, warranted her continued detention to hospital. Lucy went on to explain her preference for Transactional Analysis as her Assessment theory as she benefited from the practical means to observing behaviours and aligning with the specific characteristics of Berne's (1961; 1964) Parent, Child and Adult ego states. She shared how her understanding of ego states had primarily been useful in recognizing her own emotional and intellectual presentations and influenced her decision to consider working in practice contexts other than children with disabilities. Lucy explained that she recognized she would too oft revert to a Parent state in helping children with disabilities, rather than supporting and enabling as an Adult, and fulfilling the expected role of the professional practitioner.

Lucy went on to explain that Ava had consistently engaged her in Adult-to-Adult discourse. For example, when talking about discharge, Ava had consistently shared fears for going back to the community, given concerns for being recognized and people judging her, rather than understanding the extreme circumstances of mental disorder. Further, Ava had been consistent in her commitment to maintaining concordance with medication and meeting regularly with services. Lucy said her assessment of Ava was therefore that she was engaging openly with anxieties that demonstrated insight and a consistent Adult understanding of the potential complexities upon discharge. Lucy said therefore, in this instance, the appropriate Intervention theory is Solution-focused, to hear Ava's solutions and maximize a partnership approach. Pat agreed that Ava's goals appeared insightful and reasonable and hoped the Court would consider her requests favourably. Lucy asked Pat for feedback on her theorizing, and was a little surprised when Pat shared her Blended Theory Model, as shown in figure 5.13 (below):

Overarching:
Critical theory

Assessment:
Discourse Analysis

Intervention:
Rights-based
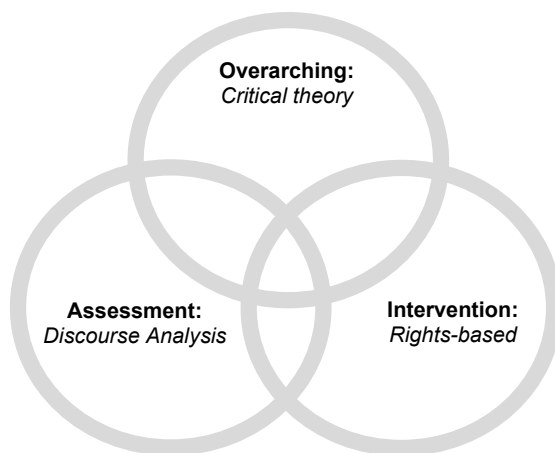
Figure: *5.13.*

Specifically, Lucy was surprised that Pat was not applying the Recovery model as her Overarching theory. Pat explained that actually she had long-shared Lucy's questioning of the Recovery model and regularly questioned what recovery might mean for Ava and others.

Pat shared her professional frustration with terminology generally and her 'finding' of Critical theory which promotes engagement with the interrogation of language, 'that otherwise, and surreptitiously, continues to oppress and discriminate' (Habermas, 1979). Pat recommended Roscoe's (2019) Critical Discourse Analysis and Social Work in further explaining her choice of Assessment theory. Pat encouraged Lucy to embrace her initial thoughts for a rights-based approach though, and to revisit her professional opinion to offer a clear rationale that demonstrated recognition of legislation and Marie's rights (Care Act 2014, Mental Health Act, 1983; SWE, 2019). Pat and Lucy reflected on their session and Lucy asked, 'do you think we're Theorizing Practice?'. Pat agreed that Thompson (2010) and Stepney and Thompson's (2020) advocating for theorizing practice, was very much what they are doing. Lucy asked, 'is it eclectic?'. Pat replied, 'what do you think?'. Lucy replied that she was unsure, although aware of Thompson's (2010) criticisms. Pat also referred to Thompson's (2010) dismissal of eclecticism, although suggested his concerns appeared to be with an indiscriminate mixing of theories, whereas using the Blended Theory Model, they were being very particular about which theories they were applying, as well as where and how they were being applied. Lucy said she would revisit the literature in preparation for their next supervision.

5.6: *Critical incident 3; Adult Social Care context*

Bella and Afram are Senior Social Workers in a hospital discharge team. Bella is currently training to be a Practice Educator and been introduced to the Blended Theory Model as part of her training. Bella has asked Afram to work with her in applying the Blended Theory Model with Marcus (a hypothetical case study).

Marcus is 63 years of age and has a learning disability. He was admitted to hospital following a road traffic incident which resulted in a physical impairment that now requires him to mobilize by way of a wheelchair. Marcus' wellbeing is considered to be optimum, although he now requires residential care to be discharged from hospital. Marcus has been assessed to lack capacity to make a decision regarding his residential care needs though and has no family or friends who can represent his views or wishes. Bella shared the Blended Theory Model template and they agreed to populate separate models to discuss in a peer supervision session later that week.

Bella drafted the Blended Theory Model shown in figure 5.14 (below).

Overarching:
*French & Raven's
Bases of Power
(1959, 1965)*

Assessment:
*Life Stages
(Erikson, 1950;
Levinson, 1977)*

Intervention:
*Rights-based
(Lombe, 2013)*
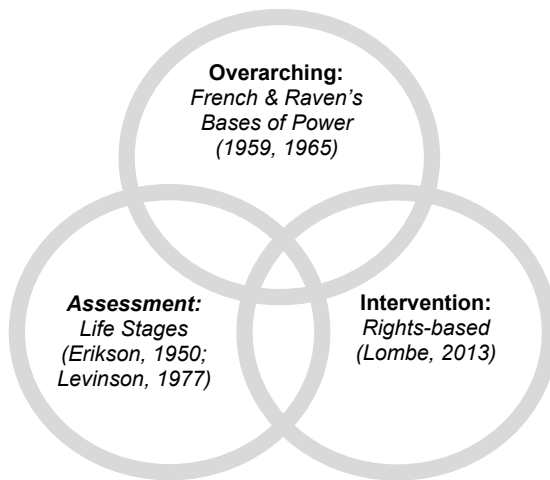
Figure: *5.14.*

Whilst Afram drafted the Blended Theory model as shown in figure, 5.15 (below).

Overarching:
Person-centred

Assessment:
Strengths-based

Intervention:
Task-centred
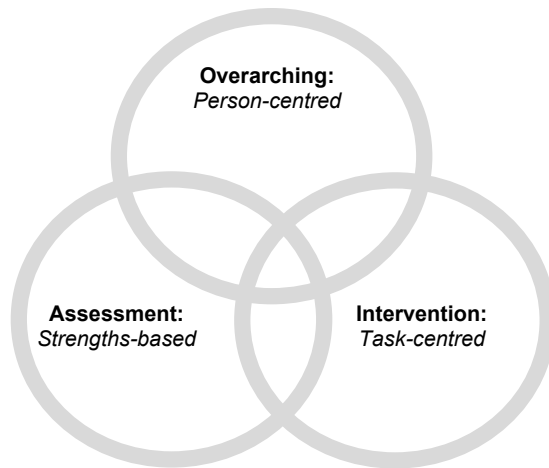
Figure: *5.15.*

At supervision, Afram took one look at Bella's model and commented 'well, we can see who's studying theories right now!'. Bella laughed and said, 'do you think I'm trying too hard?'. Afram was quick to reply 'No, please, tell me about these – what do they do, how do they work - indeed, do they work, how do you find them useful?'. Bella explained her choice of French and Raven for the Overarching domain as a theory she's used since her training. She though it sat well with Marcus' case 'as people with a learning disability have historically been disempowered' and 'it's only really since the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Equality Act 2010, that legislation has really recognized the requirement to empower people with a learning disability'. Bella said she was unsure though if it really aligned as an Overarching theory but wanted to use it as she was struck by their concept of Legitimate power and her role in ethically upholding the law and standards for social work. Legitimate power, she explained, 'aligns social work with a responsibility to challenge inequalities and abuses of power' which she again related to Marcus given concerns for his capacity to make decisions about where to live.

Afram said this was akin to anti-oppressive practice which he now wanted to use in his Blended Theory Model. Bella asked Afram why he chose Person-centred then as his Overarching theory; explaining that she also thought about using it but that it might be difficult with Marcus given his lack of capacity. Afram said he had simply gone with the Care Act 2014, which advocates for a Person-centred approach with Strengths-based underpinning to assessment. Afram suggested that it was important to remain Person-centred, to understanding what Marcus would have wanted, if he had been able to share his views and wishes. Bella commented that she was now even more concerned that she was over-egging her theorizing compared to the simplicity of Afram's approach. However, Afram was again quick to comment and said, 'surely though, this isn't about one way of practicing social work; isn't it about who we are as practitioners, and your model reflecting who you are, how you think, and how you can maximize outcomes for Marcus. Bella explained that she had been thinking about Marcus having his 63rd birthday on the ward and how there was no family or friends to celebrate his birthday, and 'how different things were likely to have been in his earlier life'. Bella explained she had begun to think about how we all change over the life course and whilst she had found Attachment theory interesting at university, she had become aware that she was less knowledgeable of the later stage of life and to understanding the potential impact for Marcus and his life-changing impairment. Bella found the work of Erikson and Levinson interesting in considering the wider implications for Marcus' discharge from hospital and commented how determined she was to finding the most suitable residential placement for Marcus in preparation for his long term physical and wellbeing needs. Afram said, 'well that fits with my Intervention theory (Task-centred) – where we need to break down the goals for his long-term care into the different tasks that can make that his reality'. Bella agreed and added that breaking down the end goal would be really useful to keeping Marcus involved as well in maximizing partnership working with Marcus. Bella pointed out that they would also require an Independent Mental Capacity Advocate of course, which should further enable Marcus' voice and involvement.

Afram asked if that was why Bella had chosen a rights-based approach. Bella said, 'partly, but it was also just about making sure Marcus received all the supports he's entitled to'. Afram said 'I've just realised we could do a Blended Theory Model which uses all our theories' and quickly sketched the Blended Theory Model shown in figure, 5.16 (below).

Overarching:
Person-centred &
Bases of Power/
AOP/ADP/ARP

Assessment:
Strengths-based/
Life Stages

Intervention:
*Task-centred/
Rights-based*
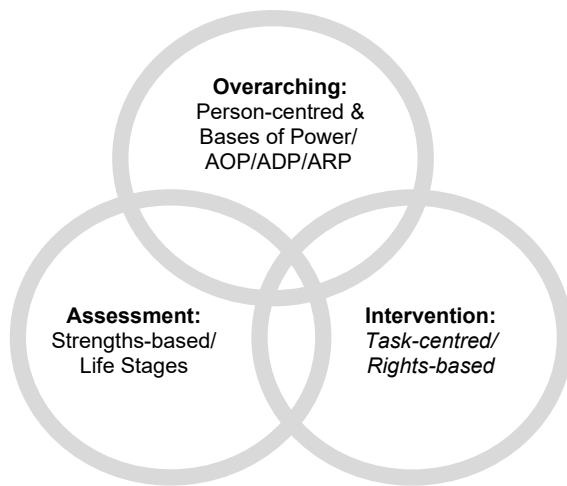
Figure: *5.16.*

Bella said, 'that's great, I'll show this to John (student social worker) and see what he thinks too'. Bella and Afram reflected they had both learned from the experience. Afram said he had been a little reluctant in the first instance, but now would like to do the same exercise with a couple of the more complex cases he is currently assigned to. Bella suggested Afram might also want to do the exercise with John then as 'he's been studying all the latest theories at university'. Afram suggested they invite John instead to their next peer supervision session which Bella quickly agreed.

5.7: Finding 1; *Summary of discussion for initially engaging the Artefact*

The discussion will now offer a summary which also address the additional political and education contexts highlighted from chapter 1, which are presented in figure 5.17 (below).

Focus Group Finding 1: *Initially engaging with the Artefact*		
Chapter 1: *contexts*	**Concerns**	**Commentators**
Political	*Concerns for the education of Social Workers in England*	*Croisdale-Appleby (2014)* *Narey (2014)* *Social Work England (2019)*
Educational	*Self-assessment and critical reflection informing continued professional development*	*Schön (1983)* *Boud (2003)* *Biggs (2003)*

Figure: *5.17.*

The educational context points to critical reflection as necessary to engage with self-assessment and consistently develop ethical practice through the integration of new learning. The political context requires changes to education, with in-house critics agreeing changes are necessary for the learning and teaching specific to theory. The Artefact is proposed as an ethical approach to promoting positive change in the learning, teaching and application of theory which acknowledges that the Artefact is currently open to misinterpretation in the first instance.

> *The exercise of our own faculties takes place also according to certain rules, which we follow at first <u>unconsciously</u>, until by a long-continued use of our faculties we attain the knowledge of them, and at last make them so familiar, that it costs us much trouble to think of them <u>in abstracto</u>.*

Kant, 2015, p.7.

I understand from Kant's quote, that the more we engage with anything unfamiliar, the more familiar it can become. Thompson's concerns and wariness for metatheorizing artefacts, for example, has been genuinely embraced with actions taken to address his concerns throughout the research inquiry. The Focus Group recognized Thompson's expert status and simplified the headings for each domain of the Artefact to now align with his (1993) Personal, Cultural and Structural domains, by also having three domains, Overarching, Assessment and Intervention. The Artefact template shares a similar form to Thompson's (1993) three nested circles by also having three circles, although in the form of a Venn diagram. Both artefacts are also intended to offer dynamic theorizing opportunities through their potential for different applications.

In further addressing concerns for initially engaging with the Artefact, and in response to Focus Group discussions, questionnaire feedback, and expert suggestions across the research inquiry, there has also been a development of different entry points to promote inclusive engagement with the Artefact. Specifically, there has been an article drafted, a website developed, exemplar artefacts drafted, working artefacts drafts and critical incidents drafted to promote engagement with the Artefact and minimize Thompson's concerns for *this* artefact. In addition, there are also plans to redraft the article and prepare a short introduction for supervision and classroom applications, as well as prepare video introduction to add to the website (which will only be republished subject to validation of the research inquiry).

5.8: *Finding 2; Limitations with emotional transparency*

At the second Focus Group meeting, one member (student social worker) questioned a potential limitation for the Artefact with transparently incorporating exponents' emotional experiences when applying the Artefact. The member went on to adapt the 'rainbow' diagrams (figures 4.11/12/13) by adding an upside-down rainbow, to mirror the practitioner's thinking of direct case work with considerations for their own wellbeing: this was done to promote discussions of ethical decision-making and transparently promote insight with emotional factors such as minor and major illness, disability and/or home environmental factors (to include, for example, relationship difficulties or financial concerns, etc.).

The new diagram added was readily embraced by all members as a valid subject area with benefits for self-assessment, critical reflection and supervision (Boud, 2003; Fook, 2007; Hawkins & Shohet, 2012). The member's redeveloped diagram inspired other members to want to develop their own working artefacts and added to the rationale for exponents' artefacts to be made available via the website to promote creativity for theorizing and a constant revisioning of the Artefact. The idea for unpicking emotions with the Artefact was unexpected and therefore, there were no related questions within the questionnaire. In summary, this is recognized as an important area for promoting creativity, theorizing and insight, with further research possibilities for making a contribution to established literature.

5.9: *Focus Group Findings 3-9*

Finding:	Merit	In brief explanation
3.	*Mapping theories*	*The Artefact was found to offer a consistent approach to mapping theories from the diverse transtheoretical epistemology, aligning with 3 domains specific to social work practices*
4.	*Selecting theories*	*The Artefact was found to offer a consistent approach to selecting specific, multiple, theories, in preparing to engage with practice and/or case studies*
5.	*Blending theories*	*The Artefact was found to offer a foundational approach to theorizing practice with multiple theoretical perspectives*
6.	*Applying multiple theories with practice, as a model for practice*	*The Artefact was found to offer opportunities to engage with Bigg's (2013) concept of the complex whole; wherein the application of specific, multiple theories, can in itself be considered a theoretical perspective*
7.	*Potential reflective and/or reflexive model*	*An unexpected finding was in the potential for the Artefact to be applied as a reflective and/or reflexive model*
8.	*Potential applications with other professions*	*Another unexpected finding was in the potential for the Artefact to be applied to understand other professions theoretical underpinnings; and perhaps even for application by other professions*
9.	*Further research opportunities*	*A number of potential research opportunities related to the Artefact were further identified by Focus Group members*

Figure: *5.18.*

Alongside determining the two limitations for the Artefact, the Focus Group agreed seven merits for the Artefact as presented in figure 5.18 (above). Merits (Findings 3-6) were specifically agreed for *mapping, selecting, blending,* and *applying* specific theories with direct case work and case studies. The other three merits were found to be: (Finding 7) with potential for the Artefact to be applied as a reflective and reflexive mental map (Schön, 1983); (Finding 8) as a metatheorizing approach to understanding other disciplines and professionals, alongside (Finding 9) further research opportunities related to the Artefact.

5.10: *Finding 3; Merits for mapping theories*

Whilst recognizing difficulties first accessing the Artefact, once the domain headings of the Artefact are understood, the Artefact was consistently found to offer merit with an initial mapping of theories specific to a particular practice context.

Focus Group Finding 3: *Mapping theories*		
Domain	**Terminology within the literature**	**Authors**
Overarching	*Overarching*	*Crawford & Walker (2008)*
	Grand	*Thompson (2010)*
	Grand	*Parker (2012)*

Figure: *5.19.*

Figure 5.19 (above) for example, offers three examples from the literature where the terms *Grand* and *Overarching* have been applied purposely to promote a wider contextualization of theories than the established *Sociological* and *Psychological* domains (Howe, 2009; Healy, 2014). The initial contextualizing of theories, as either Overarching, Assessment or Intervention embraces an holistic approach to different practitioners working with different theories from different fields and applying different theories in different contexts.

The Overarching domain is intended to align theorizing with a specific practice context whilst promoting opportunities for discussions of the merits and limitations of discipline's transtheoretical epistemology, and informal theories such as practice wisdom.

Focus Group discussions were consistent with participant questionnaires, and the literature, in acknowledging Assessment and Intervention as core domains that were well understood in the literature and by participants, in theorizing for direct case work (Walker and Beckett, 2010; McClennen, 2010; Parker, 2012).

Focus Group Finding 3: *Mapping theories*		
Overarching	**Specific theories advocated within the literature**	**Authors**
Philosophical	*Functionalism*	*Crawford & Walker (2008)*
	Existentialism	*Thompson (2010)*
	Feminism	*Fook, 2012*
Sociological	*Sociology*	*Addams (1930)* *Howe (2009)*
Psychological	*Psychology*	*Healy (2014)*
	Psychology for Social Workers	*Nicolson Bayne (1984)*
Systems	*Systems*	*Munro (2011)*
Types of Social Worker	*Causal or Functional* *Sociological or Psychological* *Mechanics or Gardeners*	*Lee (1929)* *Bruno (1936)* *Stepney (2012)*

Figure: *5.20.*

Figure 5.20 (above) offers further precedents from different writers for different theoretical perspectives to underpin social work. Whilst figure 5.21 (below) highlights the political advocates for change with how theory is taught for social work (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014).

143

Political and Regulatory	Theoretical themes required	Year
Professional Capabilities Framework	*Attachment & Loss, systems' approaches*	*2012*
Croisdale-Appleby Narey	*Generic training* *Specific pathways*	*2014* *2014*
Social Work England	*Research, theories and frameworks*	*2019*

Figure: *5.21.*

In the first chapter, I openly expressed my difficulties with understanding the many different perspectives exampled in figures 5.20/21. My experiences as a practitioner, working long hours with complex, high-risk cases (a scenario familiar to many practitioners), left little time or energy to also engage further with integrating complex philosophical, sociological, ecological and human growth and development theories. I understood the value of assessment and intervention to ethical practice in the minimizing of risk though, and therefore focused on psychological theories, to continually improve my understanding and effectiveness with direct case work. I still found that there were too many theories to know and apply, or at least to know and apply to the depth I understood the literature was expecting to avoid reductionism. I muddled through (again, perhaps like many other practitioners) until starting to train student social workers. As a burgeoning practice educator, it was then I realized just how little I knew, and how much I *needed* a resource, dedicated to foundational theorizing for learners. The first stop, in a metaphorical journey to theorizing practice (Thompson, 2010; Stepney and Thompson, 2020), was in recognizing that whilst assessment and intervention were common tenets to all statutory social work, the overarching position were too-oft unclear, or a mix of theories from sociology, and/or ecology, and/or human growth and development, and/or philosophy. Each of the headline theories mentioned are also recognized to have dedicated university courses which raised reflection and questions for just how much social workers are supposed to know, understand, and apply, to avoid being reductionist.

The Focus Group agreed that an initial mapping of theories from the wide transtheoretical epistemology was beneficial to, not only working with the wide transtheoretical epistemology, but in fundamentally understanding the complexity of learning specific theories from a transtheoretical epistemology. Questionnaire responses also suggested that some participants were readily prepared to accept the premise of Overarching, Assessment and Intervention as domains that reflected their practice and immediately began testing the mapping of theories with practice experiences. The Artefact was observed to promote focused discussions of theories by offering a common framework for all participants to engage in the discussions (Cozolino, 2002; Applegate & Shapiro, 2005), which alongside reflective and reflexive practices, was consistently observed to promote critical engagement direct case work and case studies (Biggs, 2013; Freire, 2000). The Artefact 's structure was also found to be beneficial to promoting focused discussions of alternative metatheoretical approaches that are identifiable in the literature. For example, Thompson's PCS model which has already discussed earlier in this chapter (p.125) and overlaid with the Artefact in figure 5.8.

Overarching:
Social Role Valorisation

Assessment:
Role theory

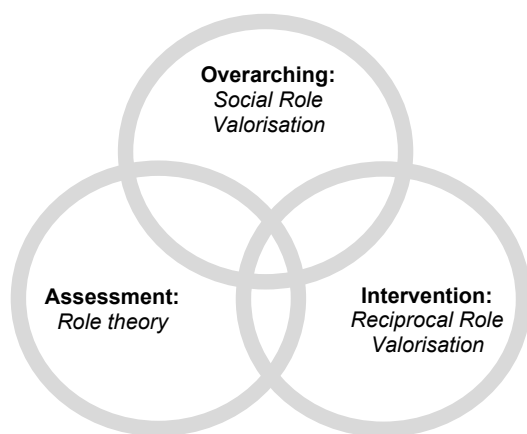**Intervention:**
Reciprocal Role Valorisation

Figure: *5.22*

Another example is Rapaport and Baiani's (2017) metatheorizing aligned to a specific mental health crises context which is overlaid here with the Artefact in figure 5.22 (above).

In brief explanation, Rapaport and Baiani revisit Wolfensberger's Social Role Valorisation as a theoretical underpinning for the promotion of community inclusion and is applied instead as an overarching theory to promote goals for communications that promote parity across lay and professional roles. Role theory is aligned with the Assessment domain, to recognize the Approved Mental Health Professional's duty to validate a lay person's capacity to fulfil the roles and duties of the Nearest Relative as subject to section 26 of the *Mental Health Act 1983*. The Intervention domain was subsequently aligned with Rapaport and Baiani's introduction of Reciprocal Role Validation, to recognize their goals for authentic parity across lay (Nearest Relative) and professional roles with a shared focus for interventions that enable and empower persons experiencing mental health crises. Applying the Artefact offered benefits in breaking down Rapaport and Baiani's advanced theorizing and promoted a common understanding for their conceptualizing of Reciprocal Role Valorisation, which was subsequently discussed by the Focus Group as a theoretical underpinning that could also be applied with, for example, Family Group Conferencing in Children and Families' settings. The Artefact's domains are therefore understood to promote ethical and effective mapping of theories with a foundational approach to engaging with the discipline's transtheoretical epistemology.

5.11: *Finding 4; Merits for selecting theories*

If the perspective that knowing all of social work's transtheoretical epistemology is uncontested, then questions arise for which specific theories are to be taught, known and applied.

The literature review highlighted that whilst specific theories *were* being selected and applied to align with specific contexts of practice in journal articles, they were different theories from those generally discussed in educational theory books. Rapaport and Baiani's (2017) article, applies Reciprocal Role Valorisation, Role theory and Social Role Valorisation, which are rarely discussed in book literature and therefore less-likely to be known or selected by learners of theory. The Artefact was developed in recognition of the benefits for choice in promoting ownership for authentically engaging with theory and learning, in-depth, specific theories that align with self and the practice context.

146

Figure 5.24 (below) offers a sample from the literature of different advocates for selecting specific theories to be known and applied with social work.

Theme	Advocate(s)	Specific theory	Year
Philosophy	*Stone*	*Humanism*	*1958*
	Gilpin	*Functionalism*	*1963*
	Thompson	*Existentialism*	*2010*
Emancipation	*Bailey and Brake*	*Freire*	*1975*
	Houston & Campbell	*Critical theory*	*2001*
	Gray & Webb	*Critical theory*	*2012*
Systems	*Lewin*		*1951*
	Bronfenbrenner		*1979*
	Munro		*2012*
Types of Social Worker	*Lee*	*Causal or Functional*	*1929*
	Bruno	*Sociological or Psychological*	*1936*
	Stepney	*Mechanics or Gardeners*	*2012*
Professional standards	*Professional Capabilities Framework*	*Attachment & Loss, systems*	*2012*
	Croisdale-Appleby	*Generic training*	*2014*
	Social Work England	*Research, theories and frameworks*	*2019*

Figure: *5.23*.

Further to figure 5.23 (above), the epistemology continues to grow; adding to the question of *how* social workers are expected to make their selection of which specific theories to learn, know and apply and avoid reductionism (Hartman, 1978; Fook, 2012).

The Artefact is intended to promote individual preferences in the selection of specific theories to learn and apply within a particular practice context and promote ownership for theorizing that reflects insight of self, and the application of self in fulfilling the social work role. In practically applying the Artefact in supervision, the mainstream theorizing (found in books) becomes a foundational approach to developing complex skills with theorizing, and for exponents to further select specific theories that benefit their practice; as well as offering a dynamic framework for understanding other metatheorizing such Thompson PCS or Rapaport and Baiani's synthesis as discussed above. The selection of theories is further considered to be within a framework that recognizes the complex whole; the sum of the theories put together with experiences from practice and reflective insights (Beckett, 2006; Biggs, 2013). The Artefact's potential for representing a complex whole adds further to expectations for exponents to offer rationales for working artefacts and creatively approaching any necessary amendments to update and incorporate new learning within working artefacts. Defending one's rationale for the selection of specific theories, further offers opportunities for discussions on the complexities of personal bias and engaging with psychological, emotional and biological understandings of self and others (Cozolino, 2002; Applegate & Shapiro, 2005). The promotion of selecting specific theories can further benefit from acknowledging *choice* not only in the selection of specific theories, but in the social work underpinning, and legal obligations, to promote choices with persons experiencing social work interventions (Cozolino, 2002; Biggs, 2013; *Care Act 2014).*

In concluding this section, I advocate for a wider embracing of learners' choice in selecting specific theories to know, learn and apply with social work. The choices of Critical theory and Participatory Action Research were pivotal to *my* learning, and in developing my knowledge, skills and abilities as an educator and researcher; both with the research project and in writing the thesis. I initially read of Thompson's (2010) preference for Existentialism and tried hard to embrace an Existentialist underpinning in my early writings, however I am grateful to Fook's (2012) preference for Feminism, in realizing that there is more than one philosophical underpinning advocated for social work.

The Focus Group consistently agreed the Artefact to be important, in promoting *informed* choice

for the selection of specific theories, given the complexities and size of the epistemology. My

preference for Critical theory arose from my preference for inspecting language, which arose

from early risk assessment practices and the requirement to validate information that otherwise

might put persons at risk. Writing the Critical Incidents further highlighted how different

rationales can be made by different practitioners for selecting different theories, and the benefits

in celebrating each unique lens that brings a shared focus for maximize direct case work

outcomes.

5.12: *Finding 5; Merits for blending theories*

Focus Group Finding 5: Blending theories	
Participant questionnaires	**Overarching, Assessment and Intervention:** *Limitations*
A.	*It would be interesting to see how some other factors may be blended with theory, such as the political and economic situation, but also culture, and possibly groups of theory that work best in short-term or crisis situations*
C.	*It could discuss the socio-economic and political situation/theories to some degree. To make the link between the model and social work practice clear, there could be examples and explanations of how the theories in the example interact, and suggestions/observations. However, I believe it already links theory with practice clearly?*

Figure: *5.24.*

Schön (1983) discusses how social workers combine theories in the absence of any other

understanding of how to apply multiple theories. Figure 5.24 (above) can be understood to show

how Schön's perspective remains relevant to contemporary practice, with questionnaires asking

149

for further details of how theories might be blended, not just with each other, but with other factors such as socio-political and legislative influences.

The questionnaire feedback sent me back to the early drafts of my own working Artefact and led to redeveloping the artefact to incorporate those specific requirement as shown in figure 5.25 (below).
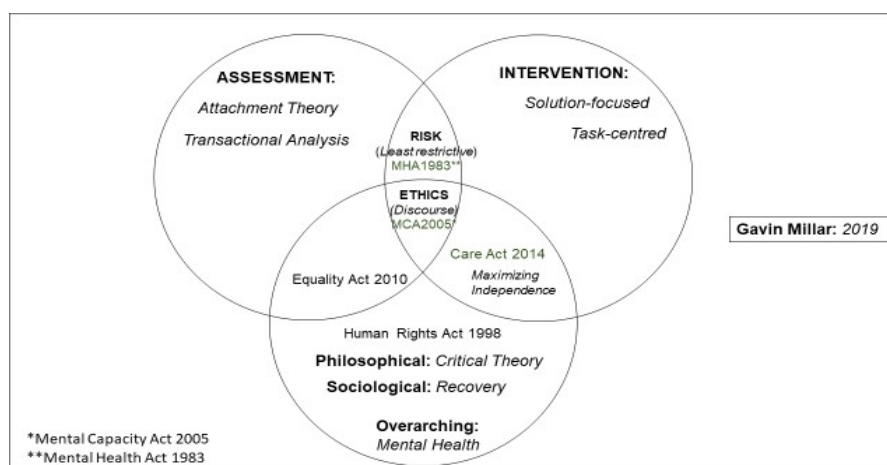
Figure: *5.25.*

The Artefact promotes a blending of theories that can, again, be aligned with Biggs' (2013) conceptualizing of the complex whole and with the highest taxonomic ranking for critical thinking, the Extended Abstract as it links theories with other epistemologies such as law and ethics. Payne (2014) and Stepney and Thompson (2018) though, specifically raise concerns for mixing theories from different epistemologies and ontological positions. Their concerns are therefore recognized and discussed further in the following critical reflection.

5.12.1: *Critical reflection embracing concerns for mixing epistemologies and ontologies*

The concern for mixing epistemologies and ontologies relates to wider academic concerns for the misapplication of theories, and for superficial and reductionist approaches to learning and applying complex theoretical perspectives (Fook, 2012; Payne, 2014; Stepney and Thompson, 2018). Historically, Positivism, brought knowledge of the natural world through observation and experimentation which led to the establishing of the Objective epistemology and a Realist ontology Interpretivism evolved as necessary to investigate and understand the social world; the interpretation of events by individual researchers, establishing a Subjective epistemology and a Relativist ontology. The thirst for knowledge though continued, which has further led to alternative understandings of knowledge and ontological perspectives, such as Critical theory, Critical Realism and Pragmatism (Ryan, 2018). Critical theory offers an ethical underpinning for social work that actively engages with promoting emancipation through alignment with professional goals for maximizing independence and inclusion. Critical theory embraces different ontological perspectives to promote inclusion and recognize changing perceptions of realities; rather than engage with social-constructed divisions of reality that are required to align with either Positivist or Interpretivist concepts for uncovering a single reality (Habermas, 1981; Houston and Campbell, 2001). Critical theory therein develops a Modified subjective epistemology that acknowledges the individual researcher's role in the research (the subjective aspect), however expects the sharing of information to be modified in actively aligning, and realigning, language and structures that promotes emancipatory actions.

In chapter three, I briefly discussed how Constructionism (Papert, 1980) was also considered as a possible research method given the potential for exponents to devise their own working artefacts. Constructionism though is aligned with Constructivism (Piaget, 1977; von Glasersfeld, 1994; Kanzian, 2017) and therein a Subjective epistemology with a Relativist ontology (Ryan, 2018). The consideration therefore to engage with a Constructionist method, requires further engagement with Payne (2014) and Stepney and Thompson's (2018) concerns for mixing epistemologies and ontologies.

Specifically, to consider if, and how, a Subjective epistemology and Relativist ontology can align with the preference for the Modified subjective epistemology and multiple realities recognized by Critical theory. Payne (1994; 2012) initially advocated for social workers only using theories in their purest, intended form, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the benefits of applying more than one theory with an eclectic approach. Thompson's (2010) criticism of the eclectic approach and Fook's (2012) dismissal of systematic approaches in general though, are examples from the literature of other developments also observable in the literature. Payne (2014) shifted to acknowledge that theories can be combined if conducted in a structured manner that aligns with the context of practice. Stepney and Thompson (2018; 2020) ask for academic and teaching endorsement of their innovative shift to Theorizing Practice in developing a robust epistemology with a focus for direct case work. The benefits for Theorizing Practice are herein acknowledged and fully endorsed, with the focus for the research inquiry asked to be considered as complementary; in promoting learners' awareness for the wealth of the discipline's transtheoretical epistemology, whilst also promoting ownership for engaging with ethical choices in selecting and blending specific theories with practice contexts (Healy, 2014; Stepney and Thompson, 2020).
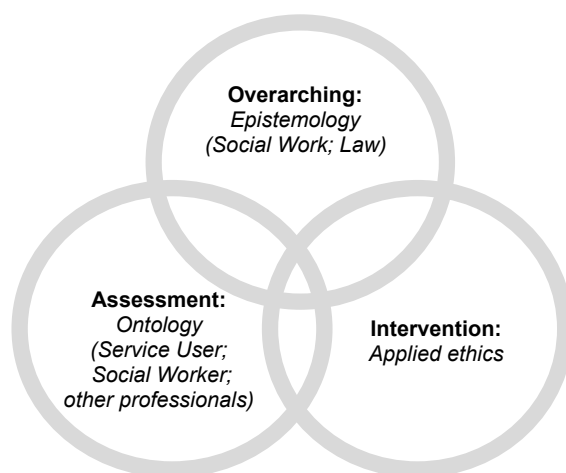

Overarching:
Epistemology
(Social Work; Law)

Assessment:
Ontology
(Service User;
Social Worker;
other professionals)

Intervention:
Applied ethics

Figure: *5.26.*

Figure 5.26 (above) further applies the Artefact template to engage with the mixing of epistemologies and ontologies. Statutory social work, it is herein suggested, offers an example of practice already immersed in working with epistemological pluralism. Statutory practice can be understood in terms of (a minimum of) two different epistemologies (Social Work and Law) as practitioners straddle the wider emancipatory goals and standards for the profession, within a legal epistemology that focuses on the antithesis; with powers to limit choice, impose expectations for specific actions and behaviours or face consequences that can include the removal of family members and personal liberty. Both professions (Social Work and Law) engage with decision-making related to individuals, and their specific circumstances at the point of assessment or judgement. Law, for example, is a long-established profession, with accurate records of decisions previously made, to promote equity with Court decision-making across England. In contrast, social work in England has only recently begun to work to the same eligibility criteria for adult services (Care Act 2014) and does not currently share the legal profession's focus for developing a transparent epistemology that promotes equity and proportionality for decisions made across the profession. Statutory interventions also cross epistemological boundaries with underpinnings that can be rights-based, research-based, or health-based (among others); and which are subsequently taxonomized, with or without our awareness, in demonstrating a practice focus for practical outcomes (Schön, 1983).

Ontologically, the differences between subjective and objective accounts of reality (Realist and Relativist positions), and the Critical theory advocacy for multiple realities, is unresolved in the literature; outside adopting a Pragmatic underpinning Morgan, 2007). Stepney and Thompson (2018) therefore advocate that knowledge, insight and care are required to authentically demonstrate an understanding for embracing the fundamental complications of working with different conceptions of reality. Examples of different ontological positions though, such as Medical and Social models, evidence that social work, again, is currently expected to embrace different ontological perspectives without necessarily understanding the concerns from the literature. Assessments, for example, can bring together a mixing of epistemological and ontological perspectives, such as, 'this person has to be in hospital', versus 'this person can thrive in the community', and 'I'm fine, can you please stop meddling in my life'.

153

The requirement to work with epistemological pluralism and unresolved ontological perspectives, within the everyday functions and duties associated with practitioner roles, means that it is surely necessary for the discipline to further engage with the concerns raised by Payne (2014) and Stepney and Thompson (2018). Specifically, to aim to embed Croisdale-Appleby's (2014) vision for social workers to be social scientists, practitioners and professionals, and engage with Tucker's (1996) advocacy for a common theory, in promoting understanding and insights that embrace alternative lifestyle choices and broaden subjective perspectives of actions and behaviours outside dominant social ideologies.

5.13: *Finding 6; Merits for applying theories*

An initial search of article-based literature demonstrated widespread applications of many different theories aligned to specific contexts of social work practice. The focus of this research inquiry though was to improve the learning, teaching and application of theory at an educational level and research if the merits and limitations of the Artefact offers an authentic addition to the established literature. As a Focus Group, we recognized Payne's (2014) requirement for structure when combining theories and added discussions of Biggs' complex whole in recognizing the sum of theories to include self and informal theories from practice experiences. We further discussed Cozolino (2002) and Applegate and Shapiro's (2005) neuroscientific principles in understanding physical brain construction with critical thinking skills, decision-making and emotional biases. The Artefact was consistently found to have merit in applying multiple theories with practice through shared recognition for the visual representation specific theories with ethical decision-making and engagement with legislation and standards. In discussion, the Artefact was always intended to embed theory with practice at a foundational level. In further explanation, the Artefact offers a precursor to perhaps embracing Thompson's (2010) and Stepney and Thompson's (2020) Theorizing Practice, where exponents might also engage with McLean's (2020) Theory Cards to read brief introductions to different theories and begin to make informed choices with deciding which theories to invest in further learning and populating working artefacts.

Finally, in this section, the application of the Artefact with other theoretical, and metatheoretical perspectives, further clarifies that the artefact is not intended as a one-stop, catch-all tool for theorizing social work; aligning with Payne (2014) and Howe's (2009) earlier statements that no single framework can be applied to all social work contexts.

5.14: *Findings 7, 8 & 9 (Unexpected merits)*

Findings seven, eight and nine were unexpected outcomes for the research project. Specifically, finding seven identified potential for the Artefact to be applied as a reflective and/or reflexive model for practice and finding eight suggested potential for the Artefact to structure metatheorizing of other discipline and professionals. Finally, the ninth finding related to four specific research opportunities that were suggested by different members of the Focus Group, and which related to further exploring the merits and limitations of the Artefact.

5.15: *Summary*

This chapter has discussed Focus Group findings integrated with key findings from the literature review, face-to-face interviews, research participants' anonymised questionnaires and the wider contexts from chapter one. There is still much to do. This was a small-scale doctoral study, where I was able to verbally explain the aims and functions of the Artefact and overcome any difficulties experienced initially engaging the Artefact. The focus now is to develop an academic introduction for the Artefact, with goals to improve inclusive engagement with the Artefact; subject to validation of the research inquiry. Writing the thesis and researching the Artefact with the Focus Group, already represents a committed effort to engaging with the problem and authentically striving to offer a contribution to the established epistemology. The Artefact was developed as a tool for supervision in the first instance, with goals to embrace praxis and promote ownership for theoretical learning and applications with practice. The drafting of the Artefact recognized social workers' role in the use of self, and the benefits of theory as a conduit to working with complex subjective and objective perspectives.

Fook's (2012) concern for structure was often discussed and ultimately viewed favourably as a cautionary position; one to consistently revisit in avoiding reductionist thinking and in focusing on creative approaches to positive outcomes. The Artefact domains however of were consistently agreed to promote clarity with an initial mapping of theories that promoted engagement with ethical issues in developing a balanced knowledge of theories for social work applications. Indeed, the Artefact was consistently observed to be a catalyst *for* creativity, with working artefacts, exemplars and Critical Incidents having all further emerged from discussions that embraced the complexity of blending and applying multiple theories with social work. The adding of structure therefore, in this instance, may be considered to have added further to the language of the epistemology (Fook, 2012; Biggs, 2013). The Artefact is intended to encourage theorizing with a focus for identifying and applying specific theories that promote insight and maximize actions for independence and inclusion. Finally, I have engaged with criticisms from the literature, concerns from political and educational contexts and boldly commend the Artefact for expert approval, as an additional resource for learning, teaching, and applying theory with social work.

Chapter 6: *Reflections and Conclusions*

6.1: *Introduction*

Reflections have been separated within this final chapter to align with the expectations and responsibilities of different professional roles and promote a critical discourse before offering conclusions. This chapter applies Kolb's (1984) reflective model as presented in figure 6.1 (below) to offer structure and a consistent approach to reflections of the research processes. Kolb's model highlights four sections to promote reflection and action. This is consistent with Freire's conceptualisation of praxis and further aligned with Critical theory to unpick language, with a focus for promoting independence and inclusion (Freire, 2000; Kolb, 2015).

Figure: *6.1.*

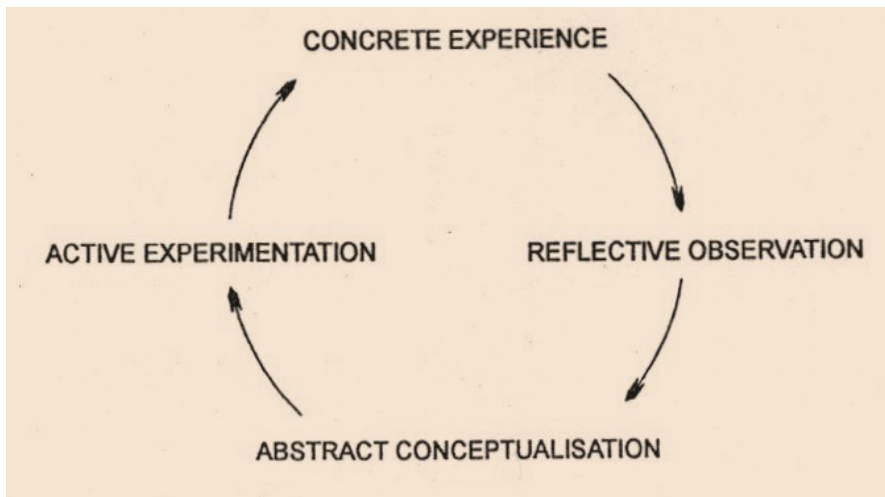Kolb (2015) suggests the reflective cycle begins by considering what happened (concrete experience) and encourages a *description* of the event to be recorded which can then be referred back to, as often as necessary, in promoting structure and alignment with the other sections of his model. From this description of the event, Kolb encourages critical appraisal of the event (reflective observation).

Kolb further encourages the introduction of theory to enable a critical exploration and inspection of the event from different perspectives. The practice of critical reflection should, in turn, prompt hypothesising about future events (abstract conceptualisation) and to addressing a plan of action (active experimentation) which will inform thoughts for the next concrete experience and to engaging with the next cycle of reflection (Kolb, 2015). In line with the research project, Critical theory is the theory that will be applied (Habermas, 1981; Morrow, 1994).

6.2: *The research experience*

The research study was initially developed in response to difficulties enabling and supporting student social workers with their learning and application of theory whilst undertaking practice learning placements. To promote skills, knowledge and ability in the learning and teaching of theory, I had been applying Thompson's (1993) Personal, Cultural and Structural model in supervision sessions. However, whilst the model was useful in engaging with sociological and legislative influences, feedback and observations suggested there was a requirement for a foundational approach to transparently incorporate theories for assessment and intervention within the early placement experiences of student social workers. The Blended Theory Model (the Artefact) was initially drafted with feedback from placement experiences and (following ethical approval) developed through classroom experiences. The Artefact offers a metatheoretical approach to working with multiple theories that are aligned with specific contexts of social work practice; with a view to integrating more complex, theoretical learning as new knowledge, skills and abilities, are learned, known and applied. To test if the Artefact was beneficial, outside my own experiences and applications, required the research project to involve exponents of the Artefact, in researching and evaluating the Artefact. A Focus Group was also convened to involve qualified practitioners and educators, and subsequently student social workers, in evaluating the Artefact via a Participatory Action Research project.

The aim of the research project was to address in-house criticisms and contribute to improving the learning and teaching of theory by generating data, critically reviewing anonymised data, and agreeing findings for the research project. To explain the rationale and aims of the Artefact, I drafted an article, although feedback indicated a requirement for the information to be reconstructed for accessibility. The article was reconfigured in the form of website which also hosted the research questionnaire. The Focus Group initially intended to meet on three occasions, although a fourth meeting was considered necessary to maximise rigour with findings. The meetings were of two-hour duration and involved a mix of participants from student social worker, practice educator, social worker and lecturer, roles. The Focus Group reviewed all (anonymised) research data, agreed actions, and ultimately findings, for the research project. The thesis is presented across six chapters and underpinned by a Critical theory methodology to concertedly engage and examine information with the purpose of promoting language and actions that are consistent with goals for independence, inclusion and emancipation.

6.3: Reflections with implications for practice

From my research notes for the earlier taught sessions of the professional doctorate programme, my primary goal was, as a social worker, in promoting positive outcome for persons experiencing social work. As an educator, I therefore wanted to develop a resource that promoted theoretical learning and embedded applications of theory with direct case work. As a lecturer and researcher, I wanted to promote learners' awareness to the complexities of the discipline's transtheoretical epistemology and demonstrate rigour in my engagement for promoting the learning and teaching of theory. Biggs (2013, p.2) suggests that responsibility for learning lies solely with learners, and points to the value of reflection in realising how educators can 'adjust our teaching decisions to suit our subject matter, available resourcing, our students, and our own individual strengths and weaknesses as a teacher'.

Acknowledging Biggs' statement, the Artefact offers an opportunity to 'adjust' contemporary teaching of theory and promote reflective practices through learners' engagement with mapping, selecting and blending specific theories that align with the practice context (Fook, 2012; Healy, 2014). The alignment of theories with a particular practice context is discussed in the literature, although different metatheoretical approaches exist (as discussed in depth in chapter 2) and there is agreement that no one artefact will suffice for social work's diverse practice landscape (Payne, 2014; Stepney and Thompson, 2018). Therefore, a mapping of theories can be beneficial to organizing and selecting appropriate theories in the first instance; to begin combining or blending different theories with each other *and* apply to specific practice contexts. Fook (2012) though disputes the need for formal organization of theories and expresses concerns for structure in potentially limiting creativity and dulling critical thinking skills. On reflection though, there was also literature asking for structure which the participant questionnaires, and the Focus Group discussions, consistently demonstrated. Indeed, the mapping of theory was consistently welcomed when the domains of the Artefact were understood, as a means to organizing theory, within a modified alignment to practice contexts. This research project demonstrated a relentless dedication to reflecting and acting upon feedback received, to promote theoretical learning in reviewing and updating the Artefact. The Focus Group, for example, aligned discussions for the Blended Theory Model with Theorizing Practice (Stepney and Thompson, 2018) and acknowledged Thompson's concerns for frameworks that exponents misunderstand. In addressing his concerns, the Artefact was redeveloped, and different entry points were drafted to promote engagement with the Artefact (for example, exemplar Artefacts, critical incidents and working Artefacts).

Applying theories with practice is not an option (Thompson, 2010; Stepney, 2012; Payne, 2014), although the Artefact makes no recommendations for any specific theories to be known or applied. Instead, exponents are encouraged to identify their own choice of multiple theories to minimise a reductionist, superficial approach to theories and their applications with practice (Hartman, 1978; Fook, 2012).

There are different suggestions for mapping theories within the literature, from the early debates of Richmond and Addams at the beginning of 20th century, through to contemporary debates involving numerous writers with suggestions for different theories to be adopted and known (Houston & Campbell, 2001; Howe, 2009; Healy, 2014). Thompson, (2010), Fook, (2012), Payne (2014) express reservations with organizing theories. However, in the absence of any agreed structure, the knowledge base continues to grow, and the choice of theories from which to select and apply, becomes more and more complex (Schön, 1983; Tucker, 1996). Thompson states his preference to avoid frameworks that may be difficult to understand and apply, and advocates for Existentialism instead to underpin thinking, comprehension and applications of theory. However, Existentialism is again one of many potential theories that have been advocated for social work, with previously, Gilpin (1963) for example, advocating Functionalism, Houston and Campbell (2001) for Critical theory and Fook (2012) for Feminism. The writer agrees with Houston and Campbell that Critical theory offers a robust underpinning for social work, whilst Freire (2000) philosophy is discussed in this thesis to underpin professional goals for enlightenment, through committed engagement for praxis with a focus for inclusion. Further reflections on completing the research inquiry, bring thoughts for teaching that promoting awareness for the modified subjective perspective to engage learners with Payne's (2014) and Stepney and Thompson's (2018) concerns for mixing epistemologies and ontologies and makes links with the complexities of practice contexts.

The Artefact was consistently deemed by research participants and Focus group members to be of value to the learning and application of theories. Focus Group members, for example, expressed how their learning of theory had developed through from engaging in the research project and applying the Artefact as a shared framework for discussing theories. Learning from attempting to map different theories with the three domains, had also brought discussions for theories that do not easily align with the Artefact (for example, psychodynamic), although the structure of the Artefact meant that we could still discuss such theories using a shared lens and language (Fook, 2012; Biggs, 2013).

For example, when the Focus Group was discussing that psychodynamic theory did not align with any one of the three domains, the discussion itself, paradoxically added to understanding psychodynamic theory through aligning the theory with the Artefact's domains. The later development of exemplars and working Artefacts further acknowledged how learning complex information can benefit from promoting engagement with learning in different forms to align learning with states of being, such as motivation, ownership and/or achievement (Freire, 2000; Cozolino, 2002; Applegate and Shapiro, 2005). The concept of assessment in education is strongly linked with debates for self-assessment and peer assessment. Dann (2002, p.74) for example, cites the importance of early opportunities for self-assessment with promoting ownership and skills for learning; citing the Department of Education and Science that self-assessment encourages 'a clear understanding of what is expected of them, motivation to reach it, a sense of pride in positive achievements, and a realistic appraisal of weaknesses that need to be tackled'. Boud adds that self-assessment enables 'students to become effective and responsible learners who can continue their education without the intervention of teachers or courses' (2003, p.13). Self-assessment for social workers includes reflection with commitment for self-development and identifying continuous professional development opportunities. A foundational theoretical approach to mapping and selecting theory was therefore agreed by the Focus Group to align with promoting choice with the selection of theory, and to promoting ownership in further developing insights through drafting working Artefacts that exponents can update to incorporate new learning. The suggestion at the third Focus Group meeting, for members to draft their own Artefacts was unexpected, as was members' suggestions for further research projects to examine the Artefact via four related research opportunities. Some members stated that whilst they found the Artefact useful as a teaching tool, they had difficulty developing their own Artefact which led to a member advocating for a research study to ask *how* to build your own Artefact. Examining why members wanted to draft working Artefacts with those who were unsure, aligns with Gilpin (1963) and Hartman's (1978) strive for structure with choice, and potentially with the consideration for different types of social workers (Lee, 1929; Stepney, 2012).

My reflections as a lecturer are to acknowledge that whilst I had a genuine belief in the Artefact, at the beginning of the research project, I was unable to fully explain why. My motivation to understand though was encouraged by positive feedback for the Artefact, which consistently led me back to the literature, to inform the research inquiry and teaching practices. The challenge going forward as an educator, is in promoting clarity for mapping and selecting theories with aims for promoting more awareness for the complexities of blending of theories and the mixing of epistemologies and ontologies. I believe the inquiry processes, and the findings from the research project, validate the decision to prioritize participation and working together in evaluating the Artefact, which will also be fore in future teaching practices. The research project demonstrated the benefits of working together in order to engage with complex problems, and the value of a shared ethos for conscientization through praxis, which will not only continue to inform my practices as a lecturer but is embedded in my understanding of what it means to be professional. Ultimately, whilst the Artefact, works for me, I also recognize there are many alternatives metatheoretical approaches in the literature which I will continue to promote with learners in encouraging their development as autonomous practitioners and benefits of developing an in-depth knowledge of the epistemology.

The practitioner role brings another perspective to the research inquiry. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the underpinning rationale for engaging with research, was to improve practice outcomes for direct case work. The practitioner role already requires me to embrace continuous professional development in keeping abreast of new ideas and legislative changes for the profession (Health and Care Professions Council, 2012; SWE, 2019). I came into social work to be a social worker; on reflection, probably a Functional (Lee, 1929) or Mechanic (Stepney, 2012), without a clear cause for the profession or society (Wolf, 1996). In further explanation, I particularly wanted to develop transparency for statutory intervention decisions that demonstrated a variety of options had been authentically considered in coming to a final decision.

The Approved Mental Health Professional role, for example, can carry substantial pressure (and correctly so) for demonstrating that decisions to remove liberty are underpinned with rigorous assessment and clarity for decision-making that accords with understanding complex legislation. Mapping theories with student social workers, meant mapping my own theoretical practice with mental health services, and from mapping theories (Multistructural) I progressed to engaging with blending and applying theories. Biggs' Relational approach aligned with Hartman (1978) and Beckett's (2006) working in-depth, with specific, multiple theories, which led to further aligning Biggs (2013) Extended Abstract with Croisdale-Appleby's (2014) advocacy for practitioners to be 'social scientists'; not only applying multiple theories with practice but *researching* the applications of theory with practice and contributing to the epistemology (Birkenmaier, Dewees and Berg-Weger, 2014; Rapaport & Baiani, 2017). The benefits to my practitioner practice have therefore been in promoting confidence with developing an evidence-based approach to discussing theories in the workplace; to promote inclusion for theoretical perspectives within secondary, and tertiary, mental health services. The discerning of theories has also been significant in shifting from a frustration at not knowing which theories to choose, to developing a visual aid (the Artefact) for explaining my choice of theories and how I apply those theories in my role. Additionally, whilst there is still no single theory for educational or practice purposes, I boldly suggest the Artefact offers an alternative perspective, that instead of advocating theories for social work, embraces that different practitioners will want to use different theories and encourages exponents to identify their choice of theories in developing their professional sense of self (Gilpin, 1963). The Artefact offers a structure which is intended to align theorizing with promoting rights and choices, whilst careful not to suggest any theories that should be known or applied.

My first reflection as a researcher is just how much I have enjoyed *being* a researcher: to immerse myself in the subject area has been genuinely thrilling at times, whilst sharing the journey with other persons also committed to best practices, has been humbling and rewarding (Freire, 2000). My experience of *being* a researcher, is to be part of a supportive, enabling and inclusive Focus Group; working alongside other members who gave up their time to support, learn and invest in promoting social work outcomes for independence and inclusion. The identifying and gathering of valid evidence, in striving to contribute to the knowledge base, has involved understanding previously unknown-to-me philosophical concepts that have added another dimension to my understanding for the researcher role which were quite unexpected and ultimately led to me decision to focus on research and teaching as a full-time activity. Completing the literature review was another key stage in my learning and development as a researcher because my belief in structure had determined that the literature review should take a systematic approach, and whilst following the literature *is* systematic, my awareness of what a system is, has changed. I understand Fook (2012) better now than ever before. I share her concerns for creativity and actively promote awareness for creative approaches to direct case work. The researcher role further brought confirmation that the things I'm interested in, also interest other social workers and highlights the value of participation to aligns practitioner and researcher perspectives. To work effectively with participation is to genuinely embrace feedback and engage with the ideas of other people in a flexible approach that encourages other views to be heard and learned from.

6.4: *Thesis conclusion*

> *The pioneer, the creator, the explorer is generally a single, lonely person rather than a group, struggling all alone with his inner conflicts, fears, defences against arrogance and pride even against paranoia. He has to be a courageous man, not afraid to stick his neck out, not afraid even to make mistakes, well aware that he is, as Polanyi has stressed, a kind of gambler who comes to tentative conclusions in the absence of facts and then spends some years trying to find out if his hunch was correct.*

Maslow, 1971, p.4.

Participation overcomes much of Maslow's difficulties with the research role. Loneliness, for example, as a researcher can be overcome by working with groups, and inner conflicts, expressed, acknowledged and understood through debates with others. Even the courage required is bolstered by the sharing of experiences when working with other persons share goals to understand the same things you want to understand. Rigour for the research study was enhanced through the knowledge and contributions of members' discussions and participant questionnaires, which enriched the trustworthiness of findings for the research project. Writing the thesis, also benefited from the research project experiences, as well as critical reflections from practice; to promote alignment with challenging oppressive structures and developing a modified subjective epistemology. Writing the thesis, from a Critical theory perspective has galvanised my commitment to language and actions that promote independence and inclusion.

In concluding, the Artefact is offered, because as a transtheoretical discipline, Social Work requires metatheoretical approaches; that are inclusive of different approaches to learning and different levels of engagement with learning and applying theory to practice. The Artefact will continue to benefit from research that aligns with a Modified subjective perspective, to promote thinking and actions that align with practice that enables, empowers and promotes inclusion (Ryan, 2018).

The Artefact offers a potential contribution to the literature and aligns with calls for the ethical theorizing of practice, with a body of evidence in asking for recognition of the Artefact as valid and ethical (Birkenmaier, Dewees and Berg-Weger, 2014; Stepney and Thompson, 2018).

I look forward to engaging in future research projects to further my learning, and with aims to contribute to the Modified subjective epistemology in promoting goals for independence and inclusion across research, education and social work.

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175

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Appendices

Appendix 1: *Ethical approval 1*
Appendix 2: *Participant information sheet*
Appendix 3: *Participant consent form*
Appendix 4: *Ethical approval 2*
Appendix 5: *Participant information sheet*
Appendix 6: *Participant questionnaire and consent form*

Appendix 1: *Ethical approval 1*

8th January 2015

Anglia Ruskin
University

Cambridge & Chelmsford

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Cambridge
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Gavin Millar

Dear Gavin,

Re: Application for Ethical Approval

Reference Number	**ESC/DREP/14/101**
Project Title	**The Values and Limitations of the ARB Theory Model**
Principal Investigator	**Gavin Millar**

I am pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Panel (FREP) under the terms of Anglia Ruskin University's Research Ethics Policy (Dated 23/6/14, Version 1).

Ethical approval is given for a period of 3 years from the 8th January 2015.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you comply with Anglia Ruskin University's Research Ethics Policy and the Code of Practice for Applying for Ethical Approval at Anglia Ruskin University, including the following.

Appendix 1: *Page 1/2*

- The procedure for submitting substantial amendments to the committee, should there be any changes to your research. You cannot implement these amendments until you have received approval from DREP for them.
- The procedure for reporting adverse events and incidents.
- The Data Protection Act (1998) and any other legislation relevant to your research. You must also ensure that you are aware of any emerging legislation relating to your research and make any changes to your study (which you will need to obtain ethical approval for) to comply with this.
- Obtaining any further ethical approval required from the organisation or country (if not carrying out research in the UK) where you will be carrying the research out. Please ensure that you send the DREP copies of this documentation if required, prior to starting your research.
- Any laws of the country where you are carrying the research and obtaining any other approvals or permissions that are required.
- Any professional codes of conduct relating to research or requirements from your funding body (please note that for externally funded research, a Project Risk Assessment must have been carried out prior to starting the research).
- Completing a Risk Assessment (Health and Safety) if required and updating this annually or if any aspects of your study change which affect this.
- Notifying the DREP Secretary when your study has ended.

Please also note that your research may be subject to random monitoring.

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me. May I wish you the best of luck with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Jeffrey Grierson (Chair)
For the Education & Social Care Department Research Ethics Panel (DREP)

T: 0845 196 5322

E: jeffrey.grierson@anglia.ac.uk

Copy to: Beverley Pasco, Paulette Luff

Appendix 1: *Page 2/2*

Anglia Ruskin
University

Participant Consent Form

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

Title of the project:

A participative action research study considering the values and limitations of an introductory

theoretical model for social work education and practice

Aims and Objectives:

This research project will examine the values and limitations of an introductory theoretical

framework (the ABC Theory Model) which has been devised by the author to promote

students' use of theory in social work education via a Participatory Action Research

methodology.

Main investigator and contact details:	**Gavin Millar**
	Gavin.millar@anglia.ac.uk
	0845 196 5584
Research Supervisor:	**Dr Paulette Luff**
	Paulette.luff@anglia.ac.uk
	0845 196 3544

1.   I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

2.   I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.

3.   I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.

4.   I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.

5.   I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded.

6.   I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University[1] processing personal data which I have supplied.

I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research

Project as outlined to me*

Name of participant (print)…………………………Signed………………..…..Date………………

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Signed: _____   Date: _____

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[1] "The University" includes Anglia Ruskin University and its partner colleges

Appendix 2: *Page 2/2*

Appendix 3: *Participant consent form*

<u>**Participant Information Sheet:** *Focus Group*</u>

Would you like to participate in researching the Blended Contexts Theory Model?

Before you decide to contribute to the research, it is important all efforts have been made to explain to you what this research is about, and what contribution you are being asked to provide; as well as your rights to withdraw from the research.

Please read the following information to promote an informed choice to contribute (or not), and please remember if you are currently studying with Anglia Ruskin University, your engagement is entirely separate from your studies; indeed the questionnaire can be completed anonymously should you prefer to do so.

Who is undertaking this research?
This research forms part of a doctoral study for Education (EdD) by Gavin Millar. Gavin works (part-time) as a Senior Lecturer for Anglia Ruskin University; and (part-time) as a local authority Senior Social Worker & Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP).

What is the intended purpose of the research study?

This research study aims to work with social work learners to critically examine the values and limitations of the Blended Contexts Theory Model in promoting:

1) A transparent rationale for discerning (selecting) theory, and applying theory with practice

2) Inclusive learning of theory

Further to these two intended outcomes, the researcher is also committed to an ethical assessment of ontological learning and development with regard to his roles as a social work educator, learner, practitioner and researcher.

The findings from the research study are central to the researcher's doctoral studies which aim to offer a unique epistemological contribution to the current knowledge base.

To promote transparency and rigour of findings, the research study aims to involve research participants in both generating, and critically evaluate, research data.

I'm not a social worker, can I still take part?
Yes please, your views would be most welcome.

What does taking part involve?
This research values inclusion and choice, and seeks to engage research participants both in generating, and evaluating, research data.

Appendix 3: *Page 1/3*

Through a mix of participative roles, the research strives to promote rigour in analyses of the values and limitations of the Blended Contexts Theory Model through critical appraisal, triangulation, and acknowledging the expert opinion of people contributing to the research (Silver, 2008); triangulation is a 'process of using multiple methods or data sets to increase the validity of findings, on the assumption that findings are more credible if they are consistent with others' (Green & Thorogood 2018, p388).

In the first instance, a Focus Group, to involve a minimum of three research participants, is required to discuss who should be involved in the research study; and agree the research design.

How will data from my contributions as a Focus Member be used?

The researcher will record Focus Group meetings, and undertake a critical appraisal of all Focus Group contributions in developing a consensus on summative findings regarding the values and limitations of the Blended Contexts Theory Model.

A critical review of findings, participatory involvement, and examination of the researcher's learning, will subsequently form a substantial part of the researcher's doctoral thesis, and potentially inform article writing and further research studies.

Feedback from this research may also contribute to informing improved teaching and learning practices in the construction of knowledge and the application of theory with social work education and practice.

All identifying information (names, addresses, contact details, places of work) will be anonymised for all publication and presentation purposes (including thesis).

Data will be stored: In accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998; only on electronic media that is password protected; and only available to the researcher (Gavin Millar); and retained for five years to potentially inform further contributions to the knowledge base, such as article writing, whereupon it will be destroyed.

The researcher is collecting data with a view to incorporating comments made to be contained within the thesis, article writing and presentations; comments will always be anonymised.

The researcher respects your right to confidentiality, and will not share details of your comments: Unless there is an identifiable risk from your comments that suggests professional negligence; or harm to an adult(s) at risk; or an unaddressed harm to an adult(s) at risk. In such instances, although the researcher will (where possible) contact you in the first instance, there is a legal consideration to inform appropriate authorities.

Ethics
The study has received ethical approval from the Department Research Ethics Panel in the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education at Anglia Ruskin University.

Withdrawal and questions?
If you have questions in advance of attending the Focus Group, please contact via the following options:
Email address: Gavin.Millar@anglia.ac.uk
Postal address: Gavin Millar, Anglia Ruskin University, FHSCE, Young Street, Cambridge, CB1 2LZ

Appendix 3: *Page 2/3*

If you would like to withdraw your Focus Group contributions from the research, please contact the researcher within 72 hours of the Focus Group having ended via the following options:
Email address: Gavin.Millar@anglia.ac.uk
Postal address: Gavin Millar, Anglia Ruskin University, FHSCE, Young Street, Cambridge, CB1 2LZ.

What if I have a complaint?
If you have any complaints about the study please speak to me (Gavin.Millar@anglia.ac.uk) in the first instance. However if you wish to make a formal complaint, the details below will help you.

Email address: complaints@anglia.ac.uk
Postal address: Office of the Secretary and Clerk, Anglia Ruskin University, Bishops Hall Lane, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1SQ.

Appendix 4: *Ethical approval 2*

![Anglia Ruskin University logo]

25th May 2018

Cambridge & Chelmsford

Chelmsford Campus
Bishop Hall Lane
Tel: 01245493131

Int: +44 (0)1245-493131 Gavin Millar

Dear Gavin,

Principal Investigator	Gavin Millar
DREP Number	FHSCE-DREP-17-141
Project Title	What are the values and limitations of the Blended Contexts Theory Model in promoting inclusive learning and teaching of theory, for social work learners?

I am pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been approved by the Departmental Research Ethics Panel (DREP) under the terms of Anglia Ruskin University's Research Ethics Policy (Dated 8 September 2016, Version 1.7). Approval by DREP is subject to ratification by the FREP.

Ethical approval is given for 3 years from 25th May 2018. If your research will extend beyond this period, it is your responsibility to apply for an extension before your approval expires.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you comply with Anglia Ruskin University's Research Ethics Policy and the Code of Practice for Applying for Ethical Approval at Anglia Ruskin University available at www.anglia.ac.uk/researchethics including the following.

Appendix 4: *Page 1/2*

- The procedure for submitting substantial amendments to the committee, should there be any changes to your research. You cannot implement these amendments until you have received approval from DREP for them.
- The procedure for reporting accidents, adverse events and incidents.
- The Data Protection Act (1998) and General Data Protection Requirement from 25 May 2018.
- Any other legislation relevant to your research. You must also ensure that you are aware of any emerging legislation relating to your research and make any changes to your study (which you will need to obtain ethical approval for) to comply with this.
- Obtaining any further ethical approval required from the organisation or country (if not carrying out research in the UK) where you will be carrying the research out. This includes other Higher Education Institutions if you intend to carry out any research involving their students, staff or premises. Please ensure that you send the DREP copies of this documentation if required, prior to starting your research.
- Any laws of the country where you are carrying the research and obtaining any other approvals or permissions that are required.
- Any professional codes of conduct relating to research or requirements from your funding body (please note that for externally funded research, where the funding has been obtained via Anglia Ruskin University, a Project Risk Assessment must have been carried out prior to starting the research).
- Completing a Risk Assessment (Health and Safety) if required and updating this annually or if any aspects of your study change which affect this.
- Notifying the DREP Secretary when your study has ended.

Please also note that your research may be subject to monitoring.

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me. May I wish you the best of luck with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Ceri Wilson (Vice Chair)
For FHSCE Research Ethics Panel (DREP)

T: 0845 196 4189
E: ceri.wilson@anglia.ac.uk

Copy to: Paulette Luff

Appendix 4: *Page 2/2*

Appendix 5: *Participant information sheet*

Participant Information Sheet: *Online questionnaire*

Would you like to participate in researching the Blended Contexts Theory Model?

Before you decide to contribute to the research, it is important all efforts have been made to explain to you what this research is about, and what contribution you are being asked to provide; as well as your rights to withdraw from the research. Please read the following information to promote an informed choice to contribute (or not), and please remember if you are currently studying with Anglia Ruskin University, your engagement is entirely separate from your studies; indeed the questionnaire can be completed anonymously should you prefer to do so.

Who is undertaking this research?

This research forms part of a doctoral study for Education (EdD) by Gavin Millar. Gavin works (part-time) as a Senior Lecturer for Anglia Ruskin University; and (part-time) as a local authority Senior Social Worker & Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP). More information is available on the webpage: *Who is researching the Blended Contexts Theory Model?*

What is the intended purpose of the research study?

This research study aims to work with social work learners to critically examine the values and limitations of the Blended Contexts Theory Model in promoting:

1) A transparent rationale for discerning (selecting) theory, and applying theory with practice

2) Inclusive learning of theory

Appendix 5: *Page 1/6*

Further to these two intended outcomes, the researcher is also committed to an ethical assessment of ontological learning and development with regard to his roles as a social work educator, learner, practitioner and researcher.

The findings from the research study are central to the researcher's doctoral studies which aim to offer a unique epistemological contribution to the current knowledge base.

To promote transparency and rigour of findings, the research study aims to involve research participants in both generating, and critically evaluate, research data.

More information is available on the BlendedContextsTheoryModel website; webpage 'Why research the Blended Contexts Theory Model?'

I'm not a social worker, can I still take part?
Yes please, your views would be most welcome.

What does taking part involve?
This research values inclusion and choice, and seeks to engage research participants both in generating, and evaluating, the research data.

Through a mix of participative roles, the research strives to promote rigour in analyses of the values and limitations of the Blended Contexts Theory Model through critical appraisal, triangulation, and acknowledging the expert opinion of people contributing to the research (Silver, 2008); triangulation is a 'process of using multiple methods or data sets to increase the validity of findings, on the assumption that findings are more credible if they are consistent with others' (Green & Thorogood 2018, p388).

Specifically, research participants can choose from the following options:

1) to complete the **online questionnaire anonymously**; please note that an anonymous questionnaire cannot be withdrawn from the research, at any time

2) to complete the **online questionnaire and consent to sharing contact details** for further research purposes; for example, you may be contacted to expand on a certain aspect of your questionnaire feedback

3) request to **complete the questionnaire with the researcher**; the research plans for a minimum of three participants to complete the questionnaire with the researcher; to offer the researcher an opportunity to learn from participants experiences of completing the questionnaire

4) **Become a Focus Group member**
   The Focus Group is to involve a minimum of three research participants, meeting on a minimum of three occasions (with the researcher) to critique the researcher's formative findings of submitted questionnaires; and ultimately agree summative findings for the research study.

Questionnaires can be submitted, and withdrawn, until midnight, 01.11.2018.

If you consent to completing an online questionnaire, you will be asked to comment on questions relating to the intended goals of the study. You may choose to complete the questionnaire anonymously. Or, you may offer your contact details if you agree to further contact regarding this research study.

How will data from my questionnaire be used?

The researcher will review all questionnaires submitted in the first instance with a view to identifying any emerging themes. Subsequently, the researcher will identify a minimum of 4 online questionnaires, and two interview questionnaires, as core research data.

Core data, along with the researcher's initial findings, will then be shared with the Focus Group to further critique the formative findings, and agree summative findings (over the three meetings) for the research study.

The Focus Group will be invited from the selected core questionnaires in the first instance; other research participants may also be asked to attend, for example if there are insufficient numbers from the first round of invites.

A critical review of findings, participatory involvement, and examination of the researcher's learning, will subsequently form a substantial part of the researcher's doctoral thesis, and potentially inform article writing and further research studies.

Feedback from this research may also contribute to informing improved teaching and learning practices in the construction of knowledge and the application of theory with social work education and practice.

All identifying information (names, addresses, contact details, places of work) will be anonymised for all publication and presentation purposes (including thesis).

Data will be stored: In accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998; only on electronic media that is password protected; and only available to the researcher (Gavin Millar); and retained for five years (01.11.2023) to potentially inform further contributions to the knowledge base, such as article writing, whereupon it will be destroyed.

The researcher is collecting data with a view to incorporating comments made to be contained within the thesis, article writing and presentations; comments will always be anonymised.

The researcher respects your right to confidentiality, and will not share details of your comments: Unless there is an identifiable risk from your comments that suggests professional negligence; or harm to an adult(s) at risk; or an unaddressed harm to an adult(s) at risk. In such instances, although the researcher will (where possible) contact you in the first instance, there is a legal consideration to inform appropriate authorities.

Ethics

The study has received ethical approval from the Department Research Ethics Panel in the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education at Anglia Ruskin University.

Withdrawal and questions?

If you have questions in advance of completing this online questionnaire, please contact the researcher via the following options:

Email address: Gavin.Millar@anglia.ac.uk

Postal address: Gavin Millar, Anglia Ruskin University, FHSCE, Young Street, Cambridge, CB1 2LZ

Participants can withdraw their questionnaire at any time before midnight, 01.11.2018.

If you would like to withdraw your completed questionnaire from the research, please contact the researcher via the following options (please note an anonymised questionnaire cannot be withdrawn from the research at any time): Email address: Gavin.Millar@anglia.ac.uk

Postal address: Gavin Millar, Anglia Ruskin University, FHSCE, Young Street, Cambridge, CB1 2LZ.

What if I have a complaint?

If you have any complaints about the study please speak to me (Gavin.Millar@anglia.ac.uk) in the first instance. However if you wish to make a formal complaint, the details below will help you.

Email address: complaints@anglia.ac.uk

Postal address: Office of the Secretary and Clerk, Anglia Ruskin University, Bishops Hall Lane, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1SQ.

Appendix 6: *Participant questionnaire and consent form*
The Blended Contexts Theory Model:
A tool promoting inclusive learning of theory with social work learners

Page 1:   Introduction to the survey

Consent

Title of the project: *What are the values and limitations of the Blended Contexts Theory Model in promoting inclusive learning and teaching of theory with social work learners?*

Main investigator and contact details: *Gavin Millar; Anglia Ruskin University, Young Street, Cambridge, CB21LZ; gavin.millar@anglia.ac.uk*

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet (*Version control: V1.2; 24.10.16)* for the study. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason.

3. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.

4. I understand what will happen to the data collected from me for the research.

5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

6. I understand that quotes from me will be used in the dissemination of the research.

Data   Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

1. Name (Optional)

```
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│                             │
└─────────────────────────────┘
```

1 a. Date

```
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│                             │
└─────────────────────────────┘
```

This research study plans for three participants to complete the questionnaire with the researcher; to offer the researcher an opportunity to learn from participants' experiences of completing the questionnaire. Face-to-face interviews will be recorded unless you express that you disagree to being recorded. Please email: Gavin.Millar@anglia.ac.uk

WITHDRAWAL:

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY.

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please speak to the researcher or email them at (gavin.millar@anglia.ac.uk) stating the title of the research.

You do not have to give a reason for why you would like to withdraw.

Please let the researcher know whether you are/are not happy for them to use any data from you collected to date in the write up and dissemination of the research.

Version Control: Date 24.10.16; *V1.2*

2.   How are you involved in learning (or teaching)

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3. Would you please share any difficulties you experience with learning theory?

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4. How do you currently learn (or teach) theory?

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5. What are your initial thoughts about the Blended Theory Model?

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6. Have you thoughts about Overarching, Assessment & Intervention as contexts for learning social work theory? For example, is it useful, or does it confuse your understanding of theory?

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7. What do you think about the 'overarching' context; have you identified (at least) one theory that you might apply within the overarching context?

[   ]

8. What do you think about the 'assessment' context; can you identify (at least one) theory for that context?

[   ]

9. What do you think about the 'intervention' context; have you identified (at least) one theory for that context?

[   ]

10. How might the Blended Context Theory Model be improved to further promote blending of theories?

[   ]

10. Please state why you found the Blended Theory Model either useful or unhelpful, in blending theories applicable to social work?

[ ]

12. How can the Blended Theory Model be improved upon to further promote blending of theories for social work purposes?

[ ]

13. Did you find the Blended Theory Model useful, or unhelpful, in linking theory with social work practice? Please explain your reasons

[ ]

15. Will you consider using the Blended Theory Model?

Please explain why/whynot?

[ ]

14. How can the Blended Theory Model be improved upon to link theory with social work practices?

[ ]

16   What do you think researchers should be reflecting upon with regard to how we learn and teach theory?

[ ]

17   Can you please feedback on the website – what works, and/or what would benefit from changing?

[ ]

18. Would you like to offer further comments?

[ ]

19.   The research study plans for a minimum of three research participants to form (with the researcher) a Focus Group, to meet on a minimum of three occasions with the purpose of critiquing the researcher's formative (initial) findings from submitted questionnaires. The Focus Group will also have the purpose of agreeing summative findings for the research study. If you consent to being approached to become a Focus Group member, please confirm in the box below

:

◯ I consent to being asked about becoming a Focus Group member

◯ I do not wish to be contacted with regard to becoming a Focus Group member

Contact information
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