



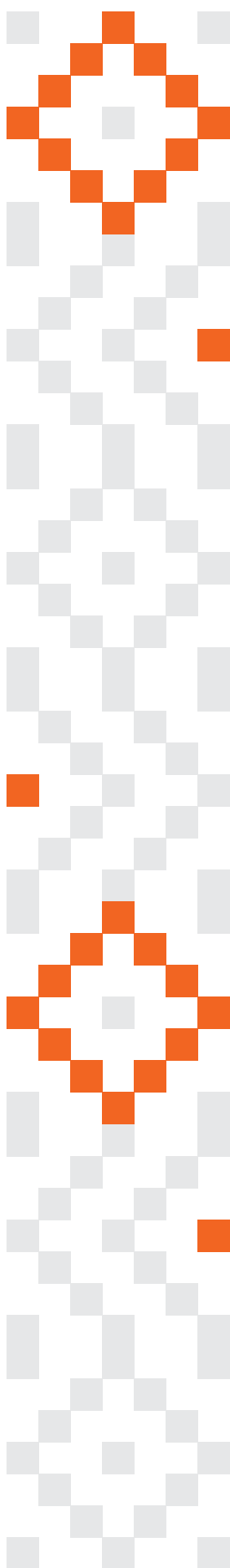
UNIVERSITY
OF
JOHANNESBURG

Contextualised Social Work Education – South African and Canadian Experiences



VIU

The Future
Reimagined



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Please note that this report relies on South African English spelling.

Abbreviations

ASASWEI:	Association of South African Social Work Educational Institutions
CASWE:	Canadian Association of Social Work Educators
CSWE:	Contextualised Social Work Education
CSDA:	Centre for Social Development in Africa, University of Johannesburg
UJ:	University of Johannesburg
VIU:	Vancouver Island University

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Jeanette Schmid, Jessie Turton and Marina Morgenshtern.

Executive Summary

Recognising that dominant social work is increasingly identified as irrelevant, ineffective and potentially harmful, and noting that there is an emerging body of literature regarding alternative social work practice but less on education, this research study aimed to highlight the implementation of Contextualised Social Work Education and to learn lessons regarding this process.

The research was conducted in Canada and South Africa. Data collection extended from August 2018 to October 2019 and was iterative. Twenty-eight social work educators were interviewed regarding their implementation of alternatives to dominant social work education. Of this group, a total of five Canadian educators participated in two national sharing circles and six South Africans in a national sharing circle there. The process concluded with an international sharing circle in which two South African and two Canadian social work educators participated.

Please note that in attending to language we have used 'Indigenous' when referring to the Canadian situation as this is seen as respectful, and otherwise retained 'indigenous'.

Themes were derived from the data. These included:

- 1. Understandings of alternatives to dominant social work education.** Participants asserted that good social work practice and education by definition were contextualised. Contextualised social work education was multidimensional, simultaneously incorporating various agendas such as decolonisation, anti-oppressive practice, Afro-centrism, developmental social work, i/Indigenous and ecological social work. Furthermore, contextualised social work education was profoundly local, but nevertheless acknowledged universal principles.
- 2. Imperatives towards contextualised social work education.** Several push and pull factors were offered including the political context, international perspectives, university and faculty policy, personal educational and professional experiences, student conditions and the need to attend to student voice(s).
- 3. Implementation of contextualised social work education.** This issue was addressed first on the level of content. Transmitted knowledge needed to include critical histories, nuanced information on local social conditions, information about the impact of neoliberal policies and their impact on contemporary oppressions, critical ethics, international models of practice, I/indigenous content, diverse ways of knowing, skills for practice and information on local policies and legislation. The second level was that of strategies or methodologies. Here participants spoke to the importance of reviewing the curriculum to align it with contextualised social work education; developing local materials; supporting students for participation in the classroom; participatory, experiential, holistic

and relational teaching methodologies; varied activities that matched diverse learning styles and cultural learning; instructor authenticity and transparency; advancing critical, disruptive and unsettling thought; facilitating student reflexivity; promoting diversity of voice; and encouraging community connection.

4. **Barriers and supports.** Factors cited were not always clearly barriers or supports, but might have aspects that impeded and others that facilitated contextualised social work education. For example, while institutions could be restrictive, existing appropriate institutional policies were an enormous support. A number of barriers, such as the prevalence of western and neoliberal discourses, institutional restrictions, and the lack of consensus on alternative frameworks and their definitions were noted. For supports, the participants stressed the encouragement and direction from accrediting bodies, faculty's personal passion and commitment to alternative social work education, the support of peers, students and community members, and the availability of locally-produced and relevant learning materials.
5. **Contextualised research.** The participants themselves became aware that the experience of contextualising social work education differed in each national context. Language and preferred lenses, historical processes and lived experiences were often quite divergent.
6. **Pathways.** Participants recommended initiating collective activism to resist professional imperialism and the dominance of mainstream social work discourses; the promotion of contextualised social work education through professional bodies and the professional community; the development of multi-level coherent policy; and responding to and honouring of students' lived experiences and needs.

The researchers framed the **discussion** around the following areas:

1. **Theorising contextualised social work.** As such it is recognised as multipronged, integrating local discourses, centring power, decolonising context, promoting community as the site of intervention, relying on and enhancing local knowledge production, foregrounding student lived experience and promoting instructor reflexivity and social location.
2. **What constitutes contextualised social work as content and pedagogy,** critical knowledge, values and ethics and emancipatory teaching being emphasised.
3. **The context or conditions** for contextualised social work education as regards coherent policies, supportive peers and a resourced environment.

Conclusions highlighted the fact that while contextualisation is asserted as foundational to social work, participants communicate a structural, critical understanding that differs from the individualised mainstream understanding of context. Participants argue that social conditions must be understood through their local construction and not a Northern lens. The research emphasises that contextualised social work education content and pedagogy support critical thinking, critical history, and critical ethics and integrate relevant critical discourses for the local context. While participants advocate for an alternative education, ultimately the intention of contextualised social work education is not to overlook mainstream social work discourses and constructions, but to decentre these. Further, the goal is to recruit a diverse group of students and to support students so that they are empowered in their learning and can be effective in facilitating community empowerment. Indeed, the community is highlighted as the point and site of intervention. The study also leads to the conclusion that in contextualised social work education the community is centred: as the point of engagement and the site of knowledge production. The research further suggests that while the local is to be foregrounded, local issues cannot be decoupled from global developments. Students also are not only to be equipped to manage in local contexts, but should have skills that are transferrable internationally. Finally, contextualised social work education cannot be implemented without a strong policy foundation.

The study confirms Schmid and Morgenshtern's (2019) conceptualisation of contextualised social work education. It amplifies the initial formulation by reasserting the critical, foregrounding analyses of power, demonstrating the integration of multiple critical discourses and privileging local understandings of and solutions to social conditions. Contextualised social work education is a political project that resists societal oppression and promotes emancipatory education.



1

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

Social work as a profession is becoming increasingly global (Ornellas et al., 2018). Dominant social work frequently adopts an individualised approach and may be utilised to further social control. As such, both academics and affected groups are increasingly critiquing mainstream, Anglophone, western, White social work as irrelevant, ineffective and indeed harmful. Alternatives to such social work have been proposed and include conceptualisations of decolonised, Indigenous, Indigenising, Afro-centric, developmental, anti-oppressive and ecological social work. These approaches are discussed in more detail under the literature review.

Practice examples consistent with these alternative approaches are being documented. However, there appears to be minimal research regarding social work education that utilises such an alternative framework. Although principles for alternative social work education have been identified, few examples of contextualised classroom content and pedagogy have been documented. This study recruited as participants academics who were in some way engaged in alternative education and based on their experience, aimed to illuminate examples of alternative educational content and strategies in Canada and South Africa. By doing so, we hope to encourage social work educators to implement the type of social work education that equips social work students to offer meaningful and relevant interventions.

Through a literature review we curated current scholarly discussions regarding alternatives to dominant social work and found a range of terms that have been used to represent such alternatives. Although the agendas of each do not necessarily intersect, certain commonalities emerge. While recognising that such terms might indicate regional preferences, following the literature review we integrated these themes to conceptualise Contextualised Social Work Education. We had already adopted this term as a shorthand for the array of alternative social work approaches proposed.

This study is a South African-Canadian project. While there are commonalities between these two national contexts in that each is a country of colonisation and both have had Truth and Reconciliation processes which have had implications for social work education, it is clear that there are more differences than intersections. The intent of the research was not to compare and contrast, but to highlight the importance of context in social work education and to identify the ways in which social work educators were attending to such context.

This report outlines the conceptual framework for the study, offers a summary of the initial literature review, discusses the methodology, and then presents the findings and associated discussion. Finally, recommendations and next steps emerging out of the study are highlighted.



2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2. Conceptual Framework

A postmodern critical social work lens forms the conceptual framework. We accordingly focus on the use of language and the many ways in which the dominant and alternative social work practice and educational discourses are framed. We note that language itself is highly contextual. For example, descriptions of “western” social work do not make it clear that South American social work approaches that privilege community work fall outside of our understanding of dominant social work (De Urrutia Barroso & Strug, 2013; Saracostti, Reininger, & Parada, 2012). Additionally, language is used differently in the two contexts studied. For example, it is respectful in Canada to capitalize the words “Indigenised” or “Indigenous” when reflecting Canadian First Nations, Metis, and Inuit epistemologies, though this practice is not the convention in South Africa.

Further, in utilising a postmodern critical social work framework we underline the importance of social justice issues. We centre conceptualisations of power, recognising its fluidity and circular nature. Additionally, consistent with postmodern critical social work, we foreground processes of knowledge production and meaning making (Fook, 2002; Healy, 2002; Pease & Fook, 1999), and see collaboration with service users and the goals of emancipation and transformation as central. Further, we aim to recognise multi-dimensional social realities and advocate for diverse epistemologies (Fook, 2002; Fook & Pease, 1999). Finally, a postmodern critical social work lens thus permits us to identify the ways in which both dominant and alternative forms of social work education might function.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding an open book. The pages are white and slightly curved. A pixelated graphic, resembling a stylized star or burst of light, is overlaid on the right side of the book. The background is dark and out of focus.

3

LITERATURE REVIEW

3. Literature Review

In 2017, we reviewed extant academic literature that speaks to Indigenisation, Indigenous, decolonised, and developmental social work. At the time, these terms were known to the authors as constructing alternatives to dominant social work. As the literature search progressed, the researchers became alert to other language used to denote alternative social work perspectives and expanded the search to include the terms 'culturally appropriate', 'contextually-relevant', and 'localised'. In this report we have also incorporated more recent articles.

3.1 Challenges regarding Dominant Social Work

The literature review confirms the researchers' beliefs that dominant social work is highly problematic. Emerging out of White, middle class, Anglophone assumptions, mainstream social work principles, approaches and values do not have consistent meaningful application outside of these contexts and thus have limited transferability. This mismatch is related to the conceptualisation of need as well as intervention (Al-Makhamreh & Sullivan, 2013; Badwall & Razack, 2012; Baltra-Ulloa, 2013; Furuto, 2013; Kalinganire & Rutikanga, 2014a; Kee, 2008; Mabuvura, 2018; Razack, 2009; Spitzer, 2014). There is also limited responsiveness to diversity (Furuto, 2013; Gray et al., 2008; Sakaguchi & Sewpaul, 2011). Western approaches are often imposed on non-western contexts through professional imperialism and cultural appropriation (Dominelli, 2012; Gray et al., 2008; Love, 2006; Midgely, 2008; Walsh-Tapiata, 2008). Further, the diagnostic, task-centred, deficit-focused, individualised approach atomises and standardises experience to the individual/micro level and tends to ignore collective experience and worldviews (De Urrutia Barosso & Strug, 2013; Dominelli, 2012; Gair, Miles, & Thomson, 2005; Patel, 2015; Razack, 2012; Saracostti et al., 2012). Another concern is that mainstream social work is frequently used for the purposes of social control - particularly in a context of neoliberalism, and thus undermines and indeed prevents emancipation and authentic empowerment, compromises human rights and silences those on the margins (Chapman & Withers, 2019; Gray et al., 2008; Harms et al., 2011; Kovach et al., 2015; Dominelli, 2012; Razack, 2012; Harris, 2006; Lombard, 2014; Patel, 2015; Sewpaul, 2014; Weaver & Congress, 2009). As such, Eurocentric social work approaches may cause significant harm. This harm is exemplified in the role of child welfare, which, in countries such as Canada, has legitimised the disproportionate removal of Indigenous and racialised children from their families and culture (Baskin, 2016; Hilary, 2014; Mandell, Blackstock, Clouston Carlson, & Fine, 2006; Young et al., 2013). The complicity of many South African social workers with apartheid is another illustration (Patel, 2015). Finally, in addition to these serious concerns, dominant social work appears ineffective in responding to mass social conditions (Gray et al., 2008; Mwansa, 2011; Mwansa & Kreitzer, 2012; Patel, 2005; Twikirize, 2014).

3.2 Alternative Perspectives to Dominant Social Work

The literature review illustrates that social work practices that resist, challenge and provide alternatives to such White social work perspectives are increasingly being articulated and implemented (Dominelli, 2012; Gray et al., 2008; Midgely, 2008; Spitzer et al., 2014; Yan & Tsang, 2008; Yip 2013). While there are many intersections between these various approaches, each is informed by a particular agenda and historical antecedents (Campbell & Baikie, 2012; Patel, 2015). Moreover, concepts used to inform these discrete approaches do not necessarily translate in the same manner from one context to another. For example, the notion of indigeneity varies. In places such as Canada, the Arctic region, the Pacific region, the United States of America, Australia, and New Zealand "Indigenous" encompasses the first peoples who were colonised (Kovach et al., 2015; Laitinen & Vayrynen, 2016; Mafile'o & Vakalahi). In places such as South Africa, "indigenous" tends to refer to the majority populations that were disenfranchised and colonised (Patel, 2015), and does not typically relate to those who first occupied these lands (Laher & Sing'Oei, 2014). In a third application, "indigenous" refers to (an assumed heterogenous group of) nationals of the country, such as in China (Sin, 2008).

Of the various perspectives proposed an early alternative is *Indigenised social work*. This approach emerged out of the application of imported, western approaches to local (African) situations (Gray

& Hetherington, 2013; Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird, & Hetherington, 2013; Ngau, 1987; Osei-Hwedie, 1993; Zhanghua & Liqun, 2013). *Localisation, local development, placed-based intervention* or for example, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples-centred social work* (Cox & Pawar, 2006; Kovach, Carrier, Montgomery, Barrett, & Gilles, 2015; Nimaggadda & Martell, 2008) seem to highlight place. *Culturally relevant, sensitive or appropriate social work* or in Yip's (2013) framing, *authentic social work*, focuses on revitalising and privileging traditional practices, local norms and knowledge while celebrating the diversity of cultural approaches (Baltra-Ullo, 2013; Gray et al., 2008; Forkuor, Ofori-Dua, Forkuor & Obeng, 2018; Furuto, 2013; Love, 2006; Midgley, 2008; Osei-Hwedie & Rankopo, 2008). *Indigenous social work* goes beyond indigenisation and the importing of external approaches to prioritising Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing, doing and being, and recognising that Indigenous helping systems were in place prior to colonisation (Baskin, 2016; Henry, 2014; Kovach, Carrier, Montgomery, Barrett & Gilles, 2015; Mabvurira, 2018; Mafile'o & Vakalahi, 2018). *Africanisation* may be akin to Indigenous social work, centering African concepts and historical helping practices (Gray, Kreitzer & Mupedziswa, 2014; Ibrahima & Mattaini, 2017). *Decolonisation* offers yet another lens, uncovering the material consequences of colonialism, imperialism, and globalisation (Furuto, 2013; Gray et al., 2008; Hendrick & Young, 2018; Kovach et al., 2015), and is often associated with Indigenous and Afrocentric approaches (for example, Ibrahima & Mattaini, 2017). Another approach is that of *developmental social work* which relies on social and economic synergies at micro, meso and macro levels to address mass social conditions. In this model, the community is the primary site of intervention (Bragin et al., 2016; Gray & Hetherington, 2013; Harris, 2006; Hong & Song, 2010; Ibrahim, 2017; Koenig et al., 2017; Mwansa, 2011; Patel, 2015; Rao, 2013; Spitzer et al., 2014; Spitzer & Twikirize, 2014). *The ecological* is yet another model in this spectrum and directs attention to the interplay of people with their physical environment; as a holistic approach it incorporates spirituality (Coates, 2013). Finally, Al-Makhamreh and Libal (2012) speak of *contextually relevant practice* that validates local knowledge and acknowledges social, political, economic, and health-related dimensions of local circumstances.

Schmid and Morgenshtern (2019), in drawing together the insights from contemporary literature, conceptualised a multidimensional notion of Contextualised Social Work practice. The following assumptions inform this approach:

- Within a socially just approach, forces of colonialism and oppression and the flow of power are foregrounded;
- Practice must be locally situated (i.e. the site of intervention is the community) and respond meaningfully to local social conditions;
- Engagement occurs through community relationships;
- Culturally authentic responses and alternative ways of knowing, doing and being are centered; local knowledge production is promoted;
- Interrelationships between humans and the (natural) environment are acknowledged for a holistic response;
- Local and global forces are recognised;
- Professional imperialism is resisted.

3.3 Contextualised Social Work Education

The literature points towards principles not only of alternative social work practice but also social work education, which Schmid and Morgenshtern (2019) consolidate to construct Contextualised Social Work Education (CSWE). First, CSWE has a **specific value base** informed by recognition of the inherent dignity of persons, human rights, social justice, collective world views and decision making, democratic principles, and collaborative engagement (Gair et al., 2005; Harris, 2006; Hochfeld, 2010; IFSW, 2018; Love, 2006; Mandell et al., 2006; Weaver & Congress, 2009).

Second, CSWE focuses on the damaging impact of **historical and contemporary colonisation** and oppression on Indigenous persons and local populations' cultures and systems (Gray et al., 2008; Marsiglia, 2013; Mokuau & Mataira, 2013; Patel, 2015; Tamburro, 2010; Walsh-Tapiata, 2008; Yip, 2013). In acknowledgement of such harms, resiliency and positive representations are affirmed (Gray et al.,

2013; Harms et al., 2011; Weaver & Congress, 2009). Additionally, the complicity of social work(ers) and social work education in advancing oppression are deconstructed and emancipatory approaches advanced (Gray et al., 2008; Harms et al., 2011; Yip, 2013; Hochfeld, 2010; Lombard, 2014; Rao, 2013). Critical reflexivity is promoted as an essential aspect of learning (Baskin, 2016; Baltra-Ulloa, 2013; Bruyere, 2008; Coates, 2013; De Urrutia Barosso & Strug, 2013; Koenig et al., 2017; Ives & Loft, 2013; Mokuau & Mataira, 2013; Mwansa, 2011; Omona, 2014; Patel, 2005).

Third, **cultural knowledge**, epistemologies, practices and history are centered and deepened, recognising the capacity of such knowledge to heal and strengthen fractured communities and social institutions (Bragin et al., 2016; Furuto, 2013; Harris, 2006; Harms et al., 2011). Homogenisation is resisted (Rao, 2013; Sin, 2008; Spitzer, 2014; Tauri, 2005; Yip, 2013). Thus, the centrality of the land, contiguity with the environment, holistic approaches, the value of children, spirituality, notions of identity and belonging may be included in the curriculum (Baskin, 2016; Coates, 2013; Love, 2006; Harris, 2006; Tamburro, 2010; Tanemura Morelli et al., 2013; Walsh-Tapiata, 2008).

Fourth, **teaching approaches are contextualised and holistic**, and alternative modes of knowing, being and doing (such as stories, learning by doing, rituals, celebration) are used as the medium of instruction (Bruyere, 2008; Kovach et al., 2015; Twikirize, 2014). Tokenisation and appropriation are avoided (Bruyere, 2008).

A fifth aspect of CSWE articulated by Schmid and Morgenshtern relates to the foregrounding of **local social conditions** in relation to political, socio-economic, and cultural forces (Spitzer & Twikirize, 2014). Priorities are defined through community engagement and community definition of such conditions (Bauwens & Naturale, 2017; Baskin, 2016; Bruyere, 2008; Hart, 2008; Mandell et al., 2006; Tamburro, 2010). Content and skills taught in the classroom relate to addressing these issues in meaningful, culturally authentic ways (Baskin, 2016; Baltra-Ulloa, 2013; Coates, 2013; Jang & Lamendola, 2007; Kalinganire & Rutikanga, 2014b; Kebede, 2014; Rao, 2013; Spitzer, Murekasenge, & Muchiri, 2014; Tamburro, 2010; Yin, 2013).

In a next set of considerations, CSWE intentionally **relies on local materials and expertise** to educate students, and encourages the local production of knowledge and theorising based on local helping strategies and transmission of knowledge (Bennett & Blackstock, 2006; Gray et al., 2013; Gray & Hetherington, 2013; Harms et al., 2011; Harris, 2006; Kee, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Kovach et al., 2015; Rao, 2013; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2001; Yan & Tsang, 2008). Rao (2013) underlines the importance of local language usage, while Midgely (2008) reminds educators to attend to diversity and silenced voices within communities.

3.4 Barriers

Scholars identify a number of barriers preventing the centring of alternative social work approaches and the adoption of contextualised social work education. Constraints include local and international contestation of the role of social work; professional imperialism and pressures to conform to Northern standards; lack of recognition of Indigenous or Southern research; pervasive neoliberalism; simplistic understandings and poor articulations and theorising of alternatives; lack of appropriate social work and educational policies; unsupportive university environments including on faculty level and resistance from social work educators; ill-equipped educators; scarce or poorly resourced field placement opportunities; inadequate funding; legislation and policies based on dominant social work principles; social work poorly organised as a profession; inadequate resourcing of social work; inadequate community resources and overwhelming social conditions; social worker mobility internationally; lack of clarity regarding target students or instructors; and inadequate classroom time for processes such as reflexivity (Bragin, Tosone, Ihrig, Mollere, Niazi, & Mayel, 2016; Bruyere, 2008; Dominelli, 2012; Furuto, 2013; Gair, 2008; Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird & Hetherington, 2013; Gray & Hetherington, 2013; Harms et al., 2011; Hochfeld, 2010; Ives & Loft, 2013; Kebede, 2014; Lombard, 2014; Mandell et al., 2006; Midgley, 2008; Midgley & Conley, 2010; Mwansa, 2011; Mwansa & Kreitzer, 2012; Nimaggadda & Martell, 2008; Osei-Hwedie & Rankopo, 2008; Patel, 2015; Pawar & Tsui, 2012; Razack, 2012; Sakaguchi & Sewpaul, 2011; Silver, 2017; Tanemura Morelli, Mataira, & Kaulukukui, 2013; Yan and Tsang, 2008; Zhangua &

Liquin, 2013). These barriers must be addressed for the successful institutionalisation of contextualised social work education.

To sum up, there are significant practice alternatives that are being articulated, theorised and implemented. However, although principles for alternative social work education have been identified, few examples of classroom content and pedagogy that is contextualised have been documented. The study aims to highlight the efforts of social work academics in two countries, and by doing so, encourage social work educators to implement the type of social work education that would equip social work students to offer meaningful and relevant interventions.

4

METHODOLOGY

4. Methodology

This exploratory research was informed by qualitative principles. Adopting a phenomenological design, it aimed to describe the common meaning of teaching contextualised social work (phenomenon) as experienced by social work professors (Creswell, 2013). The intention was to highlight the experiences of South African and Canadian social work educators in implementing alternatives to mainstream education so as to draw attention to context in progressive education. The research questions included participants identifying the terms which most closely described their chosen alternative to mainstream education (which we described as Contextualised Social Work Education); illuminating imperatives that have moved them towards choosing alternatives to the mainstream; providing examples of content and methodological strategies/pedagogies used in advancing contextualised social work education; and finally, articulating both barriers and supports towards implementing contextualised social work education. Consistent with the phenomenological design, the research team collected the data from individuals who had experienced the phenomenon, and developed a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals. This description consists of “what” they experienced and “how” they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

The research project received ethics approval from Vancouver Island University as well as from the University of Johannesburg. Another South African university required limited ethical approval before their faculty members were permitted to participate in the research.

A combination of purposeful, availability and snowball sampling strategies were used for participant recruitment to allow “a more intensive portrait of activities and actors” (Engel & Schutt, 2017, p. 119). Relationships facilitated recruitment, the majority of participants having a direct relationship (even if tenuous) with at least one member of the research team or other participants. Participants were selected as they were known to have tried to implement alternative teaching approaches in their classrooms.

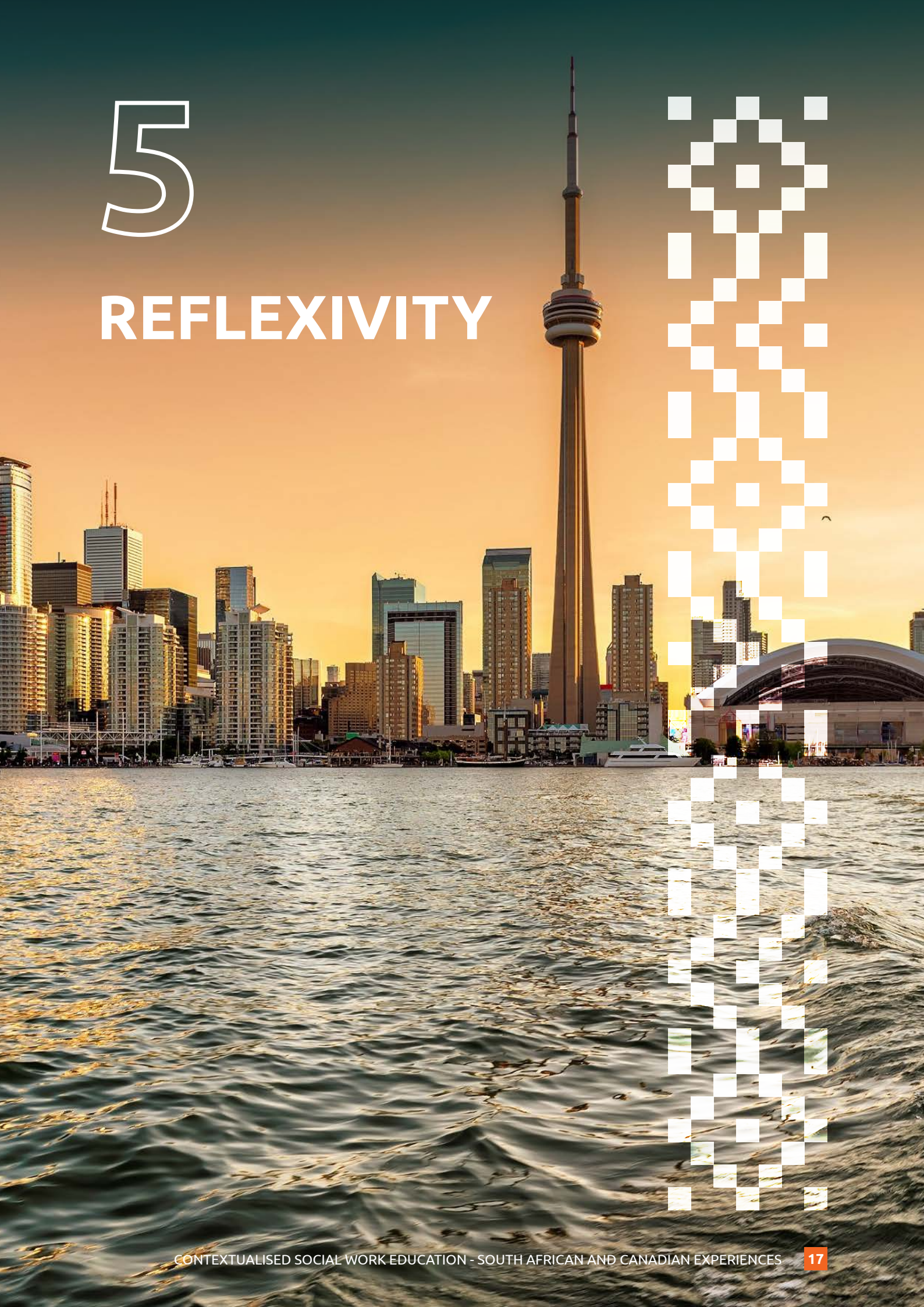
An iterative process was chosen, offering participants three opportunities to engage with notions of contextualised social work education/ alternatives to dominant social work education. Participants were first interviewed individually, this process being virtual (by Zoom) or face-to-face, depending on what was most feasible. Next, virtual national sharing circles were held, with all participants being invited to these fora. The process culminated with a virtual international sharing circle. Again, all participants were invited whether or not they had joined a national sharing circle. At this point, written submissions reflecting on earlier phases were accepted, with one person opting to do so.

Throughout, transcripts as well as thematic analyses and accompanying executive summaries were shared with participants allowing for correction and comment, thus ensuring the credibility of the findings and facilitating further discussion (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of individual interviews and sharing circles and having multiple researchers collecting data and collaborating on data analysis ensured triangulation and thus improved the likelihood of detecting the full range of subjective realities (Padgett, 2016).

Analysis followed the phenomenological process and was multi-stage. At the end of each data gathering process, the primary investigator, building on the data from the research questions, completed horizontalization of the data by going through data and highlighting “significant statements”, sentences and quotes that provided an understanding of how participants experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Next, the primary investigator developed clusters of meaning by drawing together the statements into themes. The interviews were first interpreted by country; as were the national sharing circles. The research team then reviewed these to ensure accurate reflection of the data as well as cohesiveness of themes. There was then a further round of refining the themes. As alluded to earlier, participants were able to view, correct and comment on each round of themes generated, and then could formally reflect on these themes in the sharing circles. Only once all the data gathering had taken place were the themes consolidated to identify overall primary threads. These threads were then used to develop a textural description (what the participants experienced) and structural description (the context or setting that influenced how the participants experienced it) (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, from the textural and structural descriptions, a composite description was written that presented the essence of the phenomenon of teaching contextualised social work education.

5

REFLEXIVITY



5. Reflexivity

Despite the phenomenological proclivity to bracket the researcher out of the narrative, the researchers brought reflexivity into this study (Moustakas, 1994). The researchers adopted a reflexive, reiterative stance conforming to Alvesson and Skoldberg's (2000) research methodology and Indigenous research principles of positionality and standpoint (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Baskin, 2016; Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009). Our initial team reflected four different social locations in its members (Jeanette--South African-Canadian, heterosexual, white, female, older person; Jessie--South African, black, heterosexual, female, older person; Marina--Canadian-Russian-Israeli, Jewish, heterosexual, female, middle aged person; Shane--Indigenous, Canadian, male, Two-Spirit, younger person). We note that each of these terms is socially constructed, and that these dimensions do not fully reflect our social location. Our respective positionalities informed the research methodologies and approaches we were inclined towards using. We thus reviewed and negotiated our research approach throughout the research process, though ethical approval for a particular process sometimes limited potential shifts. An example relates to the literature review. This review was conducted early and used as a foundation for the proposal. Literature reviews clearly prioritise work published in accredited journals which reflect Northern/western knowledges, the voice of Southern and marginalised researchers being less often represented (Kovach et al., 2015; Roche & Flynn, 2018; Schmid, 2017; Smith, 2012). It may therefore be more appropriate in contextualised research to gather knowledge through community-based relationships when identifying the knowledge base and associate gaps. Although we were no longer in a position to found our research on community knowledge(s), we could still shift our orientation to further phases of data gathering. Sharing circles were chosen over and above focus groups because they are a "social justice method" (Chilisa, 2012, p. 292) facilitating an equal opportunity for the participants to be heard. Such circles also reflect the relational research principles consistent with many Indigenous cultures, place the knowledge and perspectives shared into the collective space and avoid evaluating such inputs, thus potentially allowing for a richer and more authentic account (Chilisa, 2012). Additionally, we had considered how we would present this final report. Communicating research thinking and findings in the form of stories emerges as an appropriate reporting method in the Canadian Indigenous context (Kovach, 2009). Shane had resigned by this point, and the three remaining members felt that a dominant reporting style was more congruent with who we now are as a research team. It also seemed to fit more with the typical format of CSDA reporting. Without Shane there was also the fear that we might be appropriating a reporting method outside of the cultures we represent. We were, however, aware that if we were to re-conceptualise this research we might formulate our methodology quite differently, while also being sensitive to both the Canadian and South African contexts, our positions within each, and the caution around appropriation.

Another issue of reflexivity relates to use of language. Many Indigenous persons in Canada refer to Canada and the United States of America as "Turtle Island" (for example, Hilary, 2014). However, this practice is not uniformly adopted across First Nations in Canada, and thus we have remained with "Canada" as the term referring to this region.

In our data gathering process, one Indigenous educator became anxious about possibly having "lost the story". This participant reminded the researchers that we were collecting stories rather than objective, de-personalised data, and that with this process came responsibility and accountability not only directly to the participants, but to the communities they represented.

There are some limitations to this research. First, the findings speak only to the realities of a small group of Canadian and South African social work educators, a group that was diverse but not representative of the full diversity of both contexts. However, as qualitative research, each perspective is meaningful (Padgett, 2016). Second, while technology allowed us to communicate across continents, our interactions were constrained by not being face-to-face for most of the research process. The time differences between the two countries also significantly narrowed the opportunities for cross-country engagement. Thus, had we been able to meet directly the dialogue may have been richer. Third, some participants in the sharing circles had not reviewed previous themes, limiting their effective iterative

participation in further rounds. This situation was particularly problematic because the circles were so small, limiting further iteration. Also, two participants were unable to attend for the full South African circle. Nevertheless, added, vital insights were offered to the process. Finally, we are aware that our conversation was part of a broader dialogue in social work education. Exploration of the decolonisation and indigenisation of social work education occurred parallel to our research in both South Africa and Canada. Our research thus adds to this ever-growing agenda.



6

FINDINGS



6. Findings: Data Gathering Processes, Participation and Demographics

6.1 Study Participants

Twenty-eight social work educators participated in this study. Fifteen Canadian social work faculty members were interviewed, representing 11 different Canadian universities. Prior to the sharing circles, one interviewee withdrew from further participation in the study believing that the interview process had not revealed any novel insights. Thirteen South African interviews were carried out, one of which was withdrawn due to fears of identification in a highly politicised educational context. Ten universities from across the country were represented in the 13 interviews.

Three national sharing circles were held. Some persons were unable to participate in the sharing circles due to work load. It is also possible that the length of time between initial recruitment and the various phases of data collection were too protracted to sustain interest and involvement for certain participants. In Canada, three persons participated in an initial circle and two in a subsequent circle (total of five sharing circle participants out of fourteen interview participants). In South Africa, six persons out of the twelve interviewees still in the study joined in for a discussion, two only being able to join in part of the way. Four persons (two Canadian and two South African) participated in the final International Sharing Circle, and a further participant offered some written reflections. These four represented a rural South African university serving mainly Black students (and considered 'historically disadvantaged'), an urban South African university (seen as historically advantaged), a smaller undergraduate Canadian university and a larger Canadian university with a city-based campus, satellite social work programs and a distance program. This representation offered some contextual variety.

Demographic data were not specifically sought but emerged through the interviews. In Canada, six interviewees self-identified as white Canadians; five as immigrants and three of these as racialized minorities; three as Indigenous Canadians; and one as Francophone. One person did not identify their social context. All but one person taught exclusively within a social work department, with this individual teaching both in a social work department and within an interdisciplinary context. Most participants taught face-to-face classes but two also taught online. Seven of the participants explained that they taught not only locally but internationally as well. Gender identification was seldom offered. In South Africa of those that proceeded, six did not disclose their social location. Others self-identified as follows: one white male; one Xhosa male; three of Indian descent; one having grown up in a so-called Coloured community; one a woman of colour from Africa. All taught in a social work programme. We conclude that while there was diversity, there was not full representivity of population groups, regions or types of universities in either country.

6.2 Findings

Participants are identified as follows: CAP# for Canadian interviewees; SAP# for South African interviewees; CASC# and SASC# for national sharing circle participants; and ISCP# for the International Sharing Circle (where country of practice was not identified). ISC5 refers to the written submission.

Although the findings are represented in disaggregated form, responses frequently spoke to a number of issues. The themes, sub-themes and categories also obscure the many linkages and overlaps between items. The umbrella themes are informed by the interview questions posed. Each umbrella theme contains sub-themes that emerged both from the interviews and sharing circles. The themes are not discrete and sub-themes and categories sometimes reappear more than once. The umbrella themes are as follows:

1. Understanding of Contextualised Social Work Education
2. Formal and Informal Imperatives
3. Contextualised Social Work Education Content and Strategies

4. Barriers and Supports
5. Contextualising the research
6. Pathways

6.2.1 Theme 1: Understanding of Contextualised Social Work Education

Participants were asked to identify how they understood contextualised social work education (or alternatives to mainstream social work education). Prompts included 'Indigenous', 'indigenized', 'developmental', 'decolonised' or 'other' social work education. Participants tended not to intentionally distinguish between practice and education.

6.2.1.1 Social work (education) is by definition contextualised. The first sub-category articulated was that social work was by definition contextualised and constituted "good" (SAP2) or "responsive" (SAP9) social work. SAP2 suggested that social work by its very nature was contextual and culturally appropriate and implied therefore that this approach is what had to be taught. *"You're sensitive to people and people's differences and people's needs... At the end of the day, what is being a good social worker? It is embracing those components of being responsive to an individual and to a group and to a community that's different"*. Similarly, Canadian participants noted that contextualised social work education was the essence of social work and that one needed always to adapt practice to the needs of particular individuals/ groups/ communities/ families. Social work thus could not be prescribed for any population. To illustrate, CAP14 noted, *"We were constantly told in our programs to be person-centered. Then it's about contextualising: 'What is that person's context?'"*. In the same vein, CAP10 stated *"There is no social work that is not contextualised... We cannot talk about universal concepts"*. The sentiment seemed to be that if one was practising social work without contextualising, such interventions were essentially meaningless. Finally, ISC1 underlined that *"[S]ocial work is about participatory approaches, it's about community-based, persons-based and ... then the context comes into play"*. All participants implied that dominant social work failed to emphasise such contextualisation. Indeed, participants implied that dominant conceptualisations of social work needed to be resisted.

6.2.1.2 Multidimensional, intersecting dimensions. Canadian participants often articulated contextualised social work education as incorporating various intersecting dimensions including critical social work, decolonisation, social justice and advocacy-oriented social work, Indigenised/Indigenous, eco-centric or interpretive practice. Some Canadian educators felt it was essential to attend meaningfully to diversity within the student group, but also in the community. In this vein, ISC5 recommended greater inclusion of immigrant issues in understandings of decolonisation and said, *"I have always been puzzled by the fact that immigrants, the driving force of Canadian population growth, have been neglected [and] social work practice with immigrants (including refugees) has been underdeveloped"*.

Similarly, South African participants advocated for a "multidimensional", "multipronged" or "multi-fold" understanding of contextualised social work education that included many intersecting, nested and even blended aspects. These facets included localised, indigenous, indigenised, decolonised, culturally appropriate, developmental, socio-political, holistic, Afrocentric, transformative, critical, anti-oppressive, socially just, emancipatory and regenerative social work (education). Developmental social welfare was chosen by some as the basis of South African contextualised social work practice and education because it had been formalised through the White Paper of 1997. For South Africans, contextual social work (education) was not seen as excluding western social work paradigms, but its focus needed to be Afrocentric.

During the national and international sharing circles, participants sought to clarify the term "Contextualised social work education". Some Canadians feared that the researchers were imposing this term, and insisted that "anti-oppression" was more appropriate in that it conveyed directly the importance of attending to power. South Africans emphasised that "decolonisation" and perhaps "indigenisation"/"africanisation" were the preferred terms for education that resisted dominant content and methodology. Up to this point all participants had referenced the importance of attending to power in their descriptions of alternatives to dominant social work. These comments served to underline the fact that definitions of alternatives must be, and are, local.

6.2.1.3 Local conditions. Both the Canadian and South African participants suggested that contextualised social work (education) meant focusing on local social conditions and local definitions of appropriate practice. Indeed, SAP2 suggested that the core of contextualised social work (practice, education and research) “found expression” in the “local”. Some used the term ‘indigenous’ to speak to this local level. SAP9 suggested, “[contextualised social work education] should be a responsive curriculum depending on the needs and the realities of society and then specifically in my country and my province... [but] you can’t only say it should be responsive...to our immediate...diverse [rural] communities...Our curriculum must be responsive to the realities of our country, first of all, and ...to what is going on in Africa and the rest of the world”. CAP7 suggested, “Contextualised social work education...meets the needs of the local context. So, it’s important to situate in terms of time and place...[s]ocial work practice is grounded in local communities and these communities differ quite significantly from one another and for social work to be relevant it needs to understand that ... social and economic [and] natural environment”.

6.2.1.4 But still universal. ISC1 underlined that

[W]e all are striving ... to ensure that you still have a universal social work education, that’s applicable in different contexts ... [I]n South Africa at one stage we had an education that was made for a particular race and would only fit in when you are in that particular race ... I [am] afraid if we go [too] contextual ... we would lose a sense that we are training people that have to be diversified and be able to adjust in different contexts. What they have to learn is clear, critical thinking skills that would enable them to know ... which solution would be able to work ... given the context of this people, their culture, their view of life, their struggles ... [W]e have to ... prepare people ... to deal with all ... social ills ...The students must be able to have cases of the coloniser as well as be able to assist the colonisee

Although this sentiment was expressed mainly by South Africans, ISC3 (a Canadian) also supported this notion, asserting “[t]he main synergies that we have are the [universal] principles of social work that ... are central, fundamental. The contextualised education will be ... in how I work on those principles and how I develop the curriculum and ... the courses ...”.

6.2.2 Theme 2: Imperatives

Both Canadians and South Africans identified a series of interlocking imperatives including political developments, international influences, institutional policies, faculty personal lived experiences and philosophical lens, and attention to student experiences, conditions and voices. SAP9 established that “There’s a lot of influences ... [I]t’s not a linear process”.

6.2.2.1 Political developments. Many Canadian interviewees cited the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report as motivating contextualised social work education. For example, CAP10 stressed that “The TRC doesn’t allow us to play ignorant” and CAP8 commented, “[t]he Truth and Reconciliation Commission report did give us licence to push a little harder and a little bit further”. In South Africa, the majority of participants cited the impact of the ‘Fees must Fall’ campaign, stating that as a result of this protest that they themselves and their institutions heard loudly and clearly that the curriculum needed to be decolonised. SAP6 commented: “It wasn’t until the [radicalness of the] ‘Fees must Fall’ that the notion of...decolonisation came into the public sphere and actually ignited a public debate about and across faculties and universities and lay persons”. SAP2 also pointed to this campaign as being significant: “[I]t brought into heightened consciousness this idea of decoloniality... that we need to localise, Africanise the curriculum. So social work started having this internal introspective process”. Additionally, some South Africans concluded that a new approach was needed because South Africa was both in a post-apartheid era and now in the 21st century that brought with it the “fourth industrial revolution” of technology (SAP5).

6.2.2.2 International perspectives. For many of the South African participants the international context - including international university collaborations, and participants’ engagement in and exposure to international discussions such as the Global Agenda and the revised ethics - prompted a contextual approach to social work education. Canadian participants who were engaged in such international discussions also were likely to report being influenced and inspired by developments internationally.

6.2.2.3 Policy, including university and faculty policy. For most South Africans, the institutional climate and policies provided substantial imperatives. For some, the historical position of their institution, either as an apartheid-entrenched university or as an activist university acted as a prompt. At most of the South African universities represented, there was a clear institutional transformation agenda towards an Afrocentric approach. SAP1 noted that at her university there had been efforts to “[m]ove away from clinical social work to a more developmental perspective”. SAP12 noted that her institution “[a]s far back as 2004...introduced a lot around an Afrocentric college and the inclusion of Afrocentric scholarship in our module guides and ... teaching strategies and engagement with students”. This approach was often supported by a Centre for Teaching and Learning. Many individual social work departments also had initiated curriculum reform, some over longer periods. Shifts included centring a developmental social welfare perspective or advancing indigenised practice. There also seemed more recently to be a greater awareness of intentionally selecting South African literature. Some universities had linked evaluation to the publication of locally relevant contextualised materials and transformation. Participants reported collectively writing up articles and carrying out internal research around decolonisation and decoloniality. Institutional directives external to the university also were important, particularly the Exit Level Outcomes from the Council for Higher Education as reflected in nine BSW standards. Also quoted were the efforts of ASASWEI, which was “[d]riving the agenda of contextualised social work education” (SAP2), through a conference in 2017, colloquia and a special journal issue on decolonisation. SAP2 further observed that each country’s legislative framework circumscribed social work intervention, noting that *“The legislative framework makes [social work education] ultimately contextual because the laws in South Africa are very different to the laws in Canada...Social work is from a practice level directed by policy and legislation”*.

Canadian participants also saw the official stance of the social work program and accreditation standards as influencing the use of contextualised social work education, specifically curriculum content. Typically, this chosen content was Anti-Oppressive Practice or a structural position. CAP2 described the accreditation standards as a formal imperative and noted, *“There are increasingly issues there around handling issues of diversity, issues of Indigenous Canadians and even in terms of anti-oppressive practice”*. CAP8 suggested that the reviewer of their curriculum had made recommendations regarding a *“focus on gender, increasing focus on Indigenous people in this community”* into which *“multiple actors with dissenting views [of justice]”* could be inserted. CAP14 noticed: *“All [within the institution] were all very adamant that the curriculum should be contextualised ... because they felt there needs to be more Indigenous content”*. CAP9 related, *“We recently adopted an...Indigenous policy for the entire university and our dean was involved in the development of that process”*. Additional institutional influences are elaborated further in the discussion around barriers and supports.

6.2.2.4 Personal, educational and professional imperatives. These intersecting issues were important to educators in both countries. For Canadian participants personal experience included that of being an immigrant in Canada, identifying as a racialised minority, or with Indigenous heritage. CAP4 put it this way: *“I’m a member of a visible minority and so when I started my social work education [in Latin America] thirty-some years ago, I noticed that even the textbooks that we used assumed an ethnic client and a white dominant social worker... I felt like... ‘who is represented here?’ and ‘what are white people learning about?’”*. CAP5 suggested *“For me as an immigrant and a racialized minority, I’ve had a lot of ... personal experiences with practices that compromise people’s dignity and worth.”* CAP11 recalled: *“I remember [as an Indigenous person] how it felt to be there like an alien [in the educational context]”*.

Participants also noted that their social work values as professionals and educators shaped their commitment to resisting oppressive education and to identifying good pedagogy or social work. Indeed, many interviewees wanted to offer an alternative to the colonial, inappropriate education they themselves had received. They also wanted to honour alternative ways of knowing, doing and being in their classrooms. Moreover, Canadian participants highlighted that their professional experience, such as international work, engaging with marginalised communities, or engaging with Indigenous worldviews, had shaped their desire to work contextually. CAP10 noted: *“The opportunity to work internationally allows me to understand that social work is not a universal concept”*, while CAP3 observed, *“[M]y ontological and epistemological perspectives ... came from my roots and my experiences in Latin*

America". Flowing from this idea, appreciating the impact of the local (oppressive, colonising) context and history and particularly understanding the *"lineage of social work"* (CAP1) shifted educators towards using contextualised social work education. Another factor was being responsive to diversity, knowledge, voice and needs among students and communities served.

Like their Canadian counterparts, those South Africans with personal biographies characterised by marginalization shifted intuitively towards contextualised education. Those who had been subjected to apartheid education, devaluation of their selves, discrimination based on racial stereotypes and separatist policies were particularly sensitive to the need for contextualised education and for a just approach. For example, CAP7 explained that as someone growing up in a "so-called Coloured community" she reacted to the stereotype of community members being identified as "drug addicts" and "drunkards". She became *"disillusioned by how these narratives [were] not... contextualised"*. These lived experiences did not necessarily result in an epiphany. As reflected by SAP4, the question 'What made me decolonise curricula?' was disingenuous, *"because that implies that I made a decision at a particular point in my academic career" when in fact "[i]t is part of my whole biography"*. Like their Canadian peers, the South Africans were guided by their notions of what constituted good social work and social work education.

Again, like Canadians, their social work practice experience was a push towards contextualised social work education. For some South Africans it was moving outside of their segregated communities to encountering other lived experience that created conceptual and practice shifts. For many, the incongruity of western education in work with their community was especially stark. Accordingly, SAP5 underlined in the interview and sharing circles that there was a mismatch between western education and community protocols, for example, around introductions and timelines. They concluded, *"As a result, people regard social workers as the most useless ... kind of professionals"*. They also felt that shifting practice in small but meaningful ways could contextualise interactions.

SAP7 illustrated this disjuncture of western materials with Southern contexts through the following example regarding a family therapy course:

[T]he text is so irrelevant ... Where would you find a naughty corner in a shack? And how would a parent now sit and respectfully communicate to these children ... [I]t contradicts ... respect for elders ... And parenting mechanisms of taking away electronic devices? ... In rural areas ... where do the kids get the electronic devices that you can take from them?

In comparing the South African and Canadian contexts, ISC3 suggested that instructors educated under apartheid or inducted into community development as occurred for Latin American instructors, prioritised community engagement in a way that instructors without this background did not. This participant concluded that in both countries *"[there has been] a very big influence of global north theories [and] content in terms of how we teach and what books are available ... [W]e need to look at how we are going to be changing content to become more contextually relevant"*.

6.2.2.5 Student conditions. While Canadians referenced student needs and circumstances (particularly around diversity), South African educators were far more vocal about responsiveness to student conditions being an imperative towards contextualised social work education. This imperative had three aspects to it: attending to students' personal circumstances (students were predominantly Black, often poor, frequently from rural areas, and sometimes from outside of the country); understanding local conditions and their impact on students' lives; and attending to the disjuncture between what students were taught and required to do for appropriate and meaningful practice. As observed by SAP5, *"[At] university, we use not only use language [with which they may be unfamiliar] but we also use theories, social work knowledge and values and ethics that are western-based. But the same students have to go back to ... [previously disadvantaged] communities that they are serving ... [W]e are using the lenses or knowledge that is not actually appropriate for the culture."* SAP11 explained, *"[W]hen they finish with us... the teaching we offer them has to be able to be applied in those communities [and countries]"*.

6.2.2.6 Student voices. In a related point, all participants suggested that students had much to offer in terms of lived experience. For South Africans, student voices had been elevated as observed earlier through the 'Fees must Fall' campaign and social work programmes were aiming to intentionally include more student perspectives. At one institution, for example, the student society was engaged in defining social work, and identifying meaningful responses, for example, to gender violence (SAP7). South African participants also found that students responded well to an alternative approach, thus further motivating contextualised education. Canadians similarly pointed to the value of including student voices, feedback and the need to respond to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. For example, CAP4 asserted: *"We ... have more...students come to us that are representative of Indigenous, ethnocultural, LGBTQ, or a combination of diversities pulled together...How do we include them?"*

6.2.3 Theme 3: Contextualised Social Work Education: Content and Strategies

Contextualising social work education was not viewed as a simplistic endeavour, rather it was an *"ongoing process of transformation"* (CAP7). Participants considered both content and strategy.

6.2.3.1 Content. Various areas were highlighted by participants as having been included in their curriculum content, although this list was also aspirational. There is significant overlap and thus consensus between the Canadian and South African participants. All felt that these content areas had to be deepened and interrogated for the ways in which dominant discourses were being perpetuated.

6.2.3.1.1 Critical history. Both Canadians and South Africans emphasised the importance of teaching history and challenging the colonisation narrative. Students needed in-depth understanding of Canadian Indigenous history. CAP11 asked *"[H]ow can you understand anything about the challenges and struggles that Aboriginal people face today if you don't have a good understand of the history of it?"*. *"Decolonisation"* (SAP1; SAP5) and *"[a]n acknowledgment of ... the injustices of the past"* (SAP1) needed to be included in the South African context.

6.2.3.1.2 Social conditions. Both in the interviews and sharing circle, South Africans underlined a focus on the social conditions and *"real world context"* (SAP1). SAP5 noted: *"I am trying to be responsive to South Africa's unique social and historical and socio-economic circumstances and priority needs"*. Such content should be informed by *"[w]hat communities tell us about their needs"* (SAP9); by understanding shifts in social conditions such as gerontology (SAP12) and from students' articulation of the social conditions as part of their lived reality. Canadians did not emphasise the issue of centring social conditions in the same way, though one reported teaching students *"psychological first aid training in response to disasters"*. The lived reality of students had also to be reflected in curriculum content.

6.2.3.1.3 Contemporary oppression in a context of neo-liberalism. SAP12 represented participants when opining that *"the implication of neo-liberal, globalisation and economic policies"* on South African social conditions should be emphasised. The nature and mechanisms of contemporary oppression needed to be taught and the hidden curriculum needed to be interrogated. In this regard, Canadian participants suggested that students be taught about social constructs and social location (CAP3). South Africans echoed this viewpoint, maintaining that content needed to reflect reconceptualised language that *"deconstructed the social worker as expert"* and *"humanised service users"* (SAP4). Further as identified by SAP7 *"modules on anti-oppressive practice...social justice... social issues..."* were required. Along with this requirement, Afrocentrism, feminism, and attention to gender diversity should be embedded in the courses.

6.2.3.1.4 Critical teaching of ethics. Ethics was seen as a central content component. Noting the limited transferability of dominant ethics, a critical approach was recommended. Per illustration, in South Africa, ethics had to consider *"collective confidentiality"* (SAP7). Further, content regarding ethics was closely tied to values by both South African and Canadian participants. From a South African perspective, emancipatory values, human rights through a lens of Ubuntu and communal values were cited as part of ethics. All participants felt strongly that students had to understand their own values and respect those of others.

6.2.3.1.5 International models of practice. Participants asserted that teaching international models would underline that dominant social work was not immutable and would affirm alternative knowledge production. In Canada, CAP5 asserted, *"I expose my students, for example to socioeconomic approaches and social development models used in South Africa ... They learn about the significance of cultural, economic realities and politics in influencing practice and the lives of service users in different parts of the world"*. Similarly, CAP10 presents students with *"Epistemologies of the South"*, recognizing *"knowledge creation outside of the mainstream"*. South Africans agreed that even while students needed to understand local issues there was value in informing students of international developments, such as the Global Agenda and the influence of South Africans there. This exposure allowed for comparison, while preparing students for international work. Also important in the content was to convey hope. Further, regarding international engagement, SASC2 emphasized that teaching could (as in their case) be *"from the global South to the North"*.

6.2.3.1.6 Indigenous content. For Canadians, Indigenous content included offering holistic approaches, using a trauma-informed lens, acknowledging land and discussing connection to the land. Typically, spirituality is part of Indigenous worldviews. South Africans linked indigenous content to local helping strategies and solutions.

6.2.3.1.7 Diverse ways of knowing. All participants agreed that approaches and theories had to be culturally appropriate, Indigenous/local and relevant. Canadians expressed this viewpoint as multiple frameworks and multiple ways of knowing (CAP12) and being *"[t]houghtful about including content outside the North American context"* (CAP9). For South Africans this stance was labelled as understanding community solutions. As such, alternative knowledges (such as that of traditional healers) and appropriate literature had to be included. For example, SAP13 said their department had committed to *"[u]sing South African literature....and resources"*.

6.2.3.1.8 Skills. Content included transferable skills, though the focus should not be on a competency-based orientation. South Africans specified that these skills should include group work and community work skills, as well as appreciating communal networks.

6.2.3.1.9 Local policies and legislation. South Africans particularly indicated (as stated earlier by SAP2) that local policies and legislation created the parameters of intervention and thus needed to be taught.

6.2.3.2 Strategies.

Participants generated a range of strategies. South Africans intentionally included structural strategies (such as having departmental consensus regarding contextualised social work education) in addition to classroom methodology. Most participants appeared to conflate what they saw as good pedagogy with contextualised education. Further, it was also not always possible to distinguish between content and classroom methodology. Several Canadian participants asserted that their pedagogy was informed by their personal style rather than by a formal theoretical stance. For some participants there was a significant tension between formal academic expectations, which were equated with western ways of knowing, and what they saw as contextualised education. A series of (tested) strategies for delivering contextualised social work education were offered.

6.2.3.2.1 Reviewing entire curriculum content and developing local materials. South Africans emphasised that a global (re)view was needed before entering the classroom and that relevant materials needed to be available.

6.2.3.2.2 Supporting students. Although it could be inferred from Canadian participants' comments, student support was clearly an issue for South African educators. Student support involved paying attention to the student's social conditions, including poverty, and how these vulnerabilities impacted academic participation. South African participants also believed that educators had to link students with needed practical and counselling supports or create academic and emotional supports within the social work program. Student support could be engineered through the selection process, for example, ensuring that rural and male students were part of the cohort (SAP1). A key issue for

South African participants was the necessity of facilitating access to students' language(s) in the classroom context both as student support and to decolonise the classroom. As noted by SAP7 *"[w]e've brought in ... student assistants... - unemployed graduates, [who] help with the translation of terms."* Multilingualism facilitated critical thinking and participation. This approach could be achieved by being multilingual as an educator, engaging interpreters, translating materials, bringing in student assistants to help with translation and making key concepts available in a range of languages. Another form of student support was including student voices on multiple levels: within the classroom, in developing policies and creating modules. This strategy could occur informally or through student organisations. Finally, student support was offered through connecting students to other educational opportunities such as international exchanges.

6.2.3.2.3 Participatory, experiential, holistic and relational teaching methodology. All participants advocated for meaningful classroom engagement. For example, CAP7 stated: *"I ... create assignments that are tied to their area of interest, are flexible, so that they can apply their own life experiences"*. Participants advanced *"Heart and head learning"* (CAP14) and learning that is *"human, very heart based"* (CAP12) because this approach drew on student knowledges. SAP12 highlighted the fact that such engagement involved *"[g]roup work...peer engagement...and inclusion"* along with *"debriefing"* (SAP6). Additional strategies adopted by Canadian educators included circles as well as storytelling that was utilized both as a means of alternate knowledge production and to facilitate connection. All agreed that group work facilitated participation, collaboration and reciprocity so that students took ownership for their learning and developed their confidence. It also shifted the educator out of the role of 'sage on the stage' into someone who modelled methodologies (CAP1; SAP1).

6.2.3.2.4 Varied activities. Employing many different activities was seen by all as a means to address varied learning styles. This approach was important to the Canadian educators who suggested significant latitude and choice in the medium students chose to present their work. As such, CAP7 argued for creative activities because *"Through [this], you can express your culture, ... lived experience [and] ...values"*. In order to integrate Indigenous content, Canadian students were engaged in ceremonies in specially designated rooms; smudges were used; classes were opened and closed with ceremony; students were taken out on the land; and elders were hired to support Indigenous teaching. It was emphasized that Indigenous teaching needed to be directed by elders and members of the community. Other activities Canadian instructors had used incorporated music, songs, videos, power point presentations, artwork, genograms, social media polling, zines, free writes, mind-maps, class comparative assignments, debates, community partnerships for assignments, responses to current affairs and co-instruction. Case studies were a universal Canadian tool. Certain principles emerged, such as being extremely flexible, allocating time (full days) to explore particular topics, and having supports available should there be emotional consequences. While supporting an experiential approach, a number of participants advised a **"soft approach"** (CAP14) that allowed time for integration.

South Africans also maintained that experiential and *"authentic activities in a safe space"* were valuable pedagogical tools (SAP1). Case studies built on local scenarios were a favourite strategy, mostly involving written scenarios but also videos. Inviting speakers also was popular. Furthering authentic learning, students also were asked to offer practical examples for review. Students were offered the opportunity of generating solutions and critically comparing these with professional "expert" responses; debating; and engaging with the educator. Games, journaling or excursions were utilised. Student biographies were a key tool in developing reflexivity. Sometimes students from other years taught younger students. Educators used appropriate technology for small group development, and offered *"seamless...structured"* assessment that would *"[r]equire that feedback is given on work and the student can then redo and submit again"*. Students were also engaged in community projects. Finally, educators saw themselves modelling appropriate learning behaviours.

6.2.3.2.5 Instructor authenticity and transparency. Canadian participants suggested that instructors were legitimised by sharing their social location and struggles. Doing so could also build connection where instructors were initially othered. For example, CAP3 confessed: *"[T]hat I have*

an accent that is different than my students' accents, [and] locate myself in my class about that ... gives permission to the students to ask questions about that, and it's also telling them that I have some possible barriers that they have to understand". Relationships did not only have to be built in the classroom but needed to extend into the community. Accordingly, students needed to learn about *"the reciprocal nature of engagement"* and to note that they *"were not acting on clients but engaging with service users"* (CAP3). South Africans supported this strategy also: As SAP1 noted *"[T]he role of the educator is to self-interrogate his or her own beliefs, life and privileges"* and so *"becoming more generous as an educator"*. It also meant reflecting on the power one had in the classroom, as well as the relevance of one's own life story for the students.

6.2.3.2.6 Advancing critical, disruptive, unsettling thought. Canadian participants argued that critical thinking enabled students to, for example, interrogate dominant practices through debate and discussion. Students were presented with formal academic literature but also knowledge from other sources. Some Canadian instructors resisted dominant teaching methodologies, such as the focus on APA or certain forms of evaluation. South African participants also consistently advanced critical thinking and facilitated critical consciousness and learning. This strategy included developing a reflexive stance and becoming aware of one's own position. It also involved critiquing the relevance of particular information and approaches.

6.2.3.2.7 Facilitating reflexivity. Critical thinking was paired with reflexivity by all participants, encouraging students to reflect on their particular place in the world. Canadian instructors would have students participate in an exercise and debrief this role, first as a participant, and then potentially in the role of social worker. South African instructors engaged students in major projects focused on reflexivity, while also getting to know the 'other' in the classroom.

6.2.3.2.8 Diversity of voice. The representation of a variety of voices in the class room was valued in the Canadian context. Speakers, first-person articles and videos allowed for diverse voices to enter the classroom. Student voices were privileged. In the South African context, student voices were also enhanced. Speakers were brought in to make the link with local issues.

6.2.3.2.9 Community connection. All participants emphasised that classroom content was related to good relationships with communities. In SAP2's context for example, they had *"[a] lot of connections with the NGO and the government sector... There are often social workers in our space that aren't academics..."*. This approach included supporting field practice and what might be regarded as novel placements.

6.2.4 Theme 4: Barriers and Supports regarding Contextualised Social Work Education

Participants experienced both barriers and supports towards practising contextualised social work education. Some dimensions included elements of both support and constraint.

6.2.4.1 Ongoing domination of western and neoliberal discourses. Both in the Canadian and South African context, these pervasive discourses significantly impacted the ability to offer contextualised social work education, although these impacts were not experienced in the same ways. In Canada, concerns revolved around the dilution of the Truth and Reconciliation report's calls (such as to indigenise the curriculum); the unhelpful emphasis on skills and competencies; social work education being reduced to job preparation and students *"[b]eing focused on neo-liberal goals of being a compliant, skilful, ... objective worker"* (ISC4); the push towards standardisation and set curricula; increasing funding constraints; increased workloads, larger classes and the lack of time for student engagement or for the intentional review and transformation of courses; the high number of part-time "precarious" faculty (who could not be fully invested in change); the emphasis on particular forms of evaluation that were at odds with non-traditional teaching approaches; students who were resistant to particular ideas and *"ingrained in the neo-liberal and capitalist perspectives"* (ISC3) and who highlighted their dissatisfaction in their evaluations; businesses that were offering online curriculum development and courses; and conferences that offered only limited time for presentation and exchange but were attended to ensure

tenure. Finally, online learning was seen as particularly challenging in terms of offering contextualised education because it focused on the downloading of content rather than capturing *“local, emergent knowledge”* (CASC2).

South Africans had similar difficulties because of neo-liberal influences, such as the managerialist approach of the neoliberal *“appropriation of education”* (SAP4). Barriers had to do with large intakes, class sizes, assessment procedures, the pressures to publish, and the expectations of high world rankings. These factors impacted how students, academics and learning were defined. Time to develop appropriate education and shift from western education was limited, with bureaucratic responsibilities demanding attention.

6.2.4.2 Institutional space - both impeding and facilitative. Institutional space could be both constraining and supportive. Regarding barriers, Canadian participants felt that academic institutions were highly resistant to change and would not acknowledge that they were *“inherently oppressive structures”* (CAP7). Institutional reluctance was expressed in universities supporting the symbols of Indigeneity but not the substance. Courses with an Indigenous focus often became isolated from education as a whole. The institution’s lack of understanding was further reflected in hiring practices and the absence of diverse faculty. Such racialised or marginalised faculty often faced greater challenges than their counterparts, were more vulnerable when challenging dominant ideas and were expected to take on responsibility for the emotional well-being and support of their students. A very different aspect of social location had to do with complicity in that (white) academics were likely to protect their own position rather than advocate for diversity in hiring. Those from Canada teaching internationally identified similar constraints elsewhere and noted that political interference was often more blatant outside of Canada. Canadian participants further felt that not only was the institution unresponsive, but colleagues only paid *“lip service”* to ideas of transformation (CAP5). There were also insufficient opportunities for collegial interaction. These barriers became a central topic in one of the Canadian national sharing circles, the participants appearing quite despondent, expressing the view that innovative teaching might be idealistic. CASC2 felt it was problematic that Canadians were not always open to integrating international perspectives. They confirmed that resisting the impositions of the institution was difficult - particularly because it was seen as an individual rather than communal effort and because minority instructors as well as precarious faculty were particularly vulnerable. While they conceded that engaging students in critical discussion created student vulnerability, certain students simply resisted such discussion. CASC3 concluded, *“It’s a sensitive [political] period to actually be looking at contextualised social work”*.

Although there were many barriers, a number of participants nevertheless identified existing supports in the institution. Some Canadians felt that the accreditation process offered a helpful framework and oversight. For many Canadian participants, their personal passion, along with reflexivity and professional development, supported their commitment to contextualised social work education.

For South Africans, the institutional space was primarily described as a facilitating environment especially as universities generally supported a transformation agenda and offered associated supports, for example, around multilingualism. The Centres for Teaching and Learning provided important resources and needed professional development. Research grants intended for examining contextualised social work education had merit, as they offered a platform for using decolonised ideas. In addition, one was able to work towards contextualised social work education if one had a passion for social work and was committed to finding and implementing alternatives and telling one’s own stories. Some participants had colleagues who shared this vision for transformed curricula and teaching and had mentors, co-instructors or elders alongside. South Africans maintained that peer support, the sharing of ideas and co-teaching were encouraging. Indeed, professional bodies such as the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) and ASASWEI played an important role. There was solidarity and warmth among social work academics. Support through structures such as the Black Academic Forum was valuable. Other supports in the South African context included having a diverse group of lecturers.

However, South African participants felt that despite (socio-politically informed) transformation agendas there were also limitations within the institutional space. These limitations included the lack of

clear departmental policies, or if the vision for alternative education existed, a paucity of appropriate mechanisms. It was implied that in contexts where there were no departmental policies, academic freedom allowed certain educators to avoid teaching a decolonised curriculum and as such, some academics remained rooted in past /western learning approaches. Neophyte instructors arrived having been inducted into dominant conceptual frameworks. Support staff were not part of the transformation process and thus potentially impeded change. The limited number of field placements and the dominant approaches there were also a challenge. Funding was limited and thus did not adequately support basic maintenance of physical and digital infrastructure, create meaningful teaching spaces, support field trips and community engagement, underpin multilingualism in the classroom, research and teaching materials, attract appropriately qualified, young educators, nor reward productive researchers. Financial aid for students in poverty and associated services was also needed. An associated complaint was that bureaucracy limited innovation. There were also constraints in ethics approval processes in producing relevant knowledge. It was sometimes challenging to ensure consistency across multiple campuses. Last, the lack of interdisciplinary support for an alternative curriculum could be problematic.

Both Canadian and South African participants suggested that positive student responses to a more contextualised curriculum was encouraging. ISC4 noted that *"contextualised social work is something that resonates much more with students who have experienced oppression ... poverty and intergenerational trauma related to colonialism"*.

All participants in the sharing circles confirmed the value of engaging in this research project because it established a common conversation. The research process facilitated further reflection on the issues raised and affirmed the strategies they were currently employing. It also brought to light the activities of their colleagues, while reminding them that entrenching such shifts was a long-term process.

6.2.4.3 Inconsistent, idealistic definitions. The lack of clear definitions regarding alternatives was problematic for participants. For example, some of the South Africans interviewed felt that what decolonised or developmental social work meant was not clear. Some contested the definition of Africanisation and suggested that although it was often conflated with decolonisation, it was not the same. Indeed, some participants contended that Africanisation and indigenisation excluded certain (previously oppressed) population groups, and this practice was seen as inappropriate. Some complained that Ubuntu was talked about but did not necessarily inform community behaviour. As demonstrated earlier in the findings, some Canadians similarly were concerned that the definition of decolonised or Indigenous social work education remained vague and undefined.

Regarding this research itself, the range and diversity of alternatives to mainstream social work education described caused some consternation for the Canadian sharing circle. On the one hand, there was an appreciation of the variety of and synergy between the opinions expressed and of the complexity offered. This notion also reinforced the idea that social work language itself was contextual. On the other hand, however, for some the variant definitions represented a lack of unity regarding a common understanding of contextualised social work education and/or its theoretical base. Further to this discussion, some participants of the Canadian national sharing circle felt that while the interview findings affirmed social work as an inherently contextual profession, it seemed also that the findings highlighted the tensions or confusions between "mainstream and alternative practices". Such inconsistencies were reflected in the differences between curricula on the one hand and on the other, first, practice expectations, second, the accreditation standards and third, neoliberal expectations of training students as technicians. CASC3 felt such disconnects left social work educators in *"precarious"* positions.

6.2.4.4 Mainstreaming of alternatives. At the same time, Canadian interviewees were cautious about definitions and applications, warning that some of these alternative approaches had been mainstreamed or superficially applied, thus losing their meaning.

6.2.4.5 Student lived realities. Canadian students face challenges such as poverty, working, singly raising children or attending university far from their home communities. Such situations impeded students' abilities to engage fully with course materials and in the classroom. Conservative student views and associated resistance also impeded contextualised social work education. In South Africa,

students are often un/under resourced financially and technologically. The diverse student profile, the range of languages and the focus on English as a medium of instruction added significant complexity. As with Canadian students, students were also frequently reluctant to explore the consequences of structural issues or concepts that challenged their ideas. One participant mentioned that student protests interfered with teaching. It was noted that opportunities for students upon graduation were limited, despite social workers being needed to effectively implement legislation. While there was significant international recruitment, international regulatory institutions did not always fully acknowledge the rigour of South African (contextualised) social work education (SAP2).

On the positive side, students often had a nuanced understanding of social conditions having experienced these first hand. Acknowledging and incorporating their lived realities as well as their solutions (ISC2) facilitated contextualised discussion and learning.

6.2.4.6 Relevant materials. Both Canadians and South Africans identified the issue of insufficient materials that offered alternative perspectives. In the Canadian national sharing circle, the lack of policy materials that spoke specifically to *“reconciliation, Indigenisation and decolonisation [of social work]”* (CASC2) was emphasised. ISC3 observed that in Canada *“We still are using materials that are very dominant. There is ... new literature especially ... from Indigenous scholars and ... immigrants or other... groups, but still we are using books that are very western and very dominant”*. South Africans also lamented the continued reliance on overseas materials.

However, South African participants suggested that having local materials and being engaged in local knowledge production, such as publications, case studies and videos was a significant support and that an ever-increasing number of social work educators were engaged in such endeavours. Contributing to international policy development and ensuring a progressive voice was also impactful, as was having role models in this area. ASASWEI played an important role in the production and dissemination of local knowledge and this role was highly valued. Although Canadians had not articulated the strategies in this manner, several had written materials that could be used in the classroom. Knowledge production occurred also through establishing Indigenous courses and schools. However, Canadians did flag the risk of appropriation in offering Indigenous content, and emphasised the importance of ensuring appropriate allyship.

6.2.4.7 Practice context. In South Africa, the legislative framework was prominent for the participants. SAP2 noted that while some legislation had a more progressive focus and could have a culturally appropriate application, some legislation undermined cultural practices. For example, formal notions of adoption did not fit with all cultural practices.

6.2.4.8 Community relationships. For Canadians, support was experienced in strong community relationships and being part of social movements that informed and endorsed a contextualised approach. In one of the Canadian national sharing circles it was affirmed that community responsiveness was central to contextualised social work education. Consequently greater attention needed to be paid to diversity (with respect to, for example, immigrant/international as well as Indigenous student needs). There was some debate in one Canadian sharing circle, without resolution, as to whether social workers practising in a contextualised manner needed to adopt a relativistic stance in relation to core values depending on the community's values. A final Canadian issue was the frequent disconnect with communities - these relationships needed to be strengthened significantly to ensure contextualised social work.

South African social work educators felt that where there was positive engagement with communities this relationship was helpful.

6.2.4.8 Student support. Some South African participants noted that ensuring open access for students was seen as an essential support to contextualised social work education. Also facilitating student voice and feedback served as an important support.

6.2.4.9 International standards versus standardisation. South African participants in their national sharing circle identified that local as well as global standards were useful in identifying appropriate curriculum development goals. SASC2 clarified that having standards was different to promoting standardisation. Indeed, the former allowed for local application and innovation, whereas standardisation imposed universal notions of best practice and ignored the specific context. This differentiation seemed to be critical.

6.2.5 Theme 5. Contextualising the Research

The participants of the international sharing circle drew attention to contextual differences regarding South Africa and Canada.

6.2.5.1 Use of professional language. Participants noted that the term Contextualised Social Work Education did not necessarily have much meaning in each context. Rather Canadians tended to frame alternative practice through the lens of Anti-Oppressive Theory. In South Africa, the preferred construction was around an Afrocentric approach and the theory of Decoloniality. Language also reflected dynamic political realities, with ISC1 observing that *“[D]ecolonisation, Indigenisation [and] ... contextualisation [once were] issues of the minority, the voiceless, the oppressed”* and now were part of the dominant university discourse.

6.2.5.2 Historical processes. ISC3 highlighted differences between *“[t]he historical process[es]”* of the two countries, notably that *“[t]he anti-apartheid ... start was years ago”* and was now expressed in an institutional and national movement of decolonisation. This movement had also allowed for meaningful work regarding decolonisation. In contrast, in Canada awareness of Indigenous oppression and identifying meaningful responses was far more recent: *“We are not in a movement here in Canada. We have intentions, we have some initiatives ... there are some good scholars, including Indigenous and immigrant scholars, working on anti-oppressive practice ... [but] in Canada the social policies ... still are very western ... and [are not focused on] context”*.

6.2.5.3 Lived experience. ISC2 felt that it was important to recognise that *“... whilst there are similarities, [such as a common experience of colonialism], there are also big differences between the Canadian ... and the South African experience”*. Differences were on the levels and pervasiveness of poverty, the diversity of student bodies, and the resourcing of academic institutions. However, ISC3 wanted to emphasise that in Canadian student cohorts, there often were significant income disparities between students; and that there were Canadian communities that were severely impoverished.

6.2.6 Theme 6: Pathways

Emerging out of a consideration of the challenges and supports, various recommendations for entrenching contextualised social work education were suggested. Some Canadian participants felt that important steps were being taken that simply needed to be embedded. Some felt change could only be achieved through a slow, deliberate process. Others were not sure if there could be meaningful change. Indeed, CAP4 asserted: *“[O]ur entire system would have to change drastically”*, though CAP15 concluded *“Social work in Canada is truly alive...it’s moving everywhere...”*. South African participants suggested that South African academics had already initiated many transformative efforts on policy, institutional and social work discipline levels that could be drawn upon in further entrenching contextualised social work. In summary, ISC1 maintained *“[W]e all are in agreement ... that something has to be done ... to make our education more relevant and user friendly and change the dynamics of the people’s lives”*.

Recommendations from participants to strengthen alternative epistemologies

- Use collective activism to resist the dominant agenda through
 - ▶ developing collaborative, collective efforts into a community of practice that identifies relevant content and pedagogy
 - ▶ holding each other accountable; motivating oneself and peers to facilitate buy-in using technology to connect locally and internationally

- ▶ theorising 'Contextualised Social Work Education': "[T]here should be greater focus ... on ... theories that can influence how contextualised social work could operate" (ISC2). ISC1 agreed that "[w]e need to be] broadening the knowledge about social work education ... [to] reflect and represent the contribution of the voices of the oppressed, the Indigenous people and their way of solving ... some of the difficult social and psychological issues of our time and in their time".
- ▶ developing local and international research and partnerships for publications and conferences
- ▶ facilitating meaningful engagement and dialogue at conferences
- ▶ pushing back at bureaucracy and decolonising structures, agendas and curricula
- ▶ supporting upper management in taking a stance for contextualised education and against neoliberal policies in the current politically charged environment
- ▶ recognising that established, secure academics can take on greater risks than younger, or in Canadian context, racialised or precarious staff
- Promote Contextualised Social Work Education through professional bodies and professional community
 - ▶ In Canada, review accreditation standards to reflect multiple ways of knowing and being and create pathways for registration of elders with the regulatory council
 - ▶ Contextualise national codes of ethics
 - ▶ Offer relevant professional development; accessible, meaningful conferences that facilitate dialogue
 - ▶ Support mentoring, training and in-class support regarding alternative pedagogies through directives
 - ▶ Ensure that younger social work educators are inducted into progressive understandings of social work
- Develop coherent policy at departmental level, across disciplines and within academic institutions and
 - ▶ Promote academic discretion to allow for innovation
 - ▶ Promote (and fund) research and publication and thereby advance curricula revision through clarity of what contextualised social work means and how to implement it
 - ▶ Develop and strengthen local and international research partnerships
 - ▶ Generate increased departmental/faculty and university conversations around the issue. In Canada, conversations need to include English, French and Indigenous social work
 - ▶ Support alternative pedagogies so that students have relevant skills
 - ▶ In Canada, support Indigenous or racialised/ marginalised educators as well as 'precarious' faculty (those on contract) through encouraging alternative pedagogies and hiring diverse faculty
 - ▶ Attend to class structure through ensuring smaller classes, and providing physical spaces that facilitate experiential learning
- Respond to student needs and honour their expertise and lived experience: ISC2 felt: "[W]e will have to start finding solutions that ... honour the real-world situations [of all the students]". ISC1 concluded that "[W]e have to hear the voice of the students ... coming from different backgrounds. We need to hear how they resolve issues ... and understand their concerns".
 - ▶ In Canada facilitate the attendance and success of Indigenous and other marginalized students
 - ▶ Include student voices in activism, developing policy and delivering education
 - ▶ Maintain a focus on the "structural dimensions to peoples' lives" (SAP4)
 - ▶ Ensure appropriate content and pedagogy "that are meaningful...[and] truly teach and support those types of social work that make disruptive change" (ISC4).
 - Training students in community-based, participatory activities
 - Deepening reflexive practice and facilitating curiosity rather than defensiveness; supporting students to be courageous;
 - Having a more inclusive curriculum that incorporates other knowledges and ways of doing
 - Foregrounding (local) conditions and solutions: ISC1 underlined that "[I]t is very important for us to acknowledge and recognise ... the social problems ... and what ... solutions ... the communities [have] develop[ed] to deal with those".
 - Focus on the environmental. ISC3 argued: "[T]his is a problem in local space [and] impacts the world".
- Engage the community practitioner voices in developing policy and delivering education

7

DISCUSSION



7. Discussion

The study highlighted several important issues pertinent to the implementation of contextualised social work education. Through a phenomenological lens these issues can be crystallised as first, understanding what contextualised social work education is conceptually, (or theorizing contextualised social work education), what it is practically (content and pedagogy) and third, identifying the context or conditions required for implementation.

7.1 Theorising Contextualised Social Work Education

A first issue raised by this research relates to the need for understanding Contextualised Social Work Education (CSWE) in its complexity. CSWE is a multi-layered concept informed by critical perspectives.

7.1.1 Multipronged approach

The educators in this research conclude that alternatives to mainstream social work education need to include multi-fold, intersecting and integrated dimensions. In the literature such perspectives are sometimes identified as 'pluriversal' (Hendricks & Younge, 2018), representing a post-modern understanding of the validation of multiple perspectives. Participants have named each of the strands that are being woven together into this multi-discourse as critical discourses.

7.1.2 Local discourses

The study outcomes demonstrated that the language and selected lenses/discourses referred to in this previous point were highly contextual, as well as being reflective of the prevailing political context. This viewpoint is consistent with that of Ornellas et al., (2018) who stress that the "identity and structure of the social work profession" (p. 1193) need to be understood (with)in each national context. As such, decolonialism, Africanisation and indigenisation are validated by being part of the broader South African transformation discourse (particularly in education). The preferred Canadian discourses of Indigenous/Indigenized on the one hand and critical race, feminist, (dis)ability theory on the other reflect a parallelism and perhaps fragmentation that is represented in Canadian political debate. Indigenous activism and the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Process have carved out a space that focuses particularly on the Indigenous population of Canada. At the same time, those representing immigrant and other marginalised groups advance discourses that pay attention to the oppressions experienced by these groups. Anti-oppressive practice and theory, as well as articulations of critical social work (Webb, 2019) may be seen as incorporating these parallel discourses under one perspective in social work, and may account for this paradigm being favoured by Canadian participants.

7.1.3 Centring power

Participants underscored the fact that an analysis of power dynamics is central to the conceptualisation of contextual social work education. Context cannot be understood fully without understanding the flow of power in particular communities both historically and currently. The emphasis that the South African participants placed on the teaching of global impacts, and Canadians on Indigenous circumstances are examples of understanding the forces shaping local social conditions.

Students also need to grasp how power circulates between social workers and members of the community. Similarly, participants suggested that power in the classroom context has to be understood. The methodologies selected incorporate an understanding of power. As an example, experiential activities in the contextualised classroom need to go beyond mimicking the need for practising social work techniques or addressing classroom learning styles to facilitating critical thinking and analyses of power. Emancipatory approaches are thus at the core of contextualised social work education.

7.1.4 Decolonizing context

Part of clarifying the central meaning of contextualised social work education relates to an understanding of the concept of **'context' and 'contextual'**. Mainstream person-in-environment discourse situates the individual within their contextual environment and seeks to improve the service user's functioning within that environment. However, this western discourse is individualised, thus ignoring the collective; locates blame within the individual; and focuses on remediation of the individual's behaviour, cognition and feeling. Another challenge with mainstream notions of context is that the contextual environment is presented as flat and not representing multiple lived realities. Social work as a discipline has colonised this particular view of context/ual. In contrast, while arguing that "good social work is contextual" and thus at the core of their teaching, study participants demonstrated a much thicker and indeed, alternative, understanding of context that is located in the 'local'.

This conceptualisation of the context/ual is infused by a fundamentally different epistemology. It is a critical understanding of context that places not only individuals, but groups and particularly communities at the centre of this environment. As advanced implicitly by participants, for a complete critical understanding of context, social conditions must be understood in their complexity. Such an understanding reflects multiple systemic and structural forces that create social conditions; local definitions and experiences of such conditions (and thus resisting western formulations where these are inappropriate); and responses built on local tested solutions and the enhancement of local resources. The participants' emphasis on social conditions is used as a shorthand for signalling attention to structural issues (Ibrahima & Mattaini, 2017). Context is thus framed in terms of socio-political-historical (Al Markameh & Libal, 2015) and (natural/physical) environmental dimensions.

Using multiple, intersecting discourses also facilitates the identification of multiple community realities, while the analysis of power (which for participants tends to be a structural analysis) grounds the lived experience with political and structural realities thus offering a textured understanding of context.

7.1.5 Community as Site of Intervention

Another point that is implicit in the research is that the unit and site of intervention is the **community**, though this idea does not exclude individual or group work. Indeed, in prioritizing community, the participants do not ignore individual psychological dimensions. These, however, have to be understood and responded to within a broader framework. The literature supports this stance emphasising, for example, insight into personal but also intergenerational trauma and its impact on individual, family and community experience (see for example, Burton et al., 2016; Menzies 2019). Further, participants underline community engagement, community definition of issues and community solutions. They also pay attention to collectivist values (Ibrahima & Mattaini, 2017). At the same time, it is understood that communities are heterogenous and complex.

It should be noted that it was South Africans in particular that argued for an understanding of social conditions informed by local realities instead of imposed Northern constructions of such conditions. Although Canadians spoke about the importance of understanding Indigenous needs and engaging with Indigenous communities, they did not speak to the construction of social conditions in the same way. It would seem that using the discourse of intergenerational trauma is perhaps a shorthand for the Canadian participants, although this notion conflates the issue of 'social conditions' with that of 'Indigenous communities' and makes other social conditions less visible.

Community engagement was important not only when delivering interventions, but for the classroom also. Participants suggested that in contextualised social work education community members and elders are invited to the classroom to create a bridge between the institution and the community, and to bring in lived experience. Some participants suggested that community consultation was important in shaping curriculum.

In summary, the discussion of community, and (as advanced in Indigenous education), knowledge and relationships are thus closely connected in research participants' minds (Tomlins-Jahnke, Styres, Lilly & Zinga, 2019).

7.1.6 Local knowledge production

Another facet emerging from the research is the emphasis on **local knowledge production** for effective contextualised social work education. Indeed, what is taught locally is constructed through the materials that are locally available.

Processes of local knowledge production are framed by the complex appreciation of historical and contemporary oppression as well as a deep understanding of culture that goes beyond cultural safety and humility. Knowledge production includes the theorising of social conditions alluded to earlier. Accordingly, participants recommend that issues such as parenting or gerontology be understood through the local lens in terms of the meaning these issues hold for the local community/ies and in terms of preferred (tested) solutions.

All levels of knowledge production are approached critically. For example, the participants suggest that a local speaker's presentation be interrogated for its assumptions. As a consequence, the resultant materials are not only local, but are qualitatively different in that they assume a critical stance- in terms of knowledge gathering and student interrogation of such materials.

Social work educators need to develop accessible materials that speak to local realities. However, it is equally important to tune into local/Indigenous knowledges and knowledge development and transmission (including pre-colonisation) (Mabvurira, 2018) and to facilitate disciplinary acknowledgement of these modes of knowledge production.

The research participants also emphasise that creating Indigenous or local discourses does not mean excluding dominant perspectives, although it does mean decentering mainstream lenses. A similar position is outlined by McEachern (2014). Even so, the place of local/Indigenous knowledge remains a contested issue in social work education.

7.1.7 Foregrounding students' lived experience

The research further highlights the need to contextualise social work education in the classroom to **foreground students' lived experiences**. First, this idea means being intentionally responsive to the circumstances in which students find themselves and understanding the practical and emotional (e.g. trauma) implications thereof in the educational setting. For example, South African educators see themselves as prioritising local social conditions (such as poverty) and lived solutions in the curriculum, while also attending to issues of accessibility, in particular regarding language. Second, such responsiveness suggests actively engaging student voices regarding their education, an issue supported by all those interviewed.

Connected to the idea of student needs, the research identifies the need for contextualised social work education to be offered to **diverse, rather than homogenous, student populations**. Some authors argue that the focus should be on the colonised student, equipping them to be effective in their context (for example, Hill & Macdonald, 2014; Mabvurira, 2018). It is possible that the participants took an alternative view, believing that contextualised social work education belongs in every classroom because in urban Canadian contexts student groups can be extremely diverse, and in South Africa because it is the majority that has suffered.

7.1.8 Instructor social location and reflexivity

While the focus is on students, it is evident that **instructors' awareness** of social location is central to facilitating contextualised social work education. Participants stress that educators play a crucial role in modelling reflexivity in the classroom.

Educators with experience of marginalisation both in educational and societal settings are particularly sensitive to the importance of providing alternatives to mainstream social work (education) perspectives, although this agenda is also advanced by other research participants adopting critical social work lenses.

7.2 What constitutes contextualised social work education?

The content and methodological elements of contextualised social work education speak to the need for education in historical and contemporary oppression, critical ethics, reflexivity, student empowerment and critical thinking skills. Contextualised social work education facilitates a critical sensitivity to context.

7.2.1 Content

The various constitutive elements of content described by the participants equip students with critical knowledge about local context. Indeed, the local is privileged and student should have a critical understanding of local histories, traditions, norms, knowledges and ways of helping. However, there must also be familiarity with the global context(s). The skills component must equip students to work ethically and appropriately in their local context, while being transferable to allow meaningful engagement with unfamiliar communities - whether these be in their countries or internationally.

7.2.2 Pedagogy

To convey such content meaningfully, experiential, and participatory **pedagogy** that builds relationships is required. Empowering approaches are important because they redistribute power in the classroom. Thus, even though participants suggested that contextualised social work education simply constituted 'good' teaching that matched their 'values' or 'style', their comments make it clear that they have developed a critical standpoint and integrated an approach to education that resists conservative banking or deductive methods (Freire, 2000).

In addition, all educators in the study agree that students need to develop a critical, deep reflexivity to be successful practitioners in varying contexts and to theorise practice (Hendrick & Younge, 2018). This reflexivity is accompanied by a critical ethical and value base. Moreover, contextualised social work education emphasises that conscientisation, resistance and advocacy form part of the social work response (Freire, 2000) and engages students themselves in these processes.

These content and pedagogical recommendations are supported by Rasell et al. (2019) who highlight the importance of a local-global balance; context sensitivity; identification with the (global) profession; and dialogical and critical teaching approaches. They, like the participants, emphasise student well-being. In addition, both Rasell et al. (2019) and Engelbrecht et al. (2019) concur with the participants that educators impart to students a strong value base. The educators in this research project recommend that a slow, gentle, though direct approach be taken in the classroom, a position supported by authors such as Dumbrill and Yee (2019) and McEachern (2014).

7.3 Context/Conditions for Contextualised Social Work Education

7.3.1 Coherent policy environment

This group of educators identify the need for **relevant, appropriate and coherent policies** at national, institutional and disciplinary as well as interdisciplinary levels. While concurring that a positive policy environment is needed, the research participants have different interpretations regarding the stage of implementation of contextualised social work. This diversity of opinion is not uncommon in relation to the decolonisation of universities (Thompson, 2019). While some feel that very little has been achieved, others feel that there are foundations of contextualised social work education on which educators can build. The South Africans are especially conscious of the transformation at the institutional and social work professional levels, there having been significant shifts in recent years. Akin to Canadian Indigenous practice, they wish to acknowledge their (academic) heritage (Tomlins-Jahnke, Styres, Lilley & Zinga, 2019) and the work that has already been done. At first glance it appears that South African educators have significant supports and that the struggle has been won. While there are certain

resources in place, such an assumption belies the extensive struggle towards decolonised education in which these participants are engaged. Although the transformative discourse is strong, there is the competing neoliberal narrative which Dlamini and Sewpaul (2015) suggest can undermine change efforts. Canadian participants also highlighted the policy environment but foregrounded neoliberal concerns, sometimes feeling quite disempowered and alone in resisting dominant education.

The research points to the value of explicitly articulated support by professional social work organisations, faculty associations and groups that formally encourage those who are marginalised in advancing this agenda (Campbell, Dea, & McDonald, 2019).

7.3.2 Resources

The participants implied that if the appropriate policies were in place, needed resources would follow. Adequate resources were needed for in-class teaching, community engagement and research/resource development.

7.3.3 Peers

The participants suggested that it was vital to have like-minded peers. The research thus problematises social work educators' potential complicity in maintaining dominant narratives (Wehbi, Parada, George & Lessa, 2016). Moreover, the research participants note that contextualised social work education is disruptive and creates discomfort. Thus, faculty need to be unified in supporting this agenda. Also, ensuring a sustainable diverse team of instructors is essential. Additionally, it is important to ensure that Indigenous instructors, for example, do not carry the prime responsibility for contextualisation (Campbell, Dea, & McDonald, 2019). Further, in promoting contextualised social work education, it must be acknowledged that educators' sense of self is intrinsically intertwined with the political, economic and social realities of their context. Acting as a community of like-minded social workers was also considered important whether on the local or international level. We infer from these observations that in each context educators need to assess what preceding initiatives can be further developed towards the entrenchment of contextualised social work.

7.4 The meta-narrative of the 'contextual'

The analysis highlights the fact that the issues of context and contextualisation were not only present in the participant responses, but acted in the very way in which both participants and researchers engaged in the research. For example, for South African educators' context is consistently and continually visible. One participant engaged in the interview while a student protest was occurring in the background. One of the other participants, while sharing their thoughts, indicated that they also were looking out of the office window where they could see the living conditions of both service users and students. Students insisted that one of the research team members, in their capacity as a lecturer, respond directly to student concerns regarding femicide and xenophobic acts in the community that were impacting students' ability to engage in their learning. Power outages and internet challenges impacted the scheduling of interviews and fluidity of conversation. One participant travelled an hour each way to make themselves available where there was a stable internet connection. This experience speaks not only to the constant awareness of social conditions, but also suggests that participation in research projects may be an issue of resources and privilege. Some educators reported dealing with resource-poor teaching environments. Other educators reflected on their personal marginalisation. This constant awareness of context seems to be a factor in promoting education that is contextualised, and casts the spotlight on educators' resilience in resisting dominant social work education.

8

CONCLUSION

8. Conclusion

This South African-Canadian research project investigated the perspectives and experiences of a group of social work educators who are implementing social work education that resists dominant conceptualisations of education and social work practice, and on the basis of this information, described contextualised social work education as a phenomenon.

While we have aimed to identify common themes in this research, we are also cautious not to decontextualise research findings in the process. Indeed, the intention is to underline what South African and Canadian participants have emphasised: each context requires a unique response; and each context will use its own language to identify predominant discourses, concerns and appropriate interventions. Gray and Coates (2010) advocated for Indigenous social work that was not narrowly ethnocentric and that recognised that the discipline needed to go beyond simply introducing Indigenous case studies, hiring Indigenous social workers and focusing on cultural research. Contextualised social work education goes that distance towards a multidimensional model.

The research also underscores the finding that indigenous work cannot be decoupled from global developments. Not only do students need to understand international models and policies, but local contexts are constantly impacted by broader political and socio-economic developments (Ibrahima & Mattaini, 2017). As Nikku and Pulla (2014) assert, “Social work is contextual yet increasingly internationalised” (p.373). South Africans may be particularly attuned to the glocal nexus, because of their global position, their sensitivity to North-South relations, and because many social workers trained in South Africa leave to practise elsewhere (Kasiram, 2004). The study also indicates that South Africans wish to demonstrate that their education is ‘world class’. In recognising global effects moving forward, participants are intensely aware of the pervasive and damaging influence of the neoliberal agenda (see for example, Harms, 2016; Ornellas et al., 2018; Sewpaul, 2006) and to use contextualised social work education as a means of resistance.

Third, the research has reinforced the idea that alternative education uses a critical lens to contextualise content and pedagogy. Contextualised social work education is founded on critical perspectives, values and ethics. The role of power is a consistent and essential thread. It is therefore a deeply political project that resists not only societal, public oppression but aims for emancipatory education.

The phenomenon of contextualised social work education thus emerges as offering a significant philosophical and paradigmatic shift away from dominant conceptualisations of social work education. The educators in this study confirmed Schmid and Morgenshtern’s (2019) construction of contextualised social work education, in which they postulated that contextualised social work education is founded on postmodern critical social work. This theoretical lens incorporates notions of power and oppression and advances anti-oppressive practice. It offers an acknowledgment of multiple lived realities. It extends critical thinking to privileging the local, and a deep appreciation for historical and contemporary developments particularly as regards oppression and discrimination; having a nuanced understanding of local knowledges and ways of doing (especially pertaining to helping strategies); locating practice primarily at the community level (and thus centering local ways of knowing, being and doing); and working in a participatory, empowering manner with communities. The authors argue that contextualised social work education thus needs to train social work students in emancipatory, reflexive praxis that has a local lens, offering content and pedagogies that facilitate critical thinking and deepen local knowledge. The literature review on which Schmid and Morgenshtern’s conceptualisation was based attempted to draw together disparate threads of alternative social work education. The study highlighted that this approach is what educators are indeed doing in practice as they integrate various critical discourses that are relevant to their context. The participants also suggested that not only was the focus on the local, but that Northern interpretations of particular social conditions needed to be reinterpreted through a local lens. The research moreover amplified the political nature of alternative education by underlining the analysis of power as a central concept.

Theorising contextualised social work education is a work in progress, with participants suggesting that the very process of joining in this research facilitated greater interrogation of the issue. As a consequence, they recommended forming a community of practice that can resist the ongoing imposition of dominant perspectives. One forum where this interrogation can occur is at professional conferences. The researchers would like to recommend to the CSDA to hold an international conference on this issue that engages organisations such as ASASWEI and CASWE.

Finally, Smith (2019) argues that in moving from discourse to implementation academics need to begin by acknowledging the harms of the academy to date as well as what might be problematic currently and then move to considering what might be done and aiming for excellence. It seems that the research participants are on this path.

9

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We offer a bibliography rather than simply references so as to add to the resources that are being collated on this subject

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