

Transnational Social Workers' Understanding of Australian First Nations Perspectives in Statutory Child Protection

¹*Corina Modderman, ² Mishel McMahon, ³Guinever Threlkeld, ⁴Lynne McPherson,

¹ Corina Modderman: Social Work & Social Policy, La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, 210 Fryers Street, Shepparton, Victoria 3630, Australia

03 58208618 C.Modderman@latrobe.edu.au

² Dr. Mishel McMahon: Social Work & Social Policy, La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University

³ Dr. Guinever Threlkeld: Social Work & Social Policy, La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University

⁴ Associate Professor Lynne McPherson: School of Arts and Social Sciences, Southern Cross University

*Correspondence to be sent to: Corina Modderman, Social Work & Social Policy, La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, 210 Fryers Street, Shepparton, Victoria 3630, Australia Email: c.modderman@latrobe.edu.au

Abstract

Chronic staff shortages and high rates of turnover in child protection programs create opportunities for social work mobility across the world. Australian child protection departments actively recruit social workers from the United Kingdom and Ireland. This strategy may cause tension relating to the application of known western social work practice and theory and limited understanding of Australian First Nations worldviews. Australia continues to struggle with the ongoing impact of colonisation, First Nations children are overrepresented in child protection service delivery. This paper explores the understanding held by overseas-born and educated social workers of Australian First Nations peoples, when they migrate to practice in frontline child protection. Interviews with 13 practitioners across two-time points explored social work practice in the transnational context. This paper identifies that there is a need to raise transnational social workers' awareness of Australian First Nations child rearing practices that may lie outside their experiential understanding.

- Transnational social workers have little understanding of First Nations peoples and their perspectives.
- This limited understanding may also impact transnational social workers' rapport with First Nations Australians because their personal lived experiences may greatly differ from the Australian First Nations lifeworld.

Keywords: Transnational social work, First Nations peoples, child protection

This collaborative writing project has taken place on the land of the Yorta Yorta, Bpangerang, Dhudhuroa, Wiradjuri, Bunjalung, Gomeroi and Durambal peoples and emerged

from the need to improve outcomes for Australian First Nations children and their families involved with statutory child protection programs. In this paper the term ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ will be used interchangeable with the term ‘First Nations peoples’. To address relational accountability the lead author will be introduced (Steinhauer, 2002). Corina Modderman identifies as a Dutch Frisian woman who grew up on flat country surrounded by lakes and meadow birds. Corina arrived as a transnational social worker (TNSW) in Australia to practice in child protection ten years ago and lives in rural Victoria. Corina’s identity is informed by western ways of knowing and from her social work background positions herself within a strong social justice, progressive standpoint.

European settlers’ colonisation and the ideas of social Darwinism had a devastating impact on the lives of First Nations peoples and continues to effect social, economic, and cultural marginalisation (Bennett & Gates, 2019). In Australia social workers practice within communities where First Nations peoples are still amongst the most disadvantaged (Zubrzycki et al., 2014). This is particularly evident in statutory child protection, an area of practice for which overseas social workers are recruited to fill critical workforce gaps (Modderman, Threlkeld, & McPherson, 2017). TNSWs, born and educated in the United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland, may have little knowledge or understanding of First Nations communities (Bartley et al., 2011; Modderman, Threlkeld, & McPherson, 2017; Modderman et al., 2019). Practicing social work is closely aligned with cultural location (Bartley et al., 2011; Modderman, Threlkeld, & McPherson, 2019; Simpson, 2009; Welbourne, Harrison, & Ford, 2007). Professional migration entails being separated from the construction of social work as it was known in the country of origin (Modderman et al., 2019). Relatively little is known about TNSW and preparation for a transition of practice that includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). This study draws on Tervalon and Murray-Gracia’s (1998) concepts of cultural humility and

multi-layered reflexivity to address the key research question: What understanding, if any, do transnational social workers have about social work with First Nations communities when they migrate to Australia to practice in statutory child protection?

Background

First Nations peoples have a different history to non-Indigenous Australians; they were the custodians of Country until the colonisers took the Australian continent (Muller, 2016). Intergenerational trauma results from historic and continuing injustice and impacts the present generation (Fernando & Bennett, 2019). Social workers participated in racist policies by removing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children up to the 21st century (Fernando & Bennett, 2019; Modderman et al., 2017; Muller, 2016). The number of First Nations children receiving a child protection service continues to increase. In the period 2017-2018, these children were seven times more likely to receive a child protection service than non-Indigenous children. In Australia's major cities First Nations children were 17 times, in remote areas 9 times, more likely than non-Indigenous children to be in out-of-home care (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019). In the last two decades Australian First Nations academics and community organisations have been highlighting the need to foreground their own continuing concepts and principles for childrearing, which were previously ignored through the doctrine of terra nullius. First Nations communities have declared that lack of understanding of these perspectives has contributed to high rates of overrepresentation of their children in child protection services (McMahon, 2017). Zubrzycki et al., (2014) argue that Australian social work education and practice is embedded in white western epistemologies. White is understood as the norm and western thought is central in all areas of social work theory and practice (Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Walter, Taylor, & Habibis, 2011; Zubrzycki et al., 2014). Australian social work continues to be located within the wider cultural context of avoidance and discomfort concerning race and First Nations

peoples (Walter et al., 2011). TNSWs may enter a child protection system that continues to operate in the context of colonialism and oppression of First Nations peoples (Baines, 2018; Bennett & Gates, 2019). They are placed within a predominantly non-Indigenous child protection workforce that may experience uncertainty about Aboriginal cultures and communities (McDermott, 2019; McMahon, 2017). Global social work mobility may reaffirm western views as the prominent focal point of practice and replicate harms of colonisation (Coates, Gray, & Hetherington, 2006; Kindle, 2018).

In Australia social work is not a registered profession and occupies an ambiguous place in the bureaucratic landscape. Some child protection departments struggle to recruit and retain staff, and international recruitment is one response to shortages of frontline employees (Lonne, Harries, & Lantz, 2012; McArthur, Thomson, Barker, Winkworth, & Campus, 2012; Modderman et al., 2017; Modderman, Threlkeld, & McPherson, 2018; Modderman et al., 2019; Zubrzycki, Thomson, & Trevithick, 2008). Practice in the Australian context calls for social workers to have place-based knowledge including critical understanding of colonisation and understanding of First Nations' peoples cultural perspectives (Green, 2019; Land, 2015). Little is known about the ways in which TNSWs, and recruiting organisations, understand and prepare for Australian child protection practice that includes First Nations' perspectives (Fouché, Beddoe, Bartley, & Parkes, 2015; McArthur et al., 2012; Modderman et al., 2017). This paper explores the experience of TNSWs recruited to child protection service delivery in Australia and their understanding of First Nations communities.

Theoretical Framework

Tervalon and Murray-Gracia's (1998) concept of cultural humility is understood as a continuous process of self-awareness, reflection, being supportive with others, and making effort to redress power imbalances between social workers and clients (Danso, 2018;

Fernando & Bennett, 2019; Foronda, Baptiste, Reinholdt, & Ousman, 2016; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). This paper utilises multi-layered reflexivity that focusses on self, relational, and organisational practice to explore cultural humility in transnational child protection practice (Nicholls, 2009; Rix, Barclay, & Wilson, 2014). Statutory environments value instrumental accountability, reflexivity fulfils the need for approaches that respond to the emotional impact of child protection practice and seek to develop respectful working relationships with families (D’cruz, Gillingham, & Melendez, 2007; Fook, 1999a; Munro, 2011; Ortega & Coulborn, 2011; Ruch, 2005). TNSWs that enter an unfamiliar environment draw on personal and professional experience to understand and critique knowledge that is introduced, whilst concurrently they must appraise and make sense of their experiences using that knowledge in the new context of child protection (Chow, Lam, Leung, Wong, & Chan, 2011). This reflexivity involves cognitive, affective and experiential processes to recognise the influence of social and cultural contexts in child protection practice (Fook, 1999b; Zuchowski, 2019).

Self-reflexivity explores what TNSWs bring to the new context from previous social work practice and investigates biases and assumptions through reflection and continuous learning (Rix et al., 2014; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). This dimension involves individual reflection on social problems, using personal experience to understand and critique new knowledge that is introduced (Chow et al., 2011; D’cruz et al., 2007). Relational reflexivity investigates TNSWs’ orientation toward client-focused and community-based practice (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). The focus of relational reflexivity is on TNSWs knowledge about clients and how they engage with First Nations peoples in their new environment. Organisational reflexivity explores policies, procedures and behaviours in the child protection service environment (Rix et al., 2014; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). It involves examination of cultural awareness and communication styles employed by the wider

organisational child protection system (Rix et al., 2014). Detailed examination of cultural humility through multi-layered reflexivity will illuminate TNSWs perceptions and understanding of First Nations peoples when they enter the Australian context of child protection practice.

Research Design

It is within the context of long-standing concerns about historical child protection practice with Australian First Nations peoples, along with contemporary challenges of ongoing disadvantage and over representation in child protection systems, that this research topic emerged. The paper is part of a larger study that examines UK and Irish TNSWs in Australian child protection practice. Here we examine TSNW's readiness for practice with First Nations peoples. A purposive sample of 13 TNSWs from the UK and Ireland recruited to Australia's child protection workforce was interviewed twice over a three-year period using semi-structured interviews. Recruitment was facilitated by senior staff in a metropolitan area, for confidentiality not disclosed. Participants granted permission to record and transcribe interviews. In interview one there was no specific question focussing on First Nation peoples, in interview two there were two specific questions: "Thinking back to practice in the UK/Ireland and your education, how do you see your work with the Indigenous peoples of Australia? What was your understanding and how did this influence practice?"

A qualitative approach, focussed on lived experience, was adopted to answer the research question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Silverman, 2013). A narrative-informed research design was used during data collection and three phases of analysis. In the first phase, data analysis focused on familiarisation with the narratives through repeated reading of interview transcripts and listening to audio-recordings. In the next phase, Nvivo enabled a thematic

analysis to interrogate experiences for meaning and reflection on events (Mishler, 1995; Riessman, 2008). The collaborative research process enabled deeper understanding of the data to enhance the quality of the research, critically examining the dominant narrative in social work practice and research relating to First Nations peoples (Downey, Threlkeld, & Warburton, 2017a). The relationship between participants' positioning concerning the transnational context in which their narratives were embedded, and their individual agency, enabled deeper exploration of their experiences (Bamberg, 2012).

Ethical approval was granted by the organisation from which participants were recruited and by the La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee in July 2013 (HEC13-019) and extended in 2016.

Shared authorship and reflective conversations with Yorta Yorta woman Dr Mishel McMahon and Gomeroi woman Auntie Maureen Ervine, have been integral during the research process and provided credibility to findings in which participants' voices were privileged (Finlay, 2003; Polkinghorne, 2007). During the research process time was spent to reflect on positioning of self, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worldviews and child protection practice. Discussions acknowledged individual positions in relation to the research topic, enabling new insights and knowledge about transnational practice in the Australian context of social work, informed by meaningful and culturally respectful relationships (Bennett, Zubrzycki, & Bacon, 2011).

Trustworthiness and authenticity of the study are demonstrated through the inclusion of quotations that support authentic meaning as expressed by participants and theoretical claims (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Downey, Threlkeld, & Warburton, 2017b). Validity of findings is supported by attending to the context, transnational social workers migrating from the UK and Ireland to the Australian continent, in which the narratives are embedded (Patton, 1999).

Rich description of the study context allows researchers considering the application in other sites to assess transferability (Lincoln, 2007).

Findings

The findings presented here examine experiences of participants and their understanding of social work practice with First Nations peoples when they enter the Australian child protection environment. Multi-layered analysis using self, relational, and organisational reflexivity investigates how participants made sense of their new environment. Findings will illuminate how personal and professional experiences influence participants and their construction of social work in an unfamiliar child protection practice context.

Self-Reflexivity

The dimension of self-reflexivity explores biases, identifying what participants bring to the new practice context from past experience. Participants recalled the recruitment process emphasised Australian child protection systems as fairly similar to those in the UK and Ireland, and so they had not thought much about social work in a colonised country.

I think what we thought we knew was very similar to what you see on the television in Europe, that Aboriginal people are hailed as at the highest point of the society.

Well that's certainly what I felt was going on until I came here and realised that that's not what is happening. (Maria)

First Nations peoples were constructed as belonging to one culture. Initially participants focussed on becoming culturally competent. Decolonised social work was not introduced as a way of practicing ethically with First Nations communities.

That part was missing, 'what do I need to know about this culture that will support me in my role as a child protection practitioner?' What I find here is that it's less about

the culture and more about you must do this for these people because we've done this in the past. And I find that a lot of that is very tokenistic. (Lara)

Participants drew on personal and professional experience, for example anti-oppressive practice, to understand and critique child protection interventions in the new context.

.... just ensure that you're reducing the power imbalance, ensuring that their voice is heard because of all the history, while still assessing the risk and the harm and making sure the child's safe.....At home, I think you touch on all cultures, but here you have a cultural plan only for Aboriginal children, whereas I was like why is it not for Chinese or for all the cultures? (John)

A few participants with over two years of experience in Australia reflected that their previous social work practice in a multi-cultural society had not adequately prepared them for the Australian context.

Well, I guess in London I worked with many families from Sudan, Afghanistan, Libya...I got a lot of practice and training to work with these families, but that's – I wasn't prepared, really, for working with Indigenous families. I was somewhat oblivious to the history of Australia. (Kylie)

Participants who had been in Australia more than four years and engaged with experiential and continuous learning, had a better understanding of how their place of origin unwittingly may represent oppression and power.

I think the organisation thought because we were living in a multicultural environment that we'd be able to deal with that. But working with Aboriginal people can be so significantly different. We're talking about an extremely oppressed community, who face trauma after trauma after trauma from white people. And then we're there going, with an English accent. (Simon)

Some participants felt shame when they reflected on their position of being white social workers. They initially participated in mainstream practice as the unquestioned way of service delivery.

One of the first encounters I had in understanding the gravity of the situation was when I was asked to remove a child.... my manager was a teacher ...wasn't skilled in trauma, wasn't skilled in understanding past histories, cultures, contexts that would've affected the whole situation.... and sending me into that situation; white, female, English, it's just totally inappropriate. (Jenny)

Relational-Reflexivity

The dimension of relational reflexivity explored participants' ability, or inability, to embrace First Nations peoples as the experts regarding issues that affect them. Some participants were unaware how their own racial and cultural identity may reflect the dominance of whiteness in the child protection workforce.

I feel that what's happened in the past has happened. It was wrong what happened but you have to move on, there's been an apology....there are so many resources here for Aboriginal people. (Jan)

Some assumptions stereotyped First Nations cultures and identities, undermining clients as experts about their own lived realities.

...I had a book at home, Walkabout, and that was the only thing I'd ever known about Indigenous Australia....being really honest with you having worked here I've not come across a lot of Indigenous, because there's quite a lot of Indigenous people here that don't identify with being Indigenous, white Aboriginals. (Petra)

The findings reflect assumptions that generalise the experience and needs of children belonging to First Nations. Some participants diminished the impact of colonisation by advocating for generic practices and service responses.

I think every person in Australia who has children should be treated the same. Yes, take in the cultural values, but never compromise with the child's risk... in the UK, it doesn't matter what culture you're from, if somebody's being abused you take them out, and here it's kind of, 'they're Indigenous, you can't do that'. (Missy)

Relationships with Aboriginal colleagues and friends in the wider organisation, were formed mainly by participants who were more than two-years post migration. These relationships were seen as a safe place for learning and asking questions.

... if we were dealing with an Aboriginal family we would tap into them because these guys are meant to have a nous (sic) and tap in and work with them.... but then it is how you present yourself and the people that I'd worked with at that unit, I got on well with them. (Peter)

Experiential learning reduced judgment and enabled deep understanding of First Nations values and principles, this type of learning occurred for most participants outside the wider organisation, and well beyond the point of transition.

We went out bush We went to a yarning pit... discussions.... watched videos about Aboriginal people and what happened and history..... It's just the ingrained discrimination, you can see the result of what Aboriginal peoples have been through and where they are now. The trauma of it all, it's just all so clear. (Janine)

Organisational-Reflexivity

Participants experienced confusion about the incongruence between organisational policy, messages delivered in training and direct practice and processes with First Nation communities. A couple of participants had no previous knowledge about the Stolen Generations which continue to impact First Nation Australians. During general induction training they were shocked to find out that “children were stolen” (Elli) from their parents. Some participants suggested the organisation created a false sense of expertise following this one-day training.

I think any Aboriginal work that is done can be quite tokenistic. You do your one-day training on Aboriginal culture sensitivity and then you’re supposed to be equipped to work 100% with Aboriginal families. It just isn’t the case. (Tina)

Participants were puzzled by the language used when discussing Aboriginal peoples “in the child protection department but also within the wider Australian white society” (John). Some felt that racism and disregard for experiences of First Nations peoples were common in the workplace. This led to uncertainty about how to respond and engage with First Nations families.

...This is an environment where there have been these instances of abuse of power from social workers and police. And we’re going out to these homes and nobody’s thought to tell us why there might be a problem... I think primarily because it’s about white Australia’s lack of understanding of what’s happened...And people are quite scared of the truth, of making a mistake. (Lily)

Participants in their second year of professional migration frequently expressed anger and hopelessness. They described their practice environment as having high instrumental accountability that undermined developing trust and relationships with First Nations

communities. Decisions were made quickly and with little consideration of the needs of First Nations children involved, almost de-humanising them. Organisational procedures and policies, including professional supervision, were experienced as compliance driven rather than focussed on how assumptions about cultures and childrearing influence decision making.

Because of the political environment, it is like don't removeand then it ends up you remove Aboriginal children and where are you going to put them? These children are removed and then there is nowhere to put them. There are no care facilities and they are placed with white families, in respite homes and this can go on for months and months where these children are away from their families..... It is like putting dogs in a kennel. (Jill)

With prolonged exposure to the Australian child protection system participants were able to see the negative trajectories for First Nations children in the care system. Participants felt they were not able to build trust with clients within a risk averse system that frequently had a “kneejerk reaction” (Jordan), resulting in Aboriginal children placed in poorly executed state care.

It is taking trust...child protection, they're in, they're out, they remove a child, they put a child back, and they remove a child. They don't see the value in long term intervention.... more Aboriginal children coming to care and we need more money for these placements... the placements break down and the child gets lost in the system. Then there are more children in juvenile, mental health, prison.... (Kim)

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate UK and Irish TNSWs' understandings of First Nations peoples. A narrative analysis enabled investigating participants' construction of social work

and how this informed practice when entering an unfamiliar place. The results provide a foundation to rethink how TNSW practice is influenced by place-related change. Without deliberate attention, TNSW will not fully understanding the lifeworld of First Nations peoples. The change in practice location requires TNSWs to be reflexive and make sense of experiences, drawing on personal and professional knowledge. At times of uncertainty the preferred response may be to revert to known constructions of childrearing, and child protection social work. Understanding both First Nations perspectives of childrearing in addition to western childhood development theories of child protection, is not something TNSWs are familiar with through previous experience or education. A key point emerging from this research is that the majority of TNSWs had limited understanding of social work in a colonised country. Assumptions developed whilst in the UK and Ireland were not an accurate reflection of contemporary Australia and its First Nations peoples. Recruiting organisations do not take a pro-active approach in dismantling incorrect assumption. Findings show that the application of previous experience failed to recognise the history and realities of First Nations peoples.

Findings suggest that cultural competency training during induction was experienced as confusing and inadequate. As a singular approach it asserts cultural expertise without reflecting on First Nations worldviews, or the ways structural oppression and colonisation impact on contemporary child protection (Green, 2019; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Such training may undermine self-reflexivity by focussing solely on “the other”. Culture influenced professional identities of TNSWs, it defined their ways of doing social work and location of self in an unfamiliar social structure and professional environment (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). TNSW prompted a first realisation of being white and the need to learn about details of colonisation in Australia (Land, 2015). This emerging self-awareness

manifested mostly two-year post arrival and involved engagement in continuous professional development. TNSWs need to shift from a colonist mindset which only includes western social work practice, to include First Nations perspectives. Findings highlighted that this shift remained challenging.

Australian research reports TNSWs were significantly impacted by place-related change and emotionally hampered by the personal and professional impact of migration (Modderman et al., 2018, 2019). Analysis in this study shows non-judgemental engagement with relational reflexivity towards First Nations communities was not demonstrated by all TNSWs. Findings suggest that employing cultural humility through active listening and entering the client's world with empathy may have been somewhat diminished in the transnational experience (Modderman et al., 2018; Ortega & Coulborn, 2011; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). The main objective of child protection practice was predominately constructed as the child being "safe", with no mention of cultural safety. This may limit opportunity to enter the client's world with humility to ensure culturally relevant child safety and well-being (Ortega & Coulborn, 2011; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). The principle of First Nations communities participating in decisions about their children was at risk of getting lost amidst everyday hasty decision making, and limited understanding of colonisation. Findings suggest that some TNSWs felt worried about how to develop meaningful relationships with First Nations peoples, especially in an oppressive practice environment (Rix et al., 2014; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Zubrzycki et al., 2014). Connections with First Nations colleagues and friends eased some of this uncertainty, allowing participants of this study to ask questions and engage in informal conversation within more personal relationships.

Australian child protection systems have been profoundly shaped by their roots in colonial assimilation of First Nations communities. Findings indicate that TNSWs arrived to a

workforce that did not openly acknowledge, discuss or take responsibility for overrepresentation statistics and contemporary challenges for First Nations communities. There remains limited understanding of the impact of colonisation at practitioner and organisational level. The crisis-driven nature and risk-averse practice of Australian child protection systems provided little opportunity for reflection on uncertainty and complexity in which procedures may become a substitute for interpersonal engagement strategies (Ruch, 2005). This study was set in an organisational environment favouring generic service delivery with assessments deriving from Western constructions of practice, overlooking the history of First Nations peoples and their childrearing perspectives. An understanding of First Nations viewpoints for kinship and childrearing would enable TNSWs to practice from a “both ways” approach, informed by western and First Nations worldviews (McMahon, 2017). This highlights the need for organisational reflexivity that includes leadership that encourages an environment where practitioners are supported to reflect on their own values, experiences, and worldviews that impact on decision making in the child protection context. Continuous learning and turning the mirror to self, may increase a better understanding of the history of the child protection agency within the surrounding community. This will facilitate child protection practitioners to take more responsibility for issues of race, cultures and worldviews (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

This study showed pro-active engagement with experiential learning and external training programs enabled TNSWs to be more humble and to better reflect on self. These participants were able to identify power imbalances through conflicting cultural orientations and demonstrated an openness towards First Nations worldviews through continues education, effort and time (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Not all TNSWs in this study reached a stage of actively engaging with decolonised social work practice, because this way of

working is not simply attending one off training that is learned and subsequently applied. Decolonising practice involves time and willingness to continually unpack the position of self towards First Nations peoples. This study provides guidance for further research into TNSW, and local non-Indigenous practitioners and organisations, and urges the significance of preparation and humbleness in light of Australia's colonial history for professional social work. Social work in Australia needs to critically reflect upon the ongoing contribution of colonising practices, and the role of white privilege (Zubrzycki et al., 2014). Transnational practice may unwittingly perpetuate colonising practices if TNSWs, and local non-Indigenous social workers, are not offered a learning environment that extends beyond promoting generic service delivery. TNSW practices must go beyond simply acquiring knowledge about First Nations cultures. This study highlights the need to engage in critical and reflexive thinking in regard to self and western orientated social work that may embody bias and racist ideologies. Australian child protection needs to actively listen and engage with First Nations communities, to construct a both ways approach for practice. The resulting approach will be informed by First Nations perspectives of childhood which are thousands of years old and western childhood development concepts, while balancing the child's needs of safety.

Limitations

This was a small study at a metropolitan child protection office. In order to fully understand the transition of TNSWs and decolonised social work practice, more extensive research is required. This study focused on the transition from the UK and Ireland to Australia and does not include a comparison with the perceptions of social workers educated in Australia. Voices of First Nations clients that are allocated a TNSW are absent in this study.

Conclusion

This article discussed TNSWs' understandings of First Nations communities when they entered the Australian context of child protection service delivery. The analysis showed that employing cultural humility through multi-layered reflexivity may contribute to courageous conversations about overrepresentation of First Nations children in Australia's child protection systems. There is a need for exploring how this field of practice can engage with and counter colonial thinking through critical reflection. Consequently, this research supports the further development of better pathways for TNSWs that extends beyond applying western concepts of social work to First Nations peoples.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to gratefully acknowledge Auntie Maureen Ervine, descendant of the Gomeroi people, for her invaluable contributions to this paper. Thank you for sharing your more than thirty years of experience relating to children and their families involved with statutory child protection.

References

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2019). *Child Protection Australia 2017-2018*. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/child-protection/reports>
- Baines, D. (2018). New public management, migrant professionals and labour mobility: possibilities for social justice social work? In A. Bartley & L. Beddoe (Eds.), *Transnational social work: Opportunities and challenges of a global profession* (pp. 35-51). Bristol, Great Britain: Policy Press.
- Bamberg, M. (2012). Narrative practice and identity navigation. In J. A. Holstein & J. F. Gubrium (Eds.), *Varieties of Narrative Analysis* (pp. 99-122). Thousand Oaks: SAGE publications Inc.
- Bartley, A., Beddoe, L., Duke, J., Fouché, C., Harington, P., & Shah, R. (2011). Crossing borders: Key features of migrant social workers in New Zealand. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, 23(3), 16-30.

- Bennett, B., & Gates, T. G. (2019). Teaching cultural humility for social workers serving LGBTQI Aboriginal communities in Australia. *Social Work Education*, 1-14.
- Bennett, B., Zubrzycki, J., & Bacon, V. (2011). What do we know? The experiences of social workers working alongside Aboriginal people. *Australian Social Work*, 64(1), 20-37.
- Chow, A. Y., Lam, D. O., Leung, G. S., Wong, D. F., & Chan, B. F. (2011). Promoting reflexivity among social work students: The development and evaluation of a programme. *Social Work Education*, 30(02), 141-156.
- Coates, J., Gray, M., & Hetherington, T. (2006). An 'ecospiritual' perspective: Finally, a place for Indigenous approaches. *British Journal of Social Work*, 36(3), 381-399.
- D'cruz, H., Gillingham, P., & Melendez, S. (2007). Reflexivity, its meanings and relevance for social work: A critical review of the literature. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 37(1), 73-90.
- Danso, R. (2018). Cultural competence and cultural humility: A critical reflection on key cultural diversity concepts. *Journal of Social Work*, 18(4), 410-430.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative enquiry* (3rd ed., pp. 1-43). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- Downey, H., Threlkeld, G., & Warburton, J. (2017a). What is the place of reflective learning in researching farming couples' retirement decision making? *Qualitative Social Work*, 16(6), 756-774.
- Downey, H., Threlkeld, G., & Warburton, J. (2017b). What is the role of place identity in older farming couples' retirement considerations? *Journal of Rural Studies*, 50, 1-11.
- Fernando, T., & Bennett, B. (2019). Creating a culturally safe space when teaching Aboriginal content in social work: A scoping review. *Australian Social Work*, 72(1), 47-61.
- Finlay, L. (2003). The reflexive journey: mapping multiple routes. *Reflexivity: A practical guide for researchers in health and social sciences*, 3-20.
- Fook, J. (1999a). Critical reflectivity in education and practice. In B. Pease & J. Fook (Eds.), *Transforming social work practice: Postmodern critical perspectives* (pp. 195-208). St Leonards, Australia: Allen and Unwin.
- Fook, J. (1999b). Reflexivity as method. *Annual Review of Health Social Science*, 9(1), 11-20.
- Foronda, C., Baptiste, D.-L., Reinholdt, M. M., & Ousman, K. (2016). Cultural humility: A concept analysis. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 27(3), 210-217.
- Fouché, C., Beddoe, L., Bartley, A., & Parkes, E. (2015). Are we ready for them? Overseas-qualified social workers' professional cultural transition. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(1), 106-119.
- Green, S. (2019). Social work and cultural support. In B. Bennett & S. Green (Eds.), *Our Voices: Aboriginal Social Work* (second ed.).
- Kindle, P. A. (2018). Review of the book Transnational Social Work: Opportunities and Challenges of a Global Profession, by A. Bartley and L. Beddoe. *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work*, 15(5), 596-598.
- Land, C. (2015). *Decolonizing solidarity : dilemmas and directions for supporters of indigenous struggles*: London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Lincoln, Y. S. (2007). Naturalistic inquiry. *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*.
- Lonne, B., Harries, M., & Lantz, S. (2012). Workforce development: A pathway to reforming child protection systems in Australia. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43(8), 1630-1648.

- Martin, K., & Mirraboopa, B. (2003). Ways of knowing, being and doing: A theoretical framework and methods for Indigenous and Indigenist re-search. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 27(76), 203-214.
- McArthur, M., Thomson, L., Barker, J., Winkworth, G., & Campus, C. (2012). *National analysis of workforce trends in statutory child protection*. Retrieved from <http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/national-analysis-of-workforce-trends-in-statutory-child-protection>
- McDermott, D. (2019). "Big Sister" wisdom: How might non-Indigenous speech-language pathologists genuinely, and effectively, engage with Indigenous Australia? *International journal of speech-language pathology*, 1-11.
- McMahon, M. (2017). *Lotjpa-nhanuk: Indigenous Australian child-rearing discourses*. (Doctoral thesis), La Trobe University, Melbourne.
- Mishler, E. G. (1995). Models of narrative analysis: A typology. *Journal of narrative and life history*, 5(2), 87-123.
- Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2017). Transnational social workers in statutory child welfare: A scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 81, 21-28.
- Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2018). Transnational social workers' lived experience in statutory child protection. *European Journal of Social Work*, 1-13.
- Modderman, C., Threlkeld, G., & McPherson, L. (2019). The role of place for transnational social workers in statutory child protection. *British Journal of Social Work*, 94(6), 1619-1637.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2015). *The white possessive: Property, power, and indigenous sovereignty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Muller, L. (2016). Preparing to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: Decolonisation for social work practice. In J. Maidment & R. Egan (Eds.), *Practice Skills in Social Work & Welfare* (3 ed., pp. 84-100). Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.
- Munro, E. (2011). *The Munro review of child protection: final report, a child-centred system* (Vol. 8062): The Stationery Office.
- Nicholls, R. (2009). Research and Indigenous participation: Critical reflexive methods. *International journal of social research methodology*, 12(2), 117-126.
- Ortega, R. M., & Coulborn, K. (2011). Training child welfare workers from an intersectional cultural humility perspective: A paradigm shift. *Child welfare*, 90(5).
- Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health services research*, 34(5, Part II), 1189-1208.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2007). Validity issues in narrative research. *Qualitative inquiry*, 13(4), 471-486.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Rix, E. F., Barclay, L., & Wilson, S. (2014). Can a white nurse get it? 'Reflexive practice' and the non-Indigenous clinician/researcher working with Aboriginal people. *Rural & Remote Health*, 14(2), 2679.
- Ruch, G. (2005). Relationship-based practice and reflective practice: holistic approaches to contemporary child care social work. *Child & Family Social Work*, 10(2), 111-123.
- Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*: SAGE publications limited.
- Simpson, G. (2009). Global and local issues in the training of 'overseas' social workers. *Social Work Education*, 28(6), 655-667.
- Steinhauer, E. (2002). Thoughts on an Indigenous research methodology. *Canadian journal of native education*, 26(2), 69.

- Tervalon, M., & Murray-Garcia, J. (1998). Cultural humility versus cultural competence: A critical distinction in defining physician training outcomes in multicultural education. *Journal of health care for the poor and underserved*, 9(2), 117-125.
- Walter, M., Taylor, S., & Habibis, D. (2011). How white is social work in Australia? *Australian Social Work*, 64(1), 6-19.
- Welbourne, P., Harrison, G., & Ford, D. (2007). Social work in the UK and the global labour market: Recruitment, practice and ethical considerations. *International Social Work*, 50(1), 27-40.
- Zubrzycki, J., Green, S., Jones, V., Stratton, K., Young, S., & Bessarab, D. (2014). *Getting it right: Creating partnerships for change. Integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges in social work education and practice*. Retrieved from https://staff.acu.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/655804/Getting_It_Right_June_2014.pdf
- Zubrzycki, J., Thomson, L., & Trevithick, P. (2008). International recruitment in child protection: The experiences of workers in the Australian Capital Territory. *Communities, Children and Families Australia*, 3(2), 30-38.
- Zuchowski, I. (2019). Five years after Carmody: practitioners' views of changes, challenges and research in child protection. *Children Australia*, 44(3), 146-153.