DIMENSIONS OF CREATIVITY IN GENERALIST SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE: CONSTRUCTIONS OF RETIRING PRACTITIONERS

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DIMENSIONS OF CREATIVITY IN GENERALIST SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE: CONSTRUCTIONS OF RETIRING PRACTITIONERS

by

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ABSTRACT

Creativity is often proclaimed as a valuable and central element of social work practice, and social workers are regularly urged to incorporate creativity into their work, however little research describing creative social work practice exists. The purpose of this study is to contribute to a broader conceptualization of creativity in social work by examining how experienced generalist social work practitioners construct creativity in social work practice. Thirty retiring practitioners were interviewed using grounded theory methodology from a constructivist perspective. The study was conducted bilingually, in French and English.

The practitioners' constructions of creativity in social work practice led to the following definition: Creativity in social work practice occurs when a social worker intentionally envisages beyond the presumed levels of good practice required in their roles and functions, and accepts a challenge which often leads him or her to utilize uncommon, unfamiliar, or previously unconsidered means to pursue greater social justice and heightened empowerment.

Analysis of the data also led to the development of five dimensions which can facilitate incorporating greater creativity into social work practice. The dimensions are presented through the metaphor of fire-making, and include: 1. The significance of the practitioner as an individual; 2. Foundations for practicing social work creatively; 3. The social and political environment; 4. The need for an assertive commitment to practicing creatively; and 5. The need for ongoing sharing of examples of forms of creative practice.

The retiring social work practitioners shared numerous examples of creativity in social work practice from their experience. They identified the profession's need for greater creativity in the education and development of social workers, in speaking out and taking risks, in bringing about changes in bureaucracies, and in bringing about an increase in advocacy and radicalism.

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> There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done;
> There are thousands to prophecy failure
> There are thousands to point out to you
> The dangers that wait to assail you
> But just settle in with a bit of a grin,
> Just take off your hat and go to it
> Just start to sing as you tackle the thing
> That cannot be done and you'll do it! (Author Unknown)

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 Purpose of research

Creativity has often been presented as a key element within the art of social work practice (Siporin, 1988). Authors who have provided support for its significance and the "social work as art" perspective have written such works as: *Creative social work* (Brandon & Jordan, 1979), *Creative change* (Goldstein, 1984), *The creative generalist: A guide to social work practice* (Heus & Pincus, 1986), *The creative practitioner* (Gelfand, 1988), and *Serious play: Creativity and innovation in social work* (Weissman, 1990).

While the existence of these works suggests that social work has not ignored the subject of creativity, Rapoport (1968) had good reason to suggest, at the time of her writing thirty years ago: "It (creativity) has not been made the subject of serious inquiry, nor has it been endowed with values, dignity, and institutional supports which a genuine commitment would demand" (p. 140).

Rapoport, were she alive today, would be pleased to know that others share her well-warranted preoccupation with the need to promote creativity and to provide it with a more credible status. Recent authors who have written of the need for the social work profession to pay greater attention to creativity include Walz & Uematsu (1997) who call on Schools of Social Work to nurture creativity among students by providing them with exposure to a learning environment which itself reflects a commitment to creative approaches. Lewarne (1998) likewise urges the profession to take on a leadership role in a movement towards a paradigmatic shift which would see enhanced creativity at a

societal level. Gingerich & Green (1996) also express their hope that social workers will be leaders in realizing "creative and constructive new solutions" (p. 28) where practice intersects with technology.

Gelfand's (1982) expression of confidence in the benefits to increasing creativity continues to be pertinent. He states, "Many new practice techniques can be invented if practitioners learn the skills associated with the innovative process" (p. 502). In Weissman's (1990) edited collection of social worker reflections on creativity and innovation, he identifies the following reasons for paying more attention to creativity: the nature of the work (i.e. dealing with complex problems); the inadequacy of current professional knowledge; and the fluctuating and "turbulent" environment within which social work finds itself. Beyond this, Weissman also highlights the personal significance of creativity to social workers: "It simply is exciting, exhilarating, and satisfying to create something" (p. xv).

The purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to a clearer conceptualization of creativity in the social work profession through a research process which focuses on the voices of experienced generalist social work practitioners. Thirty retiring professional social workers are invited to share their perspectives on creativity and to encourage others in the field to engage in discussion and reflection in order to gain a more in-depth understanding about this "multi-dimensional, multi-perspectival, and probably, infinitely complex" (Yau, 1995, p. 60) phenomenon known as creativity. This research represents a serious inquiry into creativity, to build on it conceptually and to promote it within social work practice, training, and curriculum development.

1.2 Overview of dissertation

In this, the introductory chapter to the dissertation, I present the historical debate surrounding social work as art and science as a contextual backdrop to the study of creativity in social work practice. Chapter 2 provides a review of general creativity literature, as well as material relating to creativity in the domain of empowerment-centred generalist social work practice. In Chapter 3, methodology is discussed, followed by a transitional orientation to the data analysis sections in Chapter 4.

Chapters 5 to 7 consist of a presentation of the themes and constructs which emerged from the interviews. In Chapter 5, creativity as a construct in social work practice is defined by the practitioners. Five elements important to a comprehension of creativity in social work are presented through the metaphor of fire-making in Chapter 6. The presentation of findings concludes with the practitioners' identification of areas where creativity is urgently needed in Chapter 7.

In Chapter 8, I share reflections on the research from my position as researcher, followed by a discussion of the implications of this research for social work practice, education and research in Chapter 9. The final chapter provides a summary and conclusion to the dissertation.

1.3 Creativity - Art and Science debate

The profession of social work has witnessed continuous debate throughout its history on the subject of whether it more closely resembles art or science (England, 1986; Goldstein, 1984; Rapoport, 1968; Schon, 1983; Siporin, 1988). Accounts of the historical dance between "social work as art" and "social work as science" reveal various

phases of development (England, 1986; Reamer, 1993). Bowers (1950) made the observation that prior to 1930 most definitions of social casework classified it as an art. However, Gordon Hamilton's 1929 tribute to Mary Richmond attempted a diplomatic bridge between science and art by insisting that creative people such as Richmond skillfully incorporate both scientific and artistic attributes in their practice (Wheeler, 1978).

By 1941, Edith Abbott was emphasizing the need for a scientifically-based training foundation for men and women preparing for careers in social welfare (Wheeler, 1978). Two decades later, Boehm (1961) is said to have equated the performance of skills with the expression of one's creativity, which was followed by the 1975 assertion of Bloom that "In a word, helping professionally is a continually creative act — or should be" (Wheeler, 1978, p. 20).

Later we hear Davies (1985) echoing the same sentiment in his statement that "Social work *is* a creative job and artistry of the practitioner is a vital component once the other qualities have been mastered" (p. 186). The other qualities which Davies considers to be vital are such things as genuineness, empathy, knowledge, warmth, efficiency and sensitivity. England (1986), meanwhile, maintains that social work's central identity with the artistic tradition is something which has benefits for society as a whole, for it enables members of the profession to play a valuable role in the interpretation of meaning and experience of those with whom social workers come into contact on a daily basis.

Rapoport (1968) provides an explanation of how both art and science are in fact in constant combination whenever social work is being performed. She states: "Science

refers to how basic knowledge is arrived at; art refers to how it is adapted and applied" (p. 141). Another contribution to the discussion can be found in a recent edition of a comprehensive social work textbook in which authors Sheafor, Horejsi and Horejsi (1997) propose a merging of art and science. The scientific aspects of the profession are found in five distinct areas: collection and analysis of data related to social functioning; development of new practice techniques and programs based on accumulated knowledge; creation of conceptual frameworks and theoretical hypotheses based on data; critical analysis of the impact of intervention; and exchange between members of the profession regarding their propositions and practices.

Artistry, the authors claim, is evident in various aspects of the work:

> ...the compassion and courage to confront human suffering; the capacity to build a meaningful and productive helping relationship; the creativity to overcome barriers to change; the ability to infuse the change process with hopefulness and energy; the exercise of sound judgment; the appropriate personal values; and the formation of an effective professional style (Sheafor et al., 1997, p. 36).

Reamer (1993) further asserts that:

> ...the respective strengths of science and art need to supplement each other in social work. The rigor of science can add discipline and fine-grained detail to what might otherwise be amorphous, cloudlike aesthetic descriptions of practice. An aesthetic framework, however, can add conceptual, emotional, and contextual depth, along with a multidimensional view, to empirically based measures that might otherwise be mechanically fact-filled, sterile, unidimensional, and stripped of context (p. 192).

1.4 Summary

The debate surrounding whether or not science in social work practice is more predominant, an equal partner, or holds a minority stance to art in social work practice

will likely continue to pervade commentaries about social work in at least the imminent future. Currently there appears to be agreement that elements of both are important within this profession.

A pivotal issue brought up by Wheeler (1978) remains relevant. It is the fact that "Most past references to art or creativity have taken the forms of mere recognition. There have been no direct systematic or operational conceptualizations offered which would assist a caseworker in increasing his/her own creative or artistic abilities" (Wheeler, 1978, p. 22). It is necessary to more clearly understand and operationalize creativity in order to facilitate the process of designing and identifying activities which would lead to an expansion of its presence in the domain.

Within a tradition which recognizes social work as an art form, creativity has been identified as an essential aspect of social work practice. While there are many calls for social workers to be more "creative" and some works have been devoted to providing a direction for achieving that goal, there exists a lack of clarity as to what creativity in social work practice actually entails and in what forms it appears.

As a starting point, a working definition of creativity can be assembled from four components of Webster's (1993) treatment of "creation" and "creative". The four relevant elements are: 1) "expressive of the maker"; 2) "having the quality of something created rather than imitated or assembled"; 3) "an original work of art or of the imagination"; and 4) "the act or practice of making, inventing, devising, fashioning, or producing".

The need for practitioner-based voices to contribute their conceptualizations and experience toward a better understanding of creativity and social work practice is in

keeping with a philosophical stance that insists on the participation of the people who are most involved in a particular activity, situation or issue. A collection of generalist social workers' perspectives on the relevance of creativity in practice, and on the empowerment-creativity relationship is a neglected but important contribution to the literature. The data gathered in this research provides a clearer portrait of the multi-faceted manifestations of creativity in the day-to-day practice of generalist social work.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The theoretical framework for this research extends over two bodies of literature. The first includes general theories and discussion about creativity. The second covers the range of ideas which have been shared with regard to creativity and social work, generalist practice, and the concept of empowerment.

2.1 General theories and discussion about creativity

The concept of creativity has achieved recognition among scholars in fields such as psychology, language arts, sociology, education and management (Feist & Runco, 1993; Isaksen, Murdock, Firestein, & Treffinger, 1993). A brief summary of the historical development of creativity research up to the mid-1960's is provided by Taylor and Barron (1966). They cite works such as Sir Francis Galton's *Inquiries into Human Faculty* in 1883 and Spearman's *Creative Mind*, written in 1930, as being among the few contributions to the domain until 1950, when J.P. Guilford, then president of the American Psychological Association, publicly affirmed his belief in the need for and importance of creativity research. A national creativity conference was held two years later.

Creativity research continued to ride a wave of popularity into the 1960s, reflected in a statement by Golovin (1966):

> ...the essential foundation for technological progress is determined by two variables: first, the total number of adequately trained and motivated scientists and engineers directly concerned with generating such progress, and, second, the average level of creative capabilities of such scientists and engineers (p. 8).

Implicit in this reference to "creative capabilities" is an acceptance that the potential for creativity exists in every person. This assumption is captured by Swede's (1993) affirmation that: "..everyone is creative, to a greater (universal) or lesser (personal) degree. The capacity for creativity is built into all of us" (p. 10). Viewing creativity from such a perspective rather than one which assumes it to be a unique talent or a personality trait found only in "gifted" individuals, has provided the necessary backdrop for research exploration into methods of enhancing those creative capabilities.

Creativity has been assigned many varying definitions in the literature. Isaksen and Murdock (1993) offer Welsch's 1980 statement derived from a review of 22 definitions found in the literature as being adequately representative:

> Creativity is the process of generating unique products by transformation of existing products. These products, tangible and intangible, must be unique only to the creator, and must meet the criteria of purpose and value established by the creator (p. 17).

The notion of transformation in the definition is expanded in Koestler (1981) who emphasizes: "The creative act does not create something out of nothing, like the God of the Old Testament: it combines, reshuffles, and relates already existing but hitherto separate ideas, facts, frames of perception, associative contexts" (p. 2). With regard to the creative product's value being determined by the creator, Stein (1966) would argue that the usefulness would necessarily have to be deemed so by a group at a particular moment in history. Perhaps the difference in perspectives can be explained by understanding Welsch's (1980) definition as being more representative of personal creativity while Stein (1996) was referring more to the "universal" type.

In contrast to sectors which might dismiss creativity as being unimportant, frivolous or arbitrary, Bailin (1988) maintains:

> ...creativity has to do with significant achievement and such achievement takes place against the background of dynamics and evolving traditions of knowledge and inquiry. It involves rule-following as well as rule-breaking and an understanding of when to do each. It involves skills deployed with imagination and imagination directed by skill (p. 131).

Beyond definitions, creativity has also been conceptualized by differentiating between the creative person, product, process and environment (Mooney, 1966). Thus the treatment of the concept has seen some researchers focused on the personal characteristics of creative individuals (McLeod, Lobel & Cox 1996; Woodman, 1981), some who were concerned with assessing the creativity required to realize original and novel products, and others who investigated the road leading from the person to the product which represents the creative process (Kuman, Kemmler & Holman, 1997).

In reference to the environment, Swede (1993) notes: "The right setting can facilitate creative work, the wrong one, inhibit it" (p. 13). The pressure to conform, or to rely on authority are examples of possible environmental blocks to creativity-based practice (Parnes & Meadow, 1966). Several books have been written which discuss environmental and institutional constraints to creativity, and how they can be overcome (Ayan, 1997; Black, 1995; Collier, 1996; Hall, 1995; Landry, 1992). These authors have recognized that there can be a lot of negativity toward even considering new ideas, and that part of the work for individuals and organizations who wish to be "more creative" is creating a climate in which people feel safe to engage in a creative problem solving process or to express themselves in creative ways.

Jakab (1979), recognizing the challenging task of defining creativity within the realm of working with mental health patients, points to additional criteria toward assessing the presence of creativity. She recommends looking beyond a product's aesthetic value, and judging whether the act or product in question contributes to increased self-esteem within the creator, facilitates self-expression, and serves as a vehicle for work around conflicts which may be unconscious. Within such a perspective, "creative" therapy would encompass activities which encourage expression through means other than the traditional verbal ones.

Three creativity theorists — William Gordon, Alex Osborn, and Sidney Parnes — have been recognized for making contributions which have had a major impact upon fields of human inquiry. William Gordon's (1961) work on synectics, in which analogies and similes serve to "make the familiar strange and the strange familiar" is described by Gendrop (1996) as "...a metaphorical equation, designed to stimulate conscious, preconscious and subconscious thought" (p. 14).

A second creativity technique to emerge was "brainstorming", given birth by Alex Osborn's *Applied Imagination* (1963), with the third major contribution coming from Sidney Parnes (1977) who encouraged people to create new ideas by "...shifting perspectives to apprehend new relationships between elements of an object or event" (in Siporin, 1988, p. 181). Numerous researchers and practitioners have used the theoretical underpinnings of these models as an impetus for their own work (Gelfand, 1988; Markley, 1988; Stein, 1992).

Pruyser (1979) offers a deeply insightful discussion to the general literature regarding the essence of creativity. Some of the properties which he ascribes to a creative work include "an imaginative breakthrough, a daring, a leap into the unknown, a hope rather than a mere wish" (p. 304). He continues to attempt to capture creativity by also alluding to its *interactive* nature — from his perspective, a dynamic occurs both within the creator and that which is being created. He describes this process in a number of ways: "...the painting steers the painter's hand, the musical motif carries the composer on, meter and rhyme force the poet's own imaginative leaps, and the orator finds himself speaking sentences that have a life of their own" (p. 305).

On the issue of the creative process and aging, Golf (1989) points out incongruence in the stereotype that creativity is more predominant in individuals in the earlier years of their careers. She writes:

> We should also be aware that the older individuals are themselves a unique and rich source of creative energies and talents which could enhance the lives of younger generations. But we will have to look beyond the limited definitions of creativity which focus only on the quantitative issues (e.g., How many products and/or publications are identified at certain points in the life span?) and instead focus on the multi-dimensional qualities of creative abilities that may be more characteristic of the "second half of life" (p. 200-201).

Some may argue that given the current environment of economic rationalization in which social workers have grown accustomed to equating accountability with conformity to procedures, creativity appears to be both irrelevant and irretrievable. Yet, creativity's value has not passed unnoticed in fields such as business, management, technology, manufacturing and science. Centres for creative leadership house executives and management staff for weeks at a time in an attempt to give them an edge over

competitors. Titles such as *The competitive power of constant creativity* (Carr, 1994), and *Creative and innovative management* (Charnes & Cooper, 1984) reflect the awareness that there is merit to delving into what a creative approach has to offer.

A steady movement toward inviting front line workers in large corporations to be creative and seek solutions is also testimony that economic constraints do not necessarily choke out the need for or value of creativity. Another sign of appreciation for creativity is seen in companies which afford their employees opportunities to "play" during company time (Ayan, 1997; Collier, 1996).

Recently published articles from other fields include Blissett and McGrath (1996). They explored the relationship between creativity and interpersonal problem-solving training skills in adults and determined that there were immediate effects of providing training in creativity. In another study, Gendrop (1996), interested in ways to expand creative thinking capacities of nurses, found that synectics training led to increased creative abilities in nurses. A third recent research effort around creativity was conducted by McLeod et al. (1996) who attempted to determine whether ethnically diverse groups display higher creativity than homogeneous groups. Results suggested that ideas which came from the more diverse group were of better quality in terms of potential effectiveness and feasibility than those which arose from the comparison groups.

There has been a continual interest in creativity and artistic expression as a therapeutic treatment technique. Talerico (1985) identifies four key areas in use of expressive arts as therapy: bibliotherapy, poetry therapy, creative writing, and music therapy. Snyder (1997) writes of "Healing the Soul through Creativity" in another

example, while a journal focused on art therapy carries an article by Kerr (1999) who discusses the psycho-social significance of creativity in working with older adults.

One other field in which creativity receives much attention and interest is in the field of education. At the graduate level of university education, Bargar and Duncan (1982), in their article entitled *Cultivating creative endeavor in doctoral research*, write, "The doctoral dissertation is generally viewed as one of the student's earliest endeavors in creative scholarship and research: a time when one can experience the kaleidoscope patterns of thoughts and feelings indigenous to a life of intellectual inquiry" (p.1).

Having situated the concept of creativity within the general field of academic inquiry, attention can now be given to reviewing its treatment in the literature which serves to advise and educate the social work profession.

2.2 Social work and creativity

The literature provides an array of offerings which proclaim a significant role for creativity within the field of social work. Among those who proclaim its centrality to the profession are Siporin (1988) who states that creativity is the overriding characteristic of the art of social work practice.

Authors Garvin and Seabury (1997) reveal inherent creativity in how we think about social work, through the presentation of four metaphors found in social work practice today: moral (good versus evil), disease (health and treatment), nature (growth versus decay) and mercenary (cost versus efficiency). The significance of these and other metaphors used in social work is that they "...are implicit and not easily recognized, although they fundamentally influence how social workers view clients and interventions.

Practitioners rarely question their own metaphorical orientation, although they question that of others when it differs from their own" (p. 31-32).

Sheafor, Horejsi and Horejsi (1997) express confidence that creativity will always be important due to the fact that each client approaches the worker from a unique and ever-changing situation. Gelfand's (1982) viewpoint is that "The introduction of imaginative techniques into the daily practice of social workers in a structured and systematic manner can greatly enhance the performance of practice" (p. 499).

Weissman (1990) seems to be in agreement, claiming that creative practitioners have "...the ability to come up with novel deviations and changes which add a distinctive touch to the schemas, or ultimately result in new schema — doing something better, or doing something quite different" (p. 62). Others who have attempted to identify the characteristics of creativity include Gitterman (1986) who asserted that the willingness to risk, to learn from mistakes, and to change are inherent in a creative approach. In their definition of creativity, Beaudry and Trottier (1994) include the capacity to adjust one's behaviour to the needs and interests of each client, along with the ability to seek tools from a variety of methods.

Wheeler (1978) listed some trademarks of creative practice as being spontaneous flexibility, originality, ease of expression, and an ability to redefine situations, while Pamperin (1987), in describing creative social workers, identified a higher tolerance for ambiguity. Meanwhile Gelfand (1982) cites the application of divergent and convergent thinking in the problem-solving process as being inherent within creative social work practice.

England (1986), attempting to highlight the intrinsic worthiness of social work as an art form, asserts that the process of understanding and interpreting meaning is what gives social work its unique purpose and mission. He writes:

> The social worker, then, like the poet, must bring together disparate elements of the ordinary world, and he (sic) too must do so with unusually profound understanding, for his understanding must enrich the understanding of his (sic) clients. It is in this sense that the worker is creative; he (sic) is not just a critic understanding the meaning and expression of others, but an artist giving expression to his own understanding in a way that others will value (p. 106-107).

Social work dissertations studying some aspect of creativity include Conboy (1990), Jackson (1979), Pearlman (1989) and Wheeler (1978). In 1979, Eugene Jackson produced his contribution which explored creative problem solving among social workers. Noting that predetermined solutions and interventions cannot pretend to meet the changing needs of unique humans presenting unique situations, Jackson suggests that attention needs to be focused on the mechanisms by which one can problem solve. That process is one which, according to Jackson, is "inherently creative", and warrants the development of "creative social workers" (p. 9).

Conboy (1990) explored how the functioning of older individuals in areas of health, work, and life satisfaction was positively impacted by their engaging in creative activities such as painting, sculpting, and illustrating. The sample population was drawn from visual artists between the ages of 75 and 96.

Pearlman (1989) conducted a study which examined creativity among graduate social work students in the course of their field placements, as did Wheeler (1978). In the latter study, some of the students were provided with a course in creativity while others

were not, and testing was conducted on both groups prior to and after the intervention. A significant increase was found in the students' self-perceptions of creativity among those who were provided with the training.

With respect to creativity in the various forms of social work practice, Rapoport (1968) states that "Creativeness, artistry, and craftsmanship, it should be emphasized, all have a place in each of the social work methods: in casework, group work, community organization, as well as in research, supervision, administration, collaboration and consultation" (p. 143). Weissman (1990) points out the need to see creativity on a continuum with competence, and identifies a legitimate goal to be providing suggestions with regard to "...how the individual social worker can keep from being stifled, and foster his or her movement towards the creative end of the continuum — where creativity complements competence" (p. xiii).

Writings which discuss creativity at a therapeutic and casework intervention level are abundant. Peterson (1991), for example, writes about the benefits of a metaphoric storytelling technique when working with children and youth. Sheppard & Kanter (1995) utilize creativity in assisting an older woman living in isolation to continue to live independently. The use of writing as a therapeutic method is described by Leavitt & Pill (1995), while Kaminsky (1985) discusses the relevance of reminiscence therapy in social work with older clients. Bibliotherapy itself, a familiar tool in individual counselling, offers many facets of creativity to the intervention (Howie, 1983).

An interesting exploration into creativity and child protection social work was conducted by Stanford (1995). She describes a sense of confusion among the social

workers whom she interviewed: "They were convinced that creativity was essential, and that they were creative in some of their practice, but they maintained that their creativity was continually vitiated or waylaid when working in child protection. Their very language and manner of expression illustrated their sense of puzzlement" (p. 137).

Examples of articles dealing with creativity in social work with groups include Powell (1994) who provided writing workshops for under-educated women who lived in housing projects. Descriptions of the use of psychodrama with groups of older people in nursing homes (Carman & Nordin, 1984) and use of poetry in gerontological social work (Mazza, 1998) can also be found. Gitterman (1986) wrote on the subject of creativity and the theory and practice of group work, while Juul (1989) discusses creativity in working with groups of youth and children.

Authors speaking of creativity in work with families include Sloman and Pipitone (1991) who recommend many instances when letter writing may be beneficial in allowing different family members, including those who were child victims of sexual or physical abuse, to express themselves. Laird and Hartman (1990), describing their personal experiences with creativity as social workers in the field of family therapy, place an importance upon metaphors found in family stories and in rituals. They write:

> How was it that families, with scores of members and hundreds of memorable events as raw material for drama, selected and fashioned only a few central stories as part of the family mythology? These stories, which often seemed to be linked to form patterns over time, seemed to be expressive of the family's individual worldview, its core themes. The stories, although often brief and frequently cautionary, were clearly packed with meaning and metaphor (p. 20).

Examples of creativity at the organizational and community level of practice are also apparent in the literature. Lee and Rossi (1993) discuss problem-solving strategies when working with communities, while Gleeson, Jimmie and Dubois (1993) express interest in creative cooperative approaches between schools of social work, professional organizations, and agencies with a child welfare mandate, regarding the development of trained social workers for that field. Zibalese-Crawford (1997) offers innovation in the area of program development around HIV/AIDS with the adolescent population.

Peile (1993) has written extensively about creativity as a defining paradigm for the profession. He defines it as "the fundamental nature of all processes" (p. 132). He describes all things as having a creative process to them, an attribute which, he admits, runs counter to a societal belief in control and predictability. He explains: "The creativity of a specific object can be understood only within the broader processes of creativity in which that object is involved. Everything is in a creative process, and everything is part of the overall creative process of the whole" (p. 132).

My personal investigation into the subject of creativity required, as an initial step, a literature review to gain a better general sense of how creativity is portrayed, described, and utilized as a concept in social work literature. This led to the publication of an article (Turner, 1999) in which I develop a conceptual framework to assist social workers in understanding the forms of creativity in practice. Based on the literature review, forms of creativity in social work practice were categorized under the following headings: creative expression (as a therapeutic intervention tool including writing, painting and music); creative presentation of self by the social worker (style, use of metaphor, spontaneity,

flexibility and risk-taking); creative conceptualization at the direct practice level (identification of innovative solutions to problems using various methods to generate alternatives); creative conceptualization at the community practice level (identification of where change is needed at a structural level, and innovative methods to bring about these changes); and Peile's (1993) creative cosmology, a paradigm in which those involved in an intervention creatively engage in interactions which hold the potential for a variety of outcomes, rather than arising from an all-chaotic or strictly deterministic framework (Turner, 1999).

Ife (1988) notes that, "If they (social workers) are to provide appropriate help to clients, and if they are to continue to work towards social justice, they will need to develop and display a degree of creativity and imagination generally not hitherto found in the profession" (p. 21). Peile (1993) offers some suggestions for members of the social work profession regarding this need to incorporate greater creativity into practice. He encourages a verbal sharing of the practitioner's thinking process, including the generating of possibilities, with clients. He also recognizes value in social workers exchanging their attempts to be creative with one another.

Another author who advocates greater commitment to creativity by the profession is Lewarne (1998) who claims that greater training is required in the area of intuitive problem solving and thinking. She writes that skill in this particular area permits one to "revolutionize perception by developing an ability to see patterns in chaos; opening to information in a new way; seeing relationships and non-linear connections; and becoming facilitators of disorder to create a new order" (p. 8).

It is important that social workers pay attention not only to being creative in their thinking around problem-solving, but that they personally engage in the process of being artistically creative. England (1986) states:

> ...equally significant is the need for social workers and students to *be* artists. Social work must explore the scope of creative composition, in various forms, as a means of helping workers increase their powers of perception and expression, for if social work rests upon the worker's art, his (sic) ability to articulate his (sic) own meanings, then to require him (sic) to be 'artist" may be the best and most concise route to the identification and enhancement of these skills. This expressive use links in turn to the therapeutic potential of the arts, for by this rationale such creativity must be of use to clients at least as much as to workers... (p. 133).

Sheafor, Horejsi and Horejsi (1997) also speak of creativity in the form of artistic expression as being critical to social workers' personal well-being. They note that it is possible to find many social workers "...who are quite talented in various forms of artistic expression such as music, painting, acting, creative writing, sewing, photography, dance, (and) woodworking" (p. 33). Benefits to making use of these abilities, they claim, lie in the potential to deal with the stress inherent in the work, and to make a qualitative difference in the lives of others.

2.3 Generalist social work practice, empowerment and creativity

The "Generalist Practice Approach" began to develop in the late 1960s, in response to the recognized need for a model which "provided versatility and met the requirement for a flexible approach to social work practice demanded by the increasing complexity and interrelatedness of human problems" (Morales & Sheafor, 1995, p. 44).

Generalist practice emphasizes the need for practitioners to view the interaction between various systems as they attempt to understand a problem. As well, the approach favours reliance on a variety of techniques and theories which can be called upon subject to the needs of the client system, as opposed to adherence to a single methodology (Baskind, 1984; Johnson, 2000; Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 1993; Locke, Garrison & Winship, 1998; Morales & Sheafor, 1995).

The Encyclopedia of Social Work notes that definitions of generalist social work agree on the following principles (Landon, 1995): "...multimethod and multilevel approaches...eclectic choice of theory base...(and)...dual vision of the profession on private issues and social justice concerns (p. 1103).

Morales and Sheafor (1995) assert that the generalist model assumes a generic foundation for social work which contains, "knowledge about the profession, social work values, the purpose of social work, ethnic/diversity sensitivity, basic communication skills, understanding of human relationships, and others" (p. 45). Heinonen and Spearman (2001) point out that Canadian and American Accreditation standards require that curriculum for the undergraduate social work degree provide students with knowledge and skills in generalist practice.

Schatz, Jenkins and Sheafor (1990) distinguish between two levels of generalist practice: initial and advanced. Their ideas are pertinent to the current research study in which the label "generalist practitioner" is being applied to the retiring social workers who held positions with varying levels of responsibility and roles.

"Initial generalists" are said to be capable of:

1) engaging effectively in interpersonal helping;
2) managing change processes;
3) appropriately selecting and utilizing multilevel intervention modes;
4) intervening in multiple-sized systems as determined by the practice situation;
5) performing varied practice roles;
6) assessing and examining one`s own practice;
7) functioning successfully within an agency (in Morales & Sheafor, 1995, p. 45)

"Advanced generalist" social workers will face increased difficulty in the tasks they face, and therefore require a broader knowledge base. In addition to direct intervention, they are also expected to be involved in roles such as supervision, policy development, program evaluation and administration. The advanced generalist also engages in research and evaluation (Morales & Sheafor, 1995).

In spite of having been created from soil rich in systems and ecological theories, generalist practice today must strive beyond a "problem-solving" function and incorporate some essential critical perspectives, according to Heinonen and Spearman (2001) who write:

> There are new and different approaches that all social workers will want to understand and use to both broaden the base of social work practice and to increase its depth. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the fact that social work may involve a relationship that is inherently unequal, especially when social workers work with clients who do not want their services. The two sides of social work — providing care and providing social control — can create dilemmas and conflicts for practitioners. Yet, an element of control is part of most social work. Feminist, structural, and Aboriginal approaches offer tools for analyzing social work and its activities from the contradictory perspectives of care and control (p. 5-6).

Empowerment is a central concept in generalist social work practice (Browne, 1995; Checkoway & Norsman, 1986; Gutierrez, DeLois & GlenMaye, 1995; Heinonen &

Spearman, 2001; Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 1993; Kondrat, 1995; Miley, O'Melia & DuBois, 1998). O'Neil McMahon (1994) defines empowerment as: "the actions and processes used to increase the power held by a person or persons, thereby enabling them to achieve greater control over their own destinies" (p. 51).

Shera and Wells (1999) identify the following characteristics of social work conducted from a base which relies on empowerment as an organizing principle:

> ...clients are treated as subjects rather than objects; the focus is on clients' strengths rather than pathology; clients actively participate throughout the helping process; resources are seen as the total community rather than just formal services; emphasis is placed on the rejuvenation or creation of informal social networks; and monitoring, evaluation and advocacy are done in a collaborative fashion (p. x).

Parsons, Gutierrez and Cox (1998) explain the relationship between empowerment and practice:

> A social work practice framework contains values, sanctions, a theory base, a professional relationship, and an organizing framework for identifying and assessing social problems, setting goals, planning strategies, intervention, and evaluation. Empowerment-based practice imbues these components with a common and consistent theme of facilitating empowerment in clients. Focusing on consciousness raising and education, interventive strategies are conceptualized as a continuum of the personal to the political (p. 20).

The social work role within empowerment-based practice includes ensuring the intervention model is client-driven and appropriate to client needs, emphasizing a transformation of the structural environment instead of adaptation, and connecting people to opportunities to build skills and to acquire education and information (Manning, 1998). Lee (1994) equates the concept of empowerment with a more politicized stance vis-a-vis the profession, claiming that intervention should be with stigmatized, rather than

dominant groups. In Lee's (1994) "fifocal vision" for applying an empowerment approach, five central themes are highlighted: a historical understanding of oppression; respect for ecology; an ethnoclass perspective; a feminist perspective reminding us that "the personal is political"; and a critical perspective geared toward social change.

Generalist social work practice which holds empowerment as an organizing construct also presents a context which is conducive to the utilization of creativity. For example, Heus and Pincus (1986) maintain that the creativity inherent in a generalist approach provides social workers with a greater capacity for dealing with whatever challenges they are faced with, even compared to those who have received specialist training. Sheafor, Horejsi and Horejsi (1997) agree that creative thinking, imagination and flexibility are all required by the generalist practice approach. In a study of advanced generalist practice conducted by Biggerstaff, Baskind and Jensen (1994), practitioners told researchers that personal attributes including creativity are among the most important components of the necessary knowledge base for social work practice.

Creativity intersects with empowerment and generalist practice in several ways. Hancock (1997) states that "We need to be creative in our thinking about the application of empowerment in all areas of practice" (p. 235). The sense of empowerment which clients can experience as a direct impact of a social worker's utilization of a creativity-focused technique is one example.

The reciprocal relationship between creativity and empowerment is an area which could benefit from further investigation. It would seem likely that greater creativity would contribute to greater empowerment, while greater experiences of empowerment are

also likely to facilitate a higher presence of creativity in social work practice (Turner, 2000). Powell (1994) provides an account of how creative writing workshops contributed to the transformation and empowerment of participants who she describes as "marginalized women, perceived in this society as a drain on its resources...victims of race, class and gender oppression..." (p. 23). Contemplating the changes which she observed at the termination of the weekly sessions, Powell (1994) writes "These women now think of themselves as writers. That means they believe they have something to say, and the power to communicate. When you think of it, that is extraordinary. How many of us really believe that of ourselves?" (p. 25).

The themes of transcendence and creativity figure high in Getzel's (1985) assessment of where gerontological social work should be focusing its attention. The older person's poems, recollections, and autobiographical statements represent attempts to creatively express their ideas about the meaning of their lives, and represent "the persistence and indomitability of human life even in the face of the inescapable" (Getzel, 1985). These themes intersect with the empowerment theme in that people regain a sense of control over their realities

Another way in which creativity, empowerment and generalist practice appear to be linked can be found in DuBois and Miley (1999) who speak of the importance of "expanding opportunities" as a central role of social workers wishing to work from an empowerment approach. They cite the need for social workers to go beyond linking clients to existing resources, to the level of creating additional resources and devising strategies which confront social injustice in the delivery of services, through public

policies, and through social development. This focus is in keeping with the social change goals of the profession, and with the Code of Ethics (CASW, 1994).

Some writers have acknowledged that social workers as a group may face disempowerment within their employment settings (Frans,1993; Guterman & Bargal, 1996; Gutiérrez, GlenMaye & DeLois, 1995; Hasenfeld, 1987; Pinderhughes, 1983). A restriction of the capacity to be creative is in itself a disempowering reality.

Krill (1999) acknowledges the existence of forces at a structural level which leave no room for imagination or intuition, which he describes as "twin aspects" (p. 6) of the creative process. He writes:

> We have tended to accept the value orientation of modern society that prizes reason and pragmatic efficiency. Managed health care programs combine with budgetary watchdogs of government and private administrators to stress short-term methods of data gathering, categorization, narrowed goals, and prescriptive techniques. Schools of Social Work have followed suit. (p. 6)

Brandon and Jordan (1979) likewise note that:

> Powerful social forces push social workers into restricted roles. There is a strong public expectation that they should be nicely and inoffensively helpful, never angry and disturbing. Some clients paralyze social workers' imagination and creativity with threatening and disruptive demands, but most see them as low-ranking officials of whom little is to be expected" (p. 1).

Gitterman (1986) also offers some thoughts as to environmental and organizational influences which serve to restrict and inhibit creativity, thus contributing to the disempowerment process. Gitterman (1986) writes:

> Professional socialization formalizes our work and stiffens our approach. Ambiguity threatens us; it ought to challenge us. We become cautious, avoid risks, develop rigid and mechanical responses, and seek comfort in prescriptions

> and symmetries. And, through these processes, we distance and detach ourselves from our clients" (p. 18).

Grigsby (1995), in commending Peile (1993) on his offering of a creative paradigm which brings together deterministic and random forces, claims that it "...offers hope for fundamental change in the relationship and in social structure...a cosmology that both supports and explains the concept of empowerment" (p. 707).

Goldberg Wood and Middleman (1989) maintain that the process of empowering individuals, groups, families and communities is accomplished by "giving knowledge and skills away to the extent possible so that others will become more expert and powerful, (and) will have "tools" and personal resources to improve their life situations" (p. 240). Creativity may be desirable in that which is "given away", as well as in the ways that these resources are provided.

2.4 Rationale for current study based on literature review

A rationale for the continued study of the phenomenon of creativity is expressed in the following statement:

> Our little group sees the study of creativity - the process of change perhaps most uniquely human - as a worthy human purpose and one most likely to produce knowledge that will provide leverage over the ever more challenging problems we most surely will confront as our species moves, however haltingly and poorly prepared, into a new millennium (Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi & Gardner, 1994, p. 175).

Speaking specifically about the importance of research on creativity and innovation in social work, Epstein and Grasso (1990) assert:

> Many social work clinicians, supervisors, and administrators have excellent ideas for practice innovations. Frequently, because of time pressures, competitiveness, procrastination, or other preoccupation, these

> ideas are never specified, tested, and shared. These failures to describe, test and disseminate personally constructed innovations are losses to the social work field (p. 29).

One of the strengths of this study is that it serves as a vehicle for precisely this type of sharing. It permits generalist social work practitioners to identify and articulate ways in which they and their colleagues incorporate creativity into their work and apply creative thinking and creative action within their fields of practice. This study acknowledges and supports the centrality of empowerment to generalist social work practice and operates from an assumption that by devoting attention to creativity, the goal of empowerment can be enhanced and facilitated.

The research also reveals lived experiences of those who have faced barriers to creative forms of practice. Thanks to their status as retiree, the practitioners interviewed are more at liberty to openly share perspectives without fear of reprisals for speaking.

Only through extensive dialogue can a potential connection between creativity and individual and community empowerment be established. There is a need for a research effort concentrated upon examining the value of creativity in everyday generalist practice. Without it, we may be collectively overlooking an essential ingredient of competency, and one which may lead to accomplishments which heighten society's appraisal of us as a professional group. More importantly, we may be neglecting avenues through which we can contribute to greater equality and social justice.

Petkus (1996) discusses how the sociological theory of symbolic interactionism can explain why people are motivated to be creative. He defines a "creative role identity" as being "an individual liking to see him/herself, and be seen by others, as someone who

is creative in that particular role" (p. 192). Using the example of a creative teacher, the role performance which extends from the role identity might include using non-traditional textbooks or using innovative classroom activities. Seeing one's self as a "creative teacher" motivates the acting out of such "role performances".

Through a study in which ideas are being shared around "creative social workers" and "creative practice", it would follow from the above theory that if we value creativity in social work and showcase creative accomplishments or styles, an outcome may be increased motivation to engage in creative actions related to practice. Engaging in the discussion may inspire individual social workers to adopt the role identity of being a "creative social worker", or to discover that they could already be defined as such, and lead to further creative actions. Sharing the results of the study may inspire others who did not participate to reflect on their own identities and how closely they fit with that of a "creative" social worker.

Another potentially valuable role which this study can play lies in inviting the participating social workers to reflect upon and validate the importance of considering the intuitive and imaginative aspects of their work. This is captured in Imre (1990) who states:

> Social workers, like other human service workers, need breathing room to reflect on their work without having to do something, and do it now. Because of this characteristic immersion in concrete situations — so many clients to see, to refer, to arrange placement for, to help somehow in the allotted time before the next client must be seen — the importance of the intuitive and artistic resources of the self are obscured easily, and hence to some degree endangered (p. 45).

The generalist approach to social work practice has been emphasized and highlighted in this overview of literature on creativity for several reasons. First, it is a prevalent, versatile and comprehensive way of understanding social work practice. It is also a model which schools of social work are required to include in their bachelor's level curriculum at this point in history, and therefore has significance for teaching. Thirdly, generalist practice embraces the important concept of empowerment and is consistent with the political awareness generated by anti-oppressive and feminist theories, among others.

Based on a review of the literature, a question which has neither been asked nor answered to date is how generalist social workers in practice conceptualize creativity. While the literature review bears witness to a storehouse of definitions and characterizations of creativity and social work, there has not been a qualitative study completed which explores how generalist social workers define creativity, what it means for them to "be creative", the degree to which it is valued in everyday practice, and the environmental factors which social workers find either stifle or stimulate their ability to "be creative".

2.5 Summary

Creativity is a subject which has received some attention in the general theoretical literature, but inadequate attention in the writings within social work. In this literature review, definitions from the literature have been discussed, as have numerous studies. The field of social work has recognized the value of creativity in generalist and empowerment-conscious practice and encourages social workers to be creative in the

fulfilment of their professional roles.

One area which has been overlooked in the writing on creativity and social work is a concentrated discussion of practitioners' views on creativity in their daily practice experience. This gap is unfortunate for several reasons. It is difficult to strive to be "more" creative when we cannot adequately visualize what that state entails. Keeping discussions about creativity among academics and researchers may limit the potential for widespread transformation which some have proposed can be inspired by greater creativity (Lewarne, 1998; Peile, 1998; Walz & Uematsu, 1997). Finally, a generalist approach to social work practice incites the participation of all stakeholders: the profession's creativity is owned by all of its members and can benefit from the contributions of as many people as possible. An intentional effort to seek input and ideas from practitioners in generalist practice within public service agencies acknowledges the value in what front-line members of the profession have to say based on direct practice experience.

The discussion stimulated by this research enables the gathering of definitions of creativity, showcasing of specific examples based on practice experience, the identification of personal and environmental barriers which hinder one's ability to utilize creativity, and assessment of existing needs around incorporating greater creativity into practice. The information gathered through this effort strives to provide generalist social work practitioners with a clearer understanding of creativity, and with increased motivation to bring creativity in its various dimensions into daily practice. Social work educators will benefit from a body of knowledge grounded in experience from which they

can pull a more comprehensive construction of creativity for the benefit of the generalist social workers of tomorrow.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

How creativity in social work practice is conceptualized by experienced generalist social worker practitioners is the focus of inquiry of this study. It is grounded in a qualitative methodological approach. During in-depth interviews, a select group of thirty (30) social workers whose experience ranged from ten (10) to more than twenty-five (25) years were asked to share their constructions of creativity in social work practice. These practitioners witnessed first hand creativity in practice. They provide a unique contribution to a better understanding of creativity in social work because they collectively represent hundreds of years of generalist practice experience in varying roles in government organizations.

3.1 Research Design

In this research, the approach is informed by a grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) within a constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Rodwell, 1998) which values the principles and processes of hermeneutic/interpretive inquiry.

Many theorists draw a clear line between research conducted using quantitative methodology within a positivistic paradigm and that which is conducted using qualitative methodologies under the "interpretivist", "naturalistic", or "constructivist" paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Reinharz, 1994). The essential differences are on epistemological and ontological grounds which divide qualitative and quantitative research into mutually exclusive territories. On one hand, we find quantitative

frameworks adhering to a belief in an objective reality which exists apart from the observer. Knowledge of that reality, it is believed, can be obtained through a detached stance and variable manipulation or isolation, to determine causal interactions and relationships.

On the opposite end of the continuum, qualitative methodology within a constructivist paradigm is based on the belief that all social reality is constructed through the sharing of perspectives. Without human beings to cast a glance on any given situation or phenomenon, there would be no perspectives, and no constructions. By giving voice to those who hold various perspectives it is possible to create and recreate new understandings which become the representations of reality.

3.2 Rationale for a qualitative study into a profession's creativity

Stainback and Stainback (1988) identify five valid reasons for inquiry that is qualitative in nature: the invisibility of everyday life; the capacity of such research to generate clearer understanding through attention to details in a field; the benefits of inviting people to consider local meanings of occurrences and processes; the need to compare and contrast *different* situations and settings; and the importance of enabling understanding beyond the setting to other contexts. Neuman (1997) describes qualitative researchers as "creative, open minded, and flexible" and claims that they "ask creative questions and take advantage of *serendipity*, those unexpected or chance factors that have larger implications" (p. 19).

The ontological and epistemological assumptions of qualitative methodology, as described above, are in tune with the beliefs which formed the basis for this study. The

subject of creativity and social work does not "exist", in realist terms, outside of the meanings which are given to it by those who are inclined and invited to form a perspective. A different approach to the study which would reflect a positivist paradigm and utilize a quantitative methodological approach might have been to develop an instrument to measure the "variable" creativity and to assess its correlation with other variables such as age, work setting, and gender. The problematic nature of such an approach falls back on the assumptions which it makes; that the entity "creativity" exists in an objective state, and that one can "discover" a causal relationship which would then explain levels of creativity.

The current study is based on a perceived need to better understand what creativity in social work *looked like* from the vantage point of one group of actors -- those with a career history in the domain and who could rightfully stake a claim to "knowing it". Similarly, in other fields where the creativity research terrain has not been tilled recently, there may also exist a need for a closer inspection of the patches of meaning which its members can provide.

It is noteworthy that all agreed upon constructions are valid only at a particular point in time; constructivists acknowledge that constructions are both context and time-specific (Rodwell, 1998). When new insight arises through exchanging and evaluating perspectives, (a process which occurs during an intensive research analysis), this contributes to a more highly sophisticated and well-developed "agreed upon" version of reality. The validity of that construction, nonetheless, is agreed upon subject to specific contextual conditions which will alter with time.

The present design accepts that "truth" can be identified only through an acknowledgment that creativity is a socially constructed phenomenon, but values the process of conscientious examination of the constructions which exist. The goal is to arrive at a highly developed and articulated construction (or series of constructions), which is perceived to be of value. A clearer picture of the social construction of creativity as it exists in social work can provide professional social work knowledge with a greater depth of understanding which can then ultimately be incorporated into daily work practices.

How creativity in social work is conceptualized by practitioners requires a methodological approach which provides first-hand access to those conceptualizations. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) offer a case for the use of a qualitative approach: "The qualitative researcher looks to understanding a situation as it is constructed by the participants. The qualitative researcher attempts to capture what people say and do, that is, the products of how people interpret the world" (p. 18). Smith (1998) further affirms that qualitative methods provide research results which are highly relevant to creating a better understanding of social work practice.

3.3 Interview methodology

Interviewing represents an established option for researchers who are conducting studies within a qualitative framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Douglas, 1985; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Kvale, 1996; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; McCracken, 1988; Siedman, 1991). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) demonstrate respect for interviews as a research method, in part due to "the depth of the conversation, which moves beyond

surface talk to a rich discussion of thoughts and feelings" (p. 80.).

Siedman (1991) emphasizes the need to appreciate the interview's significance in non-quantitative terms. He writes: "In-depth interviewing is not designed to test hypotheses, gather answers to questions, or corroborate opinions. Rather, it is designed to ask participants to reconstruct their experience and to explore their meaning" (p. 69).

Marshall and Rossman (1995) stipulate that the type of in-depth interviewing which is conducted in qualitative research requires that "...the participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it" (p. 80). These authors go on to point out that the strengths of interviews include being able to gather a lot of data rapidly, and being able to capture the meaning which the contributors attribute to their day to day activities.

Padgett (1998), describing the use of qualitative methods for social work research, devotes a section in her chapter on data collection to what she refers to as "intensive interviewing". Her suggestions around conducting interviews as part of the research process include: prior reflection on the degree to which the interviewer will remain detached and/or share personal perspectives and concerns on the issue (the purpose of which would be the facilitation of communication); the value of an interview guide with questions which relate to the topic being explored; the use of "probes" to pursue leading statements for further information and clarification; and the importance of including observations such as "tone of voice, affective expressions (sighs, sobs, laughs), body language, and the ambiance of the setting (noise, interruptions by others)" (Padgett, 1998, p. 61) in the interview transcripts. The "interview guide" is discussed by several authors

(Neuman, 1997; Padgett, 1998; Siedman, 1991). Implicit in the advice to help one go about the task of developing an interview guide appropriate for one's research project is the notion that while the guide is intended to provide a general focus, the interviewer should expect to follow up on leads offered by the interviewee. The interviewer must be alert to opportunities to probe and pursue meanings and understandings of the participants to the degree to which they arise. Holstein & Gubrium (1995) explain:

> In practice, this means that interview schedules should be guides at best, not scripts, for the give-and-take of the interview process. Schedules need sufficient flexibility to be substantively built up and altered in the course of the interview. New questions and discussion items are added or combined as the interview unfolds, according to the organization and diversity of meanings being conveyed. The respondent might even be asked what kinds of questions he or she thinks should be posed. The interviewer would encourage the respondent to explain why such questions made sense, simultaneously attending to the narrative contingencies and reflexivity of explanations (p. 56).

3.4 Justification for interview methodology

Individual interviewing as the methodology for this research is based on several factors. First, there is a high likelihood, given the size of the overall population of social workers in the province in which the research is being conducted (approximately 1200), that members could share a historical connection of one kind or another, due to once having been co-workers, through being members of Professional Associations, or being involved in committee work. Relationships and external dynamics could influence the desired environment for focus groups. As well, if any controversial exchanges occurred during the course of the focus group, there could be undesirable carryover.

The challenge of offering a focus group at a time and in a location which permits high accessibility served as another deterrent to choosing the focus group method. The researcher had sufficient flexibility to travel to meet with individual interviewees closer to their residence, thus broadening the potential number of contributors. Also it was more appropriate that traveling costs be borne by the interviewer rather than the interviewee.

Another reason why focus groups were not selected as a methodological approach was the knowledge that certain individuals avoid speaking in a group setting, no matter how skilled the facilitator may be. These same people may have valuable ideas to share when provided the opportunity to dialogue with the researcher alone.

3.5 Population

Generalist practice is diverse and circulates within a context where a myriad of presenting problems require solving in innovative ways. This research focuses on generalist social workers who have been employed in publicly-funded agencies, departments, or organizations for a minimum of ten years. The following table provides a descriptive overview of the characteristics of the interviewees:

TABLE ONE: CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERVIEWEES

	Female	**Male**
Gender	11	19
	English	**French**
Language	21	9
	Front-line	**Supervisory**
Position at time of retirement	21	9

	10-15	16-20	21-25	Over 25
Number of Years of experience	3	4	12	11

The decision to interview members of the social work profession who had been in the field for extended lengths of time met with some surprised reactions from academic colleagues and even among some of the practitioners (An in-depth reflection on this phenomenon can be found in the researcher's reflections in Chapter 8). A population of older practitioners who had served for decades in the governmental bureaucracy seemed to many an unlikely source of insights about creativity in practice, compared perhaps to new workers, to students, or to those working in non-profit or private sectors.

When the research study was first conceived, the intended population was going to be drawn across the population of 1200 social workers in the province of New Brunswick. As I tried to visualize the design, however, I soon began to challenge the notion of interviewing three or four representatives from categorical sub-groups such as male, female, francophone, anglophone, urban, rural, aboriginal, and newer versus more experienced. One fear was that working with such an extremely diverse population, it would be difficult to find common threads in the themes and constructions held by members of the groups. I anticipated a greater depth in understandings if I chose one group to highlight for this research study, with the option to conduct further research with other groups at a later time.

As the research was being designed and I arrived at the conclusion that I would focus on one group, the New Brunswick government announced its goal of reducing the

civil service by offering early retirement incentives to ten per cent (10%) of the civil service workforce, an equivalent of approximately seventeen hundred (1700) workers. When the deadline date for applications passed (March 15th, 2000), about one thousand (1,000) employees had agreed to accept early retirement. Approximately sixty (60) registered social workers were among the total number of retirees.

The thought of interviewing these people was appealing for several reasons. First, I would have a readily identifiable group of individuals who were defined as social workers by their positions and by their affiliations with the profession. I was also respectful of their proven capacities to have continued to work in "the system", and suspected that in order to have remained working for ten or twenty or thirty years, they must have developed creative strategies.

Secondly, I recognized that their combined experience of over six hundred (600) years of social work practice was obliged to contain literally thousands of stories from practice, including some successful and some unsuccessful attempts to practice creatively.

My third reason for choosing to interview this group was the realization that by making the choice to leave their jobs, the individuals would have fewer restraints to telling their stories than colleagues who were continuing to work and who might fear reprisal for sharing their work experiences. The context provided a greater capacity for them to speak openly about barriers to creativity within their organization. This autonomy in speaking would not be available to practitioners still employed.

A fourth reason for going this route was that a "pared down" population facilitates simplicity and logistical convenience. Working with a population of 60 as opposed to

1200 made for a more manageable potential data base for the purposes of this research.

Finally, the issue of dual relationships needed to be taken into consideration. In my role as field education coordinator for the only English speaking social work degree program in the province in which the research was conducted, chances were high that I would be in contact at a future date with social workers whose employment in a public sector position was ongoing. While a dual relationship would not necessarily result in conflict or tension, information shared within the confidential confines of the interview could influence professional decision-making required in my other role as field coordinator, such as in a case where an interviewee was to present their work environment as highly oppressive.

For these reasons, if I was going to choose one sub-group of social workers to interview, retiring experienced practitioners held the greatest appeal. The accumulated experiences of these social work practitioners represent a vast collection of "practice wisdom" within the public sector.

3.6 Recruitment of interviewees

The process of identifying retiring practitioners with ten years of experience or more who were willing and available to do an interview began with an invitation that was published in the provincial association newsletter which is mailed to every registered social worker in New Brunswick (Appendix 1). The next measure was to place telephone calls to directors of governmental departments in which many social workers were employed (Family and Community Services Departments, Mental Health Centres and Addiction Services), asking them for suggestions of names. A research grant of $1,300

awarded by the St. Thomas University Senate Research Committee provided financial support for travel to seven different communities to meet with the retirees (Appendix 2)

The research interviews were conducted between June 2000 and March 2001. As interviews were conducted, the practitioners often spontaneously suggested colleagues who they thought would be open to being contacted. Of the social workers contacted, only one declined to take part in an interview, citing a lack of time as the reason.

A total of thirty interviews were conducted with nineteen male and eleven female social workers. These figures raised some questions for the researcher, given that the field of social work has a majority of female workers. No females turned down the request for an interview. The researcher followed up on suggestions for interviewees as they were presented, therefore it was not the case that at the end of the research there remained an identified group of individuals (particularly women) who had not been approached.

One possible explanation for the higher number of men in the sample group could be related to eligibility for early retirement. Some women in the early retirement age range may have taken leaves of absences for maternity or child-rearing since their initial hiring, and therefore may need to work longer before qualifying for retirement. Another possible explanation could be related to health issues; given the traditional patterns of women living longer than men, some of the males in this group may have accepted retirement now because of health issues which had surfaced.

Nine interviews were conducted in French and twenty-one in English, based on the preference of the practitioner. Holding interviews with thirty practitioners allowed for a wide diversity of perspectives to be shared, and for a wide range of experience to be

represented in terms of field of practice, rural/urban practice settings, and number of years in the field.

The pool of interviewees included representation from directors of agencies, supervisors, and front-line workers working in fields which included child protection, children in long-term care, adults in long-term care (including seniors), special need populations, addictions, mental health counselling (child and adult teams) and employment counselling. Of the thirty practitioners, the majority had finished their careers working in offices in one of New Brunswick's six cities, although given the rural nature of the province, many of the clients they served would have resided outside a city.

The least number of years working in a field of social work was ten, and the highest was forty-two. Education levels were wide ranging, with many of the practitioners holding Master of Social Work degrees, obtained at a time when no undergraduate social work programs existed.

Holding thirty interviews rather than a smaller number was of great value in this study whose goal was to explore constructions of creativity among generalists. The comparatively large number ensured a level of representation which could facilitate a broad spectrum of perspectives, experiences, examples and situations. Once thirty interviews had been conducted, it was apparent to the researcher that a level of saturation had been achieved with regard to the practitioners' constructions.

3.7 Interview schedule

Appendix 3 is the "Informed Consent Form" which was read to all participants and signed by them to indicate their agreement to voluntarily participate in the interview.

Appendix 4 contains a detailed description of the interview questions. Four themes were used to initiate the discussions:

1. How social workers visualize creativity in social work practice.

2. The value creativity holds for the profession and for individual social workers.

3. The degree to which social workers in public agencies are capable of utilizing and exercising their potential to be creative or to use creativity in their day to day work.

4. The nature of the relationship between generalist practice and its goal of empowerment and creativity in social work practice.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Appendix 5 contains The Human Subjects Ethical Review Protocol, submitted to Memorial University and to St. Thomas University. Appendix 6 and Appendix 7 contain the Ethics approval. Appendix 8 is an overview of general information which all participants received, and includes such things as issues of confidentiality and anonymity, risks, expected results, and what would happen during the interview.

All transcribing of interviews was completed by the researcher. The researcher kept all interview transcripts and recordings in locked storage and was the only person who had access to the materials. Within twelve months of the completion of the research, the audio-recordings were destroyed. Transcripts of the interviews, with no identifying information on them, will continue to be held in a secure place by the researcher for the purpose of writing research articles only.

Once the final interview was completed, all thirty practitioners were mailed a copy of the conceptual framework which was constructed from the perspectives they

shared. A letter was attached to the framework, thanking them and extending an invitation to contact the researcher with any responses to the framework, including clarification which they felt necessary (Appendix 9). A draft of chapter 6, the main theoretical construction, was also sent to some interviewees to solicit their feedback and criticisms (Appendix 10).

3.9 Data collection reflections

3.9.1 Familiarity with practice

An aid to the recruitment and selection process, from Patton's (1990) perspective, is familiarity with the field, for "...it is our working knowledge of the contexts of the individuals and settings that lead us to select them for initial inclusion in our study" (p. 57). As a member of the social work practitioner community in New Brunswick for the past fifteen (15) years, I have knowledge of both context and people. Many of the interviewees had heard of me through other workers or through the provincial association activities, and introducing myself as a social worker and researcher may have increased the likelihood that they would contribute their time and thoughts during an interview.

As field placement coordinator for a university programme in social work, I also have awareness of the range of careers within which social workers are employed and of generalist practice. This knowledge helped to facilitate discussions during interviews. Familiarity with the vocabulary, concepts, and values of social work also created ease in interpreting the interviewees' constructions.

3.9.2 Self as human instrument

Rodwell (1998) describes the researcher as a "human instrument", a reminder that research is conducted through a reflective being whose characteristics and history may be significant to the process of gathering and interpreting others' perspectives. In my situation, researching creativity and social work has generated a number of requests to provide workshops and presentations on the topic and two articles I wrote on the subject of creativity (Turner, 1999; Turner, 2000) were published prior to conducting the interviews. One of the articles is in a journal which is provided to all members of the Canadian Association of Social Workers, creating the likelihood that at least some of the interviewees may have been familiar with the framework which I developed. Since those who responded to my invitation to be research subjects may have been influenced by my writing or my workshops or presentations, this could impact upon the type of information which they in turn shared during an interview. One could say that in those situations, the dialogical process had already been initiated.

3.9.3 Use of bilingual data

One area which posed a unique challenge to this research effort is around the issue of working with bilingual data. I am an anglophone whose second language abilities have permitted me to work with clients in a bilingual capacity and to complete university studies at the Master's level in a francophone institution. While a constant effort has been made to adequately capture and reflect the understandings of the anglophone and francophone participants, this aspect of the research takes the issue of accurate and meaningful interpretation into a realm beyond that which is found in studies where the

same language is used in the interviews. Temple (1997) reminds us that researchers who engage in bi-cultural research in which two or more languages are used, are responsible for sharing and making explicit the issues, challenges and directions taken with regard to translation-related issues that occur during the research process.

In the province where the research was conducted, English and French are both spoken in academic, government, business and social contexts. Participants in the study were invited to speak their preferred language during the interview: nine spoke in French, and twenty-one spoke in English. All documentation, including general information for potential participants and confidentiality forms, was provided in the language of their choice.

Vulliamy (1990) raises the valid issue that the quality of translation will be impacted upon by the researcher's familiarity with the language and the culture of the participants in the study. In this study, while I conducted the research, transcribing, and translating and hold English as my mother tongue, my second language capacity was at a level of fluency which met the standards for employment in government positions designated as bilingual. The completion of the Master's degree in Social Work in French at Université de Moncton had contributed to achieving that state of bilingualism. I had also lived in an Acadian community for fifteen years, using French in most personal and social interactions, and regularly communicating in French with colleagues and clients during my employment as a social worker. These experiences provided opportunities to develop familiarity with local expressions, terms, structures and practices as expressed in the dialect of French most familiar in New Brunswick.

Professional translation services were consulted only for initial documentation such as the invitation to participate, the two-page explanation and background, and for the confidentiality release form. In some instances, the writing style and word choices made by the professional translators did not provide the interviewees with a clear meaning, even though they may have been consistent with the French language in other parts of the country or the world. Therefore, the researcher decided to rely on her own knowledge and understandings when subsequent translation needs arose. The researcher was comfortable conducting data analysis using all transcripts in their original language form; there was no need to translate all interviews into either language.

Occasionally during the course of transcribing the interview data from the cassettes, a particular expression which was unfamiliar to the researcher was not discernable. In these situations, assistance was sought from a native French speaker who provided the phrasing and the meaning of the expression.

There is no doubt that when working with interview data that has been presented in two different languages, we need to be alert to inherent challenges, including: "words which exist in one language but not in another, concepts which are not equivalent in different cultures, and idiomatic expressions and/or differences among languages in grammatical and syntactical structures" (Birbili, 2000). Further study into the conceptualizations of creativity through an analysis of different language origins could be a valuable study.

3.10 Data analysis

Qualitative research efforts are focused upon three main goals: careful observation of emerging patterns, precise documentation, and reflective analysis of the material (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). A grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is appropriate for this study, as it allows the researcher to develop theory from data which has been procured according to systematic procedures. As Rodwell (1998) points out, "Constructivist analysis is keen on the creation of a grounded theory, but this is a theory only in that it is the final product of data reduction and interpretation, which is the framework to tentatively tell the story within the limits of the time and context of the investigation" (p. 154).

Gilgun (1994) has identified several parallels between direct practice processes and grounded theory research. They are: 1) Beginning with where the client is and beginning with the informants' perspectives; 2) Providing detailed descriptions of individual cases, which resembles an individualized assessment, treatment and evaluation orientation to clients; 3) Combining inductive and deductive approaches in the research process parallels the approach to practice wherein prior research, theory and practice wisdom are considered while the attempt is made to avoid imposing preconceptions on clients; 4) Conclusions are drawn in both situations after interaction, and conclusions are tentative and open to modification; 5) Data collection methods of interviewing, observation and document analysis are used by both social workers and grounded theorists.

It is important and necessary that a researcher describe and show evidence that she or he has followed specific steps in arriving at their construction of a phenomenon. At the same time, the process is not easily diced into clear-cut steps, since qualitative research characteristically involves "...the process of coding data, of making inferences, of adducing theory, and of presenting evidentiary narratives (as) part of a continuous and linked whole, and (are) not, as they are in positivist research, separable stages" (Rubin, 2000, p. 279).

It is important that intuition, serendipity and creative imagination not be denied as the researcher tries to describe in great detail the steps, from start to finish, which were followed in trying to understand the phenomenon being studied. Rodwell's (1998) description of the four types of documentation required in research conducted within a constructivist paradigm acknowledges the significance of the intuitive amidst the procedural obligations. She refers to an "audit trail", or a set of documentation to which the researcher can refer to illuminate the pathways of thought and reflection which have led to certain conclusions. They represent evidence of the critical processes along the journey from "tacit knowledge to propositional form" (Rodwell, 1998, p. 105). In this study, the researcher used the following documentation tools, as recommended by Rodwell.

The *personal log* or *reflexive journal* acts as a diary. It is both the first and last item used during a research project and provides an opportunity for reflection on the interactive relationship between the researcher and the method and results. Secondly, the *methodological log* contains decisions and rationales for the decisions. Research design

issues are included, and its existence provides evidence of the research project's dependability. A third type of journal is that known as the *field journal*. It contains descriptions of interview participants' thoughts, feelings, and any significant observations as they occurred. These field notes are then expanded upon in the *expanded field journal*. The transferral of the field notes to the expanded field journal is recommended to take place within twenty-four (24) hours of the data gathering, and leads to detailed expansion of verbatim interviews, and any other recollections. Finally, the *log of day-to-day activities* is where the record of appointments and activities are written, with reference to the dates and times they occurred. It was maintained throughout the process as well.

Analyzing interview data immediately following an interview is extremely important, in order to further explore the concepts which surface in the course of the research while their presentation is most poignant and clear. Rubin & Rubin's (1995) step-by-step guide to analyzing and coding data informed the analysis stage of the process in a broad way, as did Boyatzis' (1998) manual *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development.*

Upon completion of the transcription of each interview, a coding process was applied by reading through each sentence and assigning a label to capture the meaning of the idea that had been expressed. As each interview was analyzed, it was possible to use the codes already identified and to add new ones as new units of thought were expressed. By the time all thirty interviews had been coded, I had a collection of approximately forty codes. Some of the codes found in the analysis of the first three interviews were:

creative assertiveness
using tools in unique ways
time constraints
professional concerns
spiritual sense
creative fields
controlling environments
freedom for workers
need to get feet wet
mastering logistics of work
autonomy within mandate
creativity as efficiency
fertilizing self with creativity
openness to receive
willingness to use autonomy
creativity in question-asking
wasting energy on negativism
inspiring and focusing
collective coherency
system hampers
staying positive
system intolerance
spending nervousness
fear of being centred out
system encroaching on direct work
power to control your own life
middle class values dying hard
responsibility amid constraints
unfairly accusing the system

The next step in working with the data was to group together codes which fell under common groupings or themes. A descriptive name (eg. "creativity preparedness"; "committing to a creative stance"), reflective of the uniting theme was then assigned to the group. In this way, the theoretical framework which is found in Chapter Six was created, entirely through a process of trying to represent the essence of creativity in social work practice based on constructions of the practitioners.

The use of the Qualitative Software Program *Nudist*Vivo* (1998) was invaluable to this process, as it permitted ease in reassigning codes that had already surfaced to dialogue where similar units of meaning were expressed in later transcripts. Upon completion of coding of thirty transcripts, each of the codes could be examined through the multiple lenses of expression which were located under it. The research findings were directly informed by the units of meaning that were born in the constructions of the interviewees.

3.11 Issues of credibility and validation

In a constructivist paradigm as in a positivist one, criteria for evaluating research exist. Guba and Lincoln (1989) identify four such criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The credibility of a piece of constructivist research can be measured by assessing several elements, the most important of which is "member checks" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 238).

This study's "dependability" may be defended in the degree to which those who examine the procedures followed are comfortable that a disciplined methodical system was at work. Rubin (2000) reminds us that validation "..is more a process of convincing others about the credibility of what it was the researcher saw and heard than a disembodied procedure for demonstrating some abstract, external reality" (p. 279).

Some evidence of the credibility in the analysis and findings of this research can be found in the ongoing procedure of asking participants to reconfirm what I understood them to have told me during the interviews, and by bringing forth understandings gleaned from previous interviews into each new one. For example, in an initial interview the

perspective was expressed that social workers could indulge in greater creativity twenty years ago, so I asked subsequent interviewees to explain their agreement or disagreement with that view. This permitted me to go further in understanding what they understood creativity to be and to mean.

Several factors contributed to minor difficulties in adhering to the process of achieving "member checks". The fact that most of the practitioners were going through a transition from being employed to retiring meant changes in contact information such as phone numbers and addresses (which were maintained strictly confidential by office receptionists). In some cases the practitioners had also expressed a strong desire to leave work-related involvements behind them when they "walked out that door". This was interpreted by the researcher as a need for privacy and disconnection (at least in the early phase of retirement) with all that was related to social work, potentially including further interviews and discussions on the research topic. All practitioners who were still employed when the interview was first negotiated chose to schedule the interview during work hours, an additional indication to the researcher that their involvement was seen to be part of a professional responsibility but not necessarily something they would choose to be involved in once retired.

When interviews were completed and the researcher had the draft theoretical framework (Chapter Six) prepared, two to nine months had elapsed since the original interviews. Many of the retirees had left their workplaces at that point. Beyond mailing a description of the framework (and asking workplaces to forward it if the employee was no longer working) and inviting responses (Appendix 9), the researcher's impression was

that it would have been intrusive to pursue these individuals in their homes for the purpose of the research project.

It is noteworthy, however, that no responses came back following the mailout of the framework. It is difficult to interpret this silence. One conclusion could be that there was generally satisfaction with the representation and that no contradictory comments were derived from reading it. Other explanations could be that there was not sufficient time, or interest, or it was not seen as a priority to communicate again with the researcher.

In keeping with the desire to achieve credibility through some process of member checking, I decided to target specific interviewees who I knew were still employed or involved in activities with the profession and to circulate a draft of Chapter Six in which I present a framework for understanding creativity in social work, through the metaphor of fire-making. I invited their comments and feedback and in this manner have fulfilled the commitment to conducting research in a more participatory fashion.

Rubin (2000) uses the term "validation" in qualitative research to refer to "...an ongoing process to reflect upon what was heard and seen rather than a search for a measure of statistical precision" and suggests that "the credibility of the research is increased when the researcher can show that core concepts and themes occur across a variety of cases and in different settings" (Rubin, 2000, p. 280). The framework described in Chapter Six is precisely such a construction, for it was born from the thirty voices who speak of many settings and situations, yet claimed harmony on certain themes and issues.

As an additional attempt to adhere to a "member checking" at a broader level, I have also presented and sought feedback from audiences which included practitioners and

scholars, during two conference presentations (Turner, 2001a; Turner, 2001b). This step is important, for, as Rubin (2000) points out, "The final analysis depends on how well the material communicates to both those in the arena being studied and to other scholars in the field" (p. 280).

Through seeking feedback, I found confirmation that my re-construction of what had been shared did represent a valid reflection of the phenomenon of creativity in social work; that it was acceptable and had retained meaning for those who had originally shared their constructions of it.

3.12 Conclusion

This research relies on data gathered from thirty (30) interviews with generalist social worker practitioners who were retiring from positions in publicly funded agencies. A grounded theory/constructivist methodological analysis process was used to extract themes from the data. The research provides an opportunity for these social workers to share their perspectives on the relevance of creativity to practice during what may be a highly significant transition period, as they convert their status from employee to retiree.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTRODUCTION TO DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In this chapter, I provide an introduction to chapters five to eight which are the presentation of the dialogically constructed understandings of creativity in social work. The research interviews lasted from one to two and a half hours. During that time, these men and women shared many insightful reflections on their careers, stories which had developed during many years of experience in the field of social work. In many respects, as an interviewer, I was the metaphorical traveler who Kvale (1996) describes as one who "...wanders along with the local inhabitants, asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of *conversation* as 'wandering together with'" (p. 4).

The questioning process was organized around four themes, listed below along with the related questions used to explore the theme:

1. How do social workers visualize creativity in social work practice?

- What comes to mind when I ask you to tell me what creativity in social work practice is?
- Can you think of any specific examples which you would say reflect creativity in social work practice?
- Is there a difference between creative social work and creativity in social work?
- What are some situations in which social workers are required to be creative?

2. What value does creativity hold for the profession and for individual social workers?

- How much value do you place on the kinds of creativity you have seen or know about?
- Is creativity a topic which you think social work students should be learning about?
- How might social workers be better off if they had opportunities to nurture or increase their creativity?

3. To what degree are social workers in public agencies capable of utilizing and exercising their potential to be creative or to use creativity according to their conceptualization of it, in their day to day work?

- Could you have been more creative or used more creativity in the absence of any constraints within the workplace environment?
- Were there things about your working environment or conditions which helped contribute to your being more creative or using more creativity?
- Is it easier or more difficult for new social workers coming into employment in public service agencies to be creative or use creativity?

4. What is the nature of the relationship between the experience of empowerment and creativity in social work practice?

- Are you aware of any circumstances in which a social worker or client experienced creativity in social work as an empowering experience?
- Do you believe that people who are highly creative also experience a strong sense of empowerment?
- Are social workers who you see as adhering to an empowering model of practice creative in any ways?

At times the practitioners chose to respond to the questioning by introducing subjects which for them were connected to the issue of social work's creativity, even though they were not addressing the specific question which had been asked. Such "wandering" was encouraged by the researcher based on the belief that if the subject was of relevance in their constructions, it deserved to be considered for inclusion in the subsequent theoretical framework that was being built. This stance opened the way for a broader conceptualization of creativity than one based on the researcher's conceptualization alone.

The process of coding the transcripts lead to the organization or structuring of the perspectives in the way it is being presented in this study. Many interviews began with the practitioners verifying what I meant by creativity, to which I affirmed that I was

interested in hearing where the word took them, mentally, when used in relation to social work practice. Thus the initial part of the interview was often spent with them verbally exploring what came to mind and in what contexts they had witnessed "creativity". As well, as the interviews unfolded and throughout its entirety, they would often make points in which they would emphasize the connection with the meaning of creativity. They used expressions such as "*That's* creativity" or "To me, that's what creativity means".

Using the computer software program N*Vivo, I gathered all segments in which the practitioners addressed the meaning of creativity in a broadly defining way, and I considered them as a whole. Out of that collection, I wrote Chapter Five, which represents an attempt to define creativity in social work practice according to the perspectives of the practitioners.

A second analytical approach was used to comprehend creativity in social work in a more in-depth way. The coded data which were collected in this pursuit went beyond attempts to "define" creativity, into a realm of trying to look at the constructions practitioners held of creativity's various dimensions. As practitioners talked about creativity, I listened (and later read) how they viewed it in relation to their practice. The practitioners provided hundreds and hundreds of pages worth of views. The process of extracting the views of individuals as solitary units of meaning and then looking at how some of the views merged together in similar ways was at the crossroads of the transformation of the constructions of individuals into an ensemble in which I strived to re-present their views.

In the methodology chapter, I explained that the use of computer software qualitative data analysis software was invaluable, and while this is true, as a researcher I experienced a need, at this stage of the process, to be able to see and physically manipulate the material represented by codes in order to see the "whole picture" as if it were a puzzle whose pieces needed to be placed while watching the entire work develop.

I also recognized that to honour both the significance of this step and the intellectual and mental focus required to carry out the process with competence, I needed to claim designated time and space in an environment which would permit exclusive attention to the task. It was for these reasons that I found myself, in the spring of 2001, secluded in the local Trappistine Monastery with muti-coloured and multi-labeled sheets of paper in dozens of piles around the small bedroom, my only distraction being the call to meals and optional prayer times.

I credit the theoretical display in Chapter Six with the decision to commit that time to fully concentrating on constructing a framework from the practitioner's words and thoughts. The need to seek a similar option at critical stages in the dissertation process may be of more significance to women for whom gender often implies fewer windows of opportunity to claim time for reflection and personal pursuits.

Chapter Six holds the major theoretical re-constructions which emerged from the research effort, and provides some theoretical understandings of how creativity in social work can be understood and examined. Five elements which were most strongly emphasized are described and paralleled metaphorically with five aspects of fire-making.

The third section of the analysis and findings portion was conceived of and considered important to include due to the relative attention the practitioners afforded to it. Found in Chapter Seven, it addresses the question of where, as a profession, creativity is most needed. In spite of this question not being posed directly, it was obviously a preoccupation made evident by the number of times references of this type were made. The areas they identified will be important for all members of the field to consider. In Chapter Seven, I acknowledge the conviction with which they presented areas where creativity is most needed, and in which they recommend the profession make a commitment to being more creative.

Chapter Eight , the researcher's reflections, is included as part of the data presentation although it also serves as a bridge to the discussion and implications section of the research, discussed in Chapter Nine. In the reflections, I share relevant insights gained and recorded in the research logs. The chapter includes some experiences and observations which lend enhanced significance to the preceding three analysis chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHAT DOES CREATIVITY MEAN TO EXPERIENCED PRACTITIONERS?

In this chapter I begin to unravel the constructions which experienced practitioners hold of creativity, through a discussion of how they characterize creative social work and social workers, metaphors used to describe creative social work practice, and four narratives citing specific examples of creativity in practice. Their descriptions can transport us closer to a definition of creativity.

5.1 Characterizations of creativity in social work

Some of the social workers in this study claimed that they were required to be creative because at the time they stepped into their positions, they were the first in their regions to be responsible for a given area of practice. In other situations, there had been a major restructuring which resulted in their being provided with vast opportunity, and indeed, obligation, to do new things. An example of these times which demanded endless creativity is shared by this worker:

> ...I completed my BA and I was immediately made supervisor of child welfare services for the county, with no training — it was absolutely no training. I just walked into this office one day (it was just when the province had taken over, but prior to that it was the Children's Aid Society) and the woman who had been there just left. So I had Acts on my desk, and I had to basically try to figure out "what do I do here?" So for two years I worked night and day; my caseload was up in the 300s, because you did everything: adoptions, you did child care, you did foster homes, you did child protection and you covered a very, very big area. Crazy. Those were crazy, crazy days.

Contrary to stereotypes of government social workers which assume they fulfill the same mandate and perform the same tasks in the same domain year after year, this

practitioner comments on the diversity of experience he was able to gain throughout his career. He felt that it was precisely this change in responsibilities and areas of practice which was afforded by the organization, that pushed him to be more creative than he might otherwise have been:

> I've always done different things...I haven't always worked with the Department, although I've been there for 20 years, at this particular Department. I've been in every part of it, so I think by moving around, it kept me from getting too stale...it enables me to see the bigger picture which is a help, because I don't think I get so caught into "This is the way to do things".

More practitioners expressed the belief that social work positions held potential for creativity than there were who said creativity was not possible. The following perspective comes from a social worker who characterized social work as being less structured than another profession, which was an attribute to being able to act creatively:

> If my work was extremely structured I don't think I could hack it, you know? I don't think I would have lasted long. I taught school for a few years there, and it was too structured. It pushed me back into the addictions field because it was easier than teaching at school!

In addition to being nudged toward practicing creatively by virtue of the perception that their work was relatively unstructured, the following social worker provides hints about how certain traits or abilities in an individual play a significant role in who becomes a creative social worker:

> It has been 32 years since I graduated, and after awhile you forget which theory you're using or which approach, what's the name of the approach, and you kind of go by the seat of your pants a bit. But it fits with my personality I think — I'm a little bit impulsive. And get bored easily with routine, so I enjoy being a little bit different. I also use humour a lot in my approach, so I think that's part of it. And later in life, after I started social work, I began also a career as an artist. I think that I always was a creative person and didn't really recognize that til later on, but that's been useful, being able to incorporate that.

I include the following description of someone this practitioner thought of when the term "creative social worker" was used, because it stresses the energetic enthusiasm which he felt signified an impressive level of creativity:

> (changes occurred)... as a result of a particularly visionary social worker who came back to the province, and got into the ground floor of community based services for disabled persons and seniors. He was keen and excited, had great ideas, and he'd go to different meetings; he just oozed enthusiasm...he was one of the driving forces showing that "we can make this work". I think his enthusiasm spread to other people.

There was an acknowledgment among the social workers that time did indeed bring with it some practice/creative wisdom that gave them a level of confidence in taking a particular approach based on a "gut feeling" which had developed through years of being in situations in which they needed to respond. For example, the following practitioner admits:

> Sometimes I have to do something, or I have to try something. "Let's start here". Sometimes that's more intuitive. I guess I say that because I think I tried to convince myself that I'm a really rational person, and that I try to think everything out, and somewhere along the way I recognized that I know what I want to do long before I have a rationale for it. And usually the intuition comes, and I question it. I question — is that a really good idea. And 9 times out of 10, it is a good idea. Kind of like being on a millionaire show and saying "I think this is the answer and I'm going to go for it!" Don't change it because you'll regret it.

A similar way of thinking about creativity is expressed by the following practitioner. She emphasizes that creativity has a subtle and inherent quality to it, rather than being something that one deliberately "adds on" to their way of working. She explains:

> The word creativity brings up this notion that they're going to go off on a strange tangent somewhere, but that's not what I'm looking for in creativity. It's almost a realism that they're going to be able to use what they have, their internal strength.

> It is their creativity, but it doesn't have to be like a poem or a picture or an "artsy fartsy" thing.

Another social worker also characterized creativity as using that which already exists in one form, but stresses it is *how* one gains information that holds transformative powers. He insists that it is in using our senses to the fullest that we can gain access to the knowledge that the "other" – the person whom we purport to "work with" – holds. Only then, when we are successful in fully understanding what the other is trying to tell us, have we been truly creative, according to this individual:

> Creativity, it's going and searching. Because I, I can't invent anything. You know? The word creator, it isn't to invent, rather you use what exists already, and you go from there. It's not that we are able to create; it's that there are so many things around you, but you have to have the eyes to see, ears to hear, a heart to feel those things. You have to use all these senses and maybe that's often what is missing in the profession of social work or psychology or medicine; you don't use all these senses. They (professionals) think that they've been to college or to university, they have a university degree; they think the answers are there. They are not there, the answers. They are there, or there, or there, you know? If you don't listen to the other, you can be the best diagnostician, you can do the best diagnosis, but what is going to give you the information? It's the other, not you. You're nobody, really. It's the other person. If you go looking for the other, if you can capture what the other person has said to you, *that's* real creativity.

5.2 Metaphors of creativity in social work

Many of the practitioners used metaphors as they described the view they held of creativity in social work practice. In this section I will refer to some of the metaphors used to reflect the experience of being a creative social work practitioner, along with metaphors which refer to the way creative social work is practiced.

The metaphor "a voice of one crying in the wilderness" surfaced more than once in the interviews, as individuals looked back on their approach to practice. Being seen by

colleagues as "a loose cannon" was another expression which suggests that those who were unique or original in their ideas or approaches did not always find themselves to be popular with colleagues or administration.

One social worker who displayed extensive evidence of creativity in her work, used a metaphor about how she mowed the lawn, to explain how difficult it was for her to be anything but creative at work: "I can't mow a lawn in straight lines and strips; if I were mowing a lawn I would go around in circles — so I'm not allowed to mow the lawn at home!" An interesting offshoot of this principle, if applied to practicing social work, is that this individual would likely experience great difficulty if she was restricted to a very systematic and structured way to be with clients. Instead, this was a person who spoke of meeting her clients in ways that were empowering and comfortable to them — outside where they could smoke a cigarette, for example, or sitting close to the river which bordered the office grounds. She also offered several examples of interventions which were original yet highly effective when she had used them.

When describing what she felt to be a creative way of being involved with families, one practitioner said that she appreciated the expression which said "you have to really be able to get out and roll in the mud with them". She explained that this meant to her being available to the family, and not being afraid to see their conflicts, struggles, pain and challenges.

Another practitioner used the metaphor of playing jazz music to represent what it is like to be creative in practice: "creativity is finding anew, a valuable way of doing stuff differently. Creativity makes a discontinuity in what has gone before... it's like jazz...

you've got to know the basic melody before you can improvise".

5.3 Creativity in practice: Practitioners' narratives

The literature provides evidence that research presented in narrative form has its strengths (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999; Kohler Riessman, 1994; Lieblich, Mashiach & Zilber, 1998; Mitchell, 1981). In this section, I share narratives provided by five participants in the research, each displaying a different form of creativity.

5.3.1 Creative communicating: Hush Puppies and "Brute"

A doctor phoned me and said "I have a woman, and she has to be evaluated. I don't know what to do with her." So I said, I don't know either, but provide me with a bit of the picture. So he said, this woman is blind, deaf, and doesn't speak, and she needs injections twice each day, but she doesn't want to let us put the needle in; we can't get close to her.

So that is where there can be creativity; that's where we see creativity. If you can see that kind of a challenge. So I said to the doctor, okay, so we still have two senses left to work with. "What do you mean?" he said.

Well, she is blind, she is deaf, and can't speak, but she still has touch and smell. So there, we can start with that. In the first visit, I brought in some Hush Puppy slippers that I had at home which I didn't wear any more, but hush puppies have a really nice feel to them. Then, I asked her family if there was a particular men's cologne (first I checked to make sure she didn't have any allergies), a particular smell that had significance. And yes, a long time ago, this family member's father wore "Brute". So I went to the pharmacy and I bought some Brute.

So then, I sat down there, so she could smell the Brute, and eventually, to communicate, I put my hands on the table, and I started to tap a rhythm of one, two, three, one, one, two three, with my hands on the table, and she could feel the vibration. So I entered into communication by using those techniques. And we succeeded, after about a half an hour there, to give her the injection. I'm not the one that did it, but at least the nurse was able to do it. And each time I returned to see her, I started with my Brute, I did my little beat. That's what creativity is!

5.3.2 Buying a home when the policy says you can't: Creative problem solving

I am going to give you this example because it will probably be, in my mind, the highlight of my career. I've had on my caseload for six years two men, brothers, in their fifties – late forties, early fifties, one of whom has been very ill with schizophrenia for many years, since he was a teenager. He was looked after by his mother and father before

the parents died. Eventually the parents die and his brother, who had been working at some menial job (but he did have work), had to stay home basically to look after the brother. I'll call them Bill and Sam. The home that they were living in was the family home, left to them by the father in a very, very convoluted will – a very difficult will.

In the will, Bill was supposed to look after Sam in the home, provide a home for Sam to live in until the day he died. There was also another sister involved who wasn't living in the home at the time; she'd be in her early forties. She is well, and lives in her own home.

The home gets run down. Both men are on social assistance and the home over the years just deteriorates. Finally the Department of Municipalities, Culture and Housing come into the picture and they attempt to renovate it and fix it and repair it and it just gets worse and worse and worse.

When I took the case in 1995, the long range plan was we didn't know what, because housing would only continue to repair the place for so long. Both men had a right to adequate housing; there wasn't enough money obviously to buy another house. They didn't have any money to repair it and they live in a rural part of the province which is very important for the well being of the brother who is ill; a downtown residential area in subsidized housing is not going to work for this family. So I said, really what was needed, when the day was going to come that the repairs would not be feasible any more, we should start looking for another house for them.

Actually everybody said, you know, that's impossible. They'll have to go into housing in some city and that's the end of that. And I said, well no, because I believe that there are programs around where we can provide some sort of housing or there must be something. In the end, when all was said and done, I did discover, through a lot of digging, that there is an interest free loan that can be accessed by housing to provide money for somebody in a situation like this, to buy another home.

Now of course on social assistance, your mortgage payments can't be too much either. So I started looking with a real estate agent, for a small house in the general vicinity that met the criteria of housing where they could have a mortgage loan. In the end, we found one and after two or three looks around, the other places that we looked at didn't meet the criteria for the housing interest-free mortgage. This particular little house did.

But then we got into other issues, because the family home had to be sold and basically it was just really the land that was going to be used. Before they got the mortgage from housing, the new house which was seven years old but in good condition, had to be insured. But there's no money to insure it. But that insurance had to be in place.

So you have to be creative, because you go around in circles, because if one system says this and another system says this, and everybody sticks to the rules, then absolutely categorically this will not come together.

I finally managed to convince Community Mental Health Services, which has a "skate-to-care" fund which is used for clients, but not for loans, but I convinced them that I would like to borrow from that money to pay things like the insurance in advance so that they could get the mortgage on the house, and when the property was sold, I would pay

back the Community Mental Health Fund. That's not done; I mean you just don't do that. But if you're creative, you can do that!

But even in going down that route, I had to assure Mental Health Services that in fact the money would be paid back, so I had to go to the client Bill and I said Bill, I'm going to have to draft a letter and this is what it is. And Bill is a man who has a very below average IQ; average to below average – and we're going to have to sign this, and you're going to have to say that when the lawyer gets the money for your land, that the lawyer is going to pay Canadian Mental Health Services, and he agreed to that. So we started out borrowing from the fund to pay the changes, address and postal service, to pay the insurance for the mortgage, and moving expenses. We got an inexpensive truck and so on. So that was being creative.

Then I got into another situation. There were many problems in this case, but another major problem which also shows creativity I think, in the sense that I'm sort of referring to it right now, is the sale. They got the mortgage. And the payments were $102 per month, but there is still a five hundred dollar tax bill that will come in every year, a four hundred dollar insurance bill that will come in every year, and a $250 sewage bill that will come in every year. When you only get $500 in a cheque (per month), you can't pay a $500 tax bill just out of your pocket.

So I contacted Income Assistance, yet another system. And I said this property was going to sell, about $12,000 dollars. The mortgage is taken care of. But I would like to put some money aside so that in the next 2 or 3 or 4 years there will be money to pay these three or four major expenses which they aren't going to be able to pay.

But the system says, you can't do that. When you're on social assistance you can only have a thousand dollars in your bank account and the minute you have more than a thousand dollars in your bank account, you instantly get your income assistance cheque cut off. Often before the people at Income Assistance even talk to other professionals about the case.

My client, being very honest and up front, when he found out that he had an offer on his property which he agreed to sell; when he knew that he was going to have this money, he immediately called his worker at Income Assistance and said "I am going to get $12,000 for my property. And she said, "then you're immediately cut off", without talking to me. He called me back and he was quite upset. I called income assistance and said you can't do that – yet!! And she said yes I can; he's going to get the $12,000 and I said okay, there's still legal fees to be paid, the disconnecting of the power and that kind of stuff to be paid. And Mental Health had to be paid back; the loans that I had been getting from the funds. And I said to her, this income assistance rule – if he doesn't have the money in his pocket, then you can't stop his cheque can you? And she said no, but he's going to have the money as soon as the house is sold.

And I said okay, that's fine, I can understand that. Thank you, but the house hasn't been sold yet, so leave it with me. And then I had to try to figure out what I was going to do. The logical answer was I called the lawyer and said the minute that you have the funds, hold them in trust and don't give them to him. As long as they're holding them, Income Assistance can't cut them off.

So that was in November and they did hold the funds. But Income Assistance knew the funds were being held. They couldn't do a thing. And they wanted to cut off his cheque. So they discussed this with me on a very regular basis, about every two weeks. And I said look, until I sort out what his needs are, what his bills are, etc., we're not going to do anything.

Twenty years ago I would never have done that.

Finally I had it all sorted out. I knew exactly what he was going to need each year, and how much money he could have in the bank and I knew what needed to be done on the house. There were a couple of repairs on the house that needed to be done as well. I had a meeting with them two weeks ago and presented this to them. And said, I know these aren't your rules, but as soon as you use this money – he ended up with about $8,000 after the bills were paid – if you use this money, then this man is going to be out of a house next year because he's not going to be able to maintain it. It makes no sense. As soon as the bills start to come in next year, he can't stay there.

And they agreed, in the end, they agreed, that I could prepay the insurance, the taxes, and the sewage. They agreed that I can deplete a lot of those resources and probably will do it maybe for the next five years and try to get this man on some sort of a saving plan. At the same time, each month, I'm going to try and get him to put some money in the bank so that in five years he can pay the tax bill.

Anyway, there were ways around that. But that certainly was something that most people wouldn't think of. It was a very, very, very, very complicated case that involved several different systems, most of whom said six years ago that none of these things could be accomplished.

These brothers, today, are in this home, it has been repaired, they will have money in the bank...I am just so happy that A) This family can live the way they are living, and B) that all the systems that said no, it can't be done, managed to agree that some things didn't make sense and the rules didn't make sense, and yet, there are exceptions to every rule, and if it's presented in a way that makes sense and it's creative and isn't presented negatively, you know folks are more or less willing to give a little.

So that I think is a good example of being creative in advocacy work. Cause it just really wasn't supposed to happen. And it did.

5.3.3 Child protection work through connecting women to their communities

We would have women, families that moved here with their soldier husbands and so on, and then we had a lot of protection calls, and some of them were serious and some of them were not as serious, but were concerns. So you would have women who were alone a lot, who drank a lot, and were looking – see they were young, and would be looking for some activity after their husband was gone for 6 months. They were lonely, and they would go out with a bunch of other women, and inevitably we were getting calls on them neglecting their children, or also that they were drinking at home, or harming their children.

There were also a few other things happening with children. The teenagers were getting into difficulty, wandering the streets. They were also a target for the younger soldiers who were there; the girls were a target for sexual abuse. These girls would be under 16. So they were pretty girls, hanging around the shopping malls, and then, 18-30 year olds were hanging around, so there were some issues there. The RCMP had issues, and the military policy and so on.

So we did two things. The first thing I wanted to do was to have a committee in the community, of key players, and at the information center there was one of the key players, because she provided a lot of information on the families. I was including her in everything that was going on so that she could add her piece, but also be aware of what might be needed in the future. So we had started this with the police, and with somebody from education, and I asked a few of my other colleagues who were working in that area to come along; they would benefit from it as well because we were all in the same area.

So we started to do some problem-solving, at least identification, and out of that, I wanted to have an information day for women who were at home or who were working and we had somebody from Employment Canada come and talk about our programs. I talked about our programs. Even though I was a protection worker, talking about ways in which we helped our clients to find education, and go through another pathway and to strengthen themselves, the kind of services we provided. And day care services were provided.

We wanted to meet any women who were interested in a group for women which would go on a regular basis. We thought we'd do it weekly for 8 weeks, but it ended up open-ended; it was needed way too much!

So what we did was we united our clients with the community through the information sessions. We called them information sessions. We didn't say "we're going to get you girls and we're going to do group therapy", or whatever we would call it. We had to break them up into two groups; we had more of them come out than we expected.

After that big meeting, they came on one side and we had lunch. Then we did circles of tables, where women, two sets of women, did their outlines of what they wanted to hear about. This was exactly what we would have said we wanted to do with them – talk about boundaries, talk about stress management, talk about anger management, sexual issues, sexuality and grieving and sexuality with regard to boundaries, children's boundaries and how they need to learn their boundaries. All this whole business about sexual abuse and so on. They were listing those off like crazy!

And some of these women had big rings on their fingers and wore big fancy clothes. The other ones were all protection cases, the other ones, but they were mingling, and getting supported by the women in the community who were married and had money and everything, but wanted to go to these information sessions.

So we got free space because it was through the Information Department, the Centre, and we paid for coffee, and also they hired a babysitter. The information center got money to hire a babysitter. They did all the promotional work; posters, radio, because they bought in. It was their information morning as well and it was – we planned together, with her and then we debriefed after. The group ended in June, and they were weeping.

5.3.4 Responding to the need for sexual abuse treatment: Creativity in program development

I remember being the intake supervisor back in let's say 1978 to 1982. I would say we might have had two sexual abuse cases – maybe that's an understatement but no more than a half a dozen sexual abuse cases in the four or five years. And in hindsight, I think that we handled them very, very poorly. but later on in say the mid 1980's, I moved on from the screening supervisor position to a program management position and was responsible at one level removed for the intake part of the operation. And I started to hear talk about sexual abuse referrals, and what we should be doing with it, because our standards really weren't helping us, because it was an emerging area here. And at that time, there was a couple of staff; they weren't supervisors, they were a couple of staff, recent graduates from university. I think they had taken some studies in the feminism area and were on deck. They got support from the unit supervisor, from the child protection ongoing service supervisor, who said, yes, we've got to figure out some way to respond to this area. They were certainly working outside of standards, because if you had gone to the standards, there was nothing there, and probably you could have made a case for saying, No, that's not part of our mandate. But they said, it is part of our mandate; these are children who are being exploited or abused, and even though we don't know how to deal with it, we've got to start dealing with it.

So even to this day, we have a child sexual abuse team, within the child protection specialty. We've had that for a dozen years. I don't think that specialty evolved in the other parts of the province, because we were on the leading edge.

When I think of creativity, it wasn't me that had anything to do with it; I had no great insight, other than it made sense to me. I was receptive of the workers or supervisors who were saying "We've got to do something in this area; our way of responding to child sexual abuse, the same way we do to child abuse – it's not working!"

I would say that would be an example of some creativity that fostered certainly a whole bunch of training that people took. Part of it gave, within the community, some recognition that there was some expertise over in that office for this particular work. It still is, for dealing with sexual abuse. Eventually protocols were developed through the police and different agencies, on joint interviewing of kids and one way mirrors and how to do them so that the tapes can be used in courts. It was them that started that back in the 80s, with some staff saying"We're not doing a good enough job here".

5.3.5 The days of de-institutionalization: Creatively participating in societal change

Some of the most creative work that I was involved in had to do with some public policy changes. That was the de-institutionalization of children from an institutional model into a community based model. This was a major paradigm shift from the old way of looking at children with special needs and children in an institution which in Canada has been at the forefront for many years, but New Brunswick was really one of the forerunners, advanced leaders in community services for children. They closed a large

institution for children, and moved all the children and developed – the thing that was so exciting and creative about this – as we faced the challenge of moving these children from the institution to the community, into their neighbourhood, their family and their school – it developed a whole range of new services, and it showed that children with special needs, their basic human needs come first.

We looked at these children from all aspects of their human development. What are their strengths? What are their needs? And we didn't get hung up on problems. We didn't get focused on barriers. We didn't get focused on diagnoses. We focused on Mary and Joe and Fran, you know, the names, the person. And in this case they were persons with profound needs.

So what we did after a good period of orientation and retraining as some choose to call it; a bit of propaganda, but we needed to be de-institutionalized ourselves, detoxified from all this old fashioned thing about the institution is where they should be. But after we were open minded about that.

But that creative period was really something and when you think of it, we were caught up in a whole period of policy changes from the integration, of course, you remember way back in the 70s, integration and normalization were talked about. Now in the early 80s it started to be put into practice. Remember in New Brunswick we used to have what they called the Auxiliary Classes Act which was a separate piece of legislation that really segregated children into separate classrooms. And even before that, children were even put in church basements, schools basements, Kiwanis clubs, basements, workshops – there was a lot of segregation. What I call the apartheid of special needs children.

5.4 The emergence of a definition of creativity

Based on the commonalities found in the five examples above, and the dozens of others shared during the research interviews, it is possible to create a definition of creativity in social work practice. The cases put forth as being representative of "creative social work" lead me to conclude that *creativity in social work practice occurs when a social worker intentionally envisages beyond presumed levels of good practice required in their roles and functions and accepts a challenge which often leads him or her to utilize uncommon, unfamiliar, or previously unconsidered means to pursue greater social justice and heightened empowerment.*

In this chapter, I have offered some of the defining characteristics of creativity according to the constructions of the practitioners who were interviewees. I also shared some of the metaphors used to refer to creativity in social work. I concluded with five narratively-displayed examples of creativity from the interview data, and discussed the common elements which form a definition of creativity in social work.

I now turn to an in-depth examination of a framework of dimensions of creativity and social work, which was co-constructed with the practitioners who participated in the research. The metaphoric framework reveals how greater creativity can be incorporated into social work practice.

CHAPTER SIX

FIRE-MAKING: INTEGRAL ELEMENTS OF CREATIVITY IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Communication can be greatly enhanced through language which takes advantage of the tools of analogy and metaphor (Gibbs, 1994; Holyoak & Thagard, 1995; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphors are often used in theses or dissertations to represent the graduate student's experience as well as to present his or her findings. In the latter case, metaphors fulfill the role claimed by the meaning of the word: a ferrying or transporting (contained in the Greek word "phor") while crossing boundaries (Lander, 1999).

The social workers interviewed for this study shared their experiences and the meaning which they attached to those experiences. As I listened to their stories and as I went through the process of systematically coding the interviews, clusters of their ideas and thoughts began to develop around themes. These themes became the five elements of a framework. Significant sub-themes which tied into these five major themes became sub-categories under each of the five points.

At the completion of the initial coding and analysis, the framework was distributed by mail to all thirty interviewees, with an invitation to provide feedback to the researcher. None of the participants chose to make contact to discuss any reactions they may have had to the constructed framework. The lack of a response may have occurred due to the vagueness of the request, as a result of a lack of time or interest on the part of the interviewees, or could reflect a general satisfaction with the framework.

As the dissertation writing process moved ahead, the lack of input from practitioners who were interviewed continued to be of concern to me. Further, as I continued to consider the framework and its elements, while I maintained a sense of confidence that it represented the ensemble of aspects of creativity in social work which had surfaced during my conversations with the retiring practitioners, it seemed impersonal and lifeless. It failed to reflect the passion, emotion, commitment, and sometimes indignation with which the individuals who I interviewed had expressed themselves.

It seemed sadly ironic as well, that the study would be lacking in an area which was the very subject matter it was focused on: creativity. Perhaps it was due to this sense of the material having lost its glow that I found myself during a train ride one morning, delving into my own creativity hinterland to seek an appropriate metaphor through which the constructions found in the framework could be brought to life. During the brief voyage, I practiced an open receptivity to possibilities until, with assuredness, the image of "fire-making" moved onto the stage and became the prime metaphor candidate.

In this chapter, I will explain why a fire-making metaphor for incorporating creativity into social work practice is pertinent to research conducted in New Brunswick and with social workers. Next, I will present the five thematic categories which originally emerged from the interviews, and show how each can be compared to an element in the fire-making process. I conclude this chapter with some thoughts on the value of associating creative social work practice with the ingredients for building and maintaining a fire.

As this chapter was being written, contact was sought with a group of the original contributors to the research, in an effort to seek input which may in turn lead to refinement of the constructions which I am sharing in the chapter. Their generosity and commitment to my learning and to the social work profession are gratefully acknowledged.

6.1 Fire-making and New Brunswick — What is the connection?

What images come to mind when New Brunswick is mentioned? Certainly its forests and related industries figure significantly in the portrait. It is a province which hosts numerous logging enterprises, pulp and paper mills, woodcutter associations, and even museums and festivals organized around the theme of forestry.

On any winter day as one drives through any county in the province, it is possible to see smoke pouring out of numerous houses, the product of wood-burning furnaces or stoves. In a province where trees are in such abundance, fire-making has been both a survival necessity and a tradition from the earliest times that human beings have lived on this land.

Social workers with decades and decades of practice in this province could not have avoided visiting homes in which a wood stove was providing warmth to the occupants, or heating food and water. Evidence of the rural nature of the province continues to be found in the reliance on wood as a source of fuel for many families.

The notion of making fires is also associated with the spirit of fun and community, through the campfire tradition. After fifteen years of residing in a rural New Brunswick community, I continue to be impressed with the seemingly instinctual activity

of sauntering out to the woods on a cold winter's day, where a group of relatives or friends will roast hot dogs and marshmallows over a hastily built fire. There are many positive associations with making such fires, and while the activity is not confined to New Brunswick, it could be argued that the forests which chaperone the towns and villages may provide an ever-present invitation to use the resource for such communal purposes.

6.2 Steps in the fire-making process

What goes into making a fire? To begin, there will be no fire without someone to prepare and tend to it. A human social actor may be endowed with the responsibility by virtue of his or her role in a household, or they might assume the role out of a desire to bring pleasure to others, as with the case of deciding to build a campfire.

The second step in making a fire is to ensure one has kindling of some type — birch bark, newspaper, small pieces of wood.... something of the sort. These building blocks represent the foundation for the fire: the preparation needing to be gathered and assembled before a fire is possible.

A third consideration is whether the conditions are right to hold a fire. Too much dampness or wet wood will make it difficult if not impossible to make a fire. Nor must conditions be too dry. New Brunswickers are accustomed to periods when permits to have an outdoor fire are denied, and woods workers are obligated to cease their cutting and come out of the forests, because of dry and potentially hazardous conditions.

A fourth important requirement in the fire-making process is, of course, a source for the fire itself: the match will spark the kindling, provided the right conditions exist.

Finally, in order for the fire to fulfill its purpose, it needs a regular source of fuel; logs must be continually added at the right moment, to sustain the flame and the warmth. There must be a steady supply of firewood which can be added as needed.

6.3 Understanding the dimensions of creativity in social work practice through the fire-making metaphor

By the time I had completed thirty interviews, it had grown clear to me that the practitioners had strongly expressed the belief that comprehensive discussions about creativity and social work must examine: 1. The "self" who is the (potentially) creative social work professional; 2. Types of interventions that are initiated, maintained and enhanced with creativity; 3. The impact of the social and political contexts of social work in government; 4. The role of and need for background preparation prior to engaging in creative practice; and 5. The need for the profession to commit to a creative stance.

In this chapter, I will amplify the messages inherent in these themes by sharing some of the practitioners' voices which created the themes and sub-themes. The following table reflects an integration of the fire-making metaphor with the original themes. Each of the five categories are then discussed in further detail. The italicized paragraph at the beginning of the five sections furthers the metaphor of fire-making with relevant questions or points about that particular dimension.

TABLE TWO: DIMENSIONS OF CREATIVITY IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

1. **Respecting the Fire-maker: The significance of the practitioner as an individual**: a. Reflections on the social worker's identity b. The need to summon the creative self c. The tendency to deny the existence of a creative self d. Professional values and ethics in relation to creativity
2. **What will we use to get the fire started? Foundations for practicing social work creatively**: a. "When we started there was nothing": Fertile ground or undesirable scenario b. The merits of attaining a solid practice foundation before the creative performance c. Creativity preparedness: Facilitating the transition to creative practice
3. **The conditions that affect our fire-making: The social and political environment of creativity in social work**: a. Social work: The "creativity-friendly" profession b. Big "p" politics, small "p" politics, and frustration c. Community as a sheltering umbrella against the constraints toward creativity
4. **Lighting the fire: Assertively committing to involving creativity in practice**: a. Inherent challenges to incorporating creativity into social work practice b. Benefits of a creative approach c. The need to be assertive about creativity
5. **Putting another log on the fire: Forms of creativity in social work practice**: a. Creatively connecting with others b. Creatively intervening c. Creatively seeking solutions d. Creatively advocating

6.4 FIRST ELEMENT: RESPECTING THE FIRE-MAKER: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRACTITIONER AS AN INDIVIDUAL

The first requirement is that there be a fire-maker: Who is the person who has decided to make some fire, who is putting the necessary ingredients together, and who will ensure the fire does not burn out too quickly?

When we are talking about creativity in social work, we must keep in sight the actor, the individual who has agreed to become engaged in the practice of the profession, and who is then responsible for carrying out the necessary tasks which can be potentially creative.

I begin where the research participants began: with the assertion that the individual social worker must examine himself or herself as a potentially creative being, and utilize the self as a starting place for honouring creativity in social work practice. As we ponder the question "Who is *this* social worker?", four areas of investigation were suggested by the practitioners as being important to explore: reflections on the social worker's identity, the need to "summon" the creative self, acknowledging the tendency to deny the existence of a creative self, and professional values and ethics in relation to creativity.

In the conversations with the practitioners, the discussion usually began with their choosing to reflect on whether or not they would label themselves as "creative". A few classified themselves as non creative types compared to colleagues who they had worked alongside and who they went ahead to describe. Some admitted that others referred to them as creative, although they didn't necessarily agree that they merited that title. For example, one social worker mentioned that she had shared with a colleague that I was

coming to interview her about creativity, and the colleague had said "Oh yes, you are very creative". The worker had not viewed herself in that light before.

An essential starting point, reflected in the approach which the practitioners took in the interview, is to ask "Would I consider myself to be creative?" Other related questions might be "When have I been creative in my work?" "Has it been impossible for me to be creative?" Some may share the perspective one practitioner expressed, that one is creative in every moment.

6.4.1 Reflections on the social worker's identity

The practitioners shared the perspective that there is a creative professional self at the core of all creative work. The "creative self" is a notion which can be understood in many different ways, however. In one practitioner's estimation:

> ...the creative work comes from the individual, personal resources that the person has. You have to have a pretty good outlook. A pretty positive outlook. I think that's one of the common threads you might find. It's good to have people that are kind of exciting and uplifting and positive and a kind of hopefulness — hopefulness is a big theme.

While a positive outlook and a hopeful attitude reflect aspects of the creative professional self in the mind of the previous practitioner, another perspective was that:

> ...being creative in my work means using many ways and means that are uncommon, or looking for new approaches, because we work in a field that is very, very complex, and we are in a period, particularly right now, when there are very few resources; we must invent and imagine solutions to problems with the families, the children, and the communities we work alongside. So to me, it means being open to change and to going to seek what is done elsewhere, and continually questioning my practice.

Openness to change, seeking new approaches used elsewhere, and continual self-questioning are other traits claimed to be found in those who see themselves as having

creative identities. This questioning of the self serves as a doorway into the exploration of the concept of creativity on a multitude of levels.

Several practitioners who I interviewed expressed strong criticism for younger colleagues who they felt let a difference in values stand in the way of their being able to see their clients as people, and respond to them with respect and empathy. This was particularly the case for practitioners who had spent many years of their careers in the area of child protection. Some expressed a belief that today's social workers were more likely to have come from a middle or upper class background than those in their own cohort. The following practitioner reflects the sentiments of this nature, and underscores the need to begin thinking about one's creative ways of practicing through a critical self-examination:

> I always felt I took a very different approach than most of the people I worked with, but I think that has a lot to do with where you come from. I have 15 brothers and sisters, and grew up in a slum, so I have never been in a house that's worse than what I grew up in. So nothing I've seen ever shocked me, or caused me a lot of concern. But other people would be just bent out of shape; they would go out of a house and come back and be ranting and ranting about that house, and the condition of it or something like that. To me that wasn't the important thing...but they came from a middle class background, where there was certain values of tidiness and cleanliness and all this kind of stuff. I always entertained that we should have staff things and tell everybody else who we really were, and where they came from, and what they were bringing from that to the job, so that in working with that person, I could know that, and take that into consideration. If that worker did or said a certain thing, I wouldn't say "What the hell was this person talking about?" I don't know if people thought that's just a silly thing to do, or they were threatened by it, but I don't really recall it ever getting done.

The following worker insisted upon the importance of continually questioning ourselves on how we practice, and whether approaches we take and knowledge we rely on would stand up to critical examination, both now and in the future:

> For me, how I practice today is good, but tomorrow it could be better. I am a big believer in life long learning, and I find that thinking about creativity, it is absolutely necessary to question ourselves continually, on our own practice — to be able to take risks, and accept responsibilities.

6.4.2 The need to summon the creative self

Once the social workers began the process of reflection by asking themselves the degree to which they associated themselves with what they considered to be a creative identity, they expressed the notion that the capacity to be creative is inherent but needs to be called upon; a virtual "summoning up" of the creative self is required. This was expressed by some who referred to having been more or less creative depending on where they were in their careers. The following individual spoke of discovering her creative professional self, and how that process has parallels in helping clients discover that side of themselves as well:

> (talking about returning to work after a leave to care for her children)...it was that professional part of me, that contact with people that was missing, being home all day with two little ones..it was part of me, and then I started to paint too, and discovered that was a part of me that was untapped. So I think probably that's where the parallel is, that I discovered a part of me that hadn't been used, and wasn't being used, the same as my professional career was,(although I was happy to be at home doing what I was doing), there were parts of me that needed to be met, which weren't being met. And probably I am aware of that with clients, too, that there are parts of them that I can reach.

Several thought that the accumulation of experience and time had permitted them to grow in their freedom to be creative, but warn that there must be an ongoing attitude of critical self-reflection, as this female practitioner states:

> We have to question, we've got to stir things up, we've got to stir up our own stuff, our ideas, our ways of doing thing, and what we do. Me, I've done things when I was in the field that I felt that weren't good. And that weren't good for the client. BUT I don't beat myself up over it for a long

> time; I recognize that at that moment in time, with the knowledge and the person who I was, that's what I did. BUT, I mustn't, if I return to the field, do those things all over again. And maybe I'm judging people too harshly, but I am not sure that we question ourselves regularly.

The following worker speaks of the "dormant" self and of passion and compassion which she strongly felt should be part of the creative social worker's empathic repertoire:

> (going into a new community as a social worker)...I would befriend those people, build a little trust, have a program, and this stuff. And that's what you had to do. And you did it after hours, and you did it in your noon hour, cause you had a caseload of about a hundred people involved, you know? I keep saying...the passion sometimes is lacking because they (new graduates) are not taught compassion and passion today; they don't have extended families. They grow up in front of a t.v. set with a dinner that's micro-waved. They don't have that give and take in families that we had; I don't know about you, but you had to share when you didn't want to share, you know? And if we don't teach them that, they're not going to get it. Because they haven't had it. It's there, in them. It's just dormant.

Further fear of a negative outcome, if the creative selves are not summoned, is expressed in the following practitioner's observations:

> I see people who allow things to become humdrum. I see people who allow themselves to get all upset over things they cannot change and there is the waste of that energy and all that energy goes into negativism instead of accepting what you can't change and then trying to be creative about what you can do. I think that feeds you. I think that gives you more energy. The kids coming out of university think that they're going to come out and change the world. And hopefully they'll change their one little spot in the world, because I do think that we can do that. They're not going to change the world. And, so they have to learn not to give up, but they have to learn ways around a system which is becoming more and more technological and less and less person-oriented. And yet that's their ethical value, that's their ethical reason for being, really. So in order to do that, without being pulled down, without getting bogged down, without getting discouraged, that's where creativity comes in I think. And that creativity feeds you.

A closing comment comes from a practitioner for whom the summoning of our creative selves holds an affinity to the spiritual or philosophical realm:

> .. you need a philosophy, or even a kind of spirituality if you like. It's not just the professional courses you study that are going to allow you to survive in this profession. There are other aspects. I find that it is really important to have a personal philosophy, call it spirituality, a philosophy...

If we have a creative self, how do we reach it, or how does it reach us? The remarks offered above serve to gently remind us that we may have undiscovered selves which have been lying dormant. The comments may jar us out of a state in which we have failed to offer our creative selves a friendly space in our professional persona.

6.4.3 The tendency to deny the existence of a creative self

According to some of the practitioners who were interviewed, some of their colleagues expressed a lack of respect for those who valued creativity. The following worker expresses her belief that this is a loss to the worker, their clients, and the profession:

> I went to a workshop on music therapy ... this was a number of years ago; I actually went twice and I came back and I found a couple of people and when I was telling them about my experience ... it had been very experiential.... I got ribbed on that for ages and ages, you know, the music therapy. Yet, if you're open at all to things like music therapy... I mean that is something that can *save* somebody...that's something that puts in words what I myself cannot put in words whether because I'm not articulate enough to do it or whether I'm scared to take the risk. But when I listen to it, those words that someone else is saying at no risk to me are expressing what I'm feeling. And that is wonderful, wonderful therapy for anybody, whether you're dying, whether you're in a depression, whether you've just had a tough day. But if you're closed, you know if your mind is closed, then you're not open, you know, to learning new ideas, and I think, see, that's what I consider – new ideas – to be the basis for creativity, you know, and when you think of openness, I mean that's what our whole spiritual life too is all about too, it's just openness, that's what it is, that's it. It's openness to receive grace, it's openness to receive whatever you believe, you know, in the spiritual

> sense, so that's such a big part of all of us, that if so many people are closed, they can't be creative.

The practitioner who shared her thoughts in the previous paragraph had seen social workers, colleagues, who did not permit themselves to see the potential for creativity in their work. Further, they went beyond the denial of their own creative capacity and potentially jeopardized that which others were able to value, by making fun of the efforts. Others who participated in the research shared the perspective that they had not always recognized their potential for creativity. Of the thirty interviewed, only three, however, after questioning, could not provide examples from their own work histories, of being creative (according to their own conceptualizations of it) in one capacity or another. The following person is an example of someone who maintained that he was not a "creative type":

> (After describing creative people)...as opposed to me who is probably a little more organized, a little more structured, a little more "what is the end product we're trying to get to, and how do we get there fairly quickly?" Maybe not as attentive to how we get there, but how do we get there *quickly*?"

Some of us will shy away (or swerve away!) from admitting to being creative, while others might be deterred because others do not share their appreciation for the empowering capacity which creative expression can offer. Others of us, like the second social worker quoted above, feel that some of our traits and styles are the antithesis of what we consider to be creative abilities. As the old adage goes, if we think we are not creative, we will not be. Before asserting that "I am not creative", it may be of value for us to question this denial of any creative side of our selves. One way to induce a creativity birthing process is by opening ourselves to the how, what and why of our actions.

6.4.4 Professional values and ethics in relation to creativity

During many interviews, practitioners brought the subject of professional values and of ethics into the conversations. Often they wanted to voice their recognition that all creativity was not inherently ethical, as this social worker explains in relation to a family therapy technique example that was presented to her :

> ..and I would say, well that's very creative, but not ethical in my mind. I don't have good feelings about using that kind of creativity; that's not okay in my mind. I don't think social work is a good place to play games. I mean that may be considered creative in some areas, but it doesn't fit with my value system at all. He was suggesting that in this family that had their teenage "runner", the mother be told that she has to run away whenever they run away; whenever the child runs away the mother should run away And (my response was)...I don't think so! The idea was that through the use of paradox she would experience the same kind of feelings; and the teenager would know what it's like to be left. Anyway, that's in the distant past, thank God! It gave me a bad taste about family therapy, however.

One practitioner expressed concern over her recognition that values and beliefs and approaches to dealing with client issues today may one day prove to have been unfounded or unhelpful to clients. This awareness provided her with what we might call an "ethical edge" when she thought about herself as a creative practitioner:

> ...you just can't be as certain in your mind that you're always doing the right thing. Whatever the right thing is. I worked in a program five years ago with families that have children with autism. Thirty years ago, all the literature said that autism was caused by the mother who was cold, and they called her the "refrigerator mother". Well, if you were doing social work back then, you would of course be blaming that mother: "What's wrong with her?" Well, now it has definitely shown that it's not that; it's a neurological problem, so what we do now would be different. So how many things are we doing now, that are totally off the wall? I'm always thinking about that, which probably makes my work better, but it also causes me more distress.

As they pondered what it means to be a creative social worker, some also brought up serious concerns about seeing fellow social workers deal poorly with client issues

because they were coming from a different value base. In this section, I will offer a few of those commentaries for consideration.

> ...there's a lot of people out there that get terribly upset with people who lie. I have difficulty understanding that. If that's how they (those who lie) perceive reality, or that's what they feel they have to do to survive... but people take it as a personal affront or something. *Why*? You know, *why*? They must have their reasons...if they feel like they have to do that to get by, well, okay, you know? But people get very upset about that. I think a lot of people have very rigid rules about how people should live their lives.

It is worth pausing to see the use of the word "rigidity" in this sense. It is a term whose antithesis is often associated with being creative: flexibility. It is helpful to reflect on one's flexibility or rigidity with regard to values which impact on how social workers relate to clients. The same speaker goes on to express concern on another issue:

> ..the word that upset me more than any other word — and words can be very charged — this was used extensively and still is to some extent — "deserve". Whether someone "deserved" something. I would get so upset when people would use that word. I mean, they're alive, they deserve it. They get it. That's it! If they need it, they get it. But people are brought up with this idea of good/bad, deserve, those kinds of really very evaluating words...from a very WASPY place, you know? And that's a bad place to come from.

Being a creative practitioner carries with it some ethical responsibilities. Each social worker interviewed related several issues which connected to their beliefs about how people should be treated. Several were critical of some of their newer colleagues who seemed to retain a distance between themselves and the people they were working with. All reflected passion and commitment to the values which are reflected in the Code of Ethics (CASW, 1994).

An interesting proposal was suggested by the following social worker, with regard to a potentially overlooked skill that would strengthen the development of competence in

practice, while simultaneously permitting greater distribution of values which are integral to the profession. He explains:

> Part of training for social workers ought to be in leadership training; they ought to pay attention to their capacity to provide leadership in organizations and communities and that kind of thing. There are certain skills that you can learn that would put you in a position to influence people, and to influence organizations and so on. I think social workers have a lot of skills in terms of relationship skills, but I think paying attention to leadership capacity is an appropriate thing. Through leadership we can influence with our values.

6.5 SECOND ELEMENT: WHAT WILL WE USE TO GET THE FIRE STARTED? FOUNDATIONS FOR PRACTICING SOCIAL WORK CREATIVELY

To start a fire there must first be small pieces of material that will ignite easily: birch bark, paper, small pieces of wood. Without it, there will not be a sufficient base for the logs to catch fire.

The practitioners chose to speak about the need for some background preparation before being ready to engage in creative practice. By acquiring some of the fundamental skills or knowledge for practice first, the ability to be creative is enhanced or assured.

It is noteworthy, however, that several recounted points earlier in their careers when they were hired for positions in which they were required to "make it up as we went along", in the absence of established policies, regulations, and approaches. This caused them to contemplate and discuss the degree to which it is possible and desirable to have some form of preparation and structure before embarking on creative practice. In this section, I will consider the following components of this second element: 1. "When we started there was nothing": fertile ground or undesirable scenario? 2. The merits of attaining a solid knowledge foundation before the creative performance and 3. "Creativity preparedness" as a method of facilitating the transition to creative practice.

6.5.1 "When we started there was nothing": Fertile ground or undesirable scenario?

Many of the social workers in the study recalled experiences starting out, in which they were hired as social workers and given responsibility for programs or services that were new. As they shared their tales, I sensed some exhilaration in their remembering what it was like to have the freedom to decide what needed to be done and the subsequent follow-up. In some circumstances, they had access to significant funding for new programs (particularly during the late 1960's and early 1970's), a situation which contrasts significantly with that of today, when we are more accustomed to hearing about attempts to provide services with extremely limited financial resources. The following practitioner describes the experience of being in a situation in which one is invited to "make up" a program, a service, or to start an agency:

> You have to be somewhat creative. You don't even really have a sense of what the job is about, so you really do have to dig real deep and do what you feel needs to be done, to get the job done. You're balancing a lot of different things to begin.

While reflecting on several decades of work in the alcohol and drug dependency field, this practitioner asserts:

> ...it was probably all creativity! It moved from incarcerating people in mental hospitals as incurable — we didn't even have the word alcoholic in those days — through hospitalization for physical damage without any thoughts of the social ramifications, through the actual process of moving the actual intervention earlier and earlier and earlier in the process. Until now we're moving into harm reduction! And all the different forms of therapies, the different types of therapies, different modalities of therapies that have been adopted... it's all been creativity — we've made it up as we've gone along! So..it's creativity beyond simple problem solving!

6.5.2 The merits of attaining a solid practice foundation before the creative performance

I asked the practitioners about creativity in view of today's reality, in which the majority of social workers who enter the world of social work practice find that the "rules of the game", so to speak, are already established. In spite of their own experiences which demanded creativity in the absence of established paths, most saw value in new workers or students attaining a solid foundation first. One practitioner explains the process in the following way:

> I think that's how creativity gets formed: you get to understand everything you need to know, and then you have something to work with. If you don't have anything to work with, I think it's hard to be creative. It's hard to build on something you don't have....

The following point made by another social worker concludes that by learning established skills and means, self-confidence grows, and from that base, creativity can find a springboard:

> Creativity has a big place and one of the things that happens to most of us is that we learn a great deal; we spend a lot of our time trying to learn new skills and we practice those skills and at a certain point it starts to flow together a little more readily. I tend to see that as more intuitive and it taps a little more creativity. You start to think a little more loosely. You let other information that you have that comes from different areas of your life penetrate what you've been doing. I think it's a question of gaining some confidence, and also gaining some trust in yourself so that you can rely a little bit more on intuition than you might have in the past. And you feel a little bit more comfortable with the answers you do have at the moment.

Several of the practitioners described the dual face of social work, in which politics, regulations, and format needed to be respected on the one hand, while creativity in intervention remained essential, on the other. Rather than resorting to a stance which

viewed creativity as an impossibility due to the need to follow the rules and policies, these workers held the perspective that one can accept and respect the guidelines, while comfortably maintaining a commitment to locating the creative possibilities within the intervention:

> You're stuck in a context where there are provincial policies; somebody puts the books on the table, those binders. Regulations, that come from higher up. That's what directs what we're supposed to be doing. How to go about doing your work. So you pull out the books. You make sure that you respect the rights of the client, you pay attention to the details of your recording. It's something that you have to do. Once you have done all that — towed the line so much — *then* you can start. Certainly you have got to be creative in your interventions. And there are situations where you have no choice, cases of protection where the child is abused or neglected, you have to go according to the rules, because it's a court case, and you have to go by the book.

6.5.3 Creativity preparedness: Facilitating the transition to creative practice

When -- and perhaps more importantly, how -- does a social worker who has been "learning the ropes" shift into practicing creatively? In this section, I offer two reflections which contain some insights on this theme. In the first, the retiring practitioner suggests the need for new workers to trust their innate creativity once they have mastered the required knowledge and skills. She suggests that once mastered, it is possible to transfer that knowledge into the background in order for creativity to have its place:

> It (creativity) might be a difficult element to deal with, if they're also thinking "I have to do this, this, this, and I also have to be creative about it too! But when I'm assessing the creativity of somebody who's working with me, students that I might be involved with, or whether it's a new worker -- I see that as kind of an innate thing, in that if they can put aside all of the training; you know, all of the book stuff and be able to just be themselves, that would be how I would assess their creativity.

The following perspective from a mental health centre social worker reflects some frustration and a warning about the need to overcome what may have become a rigidity in going about doing one's work:

> I'm not sure if it comes from Social Work School or if it comes from a little bit afterwards, but a problem I run into with some of the younger ones coming into the system is, because they're newly trained, they're a little bit too rigid. I would like to see them being more open to the ideas of people who have been in the field for awhile ! They're very enthusiastic, and I have tremendous respect for the lengths they will go to for their clients; they are very client focused. But it's almost like, "I know it, and I'm going to do it this way, and if you're doing it differently, that's not the way it should be done!" I almost feel that I don't get much respect, sometimes, for being the way I am, which might be a bit vague at times, which might not be *clearly* goal directed at times. Someone asked me, a newish worker, if I would send her my goals and objectives for a client — well, I didn't have any; they weren't on paper. So I did it, and it was a good exercise for me, but I suppose it has just become second nature now that I'm aware of all that, and I don't think of it quite as concretely. But it made me realize that they've been trained to look for goals...which is fine..but if you're not seeing me come up with a report, it doesn't mean that I'm not doing anything. They almost tell me how to do my job. You know...in their enthusiasm. I don't know if there's any way of helping them see that there are many different approaches and that someone who's been around probably won't work the way they do, and they'll probably find it frustrating, if they're going by the gospel a little bit, and "this is how we've been taught"

An appropriate conclusion to this section on Preparing for Creative Practice is offered by the following practitioner who relates painting to creativity in social work practice:

> Out of good knowledge comes the best creativity. I used to be very interested in painting...I spent a fair bit of time learning a bit about it. I found that if you master your material, then you can really get creative. So I guess that's the way I get a sense of what we do in our work.

6.6 THIRD ELEMENT: THE CONDITIONS THAT AFFECT OUR FIRE-MAKING: THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT OF CREATIVITY IN SOCIAL WORK

Conditions in the environment must be propitious for fire to be possible; too much dampness and a fire will not be bribed to light. Too dry of conditions and there is a danger that the fire will become uncontrollable.

The practitioners who contributed to the research firmly vocalized the existence of social and political determinants to working in a government organization. Many, like the individual below, had witnessed what they felt to be significant changes in service over the years, some of which were to the detriment of both workers and clients:

> ...today you're more preoccupied with trying to meet the need of the individuals who are out there or who are knocking on your door, and trying to maintain what sanity you can in that kind of work environment is a challenge. Quite often you have staff that are overloaded or overworked and when you're in that kind of environment, it's hard to be thinking about 'what else can I be doing?' or 'what else should I be doing?' because you're just trying to make ends meet from day to day. I think it takes its toll at times on front line staff and people who are trying to deal with the pressures that are coming in through the front door. We see an increased pressure in terms of leaves, absences, and extended leaves, as well as turnover in social work professionals.

In this section, I will offer some of the reflections which the practitioners had with regard to the social and political context which houses much of social work practice today. The thoughts are organized in the three categories of: Social work as inherently "creativity friendly" territory; big "P" Politics and small "P" Politics and the build-up of clouds of frustration; and community as a sheltering umbrella against constraints to creativity.

6.6.1 Social work: The "creativity-friendly" profession

According to some of the practitioners, the social work terrain has inherent creative properties, as explained by this person:

> ...in one on one, when you're in that, the beauty is in that possibility that there can be something new emerge. With social work and creativity, you always have a new client coming along, always a new problem to solve, always a new way to solve it too. That's what is interesting. It isn't something that is always fixed, that you simply have a caseload as a social worker, but you have a client who is evolving, who is changing, the context of the problem is always different, and with that stimulation of a new problem always on the horizon, you can't do anything but be creative!

That perspective is echoed by the following practitioner who had thirty years of experience in the field:

> ...situations are always changing; you think you understand a situation and then two months later, a month later, you learn more about the situation, about the family, about the people, and your ideas change quite a bit. You have to be flexible. I always go back to the study/diagnosis/treatment thing. I think it's a good principle — you're always re-evaluating, re-evaluating, re-evaluating. You might have a little plan here, and you might think, this is my plan, I'm going to stick with it come hell or high water. But based on new information, based on what you learn, it usually is the case that you change as you get more information. You have to have some kind of a tentative idea of what your direction is, as you get going, but you need to be ready to change and not be surprised by too much.

The reasons the following social worker left a career in the nursing profession reflect her belief that social work is inherently creative:

> As a nurse, it was the medical model, and everything's cut and dried; you count diagnoses, and you count...everything's counted. So when you move into that model, you're moving away from innovation and the creativity that social work is known for. And that's why I went into social work... simply because of that!

The following social worker tells an interesting story about a necessarily "non-creative" phase she sees between when a new graduate begins working, and the point at which they have had the chance to establish themselves in practice:

> It is going to be more difficult at first, because they're going to be so overwhelmed by the job. I mean I see it. We have a student, a young woman who was a student here, and is now working on a casual basis but full time and even though she was a student here in this unit, the same program, she is just so overwhelmed now that she has her own caseload. I think that at first you're going

> to be majorly overwhelmed. I think that as you get used to the job, what is it they say, it takes six months to feel comfortable in any job... after that time, when you need to remember what it's all about, when you've got your feet wet, you've got a better perspective on what the policies are all about, the new programs... what you're supposed to do about this, what you're supposed to do about that. Then you can kind of take a deep breath and remember the things that you've learned, and you can implement some of the things you've learned too. Because really, I think that the people who take the social work program use a lot of creativity in what they do, whether it's programs they kind of develop for themselves or presentations... and there's a lot of creativity there. I think it's just that when they get out they become overwhelmed with everything. There's an awful lot to learn about the logistics of the job but, if those things are engrained in, if they've actually incorporated things. It just has to come out and have the time to come out. And they can bring that creativity back out and start using it!

As workers gain time in the field, they also gain credibility which may expand the lines which define their work. In the following example, the case of having flexibility in work hours is used to illustrate that point:

> Somebody could say that they're going to be at the hospital at 6:30 in the morning but not show up until 9:00 and nobody's going to know. I think as I moved on into my profession and also as I became credible, and people start to learn that you do have a value system and you're not going to do something dishonest..there's a lot more freedom involved and they know, the main employer or the main employees that you are working with, realize that this makes sense: "This will work, and we don't need to worry about whether she's fudging her time" But I think with the younger social workers, it's not nearly as easy to accomplish something like that.

The next practitioner speaks from the perspective of a manager. He defends the need for bureaucratic structures, yet refers to the "high flyers" among the social workers, those who respect the limitations while "putting their own stamp on it". In his opinion, such social workers are capable of expressing themselves creatively and of making things happen in spite of the barriers which are part of the standards and regulations "turf":

> One of the struggles new employees have is adjusting to the reality of the bureaucracy that has certain rules and standards. And they're there for good reasons, because we deal within child welfare with some very difficult situations which can have some very serious consequences if we don't do our job well.

> People can be hurt. There can be inquiries, there can be inquests into death, that type of thing. So it's serious stuff. One of my concerns is that we get new employees who are not willing to recognize that if I take a job in that office, I have to realize that I'm part of a bureaucracy; there are going to be rules. And there are going to be times where I would like to do something else and my supervisor is going to say no you can't; I need you to do this interview or I need you to do this right now. And when I look at my high flyers; those are the ones, I believe, who are able to say, okay, I'm part of a bureaucracy, I need to know what the bureaucracy requires to be done, and I need to do that, but I also need to be able to put my own style...not just blindly following the standards, but I need to put my own stamp on that. Now I don't know whether that's creativity, but a need to be innovative. When I'm struggling with a resistant family, how can I get them turned around? How can I get them working? I can read my child protection standard which will give me 10 lines on how to work with resistant families, but how do I get this particular family to turn around; maybe they've had 9 helping persons in here in the last three years, and I read the file and it says resistant, rude, ignorant, all that kind of stuff, how can I turn this person around? Now, whether you do that by doing more research, whether you do an Internet scan for integrative ways for dealing with resistant people, whether you go on a course, whatever...you just say, okay, I'm going to forget about what was said, I'm going to go in with an open mind, whatever it is. I think that there needs to be some innovation on "how do I make the breakthrough?

Many of the practitioners spoke of the challenges in trying to practice creatively in their work, for reasons which include: 1) Ongoing changes in upper level management because of the organization being a government-sponsored agency; 2) Fear of consequences of taking risks; 3) A "straight-jacketing" of employees through regulations and standardized procedures; and 4) Personal responsibilities which go with the stages of adult development and make demands on energy, time and other resources. Yet even those who began the interview insisting that creativity is not possible in social work today relented somewhat as they told their stories, admitting that there is no "creativity-free" social work, in spite of having to follow rules, regulations, standards and procedures which are often established at "head office". Overall, most held the perspective that in spite of the obstacles, social work continues to be a ripe territory for creativity.

6.6.2 Big "P" politics, small "P" politics, and frustration

The practitioners who were interviewed offered several versions of the constraints which are inherent in working in a government bureaucracy. Such constraints, they contend, are often born of what some referred to as "small p" and "big p" politics. References to "small p" politics included cases of individual supervisors who might have blocked what could have been creative ventures, or finding one's self amid a cohort of workers who seemed threatened by change and were determined to maintain the status quo. "Big P Politics" were equally challenging, taking such forms as the lack of financial resources based on decisions by politicians, or the fear of doing something different that is induced by insecurity about how "the public" would react. Many social workers expressed regret and frustration as they examined how creativity had been thwarted, diminished and destroyed by the political dimensions of their work environment context. As the following contributor reflects:

> ...there are people who are practicing social work who would be creative and could be creative and probably would like to be creative, that aren't because of the way that the system is structured, and that's primarily because you're working in a political system that's politicized from the top down. Also, there's a certain amount of "small p politics" as well.

In the example below, we are told how changes in governments often equal changes in practice approaches. Given that many of the practitioners interviewed had been social workers for decades, they had witnessed and taken part in ongoing changes in the structures and organizational formats of the Departments who employed them. The changes could have a tiring effect on the social workers, as this individual explains:

> Now back in the seventies, the government in its wisdom said child protection people should be out in the community. So they decentralized it from here and

> they moved all these child protection units out to various areas in the city. And everybody said at the time, we've tried that before; there were efforts to do that and it didn't work out too good. So here you go again now, you see; this new government comes in and what are they doing? They want them all together again, so they pull them all back. Down the road, I'm sure this other thing will get tried where they'll put them all out again. So we go around and around that circle. And what it is, is that you're dealing with a political system.

The issue of politics brings to mind the issues of freedom and power. One practitioner was adamant that any discussion of creativity and social work needed to consider the question of how much freedom a social worker has to create a new program or service, or to try something not previously tried. He states:

> You may be faced with a situation where the service simply doesn't exist, so you have to be somewhat creative at that point in time. And the question is, just how much freedom do you have to do that, when services don't exist? It may also be in terms of your target groups, where policy does not allow you to respond to a request for service because it doesn't fit in the program criteria, for example. Do you have to rigidly respect the program criteria, or is there a way that you can try to assist the person making that request?

The lack of resources is an obvious point of tension for practitioners in the field, and will obviously have a negative impact on their ability to fulfill their responsibilities to clients and to their employer. The following individual provides a very clear-cut portrait of that reality:

> If there's innovation or creativity that can be brought to bear without any significant impact on resources, I'm sure there's lot of opportunity to do that. When you go looking for resources, you probably end up against your first stumbling block. The second stumbling block probably is the question of time. Workloads being what they are, staff would probably be hard pressed to keep up with the day to day workload, as opposed to taking the time to step back and to do the reflecting, the blue sky thinking, to allow them to look at the innovative or the creative or the new.

In the following story, creative suggestions for changes which could have benefitted practitioner, clients, and "the system" consistently met with the response "you

do it" from management. The social worker explains how that response impacted negatively on him:

> ...the point I'm making here is that I didn't need this extra work. I didn't need that. To me that is a kind of a punishment. I needed to be with my caseload, and I was putting my own time in on it, — and ultimately I knew that it was going to make my job a lot easier if we could get this, but I was still having to do the work of getting there, okay? And that's not really my job. So when the light comes on (i.e. a creative suggestion is approved), that's not the end of it — you're expected to set up the service.

A view held by the following practitioner was that there exists a rational and wise hesitation when it comes to creativity. Workers who may one day end up in court having to talk about the interventions they have tried will be on firmer ground if what they are describing is based on tried and tested theories, models or approaches. In such cases, alluding to having tried something "new" or "different" or "original" could be used against the case, rather than being held up as admirable and valuable. The practitioner cautions:

> ... I think there are some natural restraints that go along with certain programs, for example child protection. If you are looking at it from a therapeutic point of view, family interventions, clinical interventions, basically everything you do is scrutinized. Because there is always that possibility that every one of your protection cases is going to end up in court. Courts, as you are probably well aware of, are very conservative, very traditional environments. And it's pretty hard to go in there and explain creative things that you have been doing. You have to go in there and say you are doing established things that have been well accepted over the years. Even in terms of family therapy and that kind of thing, you don't go in there and do anything weird or strange with that family; you're going to have to go in and explain that some day in court, something that you may have done, which may have been explained somehow in a workshop that you took with an expert on whatever family therapy approach you want to use. But try to explain that to a judge. So that's another thing that takes away from creativity in a therapeutic sense, with your clients. We're always aware that whatever we do, we could be challenged some day and we've learned through some fairly negative experiences in fact, in courtrooms, that we've just got to be careful. Especially in the adversarial way of the court, you don't always get an opportunity to explain

what you've done. You just get nailed and you have no opportunity to really defend yourself.

The following comments come from the perspective of a supervisor, and pertain to the student or new worker who arrives on the scene, full of creative energy and wanting to see changes take place. While he offers an appreciation of the importance of nurturing the "inquisitive mind", he also demonstrates an awareness of tension that can arise as the new worker meets with the "old guard":

> The primary purpose of a student out in their field placement is not to develop creativity, creativeness, the same way as when we hire a new worker, we're not hiring you in the first year to develop your creativity. We want you to learn what we've got..BUT we like to have that questioning mind: "Why are we doing it this way?" Good question to ask! "Why *are* we doing it this way?" And then the follow up question -- "Is there another way to do this, is this a better way?" Great questions to be asked. At the same time I think that particularly for a new worker coming in you need to be respectful of people who have been in the organization a number of years and who are delivering the services. Maybe there is tact, or a good way to present a question as opposed to presenting it in such a way that you're crapping all over the other person. (Those with experience say)... here's a person coming into the field with no social work experience, and I've been out for five, six, seven years plus I've taken additional courses. Why are they crapping all over me?

In contrast to the preceding perspective, the following description of social work practice displays empathy for the new workers with ideas and the motivation to bring about progressive changes, but who pay a price for taking initiative or who are told they cannot do what they wish. A significant point is made by the practitioner about the eventual diversion of that energy toward other demands and priorities:

> In the beginning, I'd write to the executive director and say "..in the absence of a policy on this, this is what we're going to do in this region until you tell us no you can't or you develop a policy". A lot of times we just got "okay". But if you didn't take that initiative, if you went and asked, they'd say, oh no, you better not do that. But if you're willing to stick your neck out... because that way, if it screws up, they can chop it off. They want you to take the blame, they want you to do the

> work — so if you're okay with that, then you can put out the energy and then it's okay. And of course starting off, and when you're younger, you do have some energy and sometimes you can do that, but when you get in there, amidst the raising of your family and caseload and stressed workdays, and stuff like that, you know...it's harder.

From this consideration of the struggles creativity meets in the structures of a workplace with varying levels of politics involved, we turn to another theme which preoccupied the practitioners: the importance of community-building.

6.6.3 Community as a sheltering umbrella against the constraints toward creativity

Several of the practitioners in this research, when asked what creativity in the profession mean to them, spoke about the centrality of community to their view of social work. This individual states,

> ...creativity can be not just in the definition of your task at work — you know, you can be creative there — but in thinking that in your role with your client you will have a greater impact if you enlarge it to clients and community. So community development or building community capacity is a very important element of social work. Social Work doesn't have to be "go check on people, make sure they get all their services in, and follow up and do a report and everything else". You need to help people to become part of a community, and that community could be a support or a resource to that person -- they become connected, and they support one another.

The following practitioner, agreeing with the sentiments expressed above, also expressed concern that new social workers are not paying enough attention to the significance of the community approach and lack knowledge of how to do community development.

> Social workers coming out of university have very little understanding of the community approach. One of my colleagues used to say that many social workers went into social work because they wanted to be psychologists, but they didn't go into psychology. Studying at university, I feel they encourage that, because they put so much emphasis on the individual. I think it's much more psycho-logical...maybe I'm passing judgment because I don't know what really goes on.

There were loud calls to members of the profession to remember that community is primordial and that conceptualizing creativity in social work assumes an understanding which has community as the bull's-eye of its target. It may strike some as surprising to hear this perspective coming so forcefully from workers whose careers have been housed in the bureaucratic government structure. Through listening to the individuals I met with, my understanding is that community is significant in the following ways: 1) We should be focusing our efforts on reconnecting people with the community; 2) We should make use of the community, for example by bringing others into our interventions and situations; 3) Communicating with the community should be a priority; 4) We need to feel part of a community in our work settings; and 5) We can display endless creativity with those communities with which we are involved in our personal lives.

A closing reflection for this section about the centrality of community to any discussion of creativity and social work is a plea for cooperation and respect with others who are part of a client's personal and professional community. This social worker was critical of what she saw as a practice of wanting to be sole decision-makers. She states:

> If I was in a position of teaching social work students, I would be saying — my God, you have to work with other professionals. I am talking about protection, because that's what I know best. We want people to help us, but on our own terms, and when things go wrong, we want to take all the decisions ourselves. For me, when it comes to protection, there is no social worker who can do that all alone, and there is no system that can do that all alone. You have to work with other systems, and the community. To me, sharing the responsibility is also sharing the decision-making. Because no one is going to share the responsibility if they don't have a word to say in how we're going to respond to the children. But I find there's a closed attitude; we say it's all the fault of the others.

The metaphor offered by the following practitioner is an appropriate one with which to end this discussion of the constraints to creative social work practice which are

part of the social and political environment. He explains:

> ...it's not that people don't have the ideas, that they don't have the energy, but sometimes the structure, the resources, and constraints that they find themselves working within restrict it. That's part of it. At the same time, you see staff that want to do more projects or maybe approach a group social work practice with a little bit of innovation or a little bit of creativity and the organization over the years. And maybe because it's a large organization it turns around slowly like the proverbial supertanker. It doesn't turn on a dime, it takes a little lead time to make things happen.

6.7 FOURTH ELEMENT: LIGHTING THE FIRE: ASSERTIVELY COMMITTING TO INVOLVING CREATIVITY IN PRACTICE

Without a match, there could be no fire; it is the ignitor, the source of the flames; no fire is possible without a match. It is a power to be recognized, respected, kept ready and called upon when required.

The theme of making a commitment to a creative stance in social work was proposed by several of the interviewees. They shared their conviction that the profession must spend more time reflecting on creativity in practice, as well as in engaging in ways that are innovative and inspiring.

Three sub-themes make up this fourth category of the framework. The first is an acknowledgment of the challenges which are inherent in attempting to be creative in public service. The second affirms the need to recognize and promote the benefits of a creative approach, while the third grouping deals with the importance of being assertive while being creative.

6.7.1 Inherent challenges to incorporating creativity into social work practice

The practitioners who affirmed the importance of and need for creativity in social work practice were aware that it is not as simple as deciding that one will routinely take creative routes. The following individual recognized the realities:

> ...back to your word creativity; sometimes you don't have time to be creative. It takes time, to think of those wonderful things that I mentioned earlier. There are times when you just can't do it. You don't have it in you to be able to do it, and if you did, you just wouldn't have the time to do it. So that's what we have to work with.

The next practitioner agrees, and describes the relationship between stress caused at work, and a shutting down of the aspirations to be creative:

> Everybody is very stressed... the reality is that there's a point where you can do good work and you can be creative, and then sometimes you go over the edge because you've just got so much to do. And then there's the stress. I think it shuts your mind off, and stops you from thinking of some kind of alternative solution.

6.7.2 Benefits of a creative approach

There also existed, in the midst of the interview data, a strong spirit of resistance toward the things that could threaten to impinge on creativity. Those who seemed to have been able to keep the creative spirit alive spoke of the benefits to drawing upon creative means on a daily basis:

> ...in social work we're dealing with some pretty sad, serious stuff. And creativity puts a little fun into the thing. Even if it's just to save your own sanity. I have colleagues out on stress leave all over the place, and I'm thinking gee, I've done this for 40 odd years, — in 40 odd years here, I've only missed about 2 weeks of work, I say what's the stress in this business? The client's doing all the work. And if they're not, I don't think the counselor is being creative enough!!

Another person reflected on the value of choosing creativity in this way:

> ...we have some awfully, *awfully* good social workers, and I think ninety percent are..or I shouldn't even actually use a percentage. I think most people around here are very, very committed to the clients. Unfortunately for some, because they're not open to change and because they're not open to creativity, they're not working to their full potential. If they're this caring now, just think about what they would be and what they could accomplish if they were more open to new ideas and creativity, you know?

6.7.3 The need to be assertive about creativity

Recognizing what creativity can do for us, and choosing to preserve and maintain the creative drive in the professional delivery of social work services can only happen when there is an assertive commitment to practice creatively. A justified challenge is put out to all members of the social work community in the following message, and in Chapter Seven of the study, there will be additional discussion of where the social work practitioners in this study suggest as areas of need toward which we ought to be applying more creativity.

> I see us as social workers as not being outspoken enough; being restrained, and allowing ourselves to be restrained instead of seeking inside and saying "Let's find a way; we're going to get through this!" Instead we think of all the reasons why it wouldn't work, and all the things that will get in the way, (when we should be saying) "Don't tell me I can't: let's just get in there and see where it takes us!" So that's what I would hope from students, from social workers, from future social workers and from all of us. It goes back to looking at ourselves, doesn't it? And saying, well, what's with me? Why am I holding back, why don't I want to make waves – am I afraid? We need to understand ourselves and how we respond or react to situations, and see what is not necessary or what is holding us back.

6.8 FIFTH ELEMENT: PUTTING ANOTHER LOG ON THE FIRE: FORMS OF CREATIVITY IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

In good conditions, with an aware and responsible fire-maker, once the kindling, in cooperation with a match have created some ashes, the more substantial pieces of wood can be added, and the fire can occur. There are different types of logs — some burn faster, some slower, giving off more heat. They release energy in the form of warmth, light, power...

The larger logs are the significant samples of creativity which social workers have achieved and will continue to contribute to the "fire of creativity". Perhaps best understood as responses to the query "In what ways are we being creative in social work?", this section is structured around four clusters that attest to capacity of

practitioners to be real in a genuine sense, and to avoid professional stiffness or rigidity. The four clusters include: creatively connecting with others; creatively intervening; creatively seeking solutions; and creatively advocating.

6.8.1 Creatively connecting with others

Practitioners who participated in this research clearly affirmed the importance of the relationship and the creative ways and means by which they went about the work of connecting with others. An explanation of the underlying rationale for this was expressed in this way:

> ...one of my beliefs is that everything happens at the level of relationships. It's because people care for one another that things happen and that things change. If I like you, I would do something for you – that's how it comes into play. If I feel I know you then I am more likely to do something for you; if I don't know you, it means nothing. That's why I strongly believe that you have to creatively establish a relationship.

Some practitioners go on from a belief in the importance of the relationship to creatively reaching out to those with whom establishing a relationship is particularly challenging:

> ...the creativity is in finding new ways of reaching people who can't or won't communicate by the obvious verbal methods. It is in establishing the relationship, in trying to bridge the gap between who I am now, as an older woman, and perhaps with an adolescent male teenager or child or somebody who isn't interested in talking to some old lady about their problems! So I suppose I'm thinking partly in establishing a relationship it's important to be creative, and not perhaps stay stuck in the same old format.

Creatively connecting with others also requires use of all the senses, and an eagerness to discover the hidden meanings behind the verbal responses:

> ...I said to a new worker, why are you writing down all their answers? "Well, I'm afraid I'll forget!" Yes, I said, but do you realize that the answer that you've written down, you know, is different from the client's answer. "What do you

> mean?" they say. "He said that." Well yes, but it's not because he said it, that it is what he meant. You know? You're going to write all that down, then you're going to stop at that. Instead, what's your *feeling* about what he said. When he said that, did you look at the way he was sitting, the non-verbals? Did you look at the whole package...you mustn't listen only with your ears, but with your eyes too. You have other senses that can tell you a lot more than the answer! The response is important, but only as part of that which allows you to analyze the situation. If you go ahead and write it down right away, you take away all chances to analyze things. As long as you accept that as if it was cash, saying "well, that's it".. And (these social workers) say — "but we were always taught to do it that way". And I say if your professors told you that, well your professors were wrong — something is missing.

The following worker felt that work with families was particularly fertile terrain for applying creativity to trying to connect with clients:

> ...students should try to be creative with families, if they are going to be involved in child protection, child care. There's the question of the family unit itself. And there, there could be good room for creativity — how to put your foot in the door, or how to get accepted by the family, or how to gain their trust – there are many new ways there, that creativity would help a lot, in establishing contacts and maintaining contacts.

Can acquiring the professional degree interfere with the ease with which one creatively connects with others? This practitioner speaks of having seen that outcome and it is offered here as a cautionary note:

> I think there's too much of — the aloofness of the professional kind of...it's almost that they (new graduates) come out with that professional status, and that aloofness somehow doesn't allow them to really connect with the clients and their clients' worlds in some respect. They come out with lots of ideas, you know, "I'm going to go out and I'm going to do this, use this intervention", but they just...(are not accomplishing) the basic stuff. And the unfortunate part is they really think they're doing the job. *I really find there's not too many students that come out that have that ability to really connect with the client.* (Emphasis added). And I think part of it is this knowledge, this kind of "they have knowledge", and this professional stuff, somehow that creates some barriers in there. At least that's my experience.

One of the social workers I interviewed described it as a "powerful moment" when he met the parent of a client on his caseload and recognized the person as a school friend whom he hadn't seen in decades. The story speaks to the powerful sense of connection which could exist with a close friend from another era in our lives, with whom we had lost contact. Can creativity be an ingredient in a mix which could bring such a strong, established sense of connection to any relationship a worker might establish with a client? It is a bond which speaks of commitment, of respect, of admiration and of trust. Of course these are all things that we value as elements of good practice, yet the ideal is likely not realized as often as we might hope. Striving for something even close to that type of relationship could enhance the process of creatively connecting with a new client.

6.8.2 Creatively intervening

Social workers refer to the goal-oriented involvement they sometimes have in the lives of others as "interventions". In this section, I offer one practitioner's perspective on what it means to be creative in intervention with a client:

> ...If you say starting out "I am going to help them", then you won't be creating; there will be no creativity. Because you will just open your briefcase of services available at the agency, and you'll make a shopping list, and you'll give them that. And there's no creativity in that. Creativity consists of how you are going to get the person to help themself.

The assertion that intervention should be about assisting others to "help themselves" is also identified in the following conclusions drawn by the practitioner, on the way less experienced workers intervene when "on call", and the way those who have been working longer will intervene:

> I almost *know* that the person who is inexperienced will have a bad on call week because they don't know enough yet to say, look I'm not getting wound up in that one. I'm not putting things in that are only going to make it worse in the long run, or take on responsibility where it's not my responsibility, or whatever. So I think that might be just experience, but it is kind of out there. If you look at the on call sheets from this week, this week, this week, it does make sense. And I don't think it's a matter of more experienced workers being cold-hearted or turning off on the problem or whatever — it's more an issue of knowing that people can cope, and giving them the respect of talking it through, saying, you know, can you cope til tomorrow and what can you do to calm down, this kind of thing; I think that people with experience are better at that.

A creative approach, according to these social workers, seems to base creative intervention on the affirmation of the resources the person has to deal with their situations, and assisting them to realize their own power and ability.

6.8.3 Creatively seeking solutions

We use the term "problem solving" currently in describing the helping role, but the discussion does not often delve into the complexities of effective and empowering problem-solving. Interviewees used phrases like "staying off the well worn path" and "having a mixed bag of tricks from which to pull different things" to reflect their ways of going about the process of problem solving. The three interview segments provided below thicken the fabric of problem solving, and engage and challenge us to reflect on the way that we look for answers and squeeze out alternatives as opposed to resorting to the "tried and true" solutions:

> When I think about when I was out in the field, for me creativity, it was knocking on every door. If I was working with a family that was having difficulties in their family, well, we looked at the problem, and then I looked, with the family, to see what supports there were in the community, to try to help in the different aspects. So then, there was nothing that would stop me from knocking at any door — I could always be turned down!

> ...in some ways because you're dealing with people, there are all kinds of people-related experiences in your own life that you can draw on — I mean just, kind of wildly eclectic; just off the top of your head just to..to bring about whatever it is that you're trying to bring about.
>
> When I first started working I would be more apt to look at a situation and say "what resources are out there for this?" whereas now I just look at it and say "What do we need?" Somewhere there's going to be that resource. That may seem naive, but I don't really feel that way.

All three of the passages reflect an outlook which affirms seeking solutions through a broad array of methods and alternatives. One might say that the creative approach to problem solving requires maintaining a positive belief that the solution can be found, and unhaltingly proceeding to seek it.

6.8.4 Creatively advocating

Another significant role played by social workers is that of advocacy. Several social workers used examples from their own practice to illustrate the creative means through which they tried to advocate on behalf of their clients. In this example, a worker with children in long term care speaks of the need to be creative in this regard:

> I think it is important to bring things down to the personal level. I went on a computer and I sent a message to our regional director and copies to other people, talking about the kids waiting and some of them waiting (for adoptive families) for two years. And I said how upsetting this was for the kids. Then they argued back, "Well you're not the only one who cares about the kids". And what I said, when I e mailed back, was Yes. But *the kids have no voice*. And I'm the one who sees the kids. The managers, everybody else, they don't see the kids, so if they don't have a voice, then I have to be their voice. So that's where I feel, for my part, trying to be creative is to find ways that I can get that voice heard.

Another social worker provided reflections on being creative in working on behalf of clients and the issue of loyalty to clients versus loyalty to the employer:

> Working the system, I think is being creative. I remember someone who retired a year or two ago telling me that she felt she did a good day's work when she

> worked the system to get something for her client. So if, let's say, your client needs diapers because the person is incontinent, well, strictly speaking that's not covered by the health card. So end of story. No, the creative worker will try to hook that incontinency up to a medical issue which is then covered with a health card. Now is that creativity, is that working the system, is that ...(something else)? I don't know. But that to me is what is creativity. I wouldn't go so far as to say "Screw the system", you know, and I don't think that's being dishonest. I think that's being creative on behalf of your client, and I think that's where social work values have to come into play. And I think we owe something to the bureaucracy because we are working, we owe loyalty to our department, yes, and all that type of thing, but we also have a greater loyalty to the client, so I don't think that we do dishonest things, but I think that if there is any way at all to fix it so that your client gets a needed service, and still stay within your mandate then that's creativity and that's empowerment.

Being able to advocate creatively requires support from circles of colleagues and administrators. As well, as this worker notes, being nurtured by a supportive network of family and friends helps to provide the worker with some of the "positive energy" which can be required in trying to advocate when faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles:

> I feel very good about what I've contributed. I feel that I have left some sort of a mark. I know in this office for awhile, this particular little incident (advocating for a client to buy a home and remain in his rural home in spite of policies against it), this particular little incident is going to be remembered....but there's others as well, over the years that would sort of fit into the same category. But I do think it's a combination of the skills that I've been able to acquire, the experiences that I've had, the education that I've been able to acquire, the colleagues that I've met. That probably should be number one. And the people that I've worked with, not just my own colleagues but others. Plus the family, a very close family. All those things have gone together to stir the pot, to allow me to grow and to feel that I have been able to contribute to the profession and have been able to successfully work with the majority of the caseloads that I've had.

There were other interviews in which practitioners revealed further creative ways of advocating for clients. In one case, a senior manager was invited by a social worker to a meeting with clients facing intellectual and physical challenges, and each person around

the table, including natural parents and foster parents, talked about the struggles and challenges they faced trying to care for that individual on limited resources. In another case, a social worker took one particular comment made by a child who blamed herself for the long period of time it was taking to make a match with adoptive parents, and sent the comment to people who held some decision-making power, in hopes it would highlight the need for additional resources to that aspect of services.

These people have obviously not given up on "the system", and after so many years of service, had managed to maintain the belief that "It's worth a try..."

6.9 Creativity in social work: Keeping the fire burning

In this chapter, I have provided the metaphor of the fire-making process to represent understandings about creativity in social work practice which were generated by retiring practitioners who were interviewed for the research. The importance of the individual social worker's identity is likened to there being a person designated to create and keep watch over the fire. The need for kindling or a preparation of material that can provide a bed of coals reflects the need to pay attention to the foundational background social workers may need in social work knowledge and skills. A third point of comparison is the significance of the conditions under which a fire is being made, akin to the social and political environment social work finds itself in. The importance of the match belies the importance of an affirming stance toward creativity's value, while the maintenance of a fire through the continued provision of wood connects to the need to continually contribute concrete examples of creativity in various forms.

A fire-making metaphor has significance if we choose to value the presence of creativity in social work. If attention is paid to each of the phases described above, a virtual "fanning of the flames" will further the generating of additional contributions which are important for client, worker and community well-being.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHERE IS CREATIVITY MOST NEEDED IN SOCIAL WORK?

As the practitioners responded to the invitation to share their views about creativity in social work practice a number of themes surfaced. Prevalent in the content of the interviews were commentaries on why social work needs to pay attention to its creativity at this time in history. Suggestions were made about unique contributions that the profession can make to specific problem areas. Also, some of the barriers were highlighted as necessary hurdles to overcome in order that social work practitioners be able to work to their maximum creative potential.

In this chapter, I provide a showcase of the most pressing areas the social workers identified as being in need of creativity. Many of the comments are voiced from a critical perspective of what the practitioners see as the current state of affairs. The identification of priority areas in need of creativity is divided into five sections: needs in the education and development of social workers, needs related to a perceived hesitancy to speak out or take risks, needs for creative change within the bureaucracy, needs related to the overall profession and needs for greater advocacy and radicalism.

7.1 Needs in the education and development of social workers

The following social worker revealed that she had often reflected on the true reasons why people choose to go into a profession like social work. She suggests that those new to the field need to fully comprehend what may be at play in their having chosen social work:

> I began thinking about "how do we help students look at why do they enter social work?" To me that was a very important question. Everybody would always talk

about how they wanted to do good, they wanted to provide help, all these things, and even very early on, *very* early on, I would say "Well that's maybe some of the reasons but I want you to look at what the reasons are that you are doing this and what has gotten strongly reinforced through what?" Students who could grab onto that, work with that and see that, and recognize their own self in their work, could be more critical rather than totally focused on "this is the way you have to go" and not being able to see. If you can't see what a person is telling you, if you can't feel it, if you can't hear it, you can't be an enabler. And that's a really strong concept of mine.

The next reflection about students refers to the importance of exposing students and new workers to more experienced practitioners who are not afraid to speak up, and who maintain their ground. The worker saw himself as a type of role model:

> I see so many new, young people coming out into the field and really, so very quickly, kind of just falling in line, and really feeling kind of hopeless, you know? In terms of feeling, there's not much we can do about the system and the way it is. And that really is quite discouraging, to see that kind of thing. I eventually was dismissed; management would dismiss me. (They would say) "he's going to give us a hard time, he's going to push us", and if deputy ministers and directors came, they would hope that I wouldn't come to meetings. Then when I would, they'd just cringe. In some ways, I think it helped some young people. I think some young people, when I left the organization, you know, I guess they saw me as someone that they would kind of like to follow — given that I would take strong positions, I would do a follow through on it, and not let the system kind of drive you down under.

Creativity was also identified as being needed in promoting independence among those clients we serve. Creative means should be used to diminish the need for the social work role and services, as this practitioner explains:

> I've already told young students and young social workers, the biggest reward that I have had in my life, from my clients, is when they have said "Thank you, I don't need you any more". That's when you have done social work, that's when you have helped someone. It isn't when you started in 1980 and you still have the same client today! Of course there will always be people who will always need you, but if it has been 20 years and you've had the same client, something's wrong. You aren't really creative, then.

Practitioners spoke with particular conviction regarding the need for social workers to create relationships which have an egalitarian basis and which show high respect for all others:

> So many people think really, we should be talking to people, dripping in our middle class values; that we are going to tell these people how they should parent. I've sat across from people at meetings, and seen somebody lecturing a parent, on "this is what you've got to start doing with Tommy". As if this is going to make a difference! "Of course" the parent is going to go right out and do it!! But the problem is, nobody is telling them (the students) they're missing the boat. That's what concerns me. There's not the kind of work being done with new students coming out, to really work with them a lot, you know? They just keep going. They think they're doing it right, that what they're doing is okay.

The next practitioner speaks along the same theme, emphasizing that a creative approach entails asking many questions rather than assuming that expert knowledge needs to be disseminated to clients:

> And you don't change people, you can change yourself maybe, but it's a long road to learn that, and that's a big thing that people new in social work need, learning to negotiate with people, learning to problem solve with people, learning to communicate more effectively. Learning to ask questions. My gosh, that's important. To ask questions. Because you'll never get in trouble asking people how you can help them, but you can if you start dictating to them and that's what happens a lot of the time.

Another practitioner raised the interesting point that social workers should be able to draw out information or realizations through creative questioning which other professionals such as nurses and psychologists may not. In other spheres, however, concern was expressed about where social workers are NOT involved or providing leadership, and this was defined as an area of high need:

> I find it quite amazing in terms of creativity when I look outside the government structures and see what's being done in communities in terms of being of assistance to disadvantaged families or families living in poverty or not having the educational background or the parenting skills... Often leadership is not coming

from social workers, it's coming from nurses, it's coming from early education counsellors, and this type of thing. And that's sad. I think that social work should be out there, doing this type of thing, but often there are other individuals who are leading it.

7.2 Needs related to a perceived hesitancy to speak out or take risks

From the interviews came continual references to the hesitancy of social workers to speak out on behalf of clients. Practitioners recognized the need for workers to use their voices more often, and to speak with greater volume. A comment made by one practitioner's supervisor at her retirement party, to the effect that other staff needed to be warned not to get in her way when she wanted something done for a client, seems to exemplify the ideal image of an assertive social worker.

The following story provides a clearer vision of the types of situations in which workers should feel obligated to speak out, according to the practitioners:

> At my first staff meeting, the psychiatrist was sitting there and reading the race track report. I'm serious. And nobody said anything. Well I was 51 or 52 years old, and had worked for a couple of years. I went into the second meeting and I said to him "What's going on here? I don't know how you can join us." And he got VERY upset. I was upset too. If you're going to focus on a client, you have to be fully present.
>
> So you have to walk through those things too. I don't know why, just because he has the medical degree, that he can't be accountable. What he does on his own time, I don't give a hoot. But you can't tell me you can be keeping track of the race track and calling your broker, or whoever he was calling. There were a couple of times where there were other psychiatrists who I felt were really inappropriate. When I think about it now, I was pretty devilish and darish or something...but I raised questions about people's qualifications. "How come you're giving this person this medication? I don't know what the best one is, but why do they have two prescriptions for it? Why were they able to take 60 pills last night? Where did they get it from? Somebody had to give it to them."
>
> Another issue is looking at DSM IV and V– you've seen the books. Why isn't social work pushing for that? We're seeing apples and oranges being thrown together!

7.3 Needs for creative change within the bureaucracy

If creativity can be helpful in the change process, it is definitely needed in bureaucratic organizations. Practitioners who participated in this research recognized the importance of being open to how change can occur in the organization. The following practitioner states:

> I also notice that if you're going to be creative, it can lead to change. We keep trying to convince people that change is good, and that it's time for change. But I think social work students, if they think they're going to end up working in a government structure, get a mind set that government is a necessary evil. It's a place you end up working because most of the jobs are there, and it's going to be oppressive systems. They think "We're going to go in there, and our clients are going to be oppressed, and we're going to be oppressed as employees", and I think there's some truth in that, but if you just expect it to be that way, then that's probably the way it's going to be, and you don't go in thinking that whatever job I'm going to do, I have to keep thinking of better, new ways to do it, to meet the challenge. There's still a lot of us that kind of like the stability of the way things are, the familiarity, and I see myself sometimes. If there is a change that I think is good, I'm pretty quick to move, but if anybody else wants to introduce a change which they feel is better, it takes me a little while.

The following individual affirms that front line work permitted creativity on a regular basis, in spite of taking place in a bureaucratic structure:

> I sometimes wonder if maybe it would have been nice to be a supervisor — I worked all these years and was never a supervisor. But if I had been a supervisor, I know I wouldn't have been in the front line doing the kind of day to day work in the trenches that really gave me the chance to put into practice these creative, exciting social work interventions. And when I look back now — I'm glad I wasn't a supervisor, because I would have missed these wonderful opportunities and I would have been behind a desk in a computer screen or signing authority forms for services. It was just as good, and I'm glad now that I was out in the field and it gave me an opportunity to be part of some of the most exciting periods of public policy changes, and to pry those programs into the social work skill set that I had.

In the following example, a practitioner explains how bureaucracies sometimes get caught in certain modes of behaving even though there is not a solid rationale for it:

> I think we should get a lot more flexible. I think that the brief therapy types and solution focused therapy types get away from this. There's a lot of things that are happening in Canadian social work that don't need to happen. Because we're following around the Americans, who have a whole completely different system; they don't have free social services. They don't have free medical care. So we're saying we've got to do this , that and the other thing, and when we try to trace it back to where it came from, we see, hey, this is a form that somebody has to fill out for an HMO to pay the shot, and HMOs are saying okay, you've got to do this program for this amount of time for this person. It shows no flexibility. But most people don't recognize that. Most people don't get an opportunity to sort of sit back and "crap detect". Okay, where is this stuff coming from? Why 28 day programs? Well, once upon a time that' s how much the HMOs would spend to pay for it. All of a sudden now we're in for ten sessions, now we're into quick and dirty. So there's a lot of things driving the service. Maybe we don't need to have that same thing – the thing that's driving the service. That's where somebody can get real creative.

A final aspect of considering needs for creativity within the organization relates to the issue of how social workers spend their time. The following participant explains the issues based on his experience:

> People say "I have too big a caseload". I have too many cases, and I think the reason it is too many is because you get 20 cases, you get all this bureaucratic work associated with it to do, it takes seventy, eighty percent of your time, and it's all stuff you have to do. It's pressing stuff; you can't not do it. You have to do it, and that leaves obviously people feeling more constrained and not having time to even get out and see their clients, and spend some time, and think about doing some social work. Usually in child welfare, you just throw a family support worker in, you let them flounder around, or get the satisfaction, whatever, that kind of thing. They put in six hours ... so they're doing the real work, for the most part. I am hearing a lot of grumbling from my colleagues there about this. I think they're spending more time doing that than they did when I was there.
>
> I think it's a little harder on the older generation – people like myself – because you might have had more time to do the direct work in past years, say 25, 30 years ago. And then you find the system encroaching on it all the time. That's more frustrating in many ways, because somebody is taking something away from you, do you know what I mean? Whereas if you come into something and you don't' know it from before, maybe you don't get as frustrated.

7.4 Needs related to the overall profession

In this section, I discuss needs which were identified as being relevant to creativity and the profession of social work overall. The first quotation is a reminder that as professionals, social workers need to recognize their responsibility in situations instead of easily shrugging blame onto "the system":

> When things are going well, I want to be seen as a professional. When things aren't going well, I don't know what I want to be called, but I don't want to be responsible, I want to qualify that; it's that *things have happened.* I'm not accusing anyone in particular — I accuse the system. The system broke down, the system. Because the system didn't support me. Even in all that, a social worker has to, at some point, be able to stand up and be accounted for. We have options in life. And we can choose to count fish at the fish plant -- it's our choice. We've chosen a very wonderful profession. To help people. To work with people to facilitate changes in their lives. Very big responsibility. I see that we have a responsibility if it doesn't work. I say 50/50. But we have to take on that responsibility.

The practitioners asserted that the profession has to be more creative in communicating what it is that social workers can do, as this woman states:

> Nurses are the key professionals working with mental health patients. Therefore, nurses are first and foremost called upon to do whatever. And if they can't or it doesn't involve medications, or they're busy, then what's left over gets given to a social worker. And it's very true in this office. My supervisor is well aware of this. So there's not an understanding in this particular area of work of what social workers can do. I have to be creative in trying to show them that hey, a social worker can do that just as well as a nurse and maybe even better.
> The schools of social work are certainly trying to change and they're trying to more clearly identify what you can do but the mumbo jumbo, the words that are used, are still pretty mamsy pamsy. And social workers, they are still seen mainly as either taking children or taking money! So there's a whole change has to occur there, or is occurring I guess you'd say, but that has to occur in order for people to realize the value that social workers can contribute to a situation.

The urgency of the issue and need is framed in the following way:

> We're just not getting it through to our members (NBASW) that if they don't support the association it is going to hurt them and it is going to hurt their chances

of jobs down the road. We have lip service to social workers being part of a health profession but that's all it is as far as I can see – lip service. I think social workers are going to be the first ones to go when government reduces. Not in the mandated areas of course, in protection. That has to be more creative and I really don't know how that can be done.

7.5 Need for greater advocacy and radicalism

In this section, I provide seven scenarios which reflect the views of practitioners that creativity is needed to bring about more advocating, more radicalism, more organizing around social justice issues, and more social action.

1) What I do find somewhat ironic to a certain extent, is in the early years — the mid seventies — mostly the seventies and the early eighties, I found that we younger employees were more ready to take on systems — more ready to advocate — more ready to complain if we didn't think clients were being treated properly, and we had a duty in terms of meeting the basic needs of clients, in those days, whether they had proper housing, doing a lot of stuff in that area. I find young employees coming out of social work programs today don't ask any questions - they just do what they're told. And they want a job, basically they just want a job. And when they find that job they fit very quickly into the mold, most of them. They adapt quite quickly. But I wish they would ask more questions in terms of "Why do I have to do it that way?" Or to go to bat more often for their clients.

2) I tend to be, I suppose, radical. And I don't know what that prepares me for, because I don't think the average employer is looking for radical social workers. But, if you're not at least that to start with, I don't know how you'd ever expect to change anything, you know what I mean? I mean, by definition change is some sort of radical, to some degree you know? So I guess I would tend to be radical, then. But I mean if you turn out a bunch of radical young social workers, maybe that leads to burnout. You know? I would think that you would prepare people to go out and stir things up. To really push the establishment. Because I mean, it really needs to be pushed.

3) Everybody isn't going to be a middle class Canadian or American, but we have to learn appreciation of cultures and differences and respect them and yet be able to support them and not ask people to become like us. Somehow we're not using our professional skills in a creative way there. Instead it's going to be twelve people who own it all. There is incredible wealth among those people, and that's an area where students and people should be looking, because you see what's needed every day.

4) They paint us all with the same brush and it's pretty unfair, and therefore I think that the middle and upper class people who really carry some weight with the politicians really see it in the wrong way. They see what the press has written and they don't often get the opportunity to see the other side. And I think creativity here would be if there were more opportunity for the people who are working in the field to provide that information to the people as I said, the middle class, the upper class. I used to go into service groups like that, and maybe it's still happening, I don't know. But I don't see that as much, people getting out there and letting people know, the people that are paying the tax dollars: "Look, we are doing this job and we need more help to turn this around".

5) You get reported if you're poor. Probably 80% of the clients are poor, offhand, I'd say. I mean, all you have to do is look at Maslowe's Hierarchy of needs, and if these needs aren't being met, you can't think about the next ones up the pyramid, for God's sake. You can't talk self-actualization and all this garbage when people are on a survival basis. I sometimes wonder if people really realize where people are at. I don't think they do. I think they just go out and say this is where you should be, because societal norms say this is where you should be, and I'm going to enforce that. So most people who are out there, social force or social cop, it's the big stick approach. I was often criticized because I wasn't "hard enough" on clients. I mean, this was actually said! In other words, I didn't carry a big stick and threaten people. Now..I don't know what you would get by doing that; I suppose you would get some conformity, at least conformity when someone's looking! But that was always the approach, the big stick approach. And I was often criticized for not taking that approach.

6) There's a lot of things that can be done. But there's not a political will to do them. I find it hard to believe that by this time in my life, there isn't a guaranteed annual income. I mean, it's mindboggling. Why even go through all this other crap? Why welfare and unemployment and all this other bullshit. You could just say "Hey, we are going to hand out X amount of money to everybody and the people that don't need it, we're going to claw her back. And it's a lot easier, you'd save money. I know when I first went to work at social services there was one gentleman there who was probably the only really true gentleman I've ever met in my life. He was an older man. He always used to say, you know, there's enough wealth created in this country every day, that everyone should enjoy a decent standard and that was true. That was just his philosophy. We live more in a society that is more bent toward this American bullshit, and it's greed. It's just boggling. Everybody wants more...

7) I had a bit of energy, and I was part of the NBASW and for the province I was the social action person. So I had a really good team of people around me, and we just had a really good time. It was around the time of the election, so we got all the candidates together and put together a group of questions on social issues, and got

> a big forum somewhere, STU or UNB or somewhere, in terms of asking them what the policies were and what each of the politicians of the parties felt about the different issues, and we mailed out questions to all the candidates in the province, and we wrote a six part series on child sexual abuse. That was shared because I was also on the social action for the CASW, on that board, so we shared our stuff with them. And we published in different newspapers..that proactive stuff I really enjoyed.

In this chapter, I have identified some of the most pressing concerns which the practitioners in the study selected as being in need of creativity at this stage in the profession's evolution. In the next chapter, I provide reflections on the constructions from my perspective as researcher.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS

In this chapter, I make additional contributions to the "findings" of the research by extending my own voice from the perspective of the researcher, or the "human instrument" (Rodwell, 1998). I share experiences and reflections recorded in my journal during the process. The issues which I cover are all connected to the pursuit of an enhanced comprehension of retiring practitioners' constructions of creativity in social work practice.

The thoughts and personal constructions are presented under three categories: methodological mishaps and considerations, responses to issues voiced by practitioners during the interviews, and additional pertinent issues beyond the immediate research focus.

8.1 Methodology

This research saw its share of surprises and occasional oversights. For example, during the 22nd interview, a practitioner casually mentioned that she had responded to the notice placed in the New Brunswick Association of Social Work newsletter when it first came out, but her email message returned, indicating that the address was wrong. Until that moment, I had not closely examined the ad for its accuracy. I soon discovered that in both the English and the French versions, the e-mail address had errors in it – but different errors, depending on the language! The incident served as a reminder to verify accuracy of all information in any printed invitations to participate in research. Fortunately, thirty participants were easily found in spite of the e-mail address error.

A humourous incident which other researchers have doubtlessly experienced was the case of mistaken identity. One morning, I arrived early at a community library, the agreed upon site for the interview (several libraries were pleased to provide private space for the purpose of research interviews). I quickly discovered that the library happened to be closed on the morning of the interview, however. As soon as the social worker pulled his vehicle in beside me, I quickly approached him and explained that the library was closed. We chatted for a moment and I was about to propose another setting, when a third vehicle pulled into the parking lot, out of which jumped another gentleman who, it turned out was the real retiring social worker. I made plans with the second gentleman for a new location, while the first, who appeared genuinely interested in continuing to pursue our conversation, was left alone in the parking lot!

Contacting retirees for research posed other interesting challenges. In New Brunswick, the same Acadian names can often be found in high numbers. Thus "Alphe Boudreau" (not a real example) might be listed several times in a telephone book. When I received a referral for a certain name in a particular city, I checked the phone book and found only one person listed with that name. When I called, I asked if the individual was retiring. Indeed he was. I explained my research. He too was obviously willing to be helpful and to grant an interview, but a comment that perhaps I was looking for the other "Alphe Boudreau" tipped me off. He soon admitted that in fact he had recently retired from a career in geology. He said he often received calls for the other person who shared his name, and had learned the individual volunteered with a much publicized environmental cause in the community. I followed up with that organization and was

eventually successful in contacting the individual. I could not help wondering if other researchers also enjoyed the "detective work" required to locate some interviewees.

Contacting government offices also provided interesting experiences. Departmental assistants deserve merit for preserving confidentiality, in not disclosing any personal information about retirees. A couple of times, responses struck me as rather amusing: "Well there was so-and-so, but they've retired, so it's too late to contact them." The sense I had was that once a worker stopped working, they had dropped off the face of the planet, never to be seen again.

A final humourous experience which I believe reflects the rural nature of the province, and the eagerness of maritimers to help others occurred when I called a post office in a small village because I believed the individual whose name I had been given lived there. I was informed by the postal clerk that the individual had moved into a town nearby. I could tell she had more information, yet knew it wasn't her place to share such information. She tried to provide a lead by explaining that the individual I was seeking was the sibling of a certain public figure, and that I might want to contact the public figure. When I said I didn't know the latter, she extended the invitation to forward a letter to the post office where she was working, with the reassurance that she would ensure it reached its destination. The strategy was successful, and I found the individual I was seeking.

8.2 Observations and insights in response to interviews

These observations and insights are presented here as a series of narratives resembling journal log entries, congruent with the form in which they were created.

8.2.1 On ageism

I am struck by the way we seem to "write them off", the retiring workers, looking to the younger generations for answers instead. I am reminded of the Harmonium song "Où est allé tout ce monde qui avait quelquechose à raconter?" (Where are all those people who had something to say?) What do we really know about the older social worker who has continued working in a bureaucracy? What do we base assumptions on? Should we be trying harder to reap their views and insights? What do we imagine when I say retiring social worker? What is ageism? Are we guilty of that? What else might we be missing?

8.2.2 On the uniqueness of their work experiences compared to my own

As I listened to these retiring social workers, I realized that in my own career I was unlikely to have experiences similar to those they had lived through, in times of major upheavals and changes. For example, the de-institutionalization of the physically and mentally disabled and the mentally ill, or placing three hundred children from an orphanage into adoptive families. I was also intrigued by the creativity they were required to demonstrate and to adopt – they had to ask themselves "How are we going to do this?" and then see it through to completion. My own work experience has tended more to begin with an orientation in which I have been shown "This is how we do things".

8.2.3 On creativity being the way we "frame" or "construct" our realities

Perhaps creativity has something to do with how we think about our situations. The first interviewee talked about recognizing our autonomy and not being overcome by the negative. I see that as something requiring creativity in our minds – reframing for

example, is only possible through a creative mental stance. It is linked to empowerment, it is linked to avoiding burnout; "if you think you are beaten you are".

8.2.4 On concern for the profession

Concern for the profession of social work as a whole came out strongly. Some mentioned using creativity to promote the profession, and expressed fear that social work was being defined by being given responsibility for things no one else wanted to do, such as child protection. The "leftovers", as one person referred to it. Another perspective about the profession, however, is found in the individual who admitted having problems with the profession and its association; they experienced dissonance with what was espoused and what the Association promoted, and their own view of social work.

What is creativity's role and value to the profession, in changing others' creative mental stances about us? How can the image of the profession and promotion of the profession be enhanced through creative means, but first, do we agree on what our image should be and what deserves to be promoted? It seems there is a need for some creative mental work to seek consensus on it.

8.2.5 On the need to seek means to share creative solutions and strategies with others who could benefit from them

In one interview, a worker with older adults discussed how we do not see many men involved in the care of older persons. An earlier interviewee had a strategy for dealing with that challenge; she would take a calendar out when talking to family members, and depending on how many adult children there were, she would divide the weeks of the year up among that number of people, making the assumption that responsibility would be shared rather than fall on the shoulders of one or two women.

While the first individual acknowledged that "maybe it will change, maybe one day more men will be involved in the care", the second practitioner was nudging the changes along by being creative. This displays how creativity contributes to change. We can choose to be passive and think things will eventually change, or we can become involved in efforts as true "change agents".

8.3 Additional reflections

8.3.1 On class, gender, and a lack of diversity in the sample group

I was aware as the interviews progressed that I was meeting with a predominantly white, middle class group of people, the majority of whom were male. The point was made most apparent when I was invited to people's homes for the interview. I found myself in very comfortable residential areas, homes that were owned rather than rented. Interviewing francophone and anglophone practitioners permitted some diversity in participation.

8.3.2 On the paradox of change agents who do not like change

"I'm not a person who likes change." I heard that comment a few times during the interviews. It raises for me a question about the claim that social workers are to be "change agents". Perhaps we need to examine that notion more deeply, to see if a preference for consistency is a hindrance to client change, and to seeing opportunities for creative changes. A quote by Simon (1994) challenges a clinging to the way things are: "Only practitioners who have believed deeply that people can change and that environments can be transformed have been able to work from an empowerment perspective in a sustained fashion". (p. 3)

Do I believe I can change? Where is the evidence in my own life experience that I have been able to change? In what ways have I not been able to change? What if I do not like and welcome change? If I have not seen evidence that I can change, and life goes on and on – do I believe less and less that we can change? And if "I don't like change", does that mean subconsciously we resist and don't allow it? Creativity becomes unnecessary because it doesn't get permitted to go anywhere. If we let the creative river in, we may be better able to see and appreciate the possibilities for change.

8.3.3 On "creativity stoppages"

How can we understand why people become less creative or experience no need to be creative? If at the beginning of practice, you are developing your ways of doing things, then there passes a point where you think you know it, maybe you stop looking. This perspective could put a greater onus on individual practitioners to ask themselves if they have allowed their creative flame to burn out, and when that happened. Seeing a loss of creativity in this light may be as pertinent as looking to one's environment for the factors that discourage creativity (eg. caseloads, etc).

8.3.4 On different stances

Some say there is more than one way to do things; others say the standards are laid out so there is no room to be creative. If there was one pervasive tension throughout the entire series of interviews, it was between the voices who said you have to know the standards but proceed to approach your work creatively, and those who started their interview saying that the "red tape", bureaucracy, standards tied their hands. Yet, as those of the latter persuasion began talking, they invariably had stories of creative problem

solving to share, suggesting again, that believing that standards and policies prohibit creativity is a myth believed by many.

8.3.5 On the "lone voice in the wilderness"

Do some social workers get negatively labelled so whatever they suggest, it becomes ignored or downtrodden? I found myself wondering this as I listened to self-declared "radicals", many of whom were in direct practice at the termination of their careers rather than in administrative or supervisory positions. I wondered if the candidness with which they described their experiences to me had caused them to become isolated or marginalized. Does the conservative nature of social work impede on creative changes when the need for changes is voiced by those who, by "telling it like it is" (from their perspective) may "ruffle feathers" or cause others to be upset?

8.4 Conclusion

It is my hope that the lines and stories which have been presented throughout this dissertation reflect the commitment, hope and passion which these professional helpers reflected, so that their perspectives might in turn ignite others who could benefit from attending to the creative dimensions of their practice. It is up to us, the social work practitioners with a bouquet of working years still ahead of us, to apply their creative vision and creative assertiveness as we rise to the challenge of reviving and revitalizing our profession. In the words of one interviewee "You have to dream, and you have to believe there is a way to get there!"

CHAPTER NINE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

This study was unique in its commitment to exploring creativity in social work as it is understood and experienced by a group of Generalist social work practitioners who have arrived at the retirement stage of their careers. In the previous four chapters, I have provided data related to how creativity is defined, how it can be conceptualized in practice, where creativity needs to be applied most at this time in the profession's history, and insights from the researcher's perspective, which surfaced in the context of conducting the research.

In this chapter I highlight some aspects of the research which took on the greatest significance to the participants, and I provide an additional layer of meaning to the issues as I discuss certain constructions in greater depth and bring in voices from sources in the literature. In the latter part of the chapter, I address the implications of this research to social work practice, education, administration and research.

9.1 Discussion

The previous chapters provided numerous possibilities for deeper exploration and reflection. Out of the thematic areas I selected five that proved to be central preoccupations during the interviews. The five themes are presented in the form of questions:

1) What characterizes creativity in social work?

2) How important is creativity to social work?

3) What prevents creativity from being recognized as a more central element in social

work?

4) What is the impact of a general lack of recognition that social workers employed in bureaucratic organizations (particularly older workers) can be creative?

5) What is the link between creativity and empowerment?

9.1.1 What characterizes creativity in social work?

The word creativity often incites visions of artistic pursuits – music, painting, pottery, or weaving perhaps. Yet in this study, practitioners rarely associated creativity in social work with artistic work. A few related it to personal artistic pursuits, or incorporated things like drawing or music therapy into their work. However, the tendency was more to discuss creativity in the realm of using the things which are immediately available to achieve a goal, and seeking solutions particularly when a challenge seems insurmountable.

The elements which surfaced as being most pertinent to creativity in social work, described through the fire making metaphor in Chapter 6, illustrate such a characterization. The first element emphasized that "creativity begins with self". It suggests that a starting point is to devote an adequate amount of time to understanding one's self, to expanding personal characteristics which lend themselves to creative work, and to dislodging personal blocks to practicing creatively. On a somewhat spiritual note, Goswami (1996), discussing the witnessing of less creativity among adults than children, suggests "Those who experience a personal sense of purpose in tune with the purpose of the universe and those who develop a special talent to manifestly follow their sense of purpose as a destiny are the ones who continue to be creative in adult life" (p. 55).

The second category which emerged from the data analysis involves the issue of "creativity preparedness", or the degree to which a foundation for creative practice is necessary. The third significant location for conceptualizing creativity and social work is in the social and political contexts of a bureaucratic structure. The interviewees claimed that while there is room and opportunity for creativity, there are impressive challenges in the environment which can dampen or extinguish creative thought and effort. Simultaneously, the sentiment was expressed that respect for the coherence and support which community can offer, both to clients and workers, should be maintained constantly to combat oppressive forces at work in the environment. Creative assertiveness, a committed stance to providing creativity with an increased role in social work, was recognized as the fourth essential element in creativity, while creative relationship-making and interventions are the focus of the fifth area and are related to the ongoing day-to-day activities which the social worker engages in. The informants asserted that working creatively invites experimentation and risk-taking in reaching out to those they are trying to assist.

Houte (1994) writes of the four key paths in which creativity research is represented in the literature. Four of the areas, the creative person, product, process and environment all correspond to some extent with the four thematic areas just described. The category of "creative assertiveness" may not readily fall under one of these categorizations, but could represent an overarching theme which touches all four paths.

The conceptualization of creativity as encompassing more than artistic endeavour would be applauded by one of the most highly published authors and an expert on

creative thinking skills, Edward de Bono (1990; 1994). He writes:

> After the Renaissance and in the Middle Ages, 'thinking' was largely the domain of theologians. The Church also controlled education through schools and universities. The 'thinking' that concerned theologians was very much the thinking of analysis, definitions, words and argument. There was a need to preserve the faith and to prove heretics wrong. As a result there was no emphasis at all on constructive and creative thinking. Religion does not seem to need constructive and creative thinking.
>
> So, it is hardly surprising that, to this day, thinking is very limited. That is why we are so poor at conflict resolution and at problem solving where the cause of the problem cannot be removed. Design and value creation are indeed done by individuals but these aspects of thinking have never become part of the intellectual culture. Creativity is seen merely as artistic expression.
>
> Sadly, there is very little insight into this glaring deficiency. (Edward de Bono nmt 3rd February 2002 New York Message for week beginning 4th February 2002 http://www.edwdebono.com/index Edward deBono's Authorised home page)

9.1.2 How important is creativity to social work?

Belief in the value of creativity in social work practice was apparent in the willingness the retiring practitioners demonstrated in giving from one to two and a half hours of their time to talk about the subject for the purpose of this research. On a broader scale, the constructions offered by the participants reinforced the view of many, that creativity is important and needed, and part of an empowering approach.

Why should a profession take time to ask itself how creativity is submerged in its practices? Those who spoke with the greatest passion and commitment about creativity playing a major role in their approach to relating to others and to overcoming obstacles revealed and demonstrated a very positive attitude toward clients and themselves. It was clear that their appreciation of the gifts of calling upon creativity served to inspire them and to make it possible to have survived in their lengthy careers, without succumbing to the weight of the issues, problems and challenges.

The social workers talked about creativity's potential for providing greater energy to individual social workers, its relevance to increasing awareness of the significance of spirituality in social work, and how it connected to maintaining a personal philosophy toward life and work. Some of the social workers spoke about how being involved in singing and painting were important and necessary outlets which helped to provide some personal rejuvenation.

When social workers expressed the need to apply creativity in communicating what the profession has to offer, they were responding to a need which is also being talked about by all stakeholders, as evidenced in this quote:

> The trends toward increased managerialization, the devolution of responsibility for service delivery to the community, and demands for interdisciplinarity heighten the need for clarity about the unique contribution of our profession and our commitment to social justice. As a result, social work as a profession needs to find a way not only to advocate on behalf of clients, but also to do so effectively on its own behalf. This includes educating the public, policymakers and others about social work and what social workers have to offer. Continued professional legitimacy will need to be earned and strengthened (Schmidt, Westhues, Lafrance & Knowles, 2002, p. 91).

To repeat the words of one practitioner, creativity ensures that the work didn't become "hum drum", but rather, maintains a healthy level of interest, motivation and excitement toward their responsibilities.

9.1.3 What prevents creativity from being recognized as a more central element in social work?

In the midst of affirmations from the practitioners that creativity is indeed the essential ingredient in social work which Siporin (1988) claims it is, there was an equivalent amount of time spent acknowledging that we are not operating at our full creative capacity. What holds us back from being as creative as we could be?

It is worth noting that in other domains where creativity has been closely studied, and particularly when great creative geniuses are considered, there is a recognition that to be creative involves significant risk, and that a certain level of confidence is required as a prerequisite. Abra (1989) explains:

> Confidence does seem crucial. For one thing, it allows creators to take chances, to venture out on their shaky limbs and face antipathy from publics that invariably prefer the familiar; consider Galileo, Darwin, or Freud, each proposing possibilities widely dismissed as ridiculous, even heretical. And indeed, highly creative students are more ready to risk, for example by guessing wildly about difficult problems, than are the uncreative. Creativity also risks, even invites, periodic failure, which sooner or later even the greatest will almost invariably experience (p. 115).

Some of the fears the practitioners identified reflect the risks that those who are creative may need to take. Some of the ways they were expressed included fear of being centred out, fear of authority, not wanting to rock the boat, and being identified as a radical or lone voice for suggesting things that were different from the norm. Several acknowledged that others became upset when some creative suggestions were proposed.

Along with a need for creative social workers to have confidence is the need for assertiveness. In my experience as a social work educator, I am aware that as individuals and as entire class groups, students often identify a need for assertiveness training. When social workers are afraid to speak up and suggest changes, the embers of creativity cannot be fanned. Assertiveness also ties in with the issue of believing in the worth and value of our accomplishments; others will not know what positive changes have come about due to creativity if an unhealthy level of modesty exists. Ephross (1983) recognized this need two decades ago. It is not too late for the ideas found in that article, *Giving up martyrdom*, to become a rally call for increased assertiveness and self-esteem. He writes:

> ...each social worker can play a part in overcoming the myths...Every time a social work audience selects a keynote speaker who does not know the realities of social work practice, each time a lifelong practitioner retires without sharing some nuggets of inner experience with colleagues in writing, wherever staff see clients in debilitating settings that lack adequate provision for confidentiality and raise no objections, whenever administrators are allowed to discuss "their" budgets without being reminded that "their" budgets are "our" budgets, we are participating in processes that are destructive to the mission and message of social work"(p. 33).

The social workers who took part in the study have been referred to as "generalists", even though many held Master of Social Work degrees and were in some cases in positions with titles which suggested specialization in a form of practice, such as mental health counselling or therapy. Their discourse, however, reflected a generalist framework, in that they referred to the impact of social structures on the individual's problems, and considered strategies toward alleviating the social problem in addition to working with the individual. That perspective fits with what Walz & Groze (1991) referred to as the "clinical activist model". They point out that the social work profession could "...advocate on behalf of those exploited or harmed by today's social system. Students could choose to move beyond a clinical orientation to engage in institution building, broad public education, and political action." (p. 503).

Is confidentiality another factor that hinders the celebration of creativity? Social workers are always required to be conscious of confidentiality limits when discussing their work. It is possible that their daily creativity also becomes walled up inside the limits of confidentiality. Everyday acts of creativity have no recognized or well-travelled avenues to be explored or applauded. This could prevent students, other social workers and the public from knowing about creativity that is going on, and reinforces the myth

that "there is no creativity in social work".

9.1.4 What is the impact of a general lack of recognition that social workers employed in bureaucratic organizations (particularly older workers) can be creative?

Moody (1985) uses the term ideology rather than stereotype or myth to reflect the pervasiveness of negative attitudes toward aging and older people. In this research, I found evidence in the discourse of participants and non-participants, that the image of a "retiring"social worker was associated with a set of beliefs which assume the image of individuals who operate in a prescribed way which is devoid of creativity, and which includes a degree of cynicism and apathy. The retiring social work practitioners who I met did not live up (or down!) to this stereotyped view.

Social workers are familiar with the term "reframing" as a tool for helping clients to see a situation in another way. Often throughout the research, as I heard input from people who were not part of the study comment negatively on my investigating the topic of creativity with this specific population, it occurred to me that a reframing might be in order. If as a society we believe firmly that creativity is NOT possible in social work conducted within a governmental organization, we may be guilty of a process we lament when we see it happening to individuals; a confinement of expectations about capacity which in turn reinforces the playing out of the expectations. Today the expression "thinking out of the box" has become an over-used anthem, yet there is a strong tendency to believe that social workers in government are in a box which cannot be opened. We need to expand our creative vision to include the potential for creativity in social work even when conducted from within the government organization. The stories recounted in

this research represent one effort to put pressure on the sides of the box which confine the potential that is there.

Joas (1996) could be talking about the conceptualization of social work performed within a bureaucracy when he insists on the presence of creativity:

> ..creativity is present even within action which is conceived of as the pursuit of utility, because, firstly, the appropriate means of action are often not immediately available but have to be created, and, secondly, the conception of a skillful strategy also requires the application of one's creative powers. Within normatively oriented action it is also possible to demonstrate the presence of creativity: action that is appropriate to the situation and conforms to norms cannot simply be deduced from the norms themselves, but often requires that the actor devise a new and unfamiliar path of action that is therefore fraught with risks. Creativity is needed not only in order to give norms and values a concrete form in practice; the existence of values depends also on there having been a creative process by which values were formed. (p. 233).

9.1.5 What is the link between creativity and empowerment?

In the review of the literature in Chapter 3, I devoted time to examining the link between creativity and empowerment. What have the interviews revealed about such a link? While a couple of practitioners expressed ambivalence in the face of overuse of the term "empowerment" to the extent that it no longer held significance for them, a number of others willingly offered the perspective that increased creativity contributes to the empowerment process. This point was emphasized strongly in the voicing of the importance of being creative in connecting clients with their communities.

The conviction with which many of the workers criticized the inability of some new workers to successfully join with those they were working with or to empathize with clients could also be seen as an issue related to empowerment. If social workers lack the ability to establish a human connection with those who are seeking greater power, the

empowerment process may be thwarted. Social workers who recognize that their creativeness falls short in establishing effective relationships with others will want to seek advice on how to work on this aspect of their practice, particularly as they realize the high status which the empowerment process is assigned in the profession today:

> As I understand it, the notion of empowerment or, as it might be better said in French, the notion of appropriation of power, must be at the centre of social workers' concerns in all areas of the practice, whether at the individual, group or community level. I would go so far as to say that empowerment, or the appropriation of power by clients, is the primary goal of all field work (Rondeau, 2000, p. 218).

If there is one message that runs throughout this discussion, it would be that honouring creativity in generalist practice has merit. It is time to "light the fire"of creativity by letting others know what we do. In the next section, I offer some strategies for supporting enhanced creativity in social work through practice, education, administration and supervision, and research.

9.2 Implications

9.2.1 Implications for social work practice

This research concurs with Rapoport (1968) who lobbied for increased attention to creativity. One way social workers can pursue that objective in practice is to use the framework which was developed based on the interview data as a reflection tool for members of the profession of social work. By applying the themes to their own work, social workers can be in a better position to respond to the constant calls to "be more creative". Members of other professional bodies can also consider how the framework applies or could be adapted to expanding creativity in their own fields. Other profession-specific qualitative studies of member conceptualizations of creativity could be compared

and contrasted to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon.

The study also provides avenues through which the "art and science" aspects of social work practice, discussed in the Introduction, can be integrated together. The study's focus on creativity in social work contributes to a better understanding of generalist practice and empowerment, and its appearance is timely, given the challenges to the profession which have been identified in the Sector study (Schmidt et al., 2002).

One common theme in this research on creativity is that the community has the capacity to address and to respond to needs. It is a highly relevant point. As one of the practitioners said, there is a tendency to think of social workers in government positions, as functioning as individuals with individuals or families, and lose sight of the community the individual comes from. The community is sometimes overlooked or considered insignificant in the compartmentalized, bureaucratized government work. One of the practitioners who read the analysis reflected that way of thinking through feedback which questioned whether community belongs to a discussion of creativity; the connection was not apparent to that worker.

There are lessons for members of professional associations of social workers in this research. Creativity and change share an important platform in social work practice. Rondeau (2001), for example, insists that the practitioners of tomorrow need to be prepared to "...see themselves as agents of change. This means there are things that should be changed and social workers ought to commit themselves and be prepared to act to make these changes" (p. 3). Increased creativity is required in social justice initiatives, as well as in the ways that workers advocate for marginalized individuals and groups.

More work needs to be done to expose the creativity of the profession and its members. Perhaps nominations and awards for creative social workers could be developed, similar to those given to creative teachers and business people. A deliberate effort to develop leadership qualities and assertiveness skills among practitioners is required to help generate creativity throughout social work practice. Enhanced creativity knowledge and training could also be successfully applied to the ongoing issue of how workers can survive the impact of cutbacks in this hallway to the 21st century, and how to contribute to positive changes for themselves and those they serve. Social workers need to take more responsibility for engagement in creative activity and for stimulating opportunities for creative replenishment.

9.2.2 Implications for social work education

Some of the curriculum areas identified by The Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work resonate with the constructions of creativity in social work practice which the practitioners emphasized in their interviews. These include a generalist practice emphasis, inter-disciplinary work, diversity, appreciation of community organization, and attention to rural social work.

Practitioners continually made references to aspects of their educational backgrounds which continued to provide them with analytical tools to understand the context of problems and issues. One practitioner stated, "I just don't think that there's any substitute for a liberal arts education. I don't even think anybody's educated unless they have a liberal arts degree." Some of the backgrounds specifically referred to were political science, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy. Educators need to be aware of

how the curriculum content, including prerequisite courses or degrees interact with one another, and what combination can best provide students with critical analysis skills.

Like other professionals, social workers would benefit from an increased focus on creative problem solving training relevant to their tasks and responsibilities. Innovative brainstorming techniques developed recently could be of great benefit to them.

A large number of social workers equated creativity with reaching across to others, and shared disappointment that many new social workers they saw did not have this basic skill. How can the concern about new social workers not having empathy or being able to develop empowering relationships with clients be addressed in schools of social work? One suggestion offered by the practitioners included bringing into the classroom more speakers who have lived in poverty or abuse, in an attempt to make the students more aware of their realities in a format which could carry a stronger impression. Strengthening the experiential component through volunteer work might also serve to enhance sensitivity. Students should also be constantly required to reflect on their own values and encouraged to be open to criticisms by field placement supervisors who might be most likely to notice behaviours and attitudes which are detrimental to empowering relationship-building. Students should always be encouraged to see the establishing of relationships as a creative process which must reflect the professional values which are at the heart of social work practice: self-determination, respect and social justice.

Creative activity of a more artistic nature can be a source of energy and renewal for social workers impacted by the stress of working in a bureaucratic organization, in which heavy caseloads and high administrative expectations can deplete motivation and

enthusiasm. Curriculum designed to prepare for the generalist Bachelor of Social Work degree must take this issue into consideration. How many social work programs require that students show evidence of developing an interest or hobby to which they can turn to escape their work? There have been recent reports that medical and engineering faculties have caught on to the importance of addressing this issue with their students. Schools of Social Work which incorporate a requirement for students to engage in one of a myriad of creative pursuits would be providing a career-enhancing building block.

Ife (1988) criticizes the negative effects of positivism, which have left social work education behaving as if it "should try to provide students with ready answers of the 'how to do it' variety"(p. 23). His suggestion to social work educators is the designing of a program which is more intellectually challenging, and one way to do so, he suggests, is to:

> look at what has in the past inspired people to seek alternatives and to develop creativity and imagination. Indeed, the study of the past itself can open up whole new worlds for students simply by reinforcing the view that the existing social order has not lasted forever (and in fact is of very recent origin), and that there have been other sorts of societies, other world views, and other ways of organizing social, economic, and political life (Ife, 1988, p. 23).

Students have reacted positively to sessions in which I exposed them to creative problem solving strategies I learned when I attended the annual Creative Problem Solving Institute in Buffalo, New York. Two unsolicited comments which appeared in two students' papers are printed here (with their permission), and are included to emphasize the value of including creative problem solving in the generalist social work curriculum:

> The inclusion of creativity into this course was an awesome idea. The concept of picking a word or object to try and stimulate our brains, to get us thinking from different perspectives, really did help my group come up with a variety of possible

> solutions for our given issue. In a society where we are socialized to think in such linear terms I think that adding creativity and brainstorming ideas are essential because it allows us to spit out any crazy ideas that we have and one of those ideas may be the solution to our problem (Carol Kelly, St. Thomas University BSW Student)

> The exercises that focused on creativity effectively depicted ways in which humor and creativity can break down stress, and lead to productivity through generating new ideas. Allowing oneself to be creative in dealing with clients, and co-workers will enable the worker to step outside of the mainstream approaches of the helping profession, and break down possible barriers one will inevitably face dealing with involuntary clients, and interdisciplinary groups. I believe that creativity will play an important role in my career dealing with youth, and community development. Creativity is the gateway into progress. If a client can have fun and see merit in the social worker's activities, addressing the underlying issue will be easier to accomplish. Creativity will definitely play a major role in my field internship when it comes to facilitating the intercultural youth group. I was very pleased that creativity was addressed as an important issue by our class. (Jeff Thoms, St. Thomas University BSW Student)

9.2.3 Implications for administration and supervision

One of the practitioners clearly captures what is needed from administrators in order for her to be more creative:

> I think what's needed for social workers to have creative work is they need to be given the opportunity to do it. They have to be supported by their superiors and their program managers. And they have to be given adjustments in their caseloads. Most social workers have caseloads but unfortunately big service providers, policy makers, don't let the social workers loose with these creative opportunities. My colleagues and I were privileged to be able to do creative work, because from the government itself, the total will of the government of New Brunswick and all services were mobilized to make sure these community based services worked. There was nobody holding back on this. That made it so much easier, and also we had unlimited resources.

In terms of how supervisors can further support creativity in their workers, the notion of "calling upon" the creativity which individual social workers had at their disposal is a useful concept. If every social work supervisor demanded not only "good work" from their staff, but "creative work", the impact could be greater than if the onus is

always on the individual social worker to assert their creative capacities and vision. Brown & Bourne (1996) provide an image of creative supervision which is worth aspiring to:

> There is a danger that supervision can become a mechanistic bureaucratic activity concerned mainly with monitoring performance, the rigid implementation of agency policy and the exercise of control. At its best, it can be a very skilled, flexible and imaginative activity, which empowers supervisees and enables them to work more effectively and less stressfully. It can be organized as a one-to-one, tandem pair and/or group activity; it can rely solely on discussion, or include a range of other ways of learning like role-play, video, sculpting or computer programmes; it can be highly structured or free-flowing; it can be supervisor-led or based on mutual participation. Skilled creative approaches need managerial support made tangible by investment of resources in comprehensive good quality training. (p. 181).

9.2.4 Implications for research

The issue of creativity and ethics is one area which deserves expanded attention in research. Claims of creative actions and interventions could be subjected to ethical analyses to provide practitioners with a richer framework for reflecting on potentially unethical practices in which the label "creative" has been applied.

Miley and DuBois (2000) offer some research questions about empowerment-based social work practice. One of their questions is pertinent to this research: "Is there really a future for empowerment-oriented social workers in bureaucratic organizational cultures and adverse managed care environments that deter client involvement and demand the application of the medical model?" (p. 9). One way to address this question is to conduct an investigation which expands on this research study, by continuing to explore creativity inside the bureaucratic organization, possibly through case studies, participant observation, or interviewing methods.

Creativity and social work has not to date been deemed to hold enough status to figure among the entries of the Encyclopedia of Social Work. During the course of this research, however, a submission to the first Canadian Encyclopedia of Social Work being edited by Frank and Joanne Turner was accepted (Turner, in press). Its presence in this reference handbook will at least provide future researchers with an interest in creativity with a readily accessible resource.

9.3 Conclusion

This study of creativity in the profession of social work explores the constructions of thirty retiring social workers through an analysis of interview data. Participants affirmed that they see creativity as being essential to the practice of social work today, and offered five categories of themes which contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon: the creative self; creativity preparedness; the social and political context of creativity; the need for a commitment to a creative stance, and ongoing creative interventions and approaches. The framework of their conceptualizations provides target areas toward which members of the profession can resolve to enhance creativity in their social work practice.

CHAPTER TEN

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation is based on research that sought the constructions of creativity in social work practice held by a group of thirty (30) generalist practitioners whose experience ranged from ten to forty-two years. Using the interview as the primary investigative medium, the content was analyzed according to grounded theory methodology in a constructivist framework.

The research process culminated in three categories of findings:

1) An attempt to approach defining the complex concept of creativity (Chapter Five).

2) A framework for better understanding how creativity manifests itself in social work practice (Chapter Six).

3) Identification of areas of the profession where creativity is particularly needed at this time (Chapter Seven).

Creativity in social work as constructed by those who contributed to this research is less the realm of artistic endeavours, and more understood in the domains of problem-solving, relating to others, and innovations arising from the recognition of individual and community needs. A passion for seeking social justice in collaboration with those to whom society attributes less power and status surfaced repeatedly in the stories that were shared. References to whether creativity fell into scientific or artistic spheres did not appear, suggesting that for the practitioners, creativity defies such categorization or the debate is not relevant to their conceptualization of it.

Practitioners strongly conveyed the impression that creativity is important to consider and to call upon, while they concurred that creativity in its vast and varied manifestations is not being utilized to the potential it could be. The metaphor of fire-making was offered as one way to conceptualize how creativity in social work practice can be examined. The individual who sets out to start a fire is as essential and important to that process as is the individual social worker. Foundational material is needed to serve as kindling, and includes the basic skills and knowledge required of generalist practitioners, but could also take the form of workshops, audiovisual materials, and personal modeling of creativity. Thirdly, environmental conditions must be right for a fire to be possible, no less than the social and political environment will affect whether or not creativity will flourish or fade. The significance of the power of the spark or match to initiate the fire can be related to the assertive commitment practitioners claimed needed to be made toward enhancing creativity throughout the field. Finally, the fire can be maintained only if logs continue to be added regularly, thus the need for regular recognition of creative achievements, undertakings and interventions which continue to add "fuel to the fire" of social work's creativity.

Some of the areas which the retiring social workers identified as being in particular need of creative attention include: aspects of the education and development process; a perceived hesitancy on the part of social workers to speak out or take risks; needs within the bureaucracy, needs related to the profession as a whole, and the need for increased activism and radicalism

Creativity could become a flagship foundational element of social work practice, but it would require ongoing reflection and regard for its value on all levels and in all aspects of practice. This research represents an attempt to bring the creativity of experienced generalist practitioners into the limelight, and in so doing, strives to increase awareness and commitment to integrating creativity into social work practice, education, administration and research. To use the organizing metaphor for the study, it is time for individual social workers, provincial and national social work associations, Schools of Social Work and the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work to "light the fire" of creativity in ways that will make a positive difference in the lives of marginalized peoples.

Fox (1991) offers an inspiring reflection and from which the impetus to be creative in social work is provided a spiritual tradition:

> We need to understand our creativity within a cosmic context in order to diffuse some of it and to discipline all of it toward goals of compassion, justice, and harmony. Creativity is the human giving birth as the whole cosmos does and as God does. It is our godly power at work. "What does God do all day long?" Eckhart asks. "He/She gives birth". So does the universe, and so do its healthy citizens, among whom we humans can and ought to be included" (p. 47).

The definition of creative social work which emerged from the interviews with retiring generalist social worker practitioners is worth repeating as a conclusion to this study, as it not only reflects the constructions of a vocal group of committed members of the profession, but it can also serve as a rally call to those already in the field or soon to be, who are prepared to push themselves in their chosen professions, and in so doing, to join in the creation of positive societal changes:

Creativity in social work practice occurs when a social worker intentionally envisages beyond the presumed levels of good practice required in their roles and functions and accepts a challenge which often leads him or her to utilize uncommon, unfamiliar, or previously unconsidered means to pursue greater social justice and heightened empowerment.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Invitation to participate

(The following is a copy of the notice which appeared within the provincial Association of Social Workers' newsletter in the form of an article; identical information will be forwarded to the main governmental departments where there is a likelihood that there will be social workers who have accepted the early retirement offer)

Invitation to those members of the New Brunswick Association of Social Workers who will be retiring from civil service positions over the next two years:

I am currently conducting research for my doctoral dissertation in social work through Memorial University of Newfoundland. The title is: "Creativity in Social Work: Conceptualizations of experienced generalist practitioners. The population chosen for this research is experienced social workers who have chosen to accept recent offers from the provincial government to retire within the next two years. I am seeking experienced social workers (ten years minimum) to volunteer and share with me in a taped interview of approximately one to one and a half hours, their perspectives and reflections on the topic of creativity and social work. I will be conducting the interviews at various locations throughout the province, and welcome the sharing of viewpoints in the interviewee's language of choice (French or English). The confidentiality of all participants will be respected throughout the process. For further information with regard to any aspect of this research, please contact myself, Linda Turner, at 506-457-2550 (private number), E-mail Address: lmturner@nbnet.nb.ca. The dissertation supervisor for this research, Dr. Ken Barter, can also be contacted regarding any concerns or issues, at kbarter@mun.ucs.morgan.ca, or 709-737-2030.

This is an opportunity to contribute to the ongoing development of the profession's knowledge base and to future social work practice.

APPENDIX 1 (FRENCH)

Invitation aux fonctionnaires membres de l'Association des travailleurs sociaux du Nouveau-Brunswick qui prendront leur retraite au cours des deux prochaines années:

J'effectue actuellement de la recherche pour ma thèse de doctorat en service social à l'université Memorial de Terre-Neuve sous le thème de la créativité dans le servie social, en particulier la conceptualisation chez les généralistes. L'échantillonnage est composé de travailleurs sociaux d'expérience qui ont accepté les récentes offres de retraite anticipée, dans les deux prochaines années, du gouvernement provincial. Plus précisément, je recherche des travailleurs sociaux (hommes et femmes) d'expérience (au moins 10 ans) prêts à partager de façon bénévole leurs perspectives et réflexions sur les thèmes de la créativité et du travail social. Les entrevues, d'une durée de 60 à 90 minutes, seront enregistrées et se tiendront en divers endroits de la province dans la langue officielle de préférence de la personne intervieweée. Tout le processus se déroulera dans la plus stricte confidentialité pour tous les participants. Pour plus de renseignements sur ma recherche, communiquer avec moi, Linda Turner, au 506 457-2550 (ligne personnelle) ou à lmturner@nbnet.nb.ca. Si vous avez des préoccupations, n'hésitez pas à communiquer avec mon surveillant de thèse,M. Ken Barter, Ph.D., à kbarter@mun.ucs.morgan.ca ou au 709 737-2030.

Voilà une bonne occasion de contribuer au développement continue de la profession en matière de connaissances et de pratique du travail social.

APPENDIX 2

St. Thomas University
Fredericton, New Brunswick
Canada E3B 5C3

Office of the Vice-President (Academic)
Tel: (506) 452-0531 Fax: (506) 452-0633

June 21, 2000

Prof Linda Turner
Social Work Department
St. Thomas University Fredericton, N.B.

Dear Linda:

The Senate Committee on Research met yesterday and considered your application for research funds to support your research into the topic of creativity in generalist social work practice and the barriers which impact on the practitioner's ability to utilize creativity.

I am pleased to inform you that the Committee has agreed to award you $1300 from its General Research funds. I will remind you that one condition of the research grant is that upon completion of the project that has been supported, you are to forward a report to the Committee detailing expenditures and outlining any consequences of your work - publication, conference presentations, teaching development, etc. As well, publications supported by grants from this Committee are to include acknowledgment of such support.

Congratulations on receiving this grant!

Sincerely,

Patrick Malcolmson
Chair, Senate Committee on Research

PM/bg

cc R. Gallant
L. Tucker

APPENDIX 3

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Interviewee ,

Your agreement to volunteer and participate in this study about social work practice is greatly appreciated. I am interested in hearing your perspectives and views about creativity in social work as you have known and experienced it over your many years of experience in a publicly funded government department or agency. The information on the following page provides you with a clear understanding of the research project as well as details regarding what would be required of you should you decide to participate. I wish to emphasize that your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw for any reason whatsoever, with my full understanding and support.

You can expect full anonymity and confidentiality, which will be preserved throughout the process. The fact that you have provided me with an interview will not be divulged to anyone. Your name will not appear on any of the research materials which will be used, nor will it be mentioned during the tape recording. Any publication of materials as a result of the research will not include any identifying information.

YOUR SIGNATURE IN THE SPACE BELOW INDICATES THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THE INTENT OF THIS CONSENT AS READ TO YOU, THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH, AND THAT YOUR PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY IN THIS TAPED INTERVIEW.

_____

Name

_____

Date

_____

Witness

APPENDIX 3 (French)

Annexe 2: Formule de consentement

Au participant,

Votre participation volontaire et bénévole à cette étude sur la pratique du travail social est fort appréciée. Je suis intéressée à connaître vos points de vue sur la créativité dans le travail social, étant donné que vous connaissez le sujet et que vous en ayez fait l'expérience au cours de vos nombreuses années de travail dans un organisme ou un ministère financé par des fonds publiques. Les renseignements donnés à la page suivante vous aideront à comprendre clairement le projet de recherche et vous donneront les détails sur ce qui est attendu de vous si vous décidez d'y participer. J'aimerais souligner que votre participation est tout à fait volontaire et que vous pourrez vous retirer du projet pour quelque raison que ce soit.

Il est entendu que je respecterai l'anonymat et la confidentialité tout au long de la recherche. Les entrevues ne seront divulguées à personne. Votre nom n'apparaîtra sur aucun materiel de recherche que j'utiliserai, et je ne mentionnerai pas non plus votre nom pendant l'entrevue enregistrée. Toute publication de matériel découlant de la recherche n'inclura aucun renseignement qui pourrait vous identifier.

Votre signature indique que vous comprenez ce que signifie votre consentement par rapport à l'objectif de la recherche et que votre participation à cette entrevue enregistrée est volontaire.

_____

Nom

_____

Date

_____

Témoin

APPENDIX 4

Interview Schedule

Background Information

- Location: Interviews will be held in a mutually agreeable location, where privacy is ensured.

- Format: Interviews will be tape recorded and immediately transcribed by the interviewer following the interview.

- Informed Consent: All interviewees will be provided the opportunity to agree to participate by signing the "Informed Consent" form after they have read the relevant information.

Questions:

The intent of the open, semi-structured interviews is to provide participants with the opportunity to discuss the issues they feel are relevant, thus permitting the dialogue to more closely represent their day to day experience. For this reason, the interview questions are intentionally open-ended. Participants will be invited to expand on their answers or to bring up points which they feel are important or related to the conversation.

The four main themes which are numerically listed below will be explored with the interviewees. Secondary headings indicate the types of questions which will be offered to explore the primary query.

1. How do social workers visualize creativity in social work practice:

- What comes to mind when I ask you to tell me what creativity in social work practice is?
- Can you think of any specific examples which you would say reflect creativity in social work practice?
- Is there a difference between creative social work and creativity in social work?
- What are some situations in which social workers are required to be creative?

2. What value does creativity hold for the profession and for individual social workers:

- How much value do you place on the kinds of creativity you have seen or know about?
- Is creativity a topic which you think social work students should be learning about?
- How might social workers be better off if they had opportunities to nurture or increase their creativity?

3. To what degree are social workers in public agencies capable of utilizing and exercising their potential to be creative or to use creativity according to their conceptualization of it, in their day to day work:

- Could you have been more creative or used more creativity in the absence of any constraints within the workplace environment?
- Were there things about your working environment or conditions which helped contribute to your being more creative or using more creativity?
- Is it easier or more difficult for new social workers coming into employment in public service agencies to be creative or use creativity?

4. What is the nature of the relationship between the experience of empowerment and creativity in social work practice?

- Are you aware of any circumstances in which a social worker or client experienced creativity in social work as an empowering experience?
- Do you believe that people who are highly creative also experience a strong sense of empowerment?
- Are social workers who you see as adhering to an empowering model of practice creative in any ways

APPENDIX 4 (French)

Déroulement de l'entrevue

Renseignements généraux

- Lieu : Les entrevues se dérouleront dans un endroit privé dont l'interviewer et l'interviewé auront convenu.
- Présentation : La recherchiste enregistrera les entrevues et les transcrira immédiatement après la rencontre
- Consentement éclairé : Pour participer aux entrevues, toutes les personnes devront signer la formule de consentement après avoir lu l'information pertinente.

Questions

Les entrevues de type ouvert et semi-structuré ont pour but de fournir aux participants l'occasion de discuter de points qu'ils considèrent pertinents et utiles pour représenter fidèlement leur expérience de travail quotidienne. Pour cette raison, les questions des entrevues sont intentionnellement ouvertes c'est-à-dire à développement. Les participants auront la liberté d'élaborer ou de soulever des points qu'ils jugent importants ou pertinents.

Nous explorerons les quatre grands thèmes suivants. Chaque thème est accompagné de questions qui aideront à approfondir le sujet.

1. La manière dont les travailleurs sociaux voient la créativité dans l'exercice de leur profession:

- Qu'est-ce qui vous vient à l'esprit quand je vous demande de me dire ce qu'est la créativité dans la pratique du travail social?
- Pouvez-vous penser à des exemples précis qui, selon vous, refléteraient la créativité dans la pratique du travail social?
- Y a-t-il une différence entre le travail social créatif et la créativité dans le travail social?
- Pouvez-vous me parler de situations qui exigent de la créativité de la part des travailleurs sociaux?

2. L'importance de la créativité pour la profession et pour le travailleur social :

- Quelle importance accordez-vous aux différents aspects de la créativité, que vous avez observés ou que vous connaissez?
- Croyez-vous que la créativité est un sujet que les étudiants en travail social devraient approfondir?
- Que gagnerait les travailleurs sociaux à avoir des possibilités de nourrir ou d'accroître leur créativité?

3. Les possibilités qu'ont les travailleurs sociaux dans les organismes publics d'utiliser ou d'exercer leur potentiel de créativité ou de se montrer créatifs selon leur conceptualisation de la créativité dans leur travail de tous les jours :

- Auriez-vous pu vous montrer plus créatif ou user de plus de créativité s'il n'y avait pas eu de contrainte dans votre milieu de travail?
- Vous souvenez-vous de certains éléments dans votre milieu ou vos conditions de travail qui vous aident ou vous ont aidé à être plus créatif ou à user de plus de créativité?
- Dans les organismes publics, est-il plus facile ou plus difficile pour les nouveaux venus dans la profession d'être créatifs ou d'user de créativité?

4. La nature de la relation entre l'expérience de la prise de conscience de son pouvoir (ses forces) et la créativité dans la pratique du travail social :

- Connaissez-vous des circonstances où un travailleur social ou un client a fait l'expérience de la créativité comme étant une expérience de prise de conscience de son pouvoir?
- Croyez-vous que les personnes très créatives ont aussi un solide sens de leur pourvoir ou de leurs forces?
- Les travailleurs sociaux qui semblent préconiser un modèle de pratique de la prise de conscience de son pouvoir ou de ses forces sont-ils, selon vous, créatifs de quleque façon que ce soit?

APPENDIX 5

Human Subjects Ethical Review Protocol

1. Project Title:

"Creativity in social work: Conceptualizations of experienced generalist practitioners"

2. Investigator:

Linda Turner, PhD Scholar
Department of Social Work
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, Newfoundland

Address and Contact Information in province where research is being conducted:
c/o Linda Turner, 2539 Ch. Weldfield-Collette Rd., Collette, New Brunswick E4Y 1H3
Private Telephone: (506) 457-2550 (with voice-mail); E-mail LMTURNER@nbnet.nb.ca

Dissertation Committee Members and Contact Information:

Dr. Ken Barter (Supervisor), Chair of Child Protection
School of Social Work, Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, Newfoundland
E-mail Address: kbarter@morgan.ucs.mun.ca
Telephone: 709-737-2030

Dr. Michael Ungar, Assistant Professor
School of Social Work, Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, Newfoundland
E-mail Address: mungar@morgan.ucs.mun.ca
Telephone:709-737-8044

Dr. Donna Hardy Cox, Assistant Professor
School of Social Work, Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, Newfoundland
E-mail Address: dhardy@morgan.ucs.mun.ca
Telephone: 709-737-8044

3. **General Purpose of Study**:

The primary purpose of this study is to explore how creativity in the field of generalist social work is understood, described, and conceptualized by social workers

who have decided to retire from their positions in publicly funded departments and organizations after a minimum of ten years of practice. An analysis of their perspectives will contribute to a clearer understanding of the manifestations of creativity in social work, and constraints which may have an impact on the utilization and existence of creativity.

4. **Expected Results of the Study**

Participants in the study may benefit from the opportunity to reflect on their careers as social work practitioners, and by being invited to share the knowledge they have gained from many years of service with others in the profession, through this scholarly undertaking. Members of the social work profession may benefit by reflecting on the conceptualizations of creativity which will be generated, and by engaging in subsequent discourse around their own use of creativity. If the study generates greater awareness and leads to increased utilization of creativity in the field of social work, there are also potential benefits for service users and for society in general, if that heightened commitment to creative social work practice leads to innovative and empowering solutions to problems.

5. **Descriptions of procedures**:

i. Invitation to participate: Invitations to participate will be directed toward social workers who have accepted a provincial government offer to participate in early retirement from their positions. The invitations will appear in the provincial newsletter of the social worker's association, on notices distributed to targeted agencies and departments, and will also be sent to individuals whose names are suggested by participants or others who are aware of the study. (See Appendix 1: Invitation to participate).

ii. Interview guide: The interview guide can be found in Appendix 4. All interviews will be tape-recorded, and transcribed by the principal researcher. "Nudist" computer software package will be utilized to facilitate the qualitative analysis of interview data.

6. **Description of subject population**:

Approximately thirty in-depth interviews (a figure which represents 50% of the total sample population) will be conducted with social workers who have formally accepted offers from the New Brunswick Provincial government to take early retirement leave (Deadline for acceptance was March 15th, 2000). Interviewees will be contacted through Social Work Association newsletters, letters sent directly to agencies, and through personal referrals.

7. **Investigators' relationship to the subjects**:

Any prior knowledge of interviewees would be of a professional nature only, and have occurred due to contacts which came about during the investigator's thirteen years of practice as a social worker in New Brunswick .

8. **Assessment of possible risks and benefits to subjects**:

No risks of any type are foreseen for participants in this study. A potential benefit may be the opportunity provided to retirees to reflect on their careers in the social work profession with an interested listener, as well as to contribute to Social Work knowledge development.

9. **Procedures to be followed to obtain informed consent**:

Each potential interviewee will be provided with a summary of the research and full information regarding the purpose and procedures. Prior to being asked to sign a consent form, they will be read the statement which is written on the form, and they will also be given a signed copy. Participants will be provided with the opportunity to refuse to answer questions as they wish, or to terminate their interview at any time.

10. **Statement regarding incentives**: No incentives, remuneration or other compensation will be provided to subjects.

11. **Description of information to be collected and research instruments**:

The information which will be gathered in this research effort consists of the opinions and perspectives of a specific group of social workers regarding forms of creativity in social work practice. The single research instrument which will be used in this study is an interview schedule, a copy of which is attached to this proposal.

12. **Preservation of Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout all stages of the research, including during the initial identification of participants, during the interview process, and within any publication which occurs based on the research results. The principal investigator of the study will be the only person conducting the interviews. The audiotapes of the interviews and the transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet for the duration of the study and destroyed within two years of its completion. No names will appear on the tapes, rather they will be labelled numerically and by date. Reference to interviews will be in the form of "Linda Turner Interview - Tape #__ Date: The researcher will be the only one in possession of a master list of the tapes. No other person will have access to the material, or to the identities of those who have participated in the study.

13. **Recording of information**

Only the principal investigator will be transcribing the interviews, all of which she is conducting herself. This will contribute to a greater guarantee of confidentiality than could be the case if others will be involved.

14. **Consent forms, Information Statements**

Participants will be provided with the opportunity to participate in the study using French or English, depending on their preference. A copy of the consent form is attached in the Appendix. The Information statement to be distributed to potential participants (also available in both languages) is attached as Appendix #??. Appendix #?? includes a copy of the notice which will be published in the NBASW Association newsletter, and distributed to government departments and agencies where members of the sample population are likely to be employed.

Memorial
University of Newfoundland

Office of Research

APPENDIX 6

May 12, 2000

ICEHR No. 1999/00-054-SW

Ms. Linda Turner
School of Social Work
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Ms. Turner:

The Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research has examined the proposal for the research project entitled "*Creativity in social work: conceptualizations of experienced generalist practitioners*" in which you are listed as the principal investigator.

The Committee has given its approval for the conduct of this research in accordance with the proposal submitted.

If you should make any changes either in the planning or during the conduct of the research that may affect ethical relations with human participants, these should be reported to the ICEHR in writing for further review.

This approval is valid for one year from the date on this letter: if the research should carry on for a longer period, it will be necessary for you to present to the Committee annual reports by the anniversaries of this date, describing the progress of the research and any changes that may affect ethical relations with human participants.

Thank you for submitting your proposal. We wish you well with your research.

Sincerely yours,

G. Inglis
Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research

GI/emb

St. John's, NF, Canada A1B 3X5 • Tel.: (709) 737-8251 • Fax: (709) 737-4612 • http://www.mun.ca/research

APPENDIX 7

St. Thomas University

Fredericton, New Brunswick
Canada E3B 5G3

Tel:(506)452-7700 Fax:(506)450-9615

Senate Research Committee

June 19, 2000

Professor Linda Turner
Department of Social Work
St. Thomas University

Dear Professor Turner,

The Senate Research Committee met and reviewed your research project in accordance with our current policy on research ethics. The Committee has approved your project.

Sincerely,

P. Malcolmson

Patrick Malcolmson
Chair

APPENDIX 8

INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Title: Creativity in social work: Conceptualizations of experienced generalist practitioners

Name of Researcher/Facilitator (and person who will conduct all interviews): Linda Turner

Purpose of this research:

The primary purpose of this study is to explore how creativity in the field of social work is understood, described, and conceptualized by social workers with a minimum of ten years of experience who have decided to retire from their positions in publicly funded departments and organizations. An analysis of their perspectives will contribute to a clearer understanding of the manifestations of creativity in social work, and constraints which may have an impact on the utilization and existence of creativity.

Expected Results of the study:

Participants in the study may benefit from the opportunity to reflect on their careers as social work practitioners, and by being invited to share the knowledge they have gained from many years of service with others in the profession, through this scholarly undertaking. Members of the social work profession may benefit by reflecting on the conceptualizations of creativity which will be generated, and by engaging in subsequent discourse around their own use of creativity. If the study generates greater awareness and leads to increased utilization of creativity in the field of social work, there are also potential benefits for service users and for society in general, if that heightened commitment to creative social work practice leads to innovative and empowering solutions to problems.

Risks of psychological and social injuries or distress:

Given the nature of this study, it is not anticipated that there would be any risk of psychological or social injury or distress to participants.

What will happen during the interview:

A series of questions which have been predetermined will provide some structure to the interview, however participants will also be encouraged to explore and suggest new but related areas, based on their conceptualizations of creativity in social work practice. The discussion will be tape recorded on audio cassettes and later transcribed so that I can systematically explore the ideas and themes which are generated by the discussion. As the only researcher for this project, I will be the sole individual who will ever have access to the transcripts and audio-recording of the interview. Both will be stored in a locked

filing cabinet, and will be destroyed when the research and writing related to the research are complete.

Confidentiality:

Anyone interested in being interviewed can expect complete confidentiality at every stage, from the initial contact with the researcher to the publication of results. Participants are reassured that their participation in the study would never be divulged as having occurred to anyone.

Anonymity: Names of individuals who provide interviews will not be mentioned on the audio recordings, nor will any names be written on the cassettes and transcripts. Interviewees will be referred to through a numbering process for the purposes of data analysis.

What happens to your words after the interview: The information which you will be sharing will be used to provide the social work profession with knowledge about how creativity in social work is conceptualized by experienced practitioners. I will be writing up my analysis of the data gathered from approximately thirty interviews, and incorporating it into my dissertation document. With regard to any publication which may occur as a result of the research, no identifying information of any type will be associated with ideas or statements that might be included to illustrate a point.

Sharing a summary of findings: The anticipated completion data for the analysis of the interview data is April, 2001. The researcher will provide any participant who would like to receive a written summary of the findings with a copy.

Compensation: No monetary compensation will be provided to participants in this study.

APPENDIX 8 (French)

RENSEIGNEMENTS AUX PARTICIPANTS

Titre : La créativité dans le travail social: Conceptualisation des généralistes chevronnés

Nom de la recherchiste-facilitatrice-interviewer : Linda Turner

Objectif de la recherche :

Cette étude a pour objectif principal d'explorer la façon dont la créativité dans le travail social est comprise, décrite et conceptualisée par des travailleurs sociaux qui comptent au moins dix années d'expérience et qui ont décidé de se retirer alors qu'ils ou elles travaillaient dans des organismes ou des ministères financés par des fonds publics. Une analyse de leurs points de vue aidera à mieux comprendre les manifestations de la créativité dans le travail social et les contraintes qui peuvent avoir un impact sur l'utilisation et l'existence de cette créativité.

Résultats prévus de l'étude :

Les personnes qui envisagent de contribuer à la recherche pourraient voir leur participation comme une occasion de faire un retour sur leur carrière de travailleur social et de partager les connaissances acquises au fil des nombreuses années de service. Elles pourraient elles-mêmes profiter des réflexions sur la conceptualisation de la créativité qui en découleront et des discussions ultérieures qui porteront sur leur propre usage de la créativité. Si l'étude sensibilise plus de gens à la question et mène éventuellement à un usage accru de la créativité dans le travail social, les utilisateurs du service et la société en général y gagneront. La participation pourrait apporter des pratiques créatives à la profession, lesquelles ne peuvent que mener à des solutions innovatrices et stimulantes axées sur la prise de conscience de son pouvoir ou de ses forces pour faire face à ses problèmes.

Risques de détresse ou de blessures psychologiques et sociales :

La nature de cette étude ne présente aucun risque éventuel de détresse ou de blessures psychologiques et sociales pour les participants.

Déroulement de l'entrevue :

Une série de questions prédéterminées donnera une certaine structure à l'entrevue, mais les particpants seront libres d'explorer et de proposer de nouvelles avenues, à condition qu'elles soient pertinentes à l'étude, c'est-à-dire basées sur leur conceptualisation de la créativité dans la pratique du travail social. J'enregistrerai les discussions sur des cassettes audio et les transcrirai pour me permettre de revoir

systématiquement les idées et les thèmes de la discussion. En tant que seule recherchiste du projet, je serai aussi la seule personne à avoir accès aux enregistrements et aux transcriptions de l'entrevue. Tout le matériel sera gardé sous clé pendant la période de recherche, puis sera détruit.

Confidentialité :

Toute personne qui participe à l'étude peut être assurée que l'information demeurera strictement confidentielle tout au long du processus, de la première rencontre avec le recherchiste jusqu'à la publication des résultats. Il en va de même de leur participation.

Respect de l'anonymat :

Le matériel ne fera jamais mention du nom des participants, que ce soit dans les enregistrements, sur les cassettes ou sur les transcriptions. Pour faciliter l'analyse des données, chaque participant et participante se verra attribuer un numéro, lequel servira également au classement.

Utilisation de vos paroles après l'entrevue :

Les propos des participants transmettront à la profession des renseignements sur la façon dont des praticiens chevronnées conceptualisent la créativité dans le travail social. J'analyserai les données recueillies à partir d'une trentaine d'entrevues. Cette analyse sera intégrée à ma thèse. Toute publication qui pourrait éventuellement découler de la recherche ne comporterait aucun renseignement qui pourrait de quelque façon que ce soit identifier une personne ou l'associer à des idées ou à des citations qui pourraient servir à ilustrer un point de discussion.

Résumé des résultats :

L'analyse des données devrait être terminée en avril 2001. La recherchiste fournira aux participants qui le veulent une copie du résumé écrit des résultats.

Rémunération :

Les participants à l'étude ne recevront aucune compensation financière.

APPENDIX 9

Copy of letter sent to participants afterwards asking for comments and explaining distribution of results.

May 23rd, 2001

128 Riverside Drive
Fredericton, NB
E3A 3Y1

Subject: Update for participants of research on "Conceptualizations of Creativity in Social Work"

Dear

Hello! I hope this letter finds you in good health and good cheer, ready to enjoy a wonderful summer! This letter is being sent to each of the thirty social workers who I interviewed for my dissertation research, sometime between July 2000 and March 2001.

I feel the need to emphasize to each of you how valuable your contribution has been. With each interview, I gained insights into what creativity in social work entails, and into the reasons why creative approaches in practice need to be better supported and valued. The interest you showed in the topic, and the commitment you demonstrated in taking the time to explain your perspectives to me gave me an ever-increasing sense that the subject is of importance and that as a profession, we could benefit from spending time paying attention to the things which prevent us from operating at our full creative potential, both individually and collectively.

During April and the better part of May, I have been involved in the process of transcribing each interview from the tape recordings, grouping responses into the four areas of inquiry (general conceptualizations, barriers and constraints, creativity and the student or new social worker, and empowerment's relationship to creativity), and then combing the material in a systematic way to see what themes would emerge from the collection of thoughts. A computer software program for qualitative data analysis known as "Nvivo"was invaluable in being able to complete this aspect efficiently.

You will find attached a framework which links the key themes and sub-themes together. I still consider it to be a "work in progress", and am forwarding it to you at this point to ask whether your own perspectives are somehow represented in the concepts which are there. I understand that as one of thirty individuals who expressed their conceptualizations, parts of the framework may not be within your view of creativity and social work, however I would be interested in hearing from you if you do not see your viewpoint represented somewhere in the chart – your feedback would be helpful to me as I refine and develop the construction.

Please feel free to communicate with me through your preferred means, if you would like to add to the framework or if you would like to make any comments

whatsoever. My mailing address is 128 Riverside Drive, Fredericton, NB E3A 3Y1. Other ways to communicate with me include email (LmTurner@nbnet.nb.ca), telephone 506-452-0412, or fax 506-452-0611.

Your comments were rich and varied, revealing and powerful. I have assigned pseudonyms to each of you when I have directly quoted from an interview, and at no time do I provide any information which would identify you to the reader (such as work location or department). In my dissertation and journal articles, I do not identify New Brunswick as the province in which I conducted the research, although some may associate the research with New Brunswick because of my current affiliation with St.Thomas University.

I sincerely wish you much continued success and enjoyment as you retire from your career in the civil service as a social worker. It has been a pleasure to meet you; you have reminded me that I have good reason to be proud to be a member of a profession which includes in its midst such committed people as yourself. I hope our paths will cross again soon!

With thanks,

Linda Turner, RSW
Memorial University of Newfoundland PhD (Social Work) student

Creativity in Social Work: Practitioners' Conceptualizations

1. Starting with the self: Who is *this* social worker? • a. Reflections on the social worker's identity • b. Summoning the creative self • c. Acknowledging the denial of the creative self • d. Creativity and professional values and ethics
2. Creating a relationship through creative intervention • a. Creatively connecting with others • b. Creatively intervening • c. Creatively seeking solutions • d. Creatively advocating
3. The social and political context of working in the bureaucracy • a. Social work as "creativity friendly" territory • b. Creativity and the imperative of community • c. "P"olitics, "p"olitics and frustration
4. Creativity Preparedness • a. "When we started there was nothing": fertile ground • b. The merits of attaining a solid knowledge foundation first • c. "Creativity preparedness": facilitating the transition to creative practice
5. Committing to a Creative Stance • a. Experiences of attempting to be creative: highs and lows • b. Benefits of a creative approach • c. Preserving and maintaining our creativity • d. The need for creative assertiveness

APPENDIX 9 (French)

le 22 juin, 2001
2539 Ch. Weldfield-Collette
Collette, N.-B.
E4Y 1H3

Bonjour!

Ça fait déjà plusieurs mois depuis que j'ai entreprise avec vous une entrevue, afin de découvrir vos idées au sujet du travail social et de la créativité. Je voudrais vous remercier encore une fois pour votre temps et pour vos nombreuses réflections. Vous m'avez permise de mieux comprendre dans quel sens nous, les travailleurs sociaux, sommes créatifs dans la pratique quotidienne de notre métier.

En ce moment, j'ai créé un cadre des points qui vous (lorsque je dis "vous", je parle des trente personnes qui ont eu une entrevue) semblaient être les plus importants. Je les ai organisé en cinq catégories. Je vous envoie, par la présente, une copie en anglais pour clarifier dans le cas où (pas mal certain!) ma traduction du cadre n'arriverait pas à bien exprimer les idées selon la conceptualisation. (Je suis determinée de vous les fournir en français quand même, pourtant je connais bien mes limites et mes capacités dans une deuxième langue:).

Vos commentaires ou réactions seraient le bienvenue, s'il y a lieu. Vous pouvez me joindre des façons suivantes; par courrier électronique, à LmTurner@nbnet.nb.ca; par téléphone à 452-0412; ou par courrier normal à l'adresse au haut de la page.

J'espère que je serai capable de transmettre dans mes écrits, l'engagement et la dévotion que vous m'avez démontré, envers la profession, mais aussi j'espère que les discussions que nous avons eu pourront aussi faire réféchir les autres sur l'importance d'appliquer la créativité et afin que ces pratiques utilisées dans le domaine puissent mieux supporter et respecter les travailleurs et leurs clients.

Encore une fois, sincèrement merci à vous tous. J'espère que votre retraite vous offrira beaucoup de bonheur. Meilleurs voeux,

Linda Turner, RSW
Étudiante de doctorat, l'Université Memorial de Terre-Neuve.

La créativité en travail social; conceptualisations des praticiens

1. Commencer par comprendre la personne: Qui est-ce, ce travailleur social? ▸ Relections sur l'identité du travailleur social ▸ Comment attirer la partie de nous qui est créatrice ▸ Reconnaître où nous ne sommes pas créatifs ▸ La créativité et les valeurs et éthiques professionnelles
2. Utiliser la créativité dans le processus d'intervention ▸ Établir des liens par des façons créatives ▸ L'intervention créative ▸ Chercher des solutions par des moyens créatifs ▸ Agir comme avocat par des moyens créatifs
3. Le contexte social et politique du travail dans la bureaucratie ▸ Le travail social: une territoire mûre pour la créativité ▸ La créativité et l'impératif de l'approche communautaire ▸ Les "P"olitiques, les "p"olitiques, et la frustration là-dedans
4. Être préparé pour travailleur de façon créative ▸ "Au début il n'y avait rien": le terrain mûr ▸ Les mérites d'obtenir une base de connaissances solides avant d'embarquer dans la créativité ▸ Être prêt pour la créativité: comment faciliter la transition à une pratique créative
5. S'engager à une croyance dans le créativité ▸ Efforts vers la créativité: les hauts et les bas ▸ Bénéfices d'une approche créative ▸ Comment préserver and maintenir notre créativité ▸ Le besoin pour une affirmation de la créativité en travail social.

APPENDIX 10

Memo to social workers reviewing draft of Chapter Six:

February 5th, 2002

Dear ,

Thank you!! Your continued assistance with my dissertation research, by reading through this presentation of the findings, is appreciated immensely.

This chapter contains the elements of a framework which I constructed based on what came out of the interviews (after coding the themes and organizing them into a structure). I appreciate your reading through it and providing me with any feedback which comes to mind as you read it and when you are finished. Please do not hesitate to comment on any aspects of it. I welcome your thoughts and input, and will use that feedback as I turn the draft into its final version.

I am enclosing an envelope with sufficient postage to return the manuscript and your comments to me. If you prefer to "chat", please give me a call at your convenience (452-0412). Please feel free, as well, if you prefer to email your comments to me.

Again, thank you very much, both for the original interview you provided me with, and for this additional service of reading the chapter and letting me know what you think. I feel very fortunate to have made this connection with you, and I value the role you have played in this research and my dissertation.

Sincerely,

Linda M. Turner