

**Understanding How Mature Students Make Sense of  
Success in the Social Work Programme at the  
University of Otago.**

**Plotting a Sociological Revolution Using the Thinking Tools  
of Pierre Bourdieu**

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## Abstract

My thesis explores how mature students, those aged 25 or older, understand the knowledges necessary for success in the social work programme at the University of Otago. In this thesis I argue that there is a social logic that underpins the programme which sits below the awareness of all involved and acts to marginalise those who lack the knowledges privileged by that logic. In turn, I propose that when staff, mature and non-mature students, the university, and the social work profession make use of this information, they can foster an environment where student success is revolutionised. My vision is a programme where everyone is successful and no one is marginalised. As a starting point, I have included a table of contents of a student success guide for future discussion.

The use of Pierre Bourdieu's thinking tools allow this social logic to be revealed in all its complexity. As such, my study was conducted as a qualitative research endeavour, where the work of Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) informed an analysis of the social work programme at a government, profession and programme level to reveal the social logic in operation. I then utilised an online survey combined with follow-up focus group and semi-structured interview events to determine how staff and students made sense of my findings for maximising student success. My thesis contributes to the debates on 1) using the work of Bourdieu to analyse the dynamics of power in an education context to bring to the surface the social logic of a field of interactions, 2) using that knowledge as a basis for bringing about the positive social transformation of those in marginalised positions by equipping struggling agents to play the social game better, and by changing the game itself to be more supportive of struggling, and, 3) how the transformation of the experience of struggling agents requires the enabling actions of those in positions of power.

## Acknowledgements

I have come to understand that my thesis journey has been by no means a solitary endeavour, and instead has been the result of countless people having my back from day one.

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I too am grateful for the time given by the staff and students of the social work programme at the University of Otago. Their input and insight throughout the survey, focus group and interview stages allowed me the opportunity to develop a rich narrative on mature student success. I also want to acknowledge the past work of the researchers in New Zealand and globally, including Pierre Bourdieu, whose shoulders I stand upon to deliver my humble message of sociological revolution.

Finally, to my friends and family who inspired and encouraged me along the way – there were so many. Notably, my famous author wife and teacher, Tania, who proofed my work, asked the hard questions and never stopped believing in my abilities. In closing, I dedicate this thesis to my dogs (Jackson and Bella)... no, just kidding, I dedicate this thesis to my daughters Mackenna and Brianna, to whom I say that the game of education is probably the most important one of all.

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# Chapter One - Overview of My Thesis

## 1.1 Introduction

My thesis is based on dispelling the myth that success is based on being the best in a complex matrix of power-infused social interactions. In other words, the myth is that success only comes to those who play the social game better than those around them. They do so because they seem to have a near instinctual feel for the rules and how to use them, which stems from their collection of skills and experiences being perfectly suited to the game. However, success does not come to all involved, and this is due, in part, to a mis-match of skills and experiences, but also due to the rules of engagement being kept from the sight of all involved. Now, consider what the world would look like if those rules were made visible and there was a commitment to ensure that everyone succeeded. This is where the metaphor of the game proves incomplete because my aim is not to produce more winners because that is still based on the assumption that losers must also exist. Rather, my aim is to bring success to everyone – which requires a sociological revolution.

## 1.2 An Introduction to My Thesis

In this section I set the scene for my research into my planned sociological revolution. I introduce the narrative of mature students who struggle for success, align it with my own experiences and then consider existing research. I acknowledge that mature students cannot be considered all the same and that the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu helps me to make sense of this research dilemma. I present my aim to reframe this false mature students' narrative by bringing the rules for their success in the programme to the awareness of all involved using Bourdieu's thinking tools. Moreover, given that the overall student cohort in the programme has become predominantly non-mature, I state that it is important that this research be carried out now before there comes a time when, for various reasons, there are no mature students. I bring this section to a close with a brief outline of my research questions, the research methodology I applied, and the basis upon which I classified mature students.

## 1.3 My Research Journey

However, before I continue, I wish to share the experience of my engagement with Bourdieu. My story began when I enrolled in an undergraduate education studies paper that focussed on how students were impacted by the culture of inequality that underpinned the educational

curriculum delivered by teachers. I came to an understanding of the reproduction of inequality present in the education system through Bourdieu's conceptual toolbox. As was my academic major, I considered the role of the social worker who is a servant of the system that perpetuates inequality, and at the same time is in opposition to this system, tirelessly advocating for their clients.

To understand the dynamics of this situation, I turned to the work of Bourdieu, firstly to gain a view through the writings of academics who applied him to their work. I soon started to observe on one hand an almost apologetic zeal for Bourdieu's work, which would manifest it in articles that focused on convincing the reader of his relevance. On the other hand, those who critiqued his work focussed on the same argument of determinism which often came from an analysis of his conceptual tools in isolation to one another.

My experiences lead me to Bourdieu himself, where I embarked on a personal study and cataloguing of his work and the concepts within for use in future post-graduate pursuits. By engaging directly, I grappled with his difficult sentence structure until I could crack the rhythm and cadence to extract sufficient meaning. He wrote prolifically, which made each article and book I discovered seem like an unearthed treasure. His early work reflected his meticulous research ethic from which he was able to give genesis to his concepts. In the middle of his career, he fine-tuned his tools and subjected them to rigorous use and review. I learned that a portion of work stemmed from his bid to explain and defend his concepts to those who misconstrued their purpose. Finally, in the later years of his life, he became both reflective of his work and assumed the role of advocate for those marginalised by neoliberalism and globalisation.

I was able to sample and synthesise the more accessible elements of his scholarship and I have learnt that the value of Bourdieu's work comes when you take on the arguments and critique and then move forward. I recognise now that the starting point of understanding Bourdieu comes from applying his work to a research project where making sense of the complexity of power infused social relations is the goal. With these principles in mind, my research focus on the success of mature students took shape.

### 1.3.1 The Narrative of Mature Student Struggle

To begin with I was curious, as a mature student myself as to what was it's about mature students' collection of life skills and experiences that leads them to have success in the social work programme at the University of Otago, while other mature students struggle and sometimes even fail. It becomes all too easy to position these strugglers as being incapable of success because they are lacking something within themselves. The narrative is that there is, in essence, something wrong with them. Therefore, in spite of their efforts, and those of the programme staff and the availability of student services provided by the university, the educational journey of mature students in general becomes synonymous with hardship and stress. This is reiterated by research in this field over the last two decades where mature students are compared and contrasted, often unfavourably, with their non-mature classmates (Ash, 1999; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Fox, 2004). This type of deficit-thinking (Mills & Gale, 2009) renders invisible the distinctiveness of mature students and ignores the reality that they experience success without struggle in other domains of their lives. This disparity of identities is difficult for mature students to reconcile and they become engulfed by a hardship and stress narrative, come to doubt themselves, and so reproduce the struggle.

### 1.3.2 I Was a Witness to the Struggle

My own journey through the social work programme was as a part-time Bachelor of Human Services<sup>1</sup> student over a six year period from 2006 to 2012. I experienced both distance and on-campus delivery of the curriculum while I worked full-time in the Information Technology Sector as a manager for a Computer Services Organisation. I grew up in working class Dunedin and attended the local Polytechnic to jump start my career in computing. Over the years, I gained volunteer experience in telephone counselling and the support of individuals and families through crisis events. I enrolled at the University of Otago at the age of forty, married, with two daughters, and very aware that I was old enough to be the father of many of the non-mature students in my classes. My years in business, my volunteer experience, and forays into tertiary level papers prior to the programme had me well-placed to manage my way through. However, from my perspective, my age and my gender set me apart from the non-mature cohort.

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<sup>1</sup> Up until 2012, the University of Otago offered a Bachelor of Arts degree pathway majoring in Human Services. This major was achieved by students fulfilling the academic requirements of the Bachelor of Social Work Programme, but without having to undertake any of the mandatory fieldwork (professional practice) components.

### 1.3.3 But Not Every Mature Student is the Same

My journey was not typical of the mature student experience found in research literature, and especially of mature social work students. From my research mature social work students are highly likely to be female, the primary caregiver for their children, possibly previous clients of social services, with financial and time based constraints. Their journey through programmes similar to that at the University of Otago were characterised by achievement in the face of struggle. However, even that is a generalisation because I observed mature students in my research coming from a variety of backgrounds and current life circumstances that confirmed just how problematic it can be to treat them as a single homogenous cohort.

### 1.3.4 Creating a New Narrative to Help the Mature Student Succeed

Therefore, my goal has been to radically reframe the struggle narrative and reconcile mature student diversity through the theoretical lens of the French Sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. Specifically, I set about to position mature students as members of a social field of interaction that is infused with a series of status-based power relationships. Also, that success in this field will come to those members who already possess, and make use of, the life skills and experiences that the logic of the field defines as necessary for success. Most significantly is that, for struggling mature students, this logic is frequently unknown to the field's members, existing instead as assumed, unspoken and uncontested truths. Consequently, I am working on the premise that success will come to those struggling mature students in the social work programme when they are first equipped with the knowledge of the programme's social logic. Secondly, when all members of the programme, including staff, act on this knowledge to re-story the narrative then that success is maximised for everyone involved.

### 1.3.5 My Research is Informed by Sociological Theory

My rationale for choosing Bourdieu was because I was fascinated with the way his theories made sociological sense of the political nature of education and social work. This is where practitioners occupy the contradictory role of representatives of the dominant and as advocates for the people caught within that system of dominance. Bourdieu described a context-based agent who holds multiple and contradictory identities across multiple domains in their life. Therefore, I utilised his toolbox of concepts, including field, habitus, doxa and capital, as a method for analysing the way that education systems reproduce societal inequality through curriculum design and delivery. I added to this the idea that the logic active in a social space in

general results in some reaching positions of dominance, while others languish in positions of marginalisation. My aim was to produce an analysis that came from working with Bourdieu's concepts from which struggling mature students could employ tangible strategies of positive transformation.

### 1.3.6 Debate over the Definition of Mature Students

There is debate over how to classify mature students using age. For example, over 21 (Bowl, 2001; Britton & Baxter, 1999; Mallman & Lee, 2014; Richardson, 1994; Waller, 2006), 25 or over (Harker, 2005), and 26 or over (Fox, 2004; Mercer & Saunders, 2004). At the University of Otago, mature undergraduate students are set apart from the school leaver by being over twenty years of age when starting their studies, with corresponding life and work experience which incorporates a gap since their last formal education experience. These prospective students considering study at the University of Otago (as distinct from secondary school students, international students, Māori students, Pacific Island and Australian) are directed to the web site page entitled 'Over 20s' (University of Otago, 2016b). Also, on the Student Learning Centre web site page set up for first year students, there is reference to a specific free course for mature students called UniStart (University of Otago, 2016c). In the registration form for this course, the classification question for age group offers three options: 20-25, 26-40, and 40+ (University of Otago, 2016a).

### 1.3.7 In My Research the Mature Student is 25 Years Old or Over

For the purposes of this research project, I made the decision with my supervisors to define mature students in the social work programme as those aged 25 or over. This is based on 1) the national tertiary enrolment statistics which bracket the age groups as 15-19, 20-24, 25-29 and so on (Student Enrolment by Enrolment and Provider 2000-2014, 2014), 2) the statistics are for enrolments each year, rather than the age at their first year of enrolment which together with the part-time nature of the programme could mean that there is potential overlap of mature and non-mature students in the 20-24 age bracket and, 3) non-mature students who have come from school are likely to have well and truly completed the programme by the time they are 24. Conversely, for those students in the programme that are 24 or younger I have classified them as non-mature students.

### 1.3.8 The Social Work Programme is Unique within the University

The social work programme itself is a distinct social microcosm within the University of Otago in a number of ways. Firstly, it came into existence to provide vocational education to social workers already active in the profession. As such, over the last 15 years, the majority of students enrolled in the programme have been classified as mature, whereas across the university, the enrolment profile has been predominantly non-mature. Secondly, the programme's yearly student population is, on average, 100 students, compared to the overall humanities population of thousands. Finally, the gender profile of the programme has over 90% female students which is significantly higher than the 60% average across humanities. It has only been in the last ten years that the percentage of mature students in the programme has trended downwards due to a combination of government and tertiary policy initiatives that focussed exclusively on non-mature students. The programme is now increasingly a site where non-mature students enrol to gain a qualification to secure entry into the social work profession. As such, based on current enrolment statistics there is every reason to conclude that mature students in the social work programme are becoming a minority cohort.

### 1.3.9 The Time to Act is Now before Mature Students are Lost to the Programme

I therefore considered it timely, in this period of transition of the age of the programme's student population, to give research consideration to what is the collection of life skills and experiences that the programme privileges for success from the perspective of all involved – the mature student, the non-mature student, and the staff who deliver the programme. One outcome will be that staff will be better positioned to maximise mature student success because they will be informed of the programme's expectations for success. The second outcome is that mature students will better understand what knowledges they bring to the programme, which of those existing knowledges will maximise their success in the programme, and what new knowledges may need addressing to increase the likelihood of their success.

### 1.3.10 How I Undertook My Research

Consequently, my research took the form of a qualitative analysis of the knowledges necessary for student success in the social work programme at the University of Otago. I began by undertaking an analysis of economic, social and tertiary government policy over the last 15 years to provide a macro and meso level view of the societal, cultural and institutional forces

acting upon the social work programme and its members. To better understand how they made sense of these forces and student success in the programme through their upbringing, I utilised staff and student online surveys, which were supported by follow-up focus groups and semi-structured interviews. I concluded my research by producing a recommended table of contents for a social work programme success guide for all students, including the struggling mature student.

### 1.3.11 My Focus on Skills and Experience Required for Success

In summary, for my research I set about to answer the following questions:

1. What knowledges of the social work programme are required by a mature student to succeed?
2. How does a mature student understand and describe the knowledges they must master to succeed?
3. How does the perspective of the mature student compare to: a) other students, b) staff in the social work programme?

I used the word knowledges to represent those skills and experiences that people have collected, applied and honed throughout the course of their lives. However, success in the programme came easier when the knowledges that the mature student had brought aligned with the knowledges that were important to becoming a social work undergraduate. For some, the struggle inherent in arriving to the programme without, for example prior experience in academic writing, was temporary as they built up their skills while in the programme. For others, the struggle was ongoing and ever present, which further emphasised the diversity of mature students. The definition of success that informed my research was aligned to how Bourdieu made sense of the social world. Therefore, I framed mature students success by the degree of alignment of their skills with those required by the programme. I was interested in their social position in the programme, both in the eyes of the staff, and in relation to their classmates. I wanted to provide a research framework for being able to supply these rules of the game to all participants as a catalyst to improve student success.

## 1.4 The Roadmap of Sociological Revolution

In this thesis, my research journey towards sociological revolution begins in chapter two with an explanation of the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual toolbox for social practice. I also explore how other researchers have utilised the work of Bourdieu in areas most relevant to this project, including gender, tertiary education, educational inequality and social

work. In chapter three, I apply my Bourdieu-informed theoretical lens to existing research on mature students so that I can establish the profile of diverse and complex mature students that at times defy classification. I follow this by considering that there are two ways to improve their success: upskilling the students and creating a more inclusive tertiary environment. Next, in chapter four, I present details of the qualitative research methodology that I utilised and then show how it was performed according to a multi-layered approach outlined by Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992).

In chapters five, six and seven, I present my findings. Specifically, in chapter five, I define the field of societal and cultural power that the social work programme is located within and show its influence on the social logic that underpins the programme. In chapter six, I describe the relational structures in the field of the social work programme and identify the agents who occupy these positions. I then show how staff and students made sense of (and responded to) these dynamics. It is in chapter seven where I focus on the skills and experiences required by mature students to experience success in the social work programme. As an outcome, I include a consolidated table of contents for a student success guide. Finally, in chapter eight, I bring my thesis to a close by presenting answers to my research questions, together with implications for policy and future research endeavours.

# Chapter Two - Establishing My Theoretical Lens

## 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I set about to explain the theoretical framework that informs my research project on the success of mature students in the social work programme at the University of Otago. The theorist I chose was Pierre Bourdieu, whose collection of sociological concepts allowed a multi-layered analysis of the power relations surrounding, and present within, the process of social work education at a New Zealand tertiary institute. My aim was to develop knowledge about the rules of engagement in this process based on the premise that systemic inequality is instinctively perpetuated by those in a position of dominance.

This chapter is structured in this way so as to scaffold the reader's journey towards understanding Bourdieu. I start with a presentation I did to students in the programme to recruit them for the online survey. I then translate and link this presentation to the thinking tools of Bourdieu as a precursor to digging deeper into his theories. I present an approach on how to apply his tools, and then discuss the more common critiques that surround his work. Finally, I look at applications of Bourdieu in existing research relevant to my project i.e. gender, tertiary education policy, educational inequality and social work.

## 2.2 Making Bourdieu Accessible

### 2.2.1 Hats and Gloves

When I recruited students for my online survey, I used the metaphor of hats and gloves to explain the theory underpinning my research project. What follows is an excerpt of my presentation to the students and a translation into the world of Pierre Bourdieu's logic of social practice.

#### 2.2.1.1 *Presentation*

“Every project is informed by a theory – or as we like to say in the social work programme... a lens through which we make sense of what we are looking at. As I said, I am very interested in what it takes to be a successful student in the social work programme. This presentation on hats and gloves will give you an idea of the thinking behind my research.

I am Dunedin born and bred, but I left to live in Auckland for twenty years and returned in 2007. The change in climate was both refreshing and challenging. I quickly realised that my success as a resident in Auckland was different to being a success in Dunedin. You see, in Auckland it was all about stopping my head from getting sun-burnt... but in Dunedin I needed to keep my head dry and warm as well. My sun-hat from Auckland was not going to cut it in Dunedin, and I certainly didn't bring any gloves with me.

I believe that I walk into this room with a backpack of skills and experiences that I have developed over the course of my life. These skills and experiences - my hats and gloves - come in various shapes and sizes; some more useful in certain situations than others... but nonetheless they are mine. The key is to match the hats and gloves to the situation I am in and acknowledge that I will also pick up new gloves and hats along the way.

It goes without saying that I may find that I do not have a hat or glove that is appropriate for the situation I am in. So I find, that in my bid to be dry, warm and sun-burn free, sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. I have also found that the advice from others sometimes on the hats and gloves I need helps and sometimes their advice doesn't, and sometimes, there is no hat or glove in my size.

Let's take a look at my gloves:

- I have my woolly 'keep warm' gloves – very useful for cold days and in fashionable black;
- I have my fingerless 'typing' gloves – very useful for cold days when I am at my computer;
- And, I also have my gardening gloves which work well for weeding, but are totally useless for working on my computer... and at a pinch they could keep me warm on a cold day;
- However, I have yet to crack the glove that keeps me warm, dry, able to type on my computer, and can be used for texting on my smart-phone. So, if success is about gloves and texting, I suck.

Let's talk a look at my hat collection:

- Here is my sun-hat from Auckland – very useful up there, and sometimes helpful down here;
- I have my trendy Ice Breaker Beanie which lasted a season and then I realised I needed my woolly all-purpose beanie;
- I also discovered a purpose built beanie that is both waterproof and warm – however, I look like that guy from the Westpac ad who wears tin-foil hats... so I have to balance success as being dry and warm with success as being cool and fashionable.

So it is with success as a student: sometimes we enrol in a programme or paper, and we have the skills and experiences required; we click with the content and we achieve well. This is where there is a perfect match between what is in our backpack of life and what the programme wants us to do.

Sometimes, we struggle in our success... we have just enough of the skills (hats and gloves) to get by – and we do. This is like my trendy Ice Breaker Beanie – it does the job but is not the best. And sometimes, we just don't know why we are here. The programme asks for a blue hat and pink gloves, and my backpack of life only has a drink bottle and an umbrella – help!

My research is about understanding the hats and gloves (skills and experiences) you bring to this programme, and your perceptions of which hats and gloves are needed to be successful... and what hats and gloves you think the staff expect you to bring.”

#### *2.2.1.2 Translation*

In this presentation, I described the investment of my time in the social game of keeping warm, dry and sunburn free. This social game took place within a larger societal and cultural space known as the field of power (Bourdieu, 1990a; Wacquant, 1993). This investment represented my commitment to playing the game regardless of the outcome. Equally, the existence of the game itself depended upon people, such as me, choosing to be players or members.

The social space or field where I was a member of this game was the geographical location of Dunedin, New Zealand. A field can be defined by more than just location – it can be defined by many factors such as profession e.g. social work. Regardless of the type of field, the logic for playing the game is part of the field as uncontested and unconscious truths, called doxa (Bourdieu, 1990a).

My background or habitus was described as being born and bred in Dunedin, then spending 20 years in Auckland, before returning to Dunedin in 2007. The time spent in both cities had shaped how I understood this game, and the skills (or hats and gloves) I had accumulated to play this game. The concept of habitus was used to represent both the sum of my upbringing, and the ongoing shaping of who I am now as a result of being a member of multiple fields.

The skills I have accumulated of keeping warm, dry and sunburn free are termed capital (Bourdieu, 1990a) and it is the social game that defines which types of capital are more useful in other words, privileged capital. Those with the capital that best matches the requirements for playing the game, take a position of high status or power in the field called the dominant. Those, for whom the match of capital is not so good, or non-existent, take a position of low status in the field called the dominated. In the game of keeping warm and dry in Dunedin, those who had woolly gloves and a beanie had a distinct advantage (or status) over those who only had a sun-hat.

The essence of my metaphor was that we, as human beings accumulate, capital from our past and present experiences in social fields, known as the process of habitus. The presence or absence of certain types of capital is not a question of being right or wrong. Rather, playing the game of social interaction is about the alignment of one's collection of capital with the capital privileged by the field they are currently a member of. Likewise, it is the lack of knowledge about the way the game is played that keeps the members of low status in that position.

### 2.2.2 Putting on the Lens of Bourdieu

Next, I moved beyond the metaphorical description of hats and gloves to articulate more fully how I applied Bourdieu's logic of practice. The premise of my research was that the social work programme is a self-contained space of power-infused social interactions called a field. In this space, which exists with a wider societal field of power, its members achieve positions of status, either as dominant or dominated, based on the degree of the alignment of their world view with the world view that the social space is predicated on, and on the successful application of their abilities in this social space. The world view of member and their abilities

are brought to the social work programme from their membership of other social spaces, both past and present. These are supplemented by those abilities and views that they acquire during the course of their membership in the programme. A successful alignment of the world view, and abilities of each member, with the world view and abilities that the social work programme defines as important, leads to their success in this social space. The logic that defines these social interactions and resulting alignments lies below the level of awareness of its members, and therefore requires research-based analysis to be understood. This analysis is facilitated by an integrated set of sociological concepts that were devised by Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). These thinking tools are used to look at the data that the analysis has generated to build a view of the power dynamics in operation. This knowledge can then be used as a catalyst to improve the alignment of those members of a social space who have not been able to achieve success.

## 2.3 Digging Deeper into the Theory

The work of Bourdieu has been vigorously contested and defended (Callinicos, 2007; Fowler, 2011), and therefore in the footnotes I have included the specific page reference to his work for the readers of this thesis<sup>2</sup>. It should also be noted that while Bourdieu's tools have been used individually, and have yielded useful research outcomes, they are best utilised when it is acknowledged that they only exist and function in relation to each other<sup>3</sup> (Bourdieu, 1990a, 2005). Therefore, the tool-box items that are the focus of this discussion will be: habitus, field, capital, agent, doxa, investment, and feel for the game. To facilitate further understanding, the items discussed will also be presented in a way that shows their relationship to the analysis of the social work programme.

### 2.3.1 Field, Capital

A field, such as the social work programme, is a structured relational site of social practice<sup>4</sup> where agents, the students and staff, take their place or position<sup>5</sup> according to their possession of the volume and structure of the capital<sup>6</sup> that the field values most (Bourdieu, 1990a;

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<sup>2</sup> My rationale for the inclusion of these footnotes was firstly to help the reader find the page references I used from Bourdieu's various works. Secondly, given that I have used a number of references, I used the footnote functionality to minimise disruption to the main body of the thesis. These footnotes therefore offer the reader the opportunity to dig deeper into Bourdieu's work outside the scope of this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 90; Bourdieu, 2005, p.2

<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97

<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 101

<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 128

Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This field is situated within a larger social space of societal and culture power forces known as the field of power (Bourdieu, 1990a; Wacquant, 1993). The concept of capital represents a person's accumulated relational tokens<sup>7</sup> that defines their utilisation of skills, power<sup>8</sup>, and opportunities for domination in relation<sup>9</sup> to the other people operating in the field under analysis (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1993, 2002; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In this way, a student's success in the social work programme field can be reconciled by the expectation that the skills and values they hold (defined as capital) match the skills and values that the social work programme expects them to demonstrate. As an example, one of the attendees commented during the staff focus group event<sup>10</sup> that success for a student could be defined as the student graduating with a Bachelor of Social Work qualification and being employed in the social work profession (Staff Member A). Therefore, the social work programme is seen to privilege the student whose skills and values will lead them to graduate, and in-turn lead them to a career in social work. It is suggested that for successful graduation and employment, students show a degree of mastery of both academic and field work (professional practice) related skills.

### 2.3.2 Feel for the Game

When an agent's capital, and the seemingly innate practical knowledge of its usage matches the criteria of successful application in a field, the agent acts in the field as if they had been born into it<sup>11</sup> (Bourdieu, 1990a). This goes some way to explain why some students are seen to fit in and achieve without obvious effort, while other students struggle and graft for their success. The agent is said to have a feel for the game when they achieve a position of dominance in the field, and over the field without apparent effort<sup>12</sup> (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1990b). The reference to the phrase 'feel for the game' is intended by Bourdieu to represent that social interactions in a field take place according to rules that agents accept, often unknowingly, as needing to be followed. In the social work programme, one of the underlying rules is that the student is constructed as a learner, while the staff who teach them are accepted as the subject matter experts. It is not to say however, that a feel for the game in one field, with its requisite possession of valued capital means a dominant position in all fields<sup>13</sup> (Bourdieu, 1990a;

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<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99; Bourdieu, 1993, p. 34-35

<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 128

<sup>9</sup> Bourdieu, 2002, p. 31

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter Four for an explanation of the research methodology, including the staff focus group event

<sup>11</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 63

<sup>12</sup> Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 66; Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 91

<sup>13</sup> Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 100, 104; Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 111

Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Instead, capital is field specific<sup>14</sup>, where its relative value<sup>15</sup> changes depending upon the stability of the operating conditions of the field (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In other words, those students who may be struggling in the social work programme are more than likely to experience success in other spheres or social spaces in their lives because their skills and values are more compatible in those spaces.

### 2.3.3 Social Struggle

The absence of effort by an agent demonstrating a seeming feel for the game<sup>16</sup> does not mean an absence of struggle or an absence of suffering<sup>17</sup> occurring in the field (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1999). For agents to achieve a position of dominance there is the requirement for other agents in the field to take a position of the dominated<sup>18</sup> (Bourdieu, 1993, 1998, 2002; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Here, the capital the dominated possess is neither privileged nor valued in the field<sup>19</sup> (Bourdieu, 1993). These agents are integral members of the field. They engage in a struggle with the dominant agents whereby the struggle is one of the operating conditions for the field to exist<sup>20</sup> (Bourdieu, 1993). It is a struggle that has the dominant<sup>21</sup> seeking to maintain the parameters of the field that ensures that the capital they possess and utilise is privileged. It is a struggle that can have the dominated<sup>22</sup> seeking to alter or rewrite the field parameters, albeit in vain, to attempt to bring about a change in their position (Bourdieu, 1993). In the social work programme, it can therefore be expected that analysis will show evidence of students who have achieved a position of success according to the rules of the social work programme field, and assume a position of dominance. Conversely, there will be an expectation, using Bourdieu's thinking tools, that there will be students who experience little or no success and are in a position of being dominated.

### 2.3.4 Doxa

The struggle could easily be mis-interpreted by research analysis to be an activity of intent where it is a conscious application of a previously thought-out strategy by the agents involved.

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<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu, 1997, p 47

<sup>15</sup> Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98

<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 11

<sup>17</sup> Bourdieu, 1999, p. 127

<sup>18</sup> Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 104-105; Bourdieu, 1993, p. 74, 88, Chapter 9; Bourdieu, 2002, p. 31; Bourdieu, 1998, p. 78

<sup>19</sup> Bourdieu, 1993, Chapter 9

<sup>20</sup> Bourdieu, 1993, p. 73-74

<sup>21</sup> Bourdieu, 1993, p. 26, 73, 88, Chapter 9

<sup>22</sup> Bourdieu, 1993, p. 26, 73

However, according to Bourdieu, the struggle is unbeknown<sup>23</sup> to the agents; they (the dominant and the dominated) are acting in the field in a way that seems natural, true and in accordance with what they believe to be common sense<sup>24</sup> (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1990b; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). It appears to the agents that the conditions of the field are natural in their existence, universal in their truth, and accepted by all without question. These truths are termed by Bourdieu as doxa<sup>25</sup> (Bourdieu, 1990a). To the agents, there is no intentional struggle - there is just an acceptance<sup>26</sup> of being, albeit for some not an ideal state of being (Bourdieu, 1990b). In other words, if there is a logic to the actions of the agents in a field where the accumulated capital is used, it is a logic of practice that is uncovered through sociological research<sup>27</sup> (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). For the participants, there is no field logic employed<sup>28</sup>, just common sense<sup>29</sup>, a sense of perception that feels right in accordance with their past experiences and upbringing (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1990b, 2002).

### 2.3.5 Habitus

The building up of capital, and the knowledge of its usage that an agent holds, is a labour of accumulation<sup>30</sup> over time (Bourdieu, 1997). It is a product of social energy<sup>31</sup>, exerted through previous struggles and experiences<sup>32</sup>. In this way, capital holds a history<sup>33</sup>, and when an agent utilises their capital, this history is reproduced<sup>34</sup> in present-day social activity (Bourdieu, 1993, 1997). This history that each agent holds is one aspect of their habitus, where the manifestation is a social structure in the mind and body of the agent. As an agent participates in a social space over a long period time<sup>35</sup>, and as that social space acts upon them, they acquire dispositions. This process of being acted upon and acquiring is the active and ongoing nature of habitus. These dispositions become ways of people making sense<sup>36</sup> of their world, acting as a filter<sup>37</sup> to what they understand and as a definer of patterns and limiters of actions. This

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<sup>23</sup> Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98; Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 67

<sup>24</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 63

<sup>25</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 31

<sup>26</sup> Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 68

<sup>27</sup> Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 108

<sup>28</sup> Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 68; Bourdieu, 2002, p. 32

<sup>29</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 132

<sup>30</sup> Bourdieu, 1997, p. 46

<sup>31</sup> Bourdieu, 1997, p. 46

<sup>32</sup> Bourdieu, 1993, p. 73

<sup>33</sup> Bourdieu, 1993, p. 34

<sup>34</sup> Bourdieu, 1993, p. 34

<sup>35</sup> Bourdieu, 1997, p. 46; Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 68

<sup>36</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 131

<sup>37</sup> Bourdieu, 2002, p. 32; Bourdieu, 1993, p. 23

means that the social spaces people live in, both past and present, are written into their body<sup>38</sup> as internalised social occurrences laid down as universal truths or doxa (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1990b, 1993, 1997, 2002). The most significant social space is within our family, known as the family habitus of an agent<sup>39</sup> (Bourdieu, 1977). The habitus becomes an agent's source of social interactions defining the moves and strategies<sup>40</sup> of behaving in a field, defining what is important in the field<sup>41</sup> and defining a sense of one's place in the field and a sense of other people's places in the field. <sup>42</sup> (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990a, 1993).

### 2.3.6 Positions of Power

There is a very clear relationship between the concepts of field and habitus where a field, such as the social work programme, requires agents equipped with the necessary habitus to make it function<sup>43</sup> (Bourdieu, 1990b, 1993). Conversely, the state of the field<sup>44</sup> influences how much of an agent's habitus is realised (Bourdieu, 1990a). Therefore, a dominant agent in a field is where their habitus is aligned with the requirements of that field<sup>45</sup> (Bourdieu, 1990a). The agent has this feel for the game<sup>46</sup> which arises from an effortless utilisation of their habitus in the field that privileges their habitus (Bourdieu, 1990a). They are seen to have acquired the correct capital and the application of their practical knowledge of usage is directly attuned to the requirements of the field<sup>47</sup> (Bourdieu, 1990a). The dominated experience a less than satisfactory alignment of their habitus with the field they participate in<sup>48</sup>(Bourdieu, 1999). While they are legitimate and necessary members of the field<sup>49</sup>, in relation and comparison to the dominant agents, their experience is one of subservience<sup>50</sup> (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1999). The capital they possess, its volume and composition<sup>51</sup>, and, their knowledge of its use is limited and insufficient for them to assume a dominant position (Bourdieu, 1990a).

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<sup>38</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 63

<sup>39</sup> Bourdieu, 1977, p, 81

<sup>40</sup> Bourdieu, 1977, p. 73; Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 90

<sup>41</sup> Bourdieu, 1993, Chapter 9

<sup>42</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 131

<sup>43</sup> Bourdieu, 1993, Chapter 9; Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 67

<sup>44</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 116

<sup>45</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 91

<sup>46</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 63

<sup>47</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 63

<sup>48</sup> Bourdieu, 1999, p. 127

<sup>49</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 110

<sup>50</sup> Bourdieu, 1999, p. 127

<sup>51</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 128

### 2.3.7 Positive Transformation is Possible

When seeking change in the field, Bourdieu (1993) made this statement about the role that knowledge of the underlying logic of social practice can play: “By consciously playing with the logic of the social world one can bring about possible outcomes that did not seem to be implied by that logic” (p. 26). Bourdieu (1993) speaks of the philosophy of freedom through knowledge behind his position: “[I]t’s by raising the degree of perceived necessity and giving a better knowledge of the laws of the social world that social science gives more freedom. All progress in knowledge of necessity is a progress in possible freedom” (p. 25). Also, Bourdieu (1993) states that knowledge can bring freedom: “A law that is unknown is a nature, a destiny . . . a law that is known appears as a possibility of freedom” (p. 25). Bourdieu (1990a) outlines these circumstances under which the positive transformation of an agent’s habitus may occur through increased knowledge of the social logic: “Not only can habitus be practically transformed (always within definite boundaries) by the effect of a social trajectory leading to conditions of living different from initial ones, it can also be controlled through awakening of conscious and socioanalysis” (p. 116). Bourdieu (2002) states further that because habitus was formed out of experience and education, it can be changed by the same mechanisms: “Habitus is not something natural, inborn; being a product of history that is of social experience and education, it may be changed by history, that is by new experiences, education or training (which implies that aspects of what remains unconscious in habitus be made at least partially conscious and explicit)” (p. 29). In other words, education is the path to new knowledge, and new knowledge is the catalyst for freedom from inequality.

However, Bourdieu (2002) talks of the stubborn nature of habitus: “Any dimension of habitus is very difficult to change, but it may be changed through this process of awareness and of pedagogic effort” (p. 29). Bourdieu (1998) cautions that change through the raising of awareness of the social game is not simple: “Knowledge seeks to defuse this sort of hold that social games have on socialized agents. This is not easy to do: [O]ne does not free oneself through a simple conversion of consciousness” (p. 79). Bourdieu (1993) also talks of how employing mechanisms of change do not guarantee predictable outcomes: “It’s a kind of transforming machine that leads us to ‘reproduce’ the social conditions of our own production, but in a relatively unpredictable way, in such a way that one cannot move simply and mechanically from knowledge of the conditions of production to knowledge of the products” (p. 87). Therefore, to change the conditions of a field’s operating criteria is to change the volume, structure and potentially the type of capital that is privileged<sup>52</sup> (Bourdieu, 2002;

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<sup>52</sup> Bourdieu, 2002, p. 31; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992 p. 99

Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) talk of how a participant in a social game can use strategies to affect the capital that is privileged and in turn affect the underlying rules of that specific game: “They can, for instance, work to change the relative value of tokens of different colors, the exchange rate between various species of capital, through strategies aimed at discrediting the form of capital upon which the force of their opponents rests ... and to valorise the species of capital they preferentially possess” (p. 99).

For the dominant, Bourdieu (1993) talks of their reaction to a possible change event: “[A]s soon as the law has been stated, it may become a stake in struggles, the struggle to conserve, by conserving the conditions of the functioning of the law, the struggle to transform by changing these conditions” (p. 26). In contrast, Bourdieu (1993) shows the reaction of dominated: “[K]nowledge of the law gives them [the dominated] a chance, a possibility of countering the effects of the law, a possibility that does not exist so long as the law is unknown and operates unbeknown to those who undergo it” (p. 26). Nonetheless, what the dominant and dominated share is a fundamental interest in retaining membership of the field<sup>53</sup> - and in turn in the ongoing existence of the field (Bourdieu, 1990a). This interest manifests itself in an investment by the agents<sup>54</sup> - of time, of effort, of participation, of capital, and of the application of their habitus - in ways that deliver varying levels of success<sup>55</sup> (Bourdieu, 1990a, 2002). It is my intention that my research can be utilised by staff and students as a catalyst for improvement in the curriculum content, the way the content is delivered, and the success of the students.

### 2.3.8 Bringing It All Together

In summary, my research questions are connected to the work of Pierre Bourdieu’s logic of social practice where the primary field is the social work programme at the University of Otago. In accordance with Emirbayer & Williams (2005) analysis of the field of homeless shelters using Bourdieu’s conceptual toolbox, it is expected that there exists at least two sub-fields, one where the staff determine the rules, and the other where the mature student’s fellow non-mature classmates determine the rules. In both fields, it is proposed that mature students represent the cohort that is dominated. The agents are mature students, the non-mature students, and the staff that comprise the social work programme. The habitus of the agents is informed by their upbringing, the tertiary institution, and their current life environment. The knowledges privileged by the programme, together with the knowledges the agents’ bring to the field are defined as capital. I use the concept of doxa to gain an understanding of the social

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<sup>53</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 110

<sup>54</sup> Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 110

<sup>55</sup> Bourdieu, 2002, p. 31

dynamics of the programme; where there are rules specific to this field which sit below the level of awareness and appear as truths and unspoken agreements between participants. The students, by virtue of their enrolment in the programme and subsequent payment of fees, have chosen to become members of the field. This is both an investment in the continuation of the field itself, but also a social cost of admission by their acceptance of the doxic framework of the programme.

## **2.4 Thinking With, Against and Beyond Bourdieu**

### **2.4.1 Bourdieu's Tools Create Space**

My first observation of the application of Bourdieu's work across academic literature is that researchers can become preoccupied with defending and critiquing his theories to the detriment of the actual research topic. I too have experienced this dilemma. However, Bourdieu stated that his conceptual toolbox is to be used as a method of research analysis (thinking with), and that this approach includes pushing against and if necessary beyond the conceptual boundaries (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This approach is acknowledged by Nash (2002) who, on one hand critiques Bourdieu's concept of habitus, but on the other hand acknowledges that the benefit of Bourdieu's thinking tools does not come from generating Bourdieuan conclusions, but for the stimulus his creative work has given to the "search for a realist approach to the sociology of education" (Nash, 2002, p. 286). In other words, my research aim is to use Bourdieu's work as my theoretical lens to generate new insights into mature student success, rather than to generate new insights into Bourdieu's scholarship.

Reay (2004), in her discussion on the use of habitus in education research states that "first and foremost habitus is a conceptual tool to be used in empirical research rather than an idea to be debated in texts" (Reay, 2004, p. 439). Added to this is the experience of Naidoo (2004) who declared that Bourdieu's toolbox is not exclusive but can be supplemented by other methodologies such as discourse analysis. These comments support the view that, for a researcher applying Bourdieu's work, the priority is on creating thinking space for new analytical perspectives (Krais, 2006). It is about using Bourdieu's conceptual toolbox to facilitate understanding of the world we see and interact with, rather than trying to make that world fit into a Bourdieuan construct. Therefore, alongside the use of his toolbox, there should be no qualms with going against it and even beyond it.

## 2.4.2 Bourdieu's Tools are Interconnected

My second observation is that some researchers choose to use the concepts in isolation, which ignores their interconnected nature. This is evident in the discussion on habitus by King (2000) who argues that as an endeavour by Bourdieu to overcome the perceived constraints of objectivism it has failed. Yet, King (2000) acknowledges that when habitus is used in conjunction with the concept of field, “the flexibility which Bourdieu intends to be present in the concept of habitus – but which is ruled out by the concept – appears” (p. 425). This is a reiteration of Bourdieu's own claim that his thinking tools are best utilised when it is acknowledged that they only exist and function in relation to each other (Bourdieu, 1990a, 2005). Swartz, a scholar of Bourdieu himself (Swartz, 1977a, 1996, 2002) stated that when asked to review articles on the application of Bourdieu, he often saw the application of parts of Bourdieu's concepts only.

## 2.4.3 Bourdieu's Tools are Fit for Purpose

I conclude that a clear understanding of one's research outcomes should inform the methodology to be utilised. This in turn allows for the best set of thinking tools to be selected and applied. This view is supported by Grenfell & James (2004), who applied a Bourdieu-informed theoretical framework to a project entitled ‘Transforming Learning Cultures in Further Education’ in the United Kingdom (UK). The aim of the project, which aligns well with the aims of this research project, was to improve the teaching and learning outcomes in further education institutions through a better understanding of the complexities of these processes. This involved an identification of the people and institutions involved in these processes and how they related to each other. Therefore, the project team factored in the analysis of the culture that acted upon these processes. This was underpinned by a commitment by the project team to understand their relationship to the research itself and the methodologies used in order to consider whose interests would be served by the process and its outcomes. Finally, the project team wanted to utilise a theory that did not prioritise application over the potential for useful outcomes. They concluded that Bourdieu's conceptual toolbox was the best fit for their purpose.

## 2.5 Critique of Bourdieu

### 2.5.1 Some Minor Concerns – Difficult to Comprehend

There are however, minor but genuine, concerns over using Bourdieu such as how his dense writing style created academic confusion (Garrett, 2007; Jóhannesson & Popkewitz, 2001) and how he continually reviewed his own work during his lifetime (Raey, 2004) leading to multiple interpretations by academics i.e.

[There is] no easy, light method to ‘master’ his ideas: the concepts often appear as complicated and dense, even blurred and fuzzy. (Jóhannesson & Popkewitz, 2001, p. 232)

This is further exacerbated by the sheer volume of Bourdieu’s work and that not all of it has been readily available in English (Garrett, 2007). Also, some of his explanations were hidden away in seemingly unrelated works, or works published later in his career. This goes some way to explaining why some who apply Bourdieu’s thinking tools do so in a manner that takes them out of relational context to one another.

### 2.5.2 Primary Criticism – Too Deterministic

These minor concerns are, however, secondary to the main criticism of Bourdieu that his work offers little hope for those who are marginalised in society. Calhoun (1993) states that the struggle for power between the dominant and dominated, albeit at times below the level of awareness of those involved, is central to the work of Bourdieu. This is taken further by Callinicos (2007) who positions Bourdieu in the overall schema of social theory as one who clearly sides with the dominated but laments that his writings offer little hope for the dominated to escape the structures of oppression. Instead, Callinicos describes Bourdieu’s construct of a human being as one who can only find meaning by being able to “play the game, and throw oneself into the perpetual struggle to transmute one’s resources in to symbolic capital” (Callinicos, 2007, p. 298). He concludes his analysis of Bourdieu by stating that “[f]or all Bourdieu’s undoubted originality... he offers another restatement of the theme... that human beings are fated to be prisoners of the structures of domination” (Callinicos, 2007, p. 298). This encapsulates one of the main criticisms of Bourdieu; in that his work is overly deterministic.

Naidoo (2004) commented that Bourdieu's work was limited when it came to considering how those in dominant positions could be successfully challenged and replaced. This point is not lost on Fowler (2011) either, who stated that while Bourdieu had not "theorised at great length any specific transformation – neither the French Revolution nor the brief Paris Commune" (p. 35), he did attribute the events of the Student Unrest in France in May 1968 to the crushed expectations of students who laboured to secure a qualification only to discover the promises of employment were unfulfilled (Bourdieu, 1988). While this is not exactly a theory for revolution, Calhoun (2002) points out that a common misconception was that Bourdieu's scientific work was devoid of revolution, but that it was only later in his life (the 1990s) that Bourdieu suddenly became a political activist against neoliberalism and globalisation. Instead, Calhoun (2002) describes Bourdieu's later political actions as "fully consistent with and understandable in terms of his scientific sociology, though they were not dictated by it." (Calhoun, 2002, p. 3). In other words, a research lens informed by Bourdieu opens the door to sociological revolution but it requires the education and cooperation of those that hold the position of power. I explain this further in the following section.

### 2.5.3 Change is Possible - But Help is Needed from the Dominant

What Callinicos (2007) and others fail to acknowledge, especially in the field of education and social work, is the role of educators and social workers. These people, who are in a position of domination, act as agents of advocacy, mediation and change on behalf of their students and clients. In an Australian education context, Mills & Gale (2009) apply Bourdieu to their work on socially just secondary schooling in disadvantaged communities to identify two vital roles that teachers can fulfil to ensure the success of their students. The first is to acknowledge that their students hold within themselves an embodied habitus that itself holds potential for reproduction and for transformation. It is the role of the teacher to understand the generative and structuring function of habitus, and to nurture the transformative potential in each of their students. The aim for the teacher is to facilitate the supplementation of the existing cultural capital of the students in a way that bolsters and enriches the students' inventories of dispositions. In this way, it is proposed that the students will be able to recognise their new found capacity for creativity in the field of education and look for opportunities for transformative action (Mills & Gale, 2009). The second role of the teacher is to work with other members of the education field to create a fair and just curriculum that values students' existing capital, give genuine voice to those students who are dominated, promotes their participation in decision making, and creates community involvement in the schooling process (Mills & Gale, 2009).

#### 2.5.4 Revolution or Change from Within

I acknowledge that, ideologically, this is a Weberian view of transformation especially as Collins (2001) states that Weber viewed revolution as a non-legitimate response because it was not mandated by the dominant community. It is instead an act of a minority and non-core group who dispute the community leadership. Therefore, the act of reform is to be seen as a process of change within a system which seeks to improve the system within the boundaries of that system (Morrison, 1995b).

While the influence of Weber is clear in Bourdieu's work, Fowler (2011) tells us that there is also evidence of the influence of Marx, Durkheim, Husserl, Mauss, Elias and Pascal. In her discussion on the influence of Marx on Bourdieu, Fowler makes the following statement about those who have critiqued Bourdieu's work on the social reproduction of dominant values. Fowler (2011) writes that "it is an illusion to conclude that within his theory, there is only 'eternal reproduction'. Surprisingly however, many very perceptive and cogent [thinkers] have argued this, in relation to both his theory of class power and his theory of masculine domination" (p. 35). Furthermore Nash (2002), in his discussion on Bourdieu's view that agents can internalise the limitations of the field of which they are members, tells us that while Bourdieu re-explores this in latter work, "there are Bourdieuians who regard this theoretical position as the central mechanism of habitus in a theory of reproduction" (p. 282). In other words, it is important that in this research I am open to developing conclusions that go beyond how other's describe Bourdieu's logic of practice.

### 2.6 Playing with Bourdieu

It is little wonder that attempts to pigeon hole Bourdieu into a specific category of thought have frustrated commentators and readers alike. As Calhoun (2002) reflects on Bourdieu's life, he acknowledges those contradictory labels such as "[a]nthropologist, sociologist, or philosopher? Action theorist or structuralist? Materialist or culturalist? Determinist or committed to political struggle? Seeking throughout his life to overcome problematic oppositions, Bourdieu also embodied them" (Calhoun, 2002, p. 1). Therefore, what follows is a discussion of the application of elements from Bourdieu's conceptual toolbox in the research literature that is relevant to my project.

### 2.6.1 Gender and Bourdieu

There has been a substantial body of work resulting from the engagement of feminist scholars with Bourdieu. Each of these engagements seems to require obligatory reference to Bourdieu's work on gender, entitled *Masculine Domination* (Bourdieu, 2001). However, as Kraiss (2006) has noted, there is ongoing controversy surrounding this text as it is considered unusually inadequate given Bourdieu's depth of analysis in his other work. Kraiss suggests that this is because it is difficult even for Bourdieu to reflect on gender dynamics from his own position as a male. An example of this dilemma is where Bourdieu stated that women were capital-bearing objects, as opposed to men who were capital-accumulating subjects (Lovell, 2000). However, this seems to be a contradiction as Bourdieu is acknowledged by Huppatz (2009) in another of his works, *Distinction – A Social Critique on the Judgement of Taste* (Bourdieu, 1984) that women do indeed go about accumulating and converting capital. Nonetheless, feminist scholars continue to engage because, as problematic as Bourdieu can be, his work can create space for new analytical perspectives (Kraiss, 2006).

Skeggs (2004) proposes that femininity and femaleness are cultural resources that can be acquired and utilised by women of any class. As such, Huppatz (2009) has applied this to her exploration of feminine and female capitals within the fields of nursing and social work. In her research, female capital is defined as the “gender advantage that is derived from being perceived to have a female (but not necessarily feminine) body” (Huppatz, 2009, p. 50). While feminine capital is defined as the “gender advantage that is derived from a disposition or skill set learned via socialisation, or from simply being hailed as feminine (this occurs when one's body is recognised as feminine)” (Huppatz, 2009, p. 50). The field of nursing and social work, collectively called caring work, was viewed by Huppatz (2009) as being feminised based on the majority of front line workers being female, and because the work of caring is typically associated with women. Both of these views led Huppatz (2009) to conclude that feminine capital is in operation.

As a consequence, one of Huppatz's (2009) findings was that many of the nursing and social work students interviewed saw the feminisation of the caring field as an indication that they were likely to be hired over men. In this way, the students saw their feminine capital being legitimised by the caring field, and as such, students employed in the field would be able to convert this recognition into economic rewards and likely job security. Her second finding was that, as feminine dispositions of the agents were able to be actualised in the field especially as clients and patients preferred to be treated by women, this gave the agents a form of confidence. However, there were limits to this as their feminine and female capitals did not

tend to dominate the masculine and male capital prevalent in the male dominated management culture of the caring organisations. In summary, Huppatz's (2009) articulation of the constraints of Bourdieu, and application within and beyond these limits, is directly relevant to this research project, which is echoed in the author's conclusion where "[d]espite Bourdieu's oversights in relation to gender, his concepts are useful in exploring the gendering of everyday life." (Huppatz, 2009, p. 62).

## 2.6.2 Educational Policy and Bourdieu

Of interest in the field of educational policy is the work of Naidoo (2004), who applied Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital to how two South African Universities responded to the political and social forces of the anti-apartheid movement between 1985 and 1990. Naidoo set about to compare the admission policies of an elite historically white university and a historically black university. One observation was that the elite university resisted the external forces of the anti-apartheid movement by leaving their policy unchanged for fear of a rush of black students who could affect completion rates and the academic standing of the university. Whereas, the other university formed a political alliance with a large anti-apartheid movement which attracted a good number of academics who, while identifying as radical, bolstered the academic standing of the university amongst the other black universities. As Naidoo observed:

The admission policy, which served to publicly codify the appropriate capital required to enter the university field, became a crucial locus of struggle because it served to legitimize or delegitimize the principles underlying the recognition of existing capital in the field. (p. 465)

It was Naidoo's conclusion that the use of Bourdieu was significant as it facilitated a clearer understanding of the relationship between tertiary institutes and the field of power they exist within. This, according to Naidoo, meant that the research could consider the impact of those external socio-political forces acting upon the universities, and explain why the results produced were different for each university.

## 2.6.3 Inequality and Bourdieu

As previously stated, the position of educators in relation to their students is similar to that of social workers and their clients. The work of Houston (2002) in outlining a model of culturally sensitive practice informed by Bourdieu is of relevance to this discussion. Houston (2002) calls social workers to be aware of the way that culture can be misconstrued as benign in its impact on their clients. However, from the perspective of Bourdieu it can be a tool of reproducing and

cementing inequality in the lives of the marginalised. As a consequence, Houston outlines a four step process of analysis that will facilitate culturally sensitive practice. The first step is for the social worker to develop an understanding of the relationship between culture, power and reproduction by thinking with Bourdieu's concepts, including field and habitus. The second step is to persistently turn that focus on the social worker and the context they find themselves within by developing a sense of professional reflexivity. Next, in the third step, Houston wants social workers to enhance their own cultural sensitivity, and finally, the fourth step talks of the social worker raising the awareness of the power of culture by educating and empowering their clients in what they themselves have learnt. It is interesting that Houston asserts that "in carrying out this work, social workers must challenge fatalistic ideas which assume that change is impossible. It is important to remember that Bourdieu rejects structural determinism" (Houston, 2002, p. 162).

#### 2.6.4 Social Work and Bourdieu

The work of Beddoe (2013) on the professional position of the social worker in New Zealand is salient for the educator in the teaching profession. The teacher is a member of the same field as the student, albeit they occupy a different position. Nonetheless, the teacher is subject to the reproductive forces of the field of power and must stand between these and the students to ensure a socially just education. So too, does the social worker find themselves in an equally compromising and contradictory position. This is what Bourdieu has to say about the unenviable position of the social worker in relation to their client, and the wider field of power:

Social workers must fight unceasingly on two fronts: on the one hand, against those they want to help and who are often too demoralized to take in hand their own interest, let alone the interest of the collective; on the other hand, against the administrations and bureaucrats divided and enclosed in separate universes. (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 190)

A critical aspect of the social worker being able to take the role of advocate, mediator and change catalyst, is recognition as a professional. For if there is no recognition of their professional standing by others in and outside of the field, then the potential for the success of their role is limited. Hence, Beddoe (2013) uses Bourdieu's thinking tool of capital to establish the importance of professional capital where it is "a form of symbolic capital; where prestige, status and influence in both institutional life and the wider public discourse are important to social workers, because they perceive themselves as somehow lacking" (p. 53-54). Further, Beddoe describes the poor state of the standing of the profession in New Zealand as something that inhibits their success, and therefore the success of their clients.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has been about elaborating and demonstrating my understanding of how to play the game of using Bourdieu's thinking tools in an academic research project. I acknowledge that the understanding I have cultivated on his theoretical framework is itself a reflection of the structuring work from immersing me in his work. My habitus is now aligned with the rules of the game of Bourdieu (albeit, this alignment is very much in its infancy). This alignment of thinking with Bourdieu thoroughly informs my research project from my literature review, throughout my methodology and into the findings chapters.

# Chapter Three - Putting the Focus on the Mature Tertiary Student

## 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I develop an understanding of the mature social work student in existing research literature and in doing so create space for my own research. I apply Bourdieu's conceptual toolbox to identify the following themes. Firstly, that the mature student is a member of the tertiary education field, and within that, a member of the social work programme field. However, their position in each of these fields is not the same. Secondly, that there is a lack of consistency across research on the defining characteristics of mature students. There is, however, agreement that the experience of the mature student is fraught and complicated by a mis-alignment of their own habitus with the habitus of the programme. In spite of these hardships, the mature student successfully graduates and finds the experience positive. I then identify ways to improve the experience of the mature student by helping them to play the education game better, and on changing the game itself. I bring this chapter to a close by showing that Bourdieu's conceptual toolbox provides a framework to manage all these aspects I have highlighted.

## 3.2 A Member of Two Fields

### 3.2.1 The Mature Student is a Non-Traditional Student in a Young Person's Game

First and foremost, mature students at university exist in research as a cohort separate from their non-mature peers. This distinction is further emphasised by the alternative names that describe the mature student which include adult and non-traditional students. According to Chung et al's study (2014) of the use of the noun phrase non-traditional students across mental health literature, the overwhelmingly majority of uses were based on students being aged 25 years or over. It is by using this age criteria that further typical characteristics of the mature student can be identified. The mature student is known to be a member of multiple fields outside of being a student, such as an employee, a parent or even a caregiver. They are also defined as having a significant gap between their secondary school education experience and their current tertiary education experience, which is described by the phrase second-chance learner. Perhaps most significantly, is that in the world of university institutions, the non-

mature student represents by far the majority of enrolments, which means that for mature student, education is predominantly a young person's game.

### 3.2.2 The Mature Student in the Social Work Programme is a Traditional Student

However, while mature students' on campus experience is like being in a vast sea of young faces, the social work programmes in research literature offer up an anomaly. Holmstrom (2011) best captures this dynamic by detailing the removal of the age restriction in UK Higher Education social work programmes which allowed students under 21 to enrol. According to Holmstrom (2011) those students under 21 came into the programme as the new non-traditional students, whereas the mature students occupied the position of the majority i.e. the traditional student.

## 3.3 A Single Definition of the Mature Student is Problematic

Yet, it is within the descriptor of mature student across existing research that an issue arises – that of how to classify the range of diversity that exists within this cohort, and whether treating them as one cohort is helpful. For example, Waller (2006) concludes that the use of the term mature student is of limited value when developing responses to their needs given the breadth of diversity that exists. While Donaldson & Townsend's review of US literature on mature student research (2007) calls for researchers to adopt new models of classification beyond mature and non-mature to fine tune these need responses. Most tellingly, is that James (1995) describes the difficulty of developing workable educational and social policy for mature students given their diversity.

### 3.3.1 Age is the Typical Defining Characteristic

In response to this dilemma, I have evidenced that recent researchers develop mature student typologies based on factors that include age, life circumstance, and their experiences at university. With age, there is a range of opinion which is by no means consistent across academic research. For example, some define mature students as being over 21 (Bowl, 2001; Britton & Baxter, 1999; Mallman & Lee, 2014; Richardson, 1994; Waller, 2006), 25 or over (Harker, 2005), and 26 or over (Fox, 2004; Mercer & Saunders, 2004). As stated previously, I have chosen the 25 or over bracket for classifying mature students.

### 3.3.2 Life Circumstance is More Useful to Describe the Mature Student

In Harker's (2005) New Zealand research on mature students at Lincoln University, she developed a typology of mature students based on life circumstance. According to Harker's findings, she was able to classify a mature student as fitting into one of the following types: 1) the older aged student who was aged 25-30, independent and flexible in their personal life, and involved in part-time work, 2) the career changing student who is over 30, has a higher financial burden than the older age student, 3) the full-time student – part-time parent, who is more likely to be male, and where their decision to become a student was triggered by a relationship breakdown, 4) the full-time parent and full-time student is the mature student living alone with at least one child balancing family and study, and 5) those married with children where if female, then they will be doing part-time study and if male then they will be full-time students. The value of this typology is that the diverse nature of mature students can be mapped with consideration given to gender and different familial configurations.

## 3.4 Experiences of Being Structured

By far the most common way of understanding the mature student and their social work counterpart in existing research is to catalogue their experiences as a member of the tertiary education field. This is about taking note of how the tertiary education field acts upon the mature student. I conclude that just as the definition of a mature student is diverse, so too are their experiences at university. Also, that the mature student is a resilient member of the tertiary education field, where even though their experiences are at times painful, they do mostly experience success.

### 3.4.1 Capital Mis-Alignment Causes Issues

One example of capital mis-alignment is with academic skills. For example, Fry, Emerson & Skyrme (2013) did research on the value of weekly lunch-hour support sessions for new mature students attending Massey University in New Zealand. The authors identified that the sessions helped the students in their struggles with study, writing and general academic skills. The gap in academic skills is also echoed in Barrett's study of mature students in 2001 at the same university, and Goldingay et al's (2014) study of mature social work students at university in Australia. The struggles faced by mature students were especially pertinent for students who had poor experiences with learning prior to enrolling at university (Fry et al., 2013). In this

way, these students lacked the necessary academic capital that is privileged by the tertiary education field.

### 3.4.2 Class Mis-Alignment Causes Issues

Another facet of mature students' habitus that can be exposed by the structuring process is their socio-economic class origins. The view, best stated by Bourdieu & Passerson (1990), is that the tertiary education field favours those with the values of the dominant members of society i.e. middle class. For those students from a working class background, there is research evidence that they struggle in a university setting. Baxter & Britton (2001) explored a group of mature students in the last year of study at an English University. The cohort left school with few achievements and enrolled at university after first going to access courses. They observed that the working class mature student is described as experiencing more disruption to fitting in at university than their middle class counterparts.

In a study at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, Caldwell (2008) confirmed the impact of working class origins on the quality of mature student university experience. The author concluded that, while the students researched did achieve success, they were acutely aware of the process of being structured. Specifically, the students acknowledged that, through education, they had experienced upward social class mobility but they still felt that they didn't belong, becoming akin to a hybrid i.e.

There is always a sense of 'being a fraud', 'fooling them [the university] again', 'passing' as middle-class but not really feeling middle-class, and, at the same time, feeling that it will never be possible to go back 'home' and be working-class again. (Caldwell, 2008, p. 56)

### 3.4.3 Roles Outside of University Create Stress

Furthermore, mature students, compared with non-mature students, have a lot more going on in their lives which does not always allow for an easy journey through to success in the tertiary education field. The mature students are often members of multiple fields that demand their focus and time so that their investment in the tertiary education field is challenged. In a number of studies of mature students in New Zealand, there is frequent mention of the stress of balancing family and work demands while studying (Ash, 1999; Barrett, 2001; Harker, 2005; McDonald & Eagle, 2000). In the UK, Mercer & Saunders (2005) and Christie et al (2008) describe mature students who have to successfully navigate the multiple worlds that they are

part of, while in Australia, Goldingay et al (2014) note that mature students have to deal with the pressures and distractions of life while studying.

However, there is a gender narrative running as an undercurrent to this situation where female mature students battle the persistence of traditional gender roles (Stone & O'Shea, 2013) to the point where Baxter & Britton (2001) conclude that females are worse off at university than their male counterparts. In addition, where both genders come from a working class background, males are observed as having fewer external role demands, which helps them to overcome their difficulties (Baxter & Britton, 2001). In a Canadian study on the experience of female mature social work students, the higher their role demands outside of university, the more stress and strain they encountered while studying (Home, 1997).

#### 3.4.4 Mature Students are Typically Time Poor

All of which highlights that mature students have a finite amount of time to devote to the multiple roles in their lives, and therefore the time they can give to study is not necessarily what the tertiary education field requires for success. Some researchers identify mature students as time poor (Acheson & Day, 2006 ; Davey, 2001), which puts pressure on learning as the adjustment to tertiary education is not a quick process (Cox & Pascall, 1994 ; Mallman & Lee, 2014) and some mature students take longer than others to understand new concepts (Melhop, 2006). When it takes longer to learn new things than the time mature students have, then difficulties emerge with meeting assignment deadlines (McDonald & Eagle, 2000). Often mature students are faced with having to prioritise their study efforts at the expense of their own leisure and family time. This leads to the mature student experiencing guilt over having to make choices that impact themselves and loved ones (Stone & O'Shea, 2013).

The preciousness of time also manifests itself in the decisions mature students make in the tertiary education field itself. Goldingay et al (2014) found that while mature students are aware of the support services available at university, they are not able to attend. Another observation is that mature students will therefore focus solely on the academic side of university life, chasing the qualification they enrolled for at the expense of establishing or extending their social life at university (Mallman & Lee, 2014). In summary, for mature students to achieve success in the tertiary education field, a significant amount of time management is required to balance the commitment of multiple role demands.

In a study of mature students at the Manukau Institute of Technology in New Zealand some mature students were hesitant to admit that they were struggling in their alignment with the

tertiary education field (McDonald & Eagle, 2000). In Goldingay et al (2014), this is taken a step further where, even though mature students admitted to facing difficulties, they acknowledged there being a stigma over those who seek out student support from the university. This meant that their less than ideal field position, for example that of being invisible (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007) can continue longer than necessary.

### 3.4.5 In Spite of their Experience, Mature Students Still Perform

Given the demands placed upon mature students and the way their lack of feel for the tertiary education game can be exposed by the field, one could surmise that failure at university by mature students is quite common. This is far from the truth as research shows that the academic performance of a mature student in the tertiary education field is seldom in doubt. In Morrison's (1981, 1995a) two studies of mature students at the University of Auckland he found that they were at least as successful as their first year non-mature counterparts, and throughout their time at university maintained a high pass rate. In a UK study, Richardson (1995) concurred as he observed that mature students achieve and secure qualifications in similar rates to non-mature students. Likewise, in an Australian study, Desmarchelier (1990) discovered that mature students from lower socio-classes out performed non-mature students from middle and upper classes.

### 3.4.6 Mature Students are Resourceful when Handling Challenges

This is a testament to the character of mature students whose approach to being in the tertiary education field is marked by a purposefulness and resourceful that allows them to address challenges that arise (Agllias, Howard, Cliff, Dodds & Field, 2015 ; Barrett, 2001). Theirs is a journey of positive transformation of identity that occurs the longer they are in the tertiary education field. All researchers reviewed agree that the journey itself can be hard for mature students. However, the emphasis on the type of struggles overcome is dependent upon the underlying theory used. The work of Baxter & Britton (2001) describes tertiary education as a risk based endeavour for mature students. In Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell & McCune (2008) the mature student is positioned as a member of a new community of practice, whereas Mercer & Saunders (2004) present a life span view of the mature student where crisis is normalised as part of human development. In Mallman and Lee (2014), the educational journey is described as a culture shock for all that are new to it, but particularly for mature students. Regardless of the theory used, the outcome is mature students who succeed and develop a positive identity, often in the face of systemic and personal adversity.

### 3.4.7 Identity Transformation and Positive Outcomes

The eventual establishment of this positive identity is marked in a number of ways. For example, there is a build-up of skills and an overall growth in self-confidence (Swain & Hammond, 2011). The education process enables mature students to establish their sense of individuality by allowing them to make sense of their lives through new learnings (Cox & Pascall, 1994). Also, the world of mature students is enhanced with new friendships and contacts made at university (Swain & Hammond, 2011), which greatly assists in developing a sense of belonging in and beyond the tertiary education field (Agllias et al., 2015). Caldwell (2008) sums these outcomes up best by reporting that being a member of the tertiary education field brings unexpected advantages and success.

## 3.5 Change the Mature Student to Play the Game Better

### 3.5.1 Develop Tangible Skills

In this sub-section of existing research, I focus on what the mature student can do to improve success as field members. In Morrison's (1981, 1995a) two studies of mature students at the University of Auckland, the key is to engage in courses that equip them prior to enrolment at university. He shows that for students who chose to forgo this preparation, their success rate was lower than those who did prepare. Once enrolled, there is more that the mature student can do by attending orientation programmes and skills based courses offered by support services (Acheson & Day, 2006; McDonald & Eagle, 2000). In addition, what Acheson & Day (2006) discovered was that while those who attended skills courses in groups improved their pass rates and grades, for those who received individual help they achieved even higher grades.

### 3.5.2 Develop Intangible Skills

The mature students who engage with experts in the university game can address specific gaps in their own collections of capital, such as academic writing. However, there are skills and dispositions that are not so straightforward to impart to students but are perhaps of even more value. Ash (1999), in her early study of mature students at Massey University identified that those with sufficient psychological coping resources were better able to make sense of the difficulties they faced at university. This is elaborated further in Kinman & Grant's (2011) study of mature social work students in the UK where improved success came to those with

highly developed emotional and social competencies, such as being emphatic and being self-reflective.

These types of skills are intangible, often referred to as soft skills in career counselling circles (Inkson, Dries & Arnold, 2015). These skills are harder to teach in a group or class situation because, as Bourdieu informs (2002), it takes time and an investment of energy to enhance one's habitus and as determined in this chapter, mature students are often lacking for time (Acheson & Day, 2006; Davey, 2001). Davey (2001), in her study of older aged mature students (over 40) identified that those who experienced high levels of satisfaction with their study experience came from families who had been to university, or that the students themselves had engaged in study prior to attending Victoria. This speaks to the concept that if a mature student's current habitus and their habitus of origin matches the conditions for success in the tertiary education field, then success and satisfaction will ensue.

### **3.6 Change the Game to Make it Easier to Play**

Given that time is a precious commodity for mature students, especially for those with competing role demands, there seems to be a disconnect between the provision of orientation programmes and general upskilling services by the university, and the ability of mature students to take advantage of them. This theme is identified by researchers who call instead for these types of events to be designed into the curriculum of the programme being studied by the students. This would be an example of the dominant members of the tertiary education field choosing to change the way the game is played to the benefit of those typically in disadvantaged positions. This is referred to in existing research as an inclusive institutional habitus (Bowl & Whitelaw, 2010 ; Raey, 1998 ; Tett, 2004 ; Thomas, 2002).

#### **3.6.1 Re-Design the Course to be Inclusive**

In the field of social work education at university, Lister (2000, 2003) speaks of her experiences with running a programme designed for students with caring commitments. The programme's promotional literature specifically mentioned for whom they designed the course, and within the programme timetable itself, there were shorter days scheduled so that children could be picked up from care. Another observation is that the experience of these mature students on previous courses was that staff were very helpful and sympathetic to their commitments. However, while the attitude of staff was appreciated, the students were still being treated as special, and therefore separated from the non-mature students. The objective

instead is to build an institutional habitus in the tertiary education field that is inclusive and treats its students with equity, as Lister concludes:

[A]lthough I have concentrated on the specific needs of women carers, in doing so I am not arguing that provision designed to meet their needs be exclusive to them. Rather, I would suggest that ... we continue to develop a flexibility in our programme provision in order to meet the range of needs of excluded groups. (Lister, 2003, p. 136)

This theme of inclusion through the programme's curriculum is echoed by Fox's (2004) conclusion that attention is required by institutions to build strategies into the fieldwork component of the social work programmes that acknowledge and maximise the strengths of mature students. The goal defined by the author is to improve their growth as future professionals in the fieldwork space.

### 3.6.2 Creating an Ecosystem of Engagement

In New Zealand, a significant amount of work has gone into the development of a conceptual model to help educators maximise the success of tertiary students, known as the student engagement model (Leach & Zepke 2011; Zepke & Leach, 2010). This ecosystem of engagement places the student at the centre, acknowledging them as feeling and internally motivated beings. This motivation comes from having enriching and encouraging relationships with their fellow students and their teachers in supportive institutional and non-institutional environments. This model has since been applied to the research of mature student success at Massey University by Kahu (2014).

The engaged student comes from a drive within themselves where the student is required to be intrinsically motivated by an inner enjoyment of the education activity itself. The staff develop this motivation through relationships with the students that are collaborative and enriching, and the students themselves build relationships with their peers in a similar vein. This is achieved within an institutional environment that focuses on inclusion, offers a range of support services together, and maintains a high expectation of individual student success. The authors acknowledge that the support of the student outside of the university is imperative to maintaining their engagement and therefore their success:

We were aware of how hard some mature age students... worked to manage their time and their lives to make successful learning possible. We added a perspective that acknowledges the role of these important non-institutional factors in engagement and included indicators of actions teachers and

institutions might take to help students address these. (Leach & Zepke, 2011, p. 201)

This is where family and friends develop an understanding of the demands of study acting upon students, and provide support, such as assistance with child care and creating space for the student to study. All of which results in engaged students who will participate actively and critically within society.

The drive for student success that this model supports compares favourably with my application of Bourdieu in this research project. However, Bourdieu (2002; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) sees success coming from improving the position of students by closing the gap between the capital privileged by the field and the capital that the students possess through their past and present habitus. In comparison, Zepke & Leach (2010) place the inner enjoyment of students at the centre of their model which is facilitated by supportive relationships and support. There is a sense of self-actualisation present in this model where the emphasis is on creating an environment for students to realise their inner potential (Payne, 2005). In contrast, Bourdieu sees the student as a holder and accumulator of capital through multiple field memberships and subsequent habitus structuring. Nonetheless, the student engagement model provides useful insights on how the conditions of the game can be addressed.

### **3.7 An Example of Applying Bourdieu's Work**

What follows is an example from research literature of using Bourdieu's work to reposition agents as holders and accumulators of capital rather than as skill deficient mature or non-mature students. In Watson, Nind, Humphris & Borthwick's 2009 research on the experiences of thirteen female first year occupational therapy students in the UK, the authors used Bourdieu's conceptual toolbox. They in-turn identified four themes to show the degree of alignment between the existing habitus of the participants and the rules and expectation of the new field of higher education they had entered into.

These themes of experience were 1) fitting in, 2) adapting, 3) resisting, and 4) being excluded. Those participants classified as fitting in experience a natural fit of their existing habitus with the high education environment. Those classified as adapting experienced a mis-alignment between their existing habitus and the higher education field but adapted over time. The third group of participants were classified as resisting the evolution of a new habitus whilst still achieving what was required of them academically (Watson et al., 2009). The emphasis for this group was their challenge of the rules of the game but from a position where they had

insufficient power to change the rules. The final classification was an experience of exclusion by the field (Watson et al., 2009) where Bourdieu tells us that while the struggle between the dominant and dominated in a field occurs, the field's very existence is due to the ongoing membership of both. The concept of exclusion is when a field's boundaries do not extend far enough to accommodate all types of members. In the end, the field has to exclude these people for the survival of the field itself (Bourdieu, 1993).

The value of the work of Watson et al (2009) is that it removes the mature – non-mature research conundrum and instead, through the work of Bourdieu, sees all students as diverse field members. By doing so, it is the position of the student in the field that becomes central to the research not the deficiencies of the students in themselves. The student is seen as a holder of skills and dispositions developed over their lifetime which has them playing the game well in some fields while being less than successful in other fields. This creates a student who is context dependent where the researcher can concentrate on field alignment rather than problematizing the student.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

In conclusion, regardless of the typology and theory applied to make sense of the diversity of mature students and their experiences, Lee's conclusion (2013) in her study of the mature students attending university in South Korea puts it best by stating that mature students, in comparison to their non-mature peers, exist in a socio-historical context much wider than that of being a student, experiencing a life off campus defined by expectations of culture, the market and society in general. It is within this context that I have chosen to make sense of mature students through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu. His use of field specific identity positioning, along with the structuring impacts from being a member of multiple fields, and the concept of field specific privileged capital, all assist in managing the diversity that researchers have wrestled with to date.

# Chapter Four – Research Methodology

## 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I attend to a number of aspects of the methodology that I applied to my research i.e. design, participant selection, data collection, coding and analysis, ethics and trustworthiness. In summary, I received approval from the Ethics Committee at the University of Otago (see Appendix 10.1) to utilise a trustworthy and ethical qualitative approach. I combined macro and meso level policy and enrolment profile reviews with micro level data collected through online surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. I subjected this data to a combination of attribute coding, initial coding, general thematic analysis, and hypothesis coding to produce my research findings. Next, by applying these methods to the data, this allowed me to discover perceptions, insights and connections about the participants, their processes and their relationships to each other (Saldana, 2009).

## 4.2 Design

### 4.2.1 Qualitative Research

I chose a qualitative case study approach because I wanted to generate a rich and full description of the power dynamics of the social work programme at the University of Otago. I did this by taking an interpretivist position where I sought to understand the experience of staff and students and combined this with a critical approach where I identified social structures that favoured some at the expenses of others (Cooper & White, 2012). I was the primary mechanism for data collection and analysis where I relied upon my existing judgements, values, and experiences to make inductive sense of the social work programme. To this end I was, as Bourdieu (1999) explains when referring to qualitative interviewing, trying to walk alongside my research subjects on a journey of accompanied self-analysis (see also Hamel, 1998). The accompanied position that I took caused me to conclude that I was both a research insider and outsider (Mercer, 2007). My view was informed by Dywer & Buckle (2009) who stated that a researcher occupies the space between insider and outside status where:

Perhaps, as researchers we can only ever occupy the space between. We may be closer to the insider position or closer to the outsider position, but because our perspective is shaped by our position as researcher (which includes having read much literature on the research topic), we cannot fully occupy one or other of those positions. (p. 61)

My experience in the focus groups is an example of my existence in the space in between. In the staff focus group, I was an outsider because I was not a staff member in the social work programme. However, as an undergraduate and postgraduate student, over the years I had developed relationships of mutual trust and respect with a number of staff. Also, I was a member of the social work programme (albeit as a human services major), so my researcher position moved closer to that of insider. In the student focus group however, I could lay claim to being a fellow student, and I could connect with the group members as I shared similar programme experiences. However, I felt more like an outsider as I did not know the students I was working with, I was a human services major rather than social work student, and I was significantly older than they were. Rather than feeling one of the group, I assumed a more formal position of a tutor and researcher on the outside, looking in.

#### 4.2.2 Theory-Based Research Design

My research design was informed by the theoretical framework of French Sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. Specifically, I used a three faceted approach as described by Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) where the first approach is to establish the position of the social field in relation to the field of power that constitutes the social order. The second approach is to map out the relational structure of the positions of the social field and identify the agents or institutions who occupy these positions. The third approach is an analysis of the different systems of dispositions that the agents have acquired over their life, and the opportunity that the conditions of the social field in question allows for these dispositions to be converted into a position of status. Therefore, to analyse the field of power, I reviewed key government and organisational documents alongside an analysis of related Ministry of Education student enrolment profiles. To map out the relational structure of positions and agents, and to identify the dispositions of those agents, I used online surveys and individual and focus group interviews.

### 4.3 Participant Selection

I employed a purposive sampling approach to select both staff and students from the social work programme (Bryman, 2012). I positioned the staff as the dominant group in the programme who had a role in the educational reproduction of the dominant values of middle class society and as such, dictated the rules of the learning game (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). I positioned the students as being acted upon by the staff. I recruited the staff by attending a staff department meeting where I presented my research topic and invited them to participate in my project. I recruited the students by attending their semester one workshops and opening

lectures. I worked with my supervisors and the ethics committee to get permission to emphasise student success of any age, rather than focussing on mature student success. I did this to ensure I got non-mature students to participate because there was a risk that they would have no incentive to contribute if they perceived my research to be for mature students only. As an incentive to participate, I offered two \$30 gift vouchers that were to be given to two randomly selected students.

## **4.4 Data Collection – Techniques and Instruments**

### **4.4.1 Field of Power Documents**

For the documents that I reviewed to map out the field of power, I combined the work of Bryman (2012) and Scott (1990) to ensure that my analysis was consistent. Specifically, according to Scott (1990), each distinct set of documentation requires careful critique according to a four point criteria that considers document authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning. In addition, Bryman (2012) elaborates on Scott's criteria to consider who produced the document, why the document was produced, the authority of the document author(s), the inclusion of any biases intended or not, the potential corroboration of events in the documents, and, if the content of the documents is open to interpretation then which interpretation, is being accepted and which is being discounted in this research process.

### **4.4.2 Social Work Programme Enrolment Profiles**

In order for me to gain an understanding of the changing nature of enrolment in the social work programme over the last fourteen years, I downloaded a set of enrolment profiles based on age, ethnicity, gender, full-time status and campus location from the Ministry of Education and Tertiary Education Commission web site (Student Enrolments by Enrolment and Provider 2000-2014, 2014). I reviewed the data to determine the likely impacts of government, institutional, and programme policy on the programme at the University of Otago, and on similar programmes at other New Zealand tertiary institutions.

### **4.4.3 Online Survey**

I carried out two online surveys for my research project: one for staff (see Appendix 10-3 Staff Web Survey), and the other for students in the programme (see Appendix 10-4 Student Web Survey). I used the online survey service called Survey Monkey ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com))

which provided the functionality to design, build, host, track and collect data for each online survey. The purpose of my utilisation of the online survey tool in this research project was to economically and efficiently collect a uniform set of information from staff and students (Bryman, 2012, Groves et al., 2013). The questions that I designed for the online survey were constructed so that each could be directly linked to an aspect of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (see Appendix 10.5 for Table 7 – Survey Questions Aligned with Bourdieu's Thinking Tools). This was one way I could ensure the relevance of each online survey question with the way that I was making theoretical sense of the results. To further ensure relevance, I piloted the online survey with a group of friends and colleagues, who provided vital feedback such as adding questions targeted at non-mature students to prevent the online survey being biased towards mature students. While the Survey Monkey design functionality provided guidance on question construction in general, each question was also assessed using guidelines outlined by Bryman (2012). The guidelines targeted the identification and removal of ambiguous terms, avoidance of long and double barrelled questions, paying attention to leading questions, and making sure that options in closed questions were balanced. I collated, coded and analysed the online survey information for verification and discussion in subsequent focus groups and as a basis for my findings.

#### 4.4.4 Interviews

If the respondents wanted to contribute further, but not in a focus group environment, I offered a one-on-one semi-structured interview (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). I chose to treat these interviews as an extension of the focus group events where data generated was put into the same pool of data for analysis and coding (Hennink, 2007). My approach to the interviews was to create a run sheet which acted as my quick reference guide for the sequence of events with the addition of supporting detailed information from the online survey in case attendees asked about any of the coding decisions I made. Along with the run sheet, I created a Microsoft PowerPoint slide pack to be used in the interviews to highlight the findings and guide discussion. In addition, I created an exercise to rank the knowledges mature students needed for success as identified in the online survey, which involved printing out each knowledge on paper slips. This exercise was then repeated to re-rank the knowledges from the perspective of success as a social worker.

#### 4.4.5 Focus Groups

I treated the focus groups as a research event which is more efficient in generating large volumes of data than a one-on-one semi structured interview because the group environment is more closely aligned with everyday social interactions (Callaghan, 2005; Halkier, 2010; Hennink, 2007). To minimise this risk I conducted a run through with the supervisors to confirm the agenda, the suitability of the questions I had scripted, and the overall process to be used. The purpose of the focus groups was firstly to provide an opportunity for the verification of findings from the online survey, document reviews, and enrolment profile analysis. The second purpose was to then engage the attendees in further discussion about the findings, and to explore specific topics that the findings highlighted. In the focus group event for the staff, I engaged an assistant to attend to aspects of logistics and process, while I attended to matters of content as they related to the research questions.

In the staff focus group, my assistant had the task of holding presentation cards up while I made reference to the content. Then, the cards were handed around the attendees so that they could read the content more closely. When I asked questions, the attendees answered one by one, with the level of interaction ebbing and flowing. The level of interaction amongst the attendees was not a concern as they were well known to each other as they worked together on a daily basis. The two knowledge ranking exercises took place at a separate table, and when instructions were given to the attendees, they were left to themselves to complete the exercise. The focus group was concluded at the ninety minute mark where I thanked everyone for their attendance and I made a commitment to circulate a transcription of the event for their review.

The student focus group took place in a meeting room at the University of Otago Central Library. I used a slide pack tailored to the students to present the results of the online survey and facilitate discussion through the use of open ended questions. I also used the whiteboard in the room to capture and reflect ideas at various points during the discussion. I used my iPad to take pictures of the whiteboard content before moving on to the next part of the discussion. One point to note is that I did not use a research assistant for this session given the small number of attendees and the moderate size of the room in which we met.

#### 4.4.6 Transcribing the Interviews and Focus Groups

The transcription method I applied, as described by Duncan (1997), summarised the discussion and highlighted relevant quotes in context which applied directly to the research questions. The assumption was that if a topic had no supporting quotes, then the attendees accepted what was

presented and had nothing further to add. The final transcriptions were emailed to the relevant participants with a request for them to review and edit any wording as needed, or if no feedback was received, then I would take as acceptance. In addition, an offer was made in the email to provide a copy of the actual recording if the participant was so inclined, but no one took up this offer.

## **4.5 Data Coding and Analysis**

At the conclusion of the online surveys, I downloaded the responses from the Survey Monkey database and divided them into qualitative responses and classification responses. In addition, the transcriptions from the one-on-one semi-structured interviews and focus group events were added to the qualitative responses. I converted the classification responses into graphs and charts with the purpose of using them to classify and contextualise the overall findings. This is known as attribute coding (Saldana, 2009), where the descriptive information, such as participant demographics, are captured, considered and coded. I subjected the qualitative responses to initial coding (Saldana, 2009) where I broke them down into discrete parts for closer examination and then I subjected each part to a general thematic analysis. My search for themes, as per the guidance of Ryan & Bernard (2003), involved consideration of a number of factors including repetition of words or phrases, unfamiliar expressions, the use of metaphor and analogy, topic transitions, linguistic connections showing causal connections in the participant's minds, and attention to what is not in the data. Next, informed by Bryman (2012), I took care to ensure the data was not taken out of context, or fragmented beyond meaning. Therefore, as mentioned previously, the questions that comprised the online survey were constructed so that each could be directly linked to an aspect of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (see Appendix - Survey Question to Theoretical Framework). This form of qualitative analysis is described by Saldana (2009) as hypothesis coding where the codes are developed from a theory, in this case Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, about what will be found in the data before it has been collected.

## **4.6 Matters of Ethics**

From the standpoint of being an ethical qualitative researcher, I acknowledge the dilemma that comes from the desire to collect a rich bounty of data while being sure to protect my research participants from needless and potentially harmful enquiry. Fog (2004, as cited in Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) captures my dilemma succinctly by stating that:

The researcher wants the research to be as deep and probing as possible, with the risk of trespassing on the participants, and on the other hand to be as respectful to the research participants as possible, with the risk of getting data that only scratches the surface. (p. 123)

Therefore, as my aim was to create a research project that was fully informed by ethics, I set about to secure approval from the University of Otago Ethics Committee and attend to the follow concerns as described by Brinkmann & Kvale (2015). Firstly, I wanted my project to be more than a pursuit of knowledge for knowledge sake, so I have laid the foundation for creating an understanding of mature student success that can inform a student survival guide document for later publication.

I supported the data collection phase with a detailed informed consent document that was built into the online survey, and Survey Monkey attended to matters of respondent anonymity and confidentiality by linking the access to the online survey to a respondent's email address, meaning they could only see their responses (Bryman, 2012, Groves et al., 2013). Furthermore, the information collected from the online survey was kept confidential by Survey Monkey in accordance with their privacy policy (Survey Monkey Privacy Policy, 2013). In the follow-up focus groups and interviews, I ensured that attendees understood their right to withdraw from the research project at any point, and that they would have an opportunity to review and approve the transcripts that I had made from my recordings. In those follow-up events, I endeavoured to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where I positioned the attendees as experts of their own experiences, and I positioned myself as sitting alongside them as they recounted their stories and answered my questions. I also used the focus groups and interviews as a way to reflect back what was shared in the online survey so that the attendees could verify how I had interpreted the data.

## **4.7 Trustworthiness**

A qualitative research approach can be considered a subjective endeavour (Bryman, 2012; Williams, 2000), therefore I made sure that I addressed trustworthiness. I am referring to the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the area of credibility, I focussed on establishing a level of confidence in my findings by getting the participants of the focus groups and interviews to verify the findings of the online surveys, and to review and accept the transcripts of those events. I triangulated my online survey findings with the existing research I had reviewed, and with the various government and tertiary documents that I had analysed. I was also able to take advantage of my insider position as a former human services undergraduate. This allowed me to use my

experience as a persistent observer of the programme over six years as a part-time attendee. Equally, I had good rapport and trust with the staff which allowed me to engage with them for the online survey and focus group in the spirit of prolonged engagement.

With respect to transferability, I concluded that my work was applicable to other social work programmes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) because the enrolment profile of the social work programme was similar to the profiles at other tertiary institutions in New Zealand, and that those programmes were subject to the same government policies. Also, while my focus was on mature student success, the findings were comparable to studies on tertiary student success in general, meaning that they could be applied to any student cohort who found themselves marginalised in an education system.

The assignment of two supervisors to my thesis work, one from the social work programme, and one from the education programme, meant that I was able to address concerns of dependability. This is about assuring that the research project produces consistent findings and that they can be repeated in another research project setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My two supervisors fulfilled the role of internal auditors of the methodology and the findings, and they continued to emphasise my ownership of the research throughout.

The final aspect of trustworthiness that I took care to consider was confirmability. This is where the focus is on ensuring the findings are shaped by the respondents themselves, and not dominated by my own motivations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used triangulation to ensure my findings were credible and utilised feedback from my supervisors to ensure that the respondent findings were emphasised. Furthermore, an aspect of Bourdieu's theoretical framework and of social work practice is a commitment to self-reflection

## **4.8 Conclusion**

In summary, I applied a qualitative case study research methodology that was informed by the work of Bourdieu, and I worked diligently to ensure I minimised any harm to my participants. I focussed on an ethical approach consistent with the principles of the social work programme itself. I also utilised the output from my literature review in conjunction with my macro and meso level policy and key document analysis to ensure my online survey, focus group and interview findings were trustworthy. In the following chapters I present the findings that resulted from the application of the methodology described here.

## Chapter Five – Field of Power

### **5.1 Introduction**

As mentioned previously in this thesis, the field of power represents the space of societal and cultural power relations where dominant groups define and maintain the social logic that acts upon the myriad of social fields within it (Bourdieu, 1990; Wacquant, 1993). As such, in this chapter I will define the field of power that the social work programme is located within, and show its influence on the logic that underpins the programme. My premise is that increased student success will come from a greater awareness of this knowledge. In order to see the influence of the field of power, I look at the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Application Pack (University of Otago, 2014a) and the University of Otago Guidelines for Learning document (University of Otago, 2012). I bring this chapter to a close by exploring how the staff in the programme make sense of and, to a degree, manage the influence of the field of power.

### **5.2 Social Work is a Gendered Profession, but Gender is Not Privileged by the Programme**

In social work, female traits are highly valued because most front line workers and their clients are female (Beddoe, 2013; Christie, 1998, 2006; Huppertz, 2009; Lewis, 2004; Pease, 2011; Tice, 1998; Williams, 1995). The number of males in management and in the probation sector, however, is an exception. The high representation of female social workers also occurs in the social work education arena. My analysis, as shown in Figure 1 (Percentage of Enrolments in the Social Work Programme that are Female - 2003 to 2014), confirmed that the majority of enrolled students since 2003 are female (Student Enrolments by Enrolment and Provider 2000-2014, 2014) and I conclude that, while the student age in the programme has changed, their gender has not.

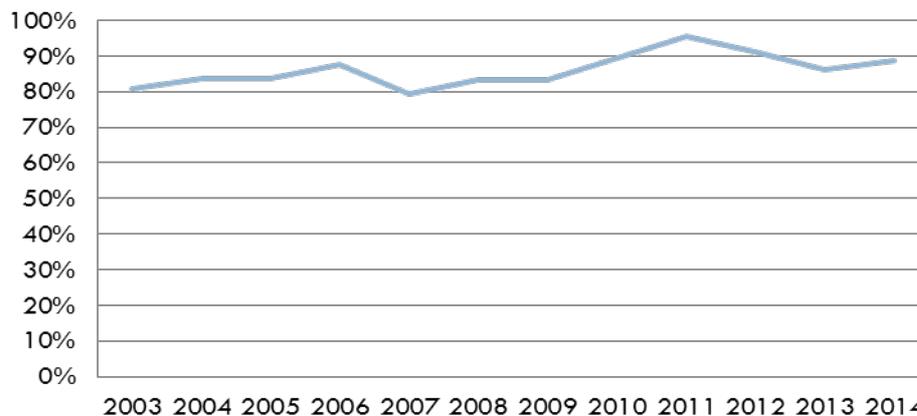


Figure 1- Percentage of Enrolments in the Social Work Programme that are Female - 2003 to 2014

To better understand the power of what I will call the ‘women are better suited to social work’ narrative, I developed a high level profile of privileged social work programme capital from a gendered perspective. I used Rudman & Glick’s (2008) list of personality traits based on a cross-national study where they identified traits agreed to by at least 20 out of the 25 nations studied as being “strongly associated with men or with women” (p. 89).

I set out to align these stereotypical traits with the preferred traits which I derived from a key word analysis of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Application Pack (University of Otago, 2014a). I wanted to understand if the capital privileged by the programme was re-enforcing the ‘women are better suited to social work’ narrative, or if a different programme narrative was present. Therefore, for each male and female stereotypical trait, I attempted to find a corresponding trait mentioned in the application pack. The results of my analysis are shown in Table 8 - Male & Female Traits showing alignment of Traits with BSW Third Year Entry Preferred Traits (see Appendix 10.6).

For example, for the male trait of ‘adventurous’ I linked this to the application pack trait of confidence. Whereas the female trait of being sentimental had no direct match to an equivalent trait in the application pack. However, I aligned the female trait of being soft-hearted with being open to learning, and the male trait of being stern with being an advocate. These examples show that while each of the male and female traits were very much at opposite ends of a gender spectrum (e.g. stern versus soft-hearted), the BSW Professional Programme Application Pack was inclusive of aspects of both gender types.

I concluded that some of the traits identified with females aligned with some of the capital privileged by the programme, yet some of the traits aligned better with the male traits. Therefore, while social work is a profession that has predominantly female workers, the staff of the programme that created the application pack favour traits important to future quality client outcomes independent of the gender of the social worker or the client.

I positioned gender in the field of power because I see it influencing all social fields rather than being unique to the social work programme. I did this so I could analyse the logic of the gendering process separate to the logic of the social work programme. This meant I could see how the social work programme responded to this process. I acknowledge that there is ongoing debate as to how Bourdieu positions gender in his logic of practice (Huppertz, 2009; Kraus, 2006; Lovell, 2000). However, my position is supported because it falls within a summary of views on gender through a Bourdieuan lens by McLeod (2005) where gender can be positioned in the field of power which then acts upon the social field in question as a social force, or it can be seen as a field specific manifestation where agents' dispositions are gendered.

I concluded that the social work programme privileged capital incorporates aspects of both male and female stereotypical traits. This means that while the programme exists in a field of power which considers social work to be women's work, the programme is not requiring its student members to be a woman. It is a paradoxical dynamic because the majority of students are female, and some of the capital privileged lends itself more readily to the traits typically described as feminine, such as the establishment of empathetic relationships with clients built on mutual respect and active listening (Rudman & Glick, 2008). However, there are areas of social work, such as advocacy, which require strength, forthrightness and at times, stubborn resolve to bring about a successful outcome for a client. These traits are traditionally more closely aligned to those of a male (Rudman & Glick, 2008).

### **5.3 The Programme is Significantly Shaped by the Social Work Profession**

The capital privileged by the social work programme begins with the agreed global definition of social work as ratified by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) in 2004 (Hare, 2004). At a national level, the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) and Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) have embodied this definition into a series of competency categories that include working with Māori, working with other ethnic and cultural

groups, being fit and proper to be a social worker (including police checks), and the core competencies for being a registered social worker (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2014; Social Workers Registration Board, 2015a).

My analysis of the IFSW and IASSW definitions, and the SWRB and ANZSW competencies shows that these international and national social work sources of privileged capital align with the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Application Pack (University of Otago, 2014a) as shown in Table 9 - SRWB and ANZASW – Privileged Social Work Competencies aligned with BSW Application Criteria (see Appendix 10.7). However, there are some qualities required of a social work student where there is no direct alignment with the core competencies of the SWRB and ANZASW, but they do align with skills needed for working and caring for people in general (Corey, 2005). This is the result of an ongoing review and assessment process by the ANZASW, and later the SWRB, to ensure that the social work programme at the University of Otago is an approved social work qualification. As such, a social worker who has an approved qualification is able to fulfil the education requirements to be a registered social worker. This is a further example of organisations in the field of power, who are independent of the programme but who significantly shape, and protect the programme.

This assessment and approval process is a mechanism to show that the programme is accountable to the social work industry. A social work qualification receives approval by the association when there is evidence that it fulfils the association's practice standards. The Professional Self-Review of the then Community and Family Studies Department<sup>56</sup> in 2003 is evidence that the social work programme was aligned to the Practice Standards defined by the ANZASW as they detailed how each practice standard was met (Department of Community and Family Studies (2003a). Further, this self-review also demonstrated an alignment to the international definition of social work definition ratified by the IFSW and IASSW in 2004.

In 2003, the passing of the Social Workers Registration (SWR) Act resulted in setting a new benchmark for social work programmes and was subsequently implemented in October 2004. This resulted in the Diploma of Social and Community Work no longer being the entry point qualification for social work. Therefore, in 2006, the four year degree Bachelor of Social and Community Work (BSCW) was introduced as its replacement while retaining the distance

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<sup>56</sup> The home of the social work programme at the University of Otago has changed a number of times since its origin in the 1970s as a university extension certificate. In the 1990s, the programme was delivered by the Community of Family Studies Section within the Department of Consumer Services, itself a part of the Sciences Faculty. Then, in 2001 the Department of Community and Family Studies was formed and was moved into the School of Social Services within the Humanities Division. In 2005, the department became the Department of Social Work and Community Development. In 2011, the department was merged into the Department of Sociology, Gender and Social Work.

option available at each year (Department of Community and Family Studies, 2003b). The BSCW was designed to be recognised by the SWRB as an accepted and recognised social work qualification. This change also allowed the department to respond to the changes in degree level programmes overseas and within New Zealand.

The SWRB criteria for the official recognition of a social work qualification in New Zealand ensures that it protects the core capital for being a successful social work student. In particular, there are two standards that address governance and industry collaboration that serve to protect the identity and objectives of the programme (Social Workers Registration Board, 2013). From the perspective of governance, there are requirements for the programme to be a distinct unit within the university. This unit should reflect the values and ethical principles of social work, and the academic leadership of the programme has to be the responsibility of a registered social work academic. The standard for professional and stakeholder collaboration seeks to bring together representatives of the programme, the profession, the university and other parties such as clients/service users to subject the programme to ongoing review and development. In this way, the potential negative impact of government decisions and university policy on the programme is minimised. This is an example of different aspects of the field of power working with and against each other.

#### **5.4 The Programme is Significantly Shaped by Thinking on Learning**

The social work programme is a professional education programme within a tertiary institution. Therefore, I found it necessary to see how the field of power defined student success from a learning perspective. I discovered that those preferred student competencies required for success align with a 2003 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) initiative to identify and develop skills beyond school as lifelong learners (Rychen & Salganik, 2003). These competencies were elaborated further in a series of New Zealand Tertiary Education competencies discussion documents in 2004 (Rutherford, 2004). The framework from these two sources categorises competencies into one of the following: able to act autonomously, competent to operate in social groups, able to effectively use learning tools (knowledge, resources, language, Information and communications technology) interactively, able to think critically and to have an attitude of reflectiveness. I use this framework to show that the capital privileged by the University of Otago in their Student Guidelines for Learning Brochure (University of Otago, 2012) aligns with the high level competencies defined at a global and national level for tertiary education.

I use Table 1 (OECD and New Zealand Privileged Tertiary Education Competencies aligned with University of Otago Student Guidelines for Learning) to propose that there is a global and national organisational field of power that links with the capital needed by a student to perform well at the University of Otago. Specifically, I show that the New Zealand Ministry of Education of the day infused their tertiary education thinking and strategies with these competencies (Rutherford, 2004). These in turn influenced the tertiary institutions in New Zealand, including the University of Otago.

*Table 1 - OECD and New Zealand Privileged Tertiary Education Competencies aligned with University of Otago Student Guidelines for Learning*

| <b>OECD / NZ Competencies</b>   | <b>University of Otago Guidelines for Learning</b>  |
|---|---|
| Operating in social groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relate well to others</li> <li>• Cooperate</li> <li>• Manage and resolve conflict</li> <li>• Assert and defend rights and responsibilities</li> <li>• Support, fulfil responsibilities and contribute</li> <li>• Motivate groups to achieve a particular outcome</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate actively</li> <li>• Listen and participate in class</li> <li>• Respect viewpoints of others</li> <li>• Form study groups</li> <li>• Provide constructive feedback to University Staff</li> <li>• Promote an environment which is safe and free from harassment and discrimination</li> <li>• Observe office hours</li> <li>• Be part of the University community and participate in life beyond the classroom</li> </ul> |
| Acting autonomously <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Big picture</li> <li>• Form and conduct life plans</li> <li>• Assert rights, interests, limits and needs</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be self-motivated</li> <li>• Be self-directed</li> <li>• Prepare for classes</li> <li>• Put best effort possible into assignments and submit work which is your own</li> <li>• Hand work in on time</li> <li>• Look ahead to the Otago Graduate Profile and consciously strive to achieve it</li> </ul>  |
| Thinking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think creatively</li> <li>• Use cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek to develop critical thinking skills</li> </ul>  |
| Reflectiveness  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take a breather once in a while</li> </ul>   |
| Using tools interactively <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ability to use language, symbols, text, knowledge, information and technology</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek help early on from staff</li> <li>• Use appropriately the services and resources of the University</li> </ul>   |

## 5.5 Policy Defines Who Can Become Student Members of the Programme

The undergraduate social work programme was originally designed for mature students already employed as workers. However, the student age in the programme became impacted by changes in government policy. I found two trends from my analysis of enrolments, as shown in Figure 2 (Percentage of Enrolments in the Social Work Programme that are Mature (25 or over), where between 2002 and 2006 the percentage of mature students peaked at 99%. Then, subsequently the percentage of mature students trended downwards to 50% in 2015.

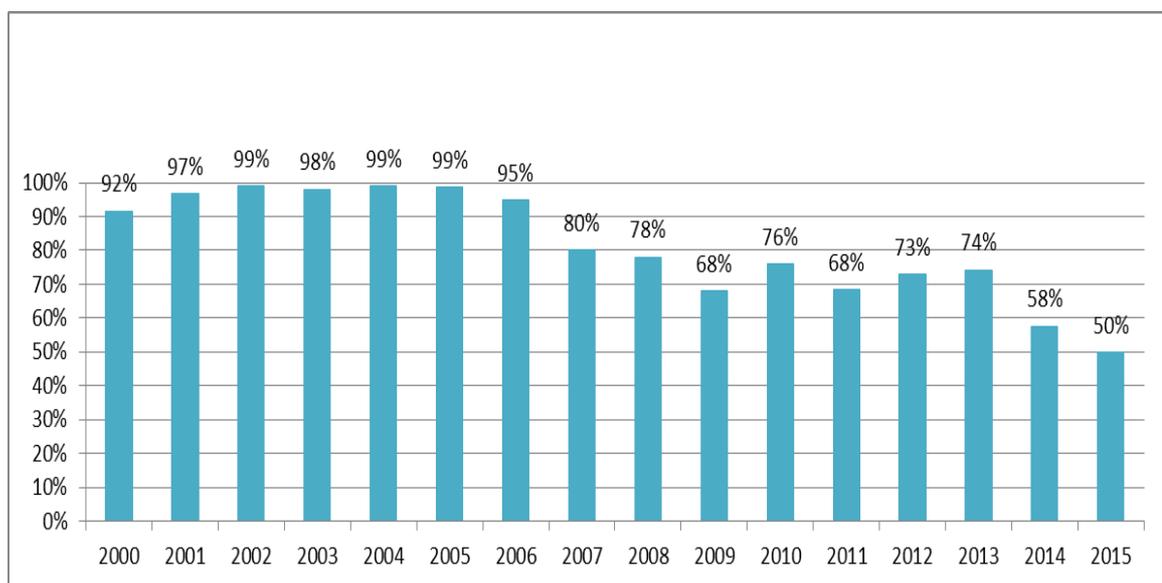


Figure 2 - Percentage of Enrolments in the Social Work Programme that are Mature (25 or over)

I argue that the field of power has acted substantially upon the social work programme from a membership perspective but the core capital necessary to be a successful student and social worker has not changed. In other words, while the rules of the social work programme field remain unchanged in their objective to produce successful graduates, the age of those who invest themselves in the game has changed. This means that there was a time when the programme catered for students who were already employed as social workers and were seeking the legitimacy of their profession through a recognised qualification. Whereas today, the programme caters for students who are seeking a recognised qualification to legitimise their entry into the profession.

In each of the tertiary education strategies released since 2002, there is evidence of a transition of emphasis from the provision of education for all ages, to a focus on the retention and

completion of non-mature students, and especially Māori and Pasifika students. In other words, since 2002, the New Zealand government created and acted upon a rationale where students twenty years or older did not warrant the attention of specific tertiary and economic policy (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2007, 2010 ; Ministry of Education & Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2014). This decision by the government resulted in a decline in mature student numbers across the tertiary sector and in the social work programme at the University of Otago.

In the 2007 Tertiary Education Strategy (Ministry of Education, 2007), this transition is justified by a comparison of the participation rates of 15-19 year olds with other countries in the OECD. Using the same dataset, a comparison was performed to show that:

Our [New Zealand's] high participation in tertiary education is among older groups – we rank fourth in the OECD on participation among those aged 30 to 39 and third for those 40 and over. Around 52 percent of all the growth in enrolments in tertiary education between 2000 and 2005 was by those aged over 40. But we rank third lowest in the OECD on the proportion of our population aged between 15 and 19 in formal education, including those in senior secondary school. (p. 31)

Therefore, in the strategy, the government stated that one of their priorities was to increase the educational success of young New Zealanders, claiming that:

The focus of this priority is on young people as the benefits of a tertiary education are higher for those who start earlier. The OECD calculated recently that a female school leaver starting a degree can expect a return of 13 percent a year on her investment in tertiary education, while a female aged 40 when starting a degree gets a return of 7.5 percent. (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 30)

The use of the OECD attendance averages by age group provided the government with a well-regarded international yardstick to justify the re-direction of financial spend in New Zealand. For example, when the National-led government of the time addressed the tertiary sector in the 2011 budget, they positioned the student loan scheme as an ever expanding debt burden that needed to be immediately addressed. They did so by restricting the criteria for loan eligibility, and excluding part-time students (of whom most are mature students) and those over 55 from allowances and/or course-related costs (The Treasury, 2011). Similarly, leading up to the 2013 Budget where there was a further reduction of student allowances for those aged 40-65, there were three ministry research documents released under the Official Information Act that show the intent to shift the monetary priority away from mature students in general (Ministry of Education, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). From the perspective of the government, there was a limited

amount of funds they were prepared to invest in the tertiary sector, and they decided that mature students were not the ones to benefit from this spend. Therefore, for some mature aged people considering enrolment and hoping for financial assistance, they would be required to finance their own way through university which would be a disincentive to proceed.

In 2003, the SWR Act established the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) which oversaw the implementation of voluntary registration of social workers throughout New Zealand. The SWRB brought a level of accountability to the profession and protection for vulnerable clients. The Act had been influenced by submissions from many social work organisations including the ANZASW, with the intent of registration being mandatory for all social workers. However, mandatory registration was deemed too costly and impractical and, while the act progressed through parliament to become legislation, the mandatory requirement was dropped (New Zealand Parliament, 2003).

However, some organisations in the social work profession, especially the government's Child Youth and Family agency, decided to state a clear preference to employ registered social workers (Ministry of Social Development, 2015). Consequently, those employed with no qualification or an unrecognised qualification were encouraged to remedy this by enrolling in a recognised programme. At the University of Otago, this accounted for the high number of mature employed social workers coming through the programme between 2002 and 2006 as seen in Figure 2 - % of Enrolments in Social Work Programme that are Mature (25 or over). However, once this initial wave passed through the programme, mature student numbers gradually started to drop.

To date, in the briefing for the incoming Minister for Social Development prepared by the chairman of the Social Workers Registration Board, there is still a call for mandatory registration to take place which will allow the objectives of the act to be fully realised (Social Workers Registration Board, 2014a). As a consequence, although in 2014 there are approximately 12,000 social workers employed in New Zealand (Careers New Zealand, 2015), only about 5,000 of them appear in the Social Workers Registration Board List of Registered Social Workers (Social Workers Registration Board, 2015b). If mandatory registration does become part of the SWR Act, then it is likely that the social work programme will witness another wave of high mature student enrolments.

When considering the impact of these budget decisions on the University of Otago, the student admission policy shapes up as an impediment to mature student enrolment. Today, if a mature student with no university entrance qualification wishes to enrol at University they are required

to pay a non-refundable administration fee, submit a brief curriculum vitae, write an essay of 500-600 words, and be subject to the competitive entry pathway (University of Otago, 2014c). While this criteria is not insurmountable, for a mature aged person who has never been to university and lacks confidence in themselves to enrol, the competitive entry pathway could be a bridge too far when considering enrolment.

## 5.6 Staff Response

While my discussion has been about the field of power, the staff of the social work programme at the University of Otago act to protect the capital necessary for student success. All staff surveyed identified themselves as registered social workers and as being active in the social work industry outside the university in some shape or form. Therefore, they are positioned as representatives of the social work industry within the university and can act, within boundaries, to protect the interests of the programme.

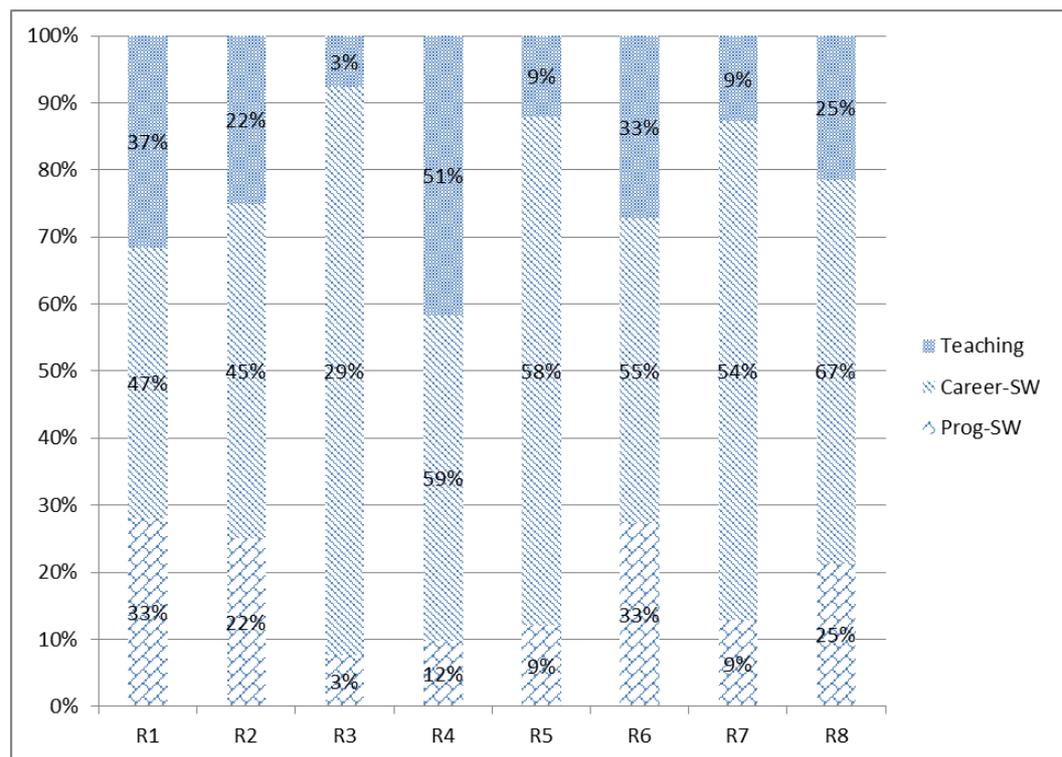


Figure 3 - Staff Habitus Comparison – As a Teacher, As a Social Worker, as a Member of the Social Work Programme at the University of Otago

I derived Figure 3 (Staff Habitus Comparison – As a Teacher, As a Social Worker, as a Member of the Social Work Programme at the University of Otago) on the comparison of staff habitus from the online survey that staff completed in 2014. I use the premise that the longer the duration of membership in a social field, the more expert a person is in that field. I have

compared the percentage of time, based on age, that each staff member has been a member of the teaching field, the social work profession field and the social work programme field. The result is that all staff who responded to the online survey have spent more time in the field of the social work profession than as a teacher or as a member of the social work programme. This further emphasises that the staff are very much qualified to be representatives of the social work profession, and therefore be in a position to protect its integrity.

In addition, my analysis of the transcripts from the staff focus group that took place in November 2014 demonstrated how staff go about this process of protecting the programme from the field of power. There are three examples of this process in action which I categorised as follows: 1) taking mitigating action from the impacts of changing government and/or university policy, 2) putting the needs of future clients first, and 3) applying the principles of social work to manage through field of power conflicts. I discuss each example in the following paragraphs.

In relation to a mitigating strategy, a recent development in the delivery of the social work programme has been the reduction of core social work papers in the first and second years of the programme, and the subsequent increase in papers taught by non-social work staff. There is acknowledgement by the programme staff that such a change in policy impacts socialisation of first and second year students as social work students. One focus group attendee stated that:

We've discussed this strategy about socialising them [the students] into social work knowledge, social work practice, social work ideals and not just doing it theoretically in class but having some activities outside of class that give real outcomes for that socialisation, I think it has to be real and tangible. (Staff Participant A)

This is an example where there has been a change in who delivers some of the social work curriculum to the first and second year students. In the past, only the staff of the social work programme have delivered the core papers to students and this meant that they could build relationships that grew and reinforce privileged capital that would last into the third and fourth year. In this new model, where the staff have less contact with the students, the social work programme staff member above wants this process to continue as they consider it essential for developing their students. As such, there is discussion by the staff on how best to achieve this outcome in the new model.

From the perspective of putting the needs of future clients first, one staff member, in response to how they managed the multiple entities of the field of power stated "[m]y focus is on the community, my focus is on the vulnerable clients the students work with, and it's on the

students themselves” (Staff Participant B). Equally, another staff member described how they resolve potential issues with clashing accountabilities:

One of things that in all the time I’ve been in a teaching role has always been really clear to me which I say explicitly to the students that my ultimate accountability is the people they will work with, and that in social work our first line of accountability should always be the people we serve, and that sets up tensions but for me that’s critically important particularly from a tertiary environment where you do have those multiple masters and that if I am in a point of conflict that’s where I come back to. (Staff Participant C)

Here the staff member describes an environment where the field of power consists of a number of parties, each with their own priority that can create difficulties for which type of capital is privileged by the programme. This conundrum is addressed by a decision-making framework that puts the student and future students at the centre, and therefore privileging the capital that will keep them at the centre.

When applying the principles of social work to the impact of the multiple parties that comprise the field of power, another staff member described how one of the strengths of social work is being able to manage multiple accountabilities:

I know one of the strengths of social work is its ability to deal with conflict and to work collaboratively and co-operatively, so when you think about the multiple stakeholders... it’s about having that mindset that’s about how can we work together to create something really good and so that it’s not about ‘them and us’ because that just duplicates what is, using that knowledge that we have to work collaboratively to bring that change. (Staff Participant D)

This staff member positions the conflict of interest that the field of power can bring as an opportunity to apply the social work principle of collaboration. In this way, the collaborative response to the negative impacts of the field of power is a social event where staff reinforce to their students the need to have this particular type of privileged capital.

In summary, the staff as members of the field have taken on a role to manage the impact of the field of power on the success of the students which includes maintaining the accountability of the programme to the social work profession. The role that the staff have positioned themselves with the social work programme field is consistent with the work of Mills & Gale (2009) who describe teachers in an Australian school within a disadvantaged community as both mediators between the schooling system and the students, and advocates for the students. Also, Mills & Gale (2009) position the teacher as an essential catalyst in and custodian of the activation of the students’ transformative habitus towards an experience of success in the

education game. This view is also consistent with the work of Leach, Zepke & Butler (2014) who confirmed that New Zealand tertiary teachers position themselves in an active and essential role in student engagement (leading to retention and degree completion).

I also expected to find in the social work programme members who are considered the dominant and those considered to be the dominated. In the social work programme, the staff would be positioned as the dominant and the students as the dominated. In my reading of Bourdieu's (1993) work, while the dominant and dominated share a vested interest in the ongoing existence of the field, the dominant typically take on the role as protectors of their position of status. The dominated have a mostly unspoken acceptance of their position while being engaged in the accumulation of privileged capital that ensures their success – in this case, achieving the status of becoming a BSW Graduate. My conclusion is that this is a simplistic outcome of applying Bourdieu's conceptual tools.

A more nuanced reading of the positions of the staff and of the students is to acknowledge that the staff are fulfilling multiple and, at times, contradictory roles. Firstly, they are positioned as those who will grant the success of the students through teaching and grading. I see this as a traditional teacher/student dynamic (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), where the teacher is the expert and the student is the learner. However, the staff also take on a role of advocate for the student, working to ensure the success of the student as they navigate their way through the sometimes oppressive education system (Mills & Gale, 2009). The staff also fulfil the role of social worker role models by representing the profession to the students. This is a different but complementary position to the role that staff take to protect the programme itself from the impacts of the field of power.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

It is worth noting that the students in the social work programme are not being asked to own and become proficient in all of the privileged capital I have identified. I do this to allay academic critique of Bourdieu's logic of practice where some state that accumulation of privileged capital is a path to guaranteed outcomes (Callinicos, 2007). In other words, if the student simply accumulates all required skills, they will succeed, and this formula is repeatable for every student. From Bourdieu's own perspective, there are a multiplicity of outcomes possible when considering the interaction of one's unique collection of skills with the logic of the field that they are a member of (Bourdieu, 1990a). This is especially given as we are members of multiple fields, that the structuring nature of those fields on a member's habitus is

an ongoing process, and that the field of power in constant change, albeit over a long period of time.

In closing, the purpose of my field of power analysis has been to expose the power dynamics that act upon the field of study and to show how key field members respond. These dynamics form part of the logic of the field of study and provide a level of research understanding to frame subsequent discussion on the capital privileged and the interaction of the field's members. In the next chapter I will present an analysis of the social work programme and its key members – the staff and students.

## Chapter Six – Relational Structures

### 6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I explored the logic of the field of power that shapes the social work programme and uncovered ways in which organisations and programme staff respond to its influence. In the first half of this chapter I map out the relational structures in the field of the social work programme and identify the agents who occupy these positions. The relational structures of the social work programme that I explore in this chapter are:

- a place where tertiary education takes place between staff and students;
- a place where societal inequality is reproduced through the curriculum;
- a place where members make sense of their position through their habitus;
- a place that exists in a wider university context that is considered to be a young person's game.

In the second half of the chapter, I explore staff and student responses to these power-infused relational structures and the reproductive forces that underpin them. Specifically, I use a series of online survey responses to demonstrate how staff and students make sense of their membership of the social work programme, which in turn sets the scene for the next chapter.

### 6.2 The Social Work Programme is a Tertiary Education Process

The first relational structure that can be derived from the field of power is where people seek a recognised qualification in social work that is delivered by experienced practitioners in a university context. At the heart of this programme is an educational process that people enter into as enrolled students with the aim of becoming a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) graduate. This process involves the direct transmission of social work and tertiary knowledge to the enrolled students by the staff through lectures, tutorials and workshops. This process also occurs when third and fourth year students go on placement as part of the fieldwork component of the programme. The students then attempt to reproduce this learned knowledge in assignments and examinations that are set and graded by the staff. In this way, it is the staff who grant students their progress through the programme. (Grenfell, 2004; Swartz, 1977b; Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002).

In this relational structure, the students who are academically successful are rewarded by the tertiary field. Specifically, the third year BSW students who are best at reproducing learned knowledge, are rewarded with entry to the fourth year honours programme. The honours option is noted as being more research-intensive and has a requirement to produce a dissertation (University of Otago, 2015). In other words, students who do honours are considered an expert in both social work subject-matter and more significantly in the game of being a student at university. Further, in this structure there is no distinction made between mature and non-mature students. The education process, however, is not only about social work and tertiary knowledge transmission and reproduction.

### **6.3 The Social Work Programme Reproduces Societal Inequality**

The second relational structure is that education is a place where the reproduction of societal inequality occurs (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, 1990). The inequality arises from an education process where the dominant cultural values of society are embedded into the curriculum and are reinforced and/or reproduced in the habitus of the students. These values encompass gender, ethnic, racial and class narratives which sit in the social consciousness as uncontested truths (doxa) that disadvantage one group in society over another.

In this relational structure of the social work programme, the staff occupy the position of the dominant, and the students occupy the position of the dominated (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, 1990). The position of the staff is maintained by the logic of the field in a number of ways. Firstly, the programme is delivered in a tertiary setting according to pedagogical practices where staff are employed to transmit approved curriculum knowledge to the enrolled students. The distinction of employed compared to enrolled is one aspect of difference that is maintained by the field logic. Secondly, the staff have to fulfil certain prerequisites to become a staff member which includes having at least a masters qualification, being a registered social worker<sup>57</sup> (Social Workers Registration Board, 2013) and being research active at the university (University of Otago, 2014b). Thirdly, the dominated are kept in the dark as to the actual social logic embedded into the field (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). They may have a view of what they believe to be the game, but this view is incomplete. This state of misrecognition or illusion maintains their position of inequality. I address this state of misrecognition by bringing

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<sup>57</sup> As per Standard 5.3 of The Process for Recognition / Re-Recognition of Social Work Qualifications in New Zealand – Policy Statement: Staff teaching in core social work theory, skills and practice components of the programme and co-ordinating the placement of students at each recognised site are social workers with full registration and a current Annual Practising Certificates.

to the surface the rules of game for staff and students to use to maximise their successful participation.

## 6.4 The University is a Young Person's Game

A review of the enrolment profiles of students exposes the next relational structure where going to the University of Otago is a young person's game. This is because the social work programme exists within a tertiary context at the University of Otago where the overwhelming majority of students are non-mature (Education Counts, 2015). In Figure 4 (Percentage of Non-Mature Tertiary Enrolments in 2014 per Provider Type), the University of Otago is well above the percentage of non-mature enrolments for universities in New Zealand, and for tertiary providers in general. In comparison, Massey University, due to their strong distance student model, only have 44.08% of their student enrolments as non-mature. Similarly, institutions classified as Wananga and Polytechnics also had mature student majorities.

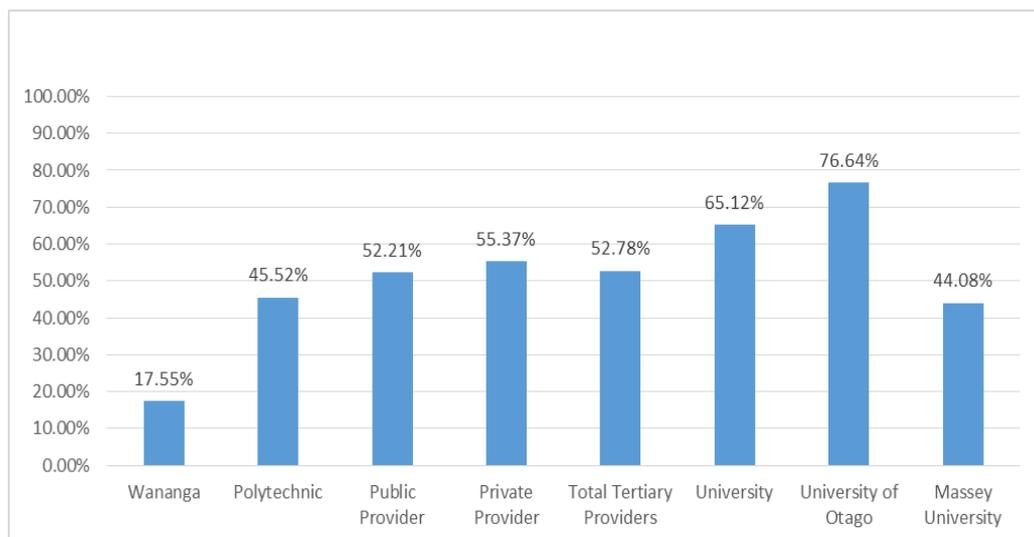


Figure 4 – Percentage of Non-Mature Tertiary Enrolments in 2014 per Provider Type

In other words, mature students undertaking tertiary study are in the minority because of their age. Existing research shows that they experience a sense of disjointed membership and they are less likely to fit in with non-mature students (Chung et al., 2014; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007). It follows, therefore, that the young person's game privileges members with youth-related capital where those under 25 are considered the dominant student cohort at university.

This particular relational structure is based on interactions between the students, where non-mature students take a dominant position in the university field, and the mature students assume the position of the dominated. One of the roles of being dominant is that the non-mature

students take the position where they dictate and reinforce the capital that is privileged. This means that the mature students have no say over what capital is important and what is not. This is termed student-sanctioned capital and is related to students' sense of fitting in (Emirbayer & Williams, 2005).

This means that in the youth oriented social environment in which mature students in the social work programme find themselves, there is capital for fitting in defined by the non-mature students. The holders of this type of capital will assume positions of high status and these holders are most likely to be non-mature students. I explore this capital later in the chapter and discuss the responses of students to the online survey questions about fitting in.

## **6.5 Sense of One's Place and the Place of Others**

I now turn my analysis to the relational structure where mature and non-mature students are distinct according to how staff and students experience and, in-turn describe each other. This is recognition that, in a social field the members have a sense of their place in the field and a sense of other people's place in the field based on how they view the field through their habitus (Bourdieu, 1979, 1990a). This sense of place can lead members to self-regulate their position in a field as the logic becomes embodied within the individual as a series fixed truths as Bourdieu states:

Thus . . . the social order is progressively inscribed in people's minds. Social divisions become principles of division, organizing the image of the social world. Objective limits become a sense of limits, a practical anticipation of objective limits acquired by experience of objective limits, a 'sense of one's place' which leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, places and so forth from which one is excluded. (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 471)

The challenge in this research project has been to explore these truths and lay the foundation for a future research based intervention that re-writes these truths in order to improve the success of mature students. Therefore, I first asked how the staff teach mature students compared to non-mature students, and then I queried how staff describe the value and challenges of mature and non-mature students. I combined the answers to create profiles of mature and non-mature students from the perspective of the staff. While I see these profiles being of value to my research to explore the social logic of the field, I acknowledge them as indicative only, and accept that students are infinitely more complex and unique (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007).

### 6.5.1 Staff Profile of a Non-Mature Student

The non-mature students are viewed by staff as a member of the field who possesses capital that results in them bringing a youthful freshness of perspective and energy to the programme:

Enthusiasm of youth, wonder, passion, hope, openness to learning. (Staff Participant E)

Some non-mature students bring a freshness, enthusiasm and openness to new learning. May be more receptive to material as they have not yet developed fixed positions in relation to issues. (Staff Participant F)

While non-mature students are seen to be lacking in life experience capital, they have the disposition to be open to new ideas which can be utilised by staff as a mirror to the more fixed beliefs that mature students possess. They also are viewed as having first-hand knowledge of issues relevant to their age group which qualifies them as being able to advocate for people of their age.

My findings align with existing research where non-mature students are viewed as being only students, with no other roles in their life that compete for their time (Home, 1997). At university, they are visible and valued (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007), yet like their mature counterparts, they still face issues with settling into the tertiary environment (Kahu, 2014). They will put effort into building a new social life at university, however, they will exclude their mature student peers (Mallman & Lee, 2014). Finally, for those non-mature students seeking a social work qualification, it is most unlikely that they will have experiences similar to their clients (Lister, 2000).

### 6.5.2 Staff Profile of a Mature Student

The staff view mature students as members of the field with an abundance of life experience:

Compared with non-mature students, I expect that there will be an even greater range of experiences, attitudes, values that they have acquired over life. (Staff Participant A)

However, the staff also identify other types of capital that co-exist with that of life experience, but can inhibit the learning process. These consist of a fixed outlook on life mixed with unresolved issues and potentially complicated with health related problems:

More likely to have to juggle responsibilities of family, both older and younger. Health issues Marriage breakdowns Language and written skills.  
(Staff Participant B)

In addition, mature students are likely to be responsible members of a larger number of fields such as full-time worker and parent in comparison to that of a non-mature student. This causes mature students to develop skills such as being able to juggle multiple responsibilities. Finally, staff in the online survey identify some mature students as having poor academic capital:

Sometimes have had poor educational experiences which may make it harder to get back into good routines of study. (Staff Participant C)

These findings are consistent with existing research, where mature students fulfil multiple roles in their lives that increase their stress levels (Ash, 1999; Home, 1997). They are invisible, devalued and stigmatised at university (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Mallman & Lee, 2014). They will struggle to find their place at university (Kahu, 2014), but even though they yearn to belong, they will focus on getting their qualification rather than building a new social life (Mallman & Lee, 2014). For those mature students doing social work, it is more likely that they share similar experiences to the clients they met when doing fieldwork (Lister, 2000).

Existing research constructs mature students in a number of ways. In New Zealand, they are likely to identify with a Pākehā / European ethnicity and study part-time for a Bachelor of Arts degree (Davey, 2001; Morrison, 1981, 1995a). Mature students are defined as facing a raft of challenges that make their life at university quite difficult. They can be alienated and disregarded by their family as they become increasingly structured by their new life at university (Mercer & Saunders, 2004). They can face issues with finances, their health, and have a limited amount of existing higher education skills (Ash, 1999; Barratt, 2001; Davey 2001; McDonald & Eagle, 2000; Richardson, 1995). Equally, some mature students do arrive at university with prior higher education skills because they attended pre-university courses or simply that they come from families where their parents or siblings have tertiary education experience (Baxter & Britton, 2001; Davey, 2001; Morrison 1981, 1995a). There is agreement that mature students are time poor, which impacts their study habits and the effectiveness of the transfer of learning (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Kahu, 2014; Lister, 2000; McDonald & Eagle, 2000). Moreover, McDonald & Eagle (2007) identified that in spite of all the challenges mature students face, they can be reluctant to admit that these are taking place.

It would easy to suggest that in light of all the issues that mature students face their performance at university would be comprised. However, there is evidence that their performance and completion at university is as good as, and sometimes better than their non-

mature peers (Desmarchelier, 1999; Morrison, 1981, 1995a; Richardson, 1995). However, the measurement of attainment and degree completion rates is outside the scope of my research, so I cannot provide any corroborating findings.

### 6.5.3 Profiles of Mature and Non-Mature Students

The students produced similar profiles when I asked them to describe the value of their mature and non-mature peers. Specifically, mature students are described as having a range of work, life and social work experience. They bring a different perspective of life compared to non-mature students, are described as having a greater level of confidence than non-mature students and have good communication skills in general:

They [mature students] have greater life experience and have a wider view of the world/life. (Mature Student Participant A)

The value of having mature students is they often have a lot of life experience and sometimes even experience working in the practice fields. They also often have different views or values which challenge that of your own and it helps you to see a different side of things. (Non-Mature Student Participant B)

The non-mature students are described as bringing a fresh approach to the programme, along with a youthful enthusiasm and openness to ideas. Finally, non-mature students are described as having a different perspective on life compared to mature students:

There is a great enthusiasm [about non-mature students], energy, freshness - open-ness in perspective which invigorates discussions for all. (Mature Student Participant C)

It is valuable having motivated and fresh, open minds. Non-mature students are often also interested in engaging in discussion about challenging topics. Bring a different level of life experience to the table having being brought up in different generations to mature students. (Non-Mature Student Participant D)

In summary, mature students sense their place in the social work programme as holders of more life experience than their non-mature peers, and non-mature students concur. Moreover, non-mature students see themselves as being fresh and open and having new ideas, and the mature students agree. What is of significance, however, is that I framed these positioning questions to get the respondents to consider the value of each type of student, and not to focus on identifying the challenges of each i.e.

What do you think is the value of having mature students (aged 25 or older) in class?

What do you think is the value of having non-mature students (aged under 25) in class?

I made this decision in order to solicit positive views from my respondents to prevent my online survey from reinforcing any negative views students may have had of each other. Therefore, even though I sought to minimise harm to my respondents, I set aside the opportunity to determine if students thought that there were any downsides to the life experience that mature students and the freshness that non-mature students have.

I therefore asked a series of questions to see how closely non-mature and mature students in the programme relate to each other. I also asked students in the programme to place themselves on a scale of fitting in with their classmates.

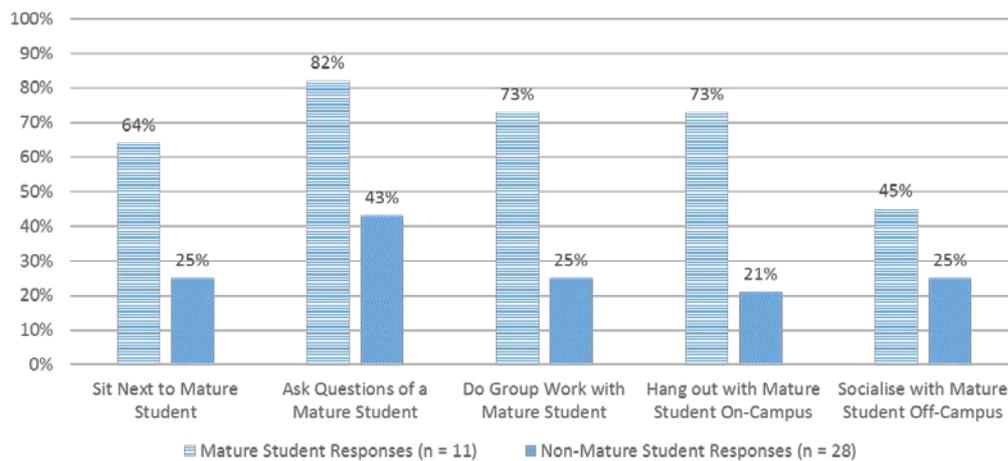
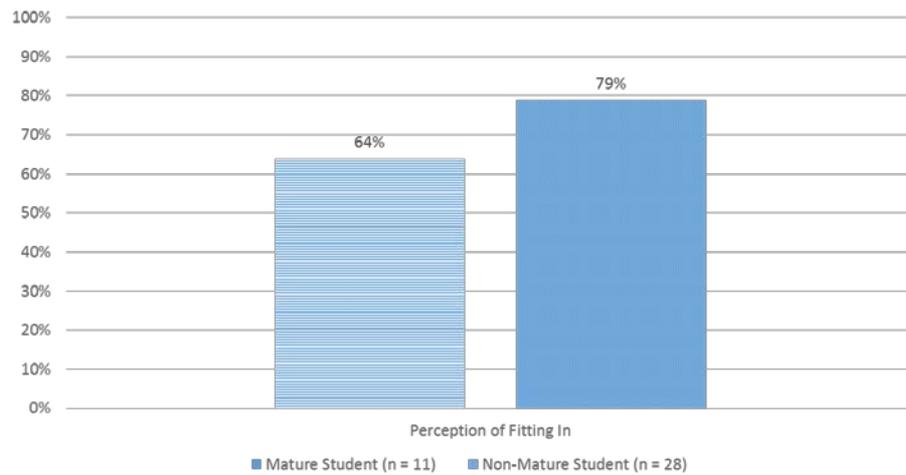


Figure 5 - Interactions between Mature and Non-Mature Students

In Figure 5 (Interactions between Mature and Non-Mature Students), mature students are more likely to choose interactions with other mature students. Conversely, the non-mature student is considerably less likely to initiate interactions with mature students. While there is room in the results for exceptions, this suggests that in the social work programme, mature and non-mature students are separate types of student members and they relate best to those of their own age group.



*Figure 6 - Perception of Fitting into the Social Work Programme*

When I asked the students to rate their perception of how they fit in with their classmates, most mature and non-mature students acknowledged that they either fit in or mostly fit in. I showed this in Figure 6 (Perception of Fitting into the Social Work Programme). These results suggest that the environment of the social work programme facilitates students fitting in. However, the mature student result was less than the non-mature student result. So, while mature students rate their sense of fitting-in lower than that of a non-mature student (which is linked to the non-mature student-sanctioned capital) they seem to be more focussed on the game that is linked to the staff-sanctioned capital – securing a Bachelor of Social Work undergraduate degree.

## **6.6 The Social Work Programme has to be a Game Worth Playing**

My response to these various relational structures of inequality and power is that there are two aspects at play in the field logic that defines the position of the staff and students and their perception of their positions. The first is to do with the illusionary nature of the field that keeps the reality of the game from the students and, in-turn maintains their oppressed position (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). For the students, the game has to be worth playing and the illusion that it is worth investing in is what ensures the ongoing existence of the field. While I have stated that the staff hold a position of dominance over the students, I do not consider the staff as the owners of the field nor holding a position of ultimate dominance in the field. My analysis of the field of power shows that the staff are themselves dealing with processes of inequality acting upon them by the field of power. It follows therefore, that even in light of the forces acting upon the staff, they also view the social work programme as a social game worth playing.

This leads to the second aspect, which runs counter to the illusion of investment. This is where social work, by its very nature, is about acknowledging and working through structures of oppression that impact their clients (Ife, 1999; van Heugten, 2005). This means that staff experienced in social work hold capital that cuts through the illusion and delivers to themselves and their students the truth of how the social work programme operates as a field.

However, this may not be as useful as it sounds. Bourdieu (1993) considered if a society, where the underlying logic of social interactions was fully exposed, would bring unhappiness to its agents: “I too sometimes wonder if the completely transparent and disenchanting social universe that would be produced by a social science that was fully developed (and widely diffused, if that could ever be the case) would not be impossible to live in” (p. 17). He concludes (1993) nonetheless that the degree of unhappiness could be minimised by a growth in knowledge: “I think, all the same, that social relations would be much less unhappy if people at least understood the mechanisms that lead them to contribute to their own deprivation” (p. 17). Here Bourdieu grapples with the value of the illusion of social practice in that knowing too much about how the forces of power operate could result in complete despair over one’s place in society.

In a precursor to the completion of his book, *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (Bourdieu, 1999), Bourdieu tells Eagleton (1991) that the subjects interviewed were very accepting of their place in society, even if it was to their detriment: “[T]he fact is that when we see with our own eyes people living in poor conditions . . . it is clear that they are prepared to accept much more than we would have believed. That was a very strong experience for me: they put up with a great deal” (Eagleton, 1991, p. 114). Bourdieu talks of doxa, the unconscious underlying rules of social interactions written into the lives of agents: “[D]oxa . . . there are many things people accept without knowing” (Eagleton, 1991, p. 114). Therefore, I wanted to understand if the perception of staff by students and the staff themselves gave any insight into the underlying power dynamics.

### 6.6.1 Positive Perceptions of Staff – By Staff and Students

While the field logic positions the staff as agents who reproduce social inequality in their students, this is not how the staff view themselves according to their responses to the online survey. In the online survey I asked the staff to describe any ways in which they worked differently with mature students compared to non-mature students. I analysed their responses and identified the use of verbs such as encourage, build, utilise, support, acknowledge, identify,

name, never assume, draw out, expect, tailor, converse and work. For example, here are a selection of staff responses where I have highlighted the active verbs:

I **tailor** my teaching to the individual needs of the student. (Staff Participant F)

I assume they have had live experiences that are relevant to social work, and **draw** on that. (Staff Participant A)

Sometimes it's about **identifying** what they know and naming it theoretically. (Staff Participant E)

I **build** on this and **utilise** their knowledge and experience in how I teach and work alongside them while they are on placement. (Staff Participant B)

The responses of the staff reveal that they position themselves in the field as active agents who have a significant positive influence on the fate of the students.

The students do not view the staff in a negative light either. In the online survey, I asked the students to rate the quality of their learning relationship with the staff. I gave the students a scale with options that included poor, adequate, good and excellent. As shown in Figure 7 (Student Perception of their Relationship with Staff) an overwhelming majority of students rated their relationship with staff as at least good or excellent regardless of the student age.

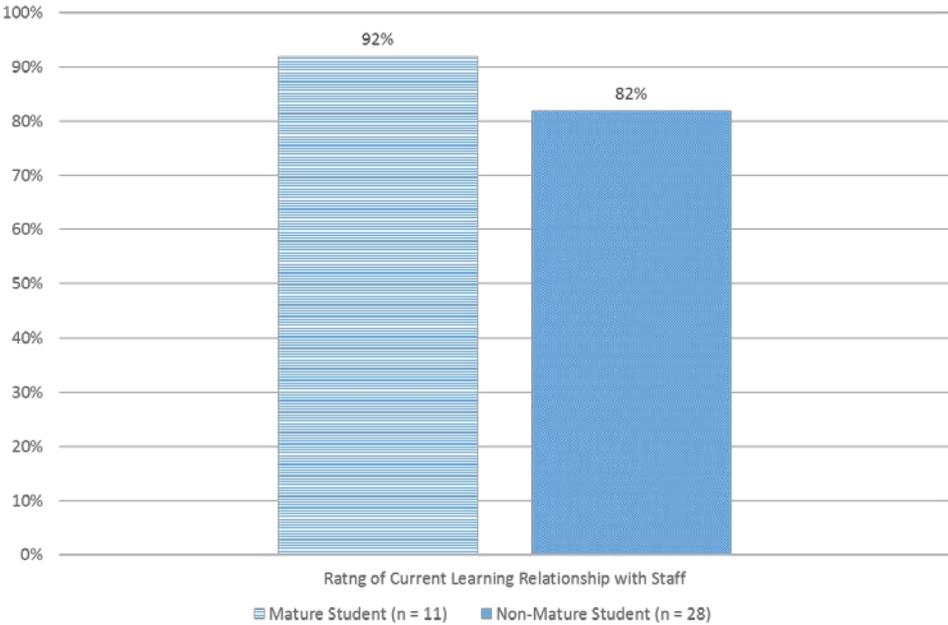


Figure 7- Student Perception of their Relationship with Staff

## 6.6.2 Students See Investment in the Game Worthwhile

When considering the illusory nature of the field, I asked the students to rate their journey as a social worker in the making and as a student in general. In this way I could gauge if the students deemed their investment in the social work programme worthwhile or not.

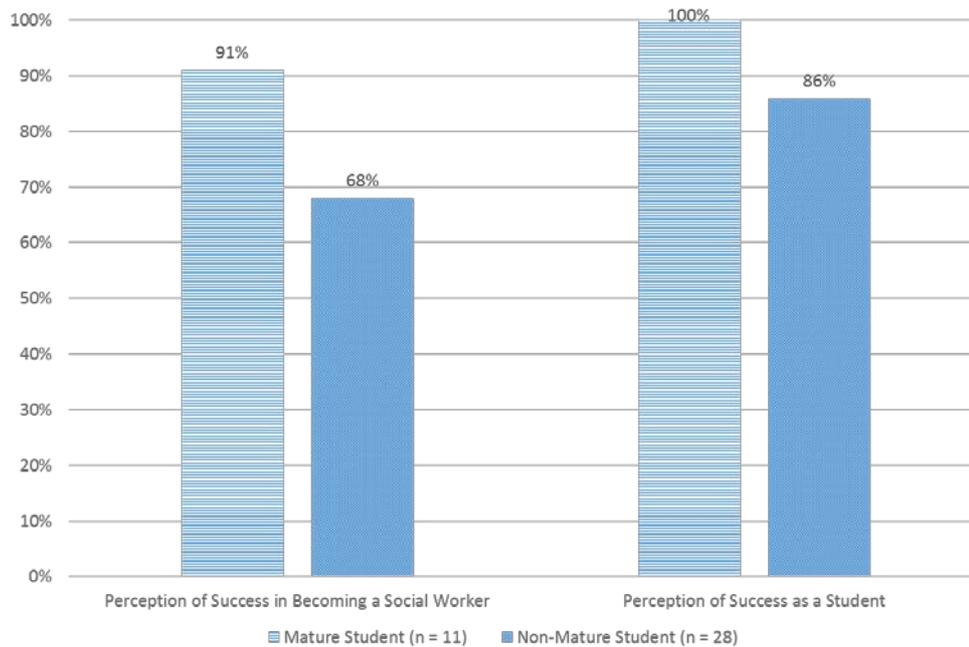


Figure 8 - Student Perception of their Journey

In Figure 8 (Student Perception of their Journey), both mature and non-mature students rate their journeys as quite or somewhat successful. However, mature students rated themselves more successful than their non-mature peers, and the journey to be a student is rated more successful than the social work journey by both groups. This confirms that the students view their investment in the social work programme as worthwhile. This is evidenced further in a range of responses to my online survey question on why social work was chosen as their major i.e. to help people:

Wanting to help people out of poverty. (Student Participant A)

Wanting to help people in need. (Student Participant C)

I am interested in people and seek to make positive change in people's lives. (Student Participant S)

I want to make positive changes for all in society - social justice. (Student Participant X)

## 6.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, staff and students are subject to the dominating reproductive forces of the field and the field of power, yet they maintain their investment in the field nonetheless. For the staff, their aim is to produce quality social work graduates who will genuinely help the people they will work with. For the students, their investment in the programme arises from a passionate desire to help people.

Moreover, the reproductive force of the field shapes and structures the habitus of the students who enter into the social work programme. It is almost as if the field is an entity that evaluates the students' habitus when they first become members of the field. This is an evaluation of the degree of alignment between the capital that the field privileges and the students' habitus. The closer the alignment, the more likely students will fit in and excel because they have what comes across as an instinctual feel for the game. For those students that experience less of an alignment, their response is likely to be a mixture of struggle and success. However, the initial evaluation carried out by the field is only the beginning because as long as students are members of the field, there is a dual process of ongoing evaluation of field alignment and the shaping of the students' habitus by the field through knowledge and values transmission.

In the next chapter I explore the habitus of staff and students and how this relates to the knowledges they consider important for being successful in the social work programme.

## Chapter Seven – Knowledges for Success

### **7.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, my analysis focuses on the capital necessary for the success of mature students (and all students in general) in the social work programme as identified, described and ranked by the staff and students themselves. I then explore the variation of knowledge identification within similar cohorts by acknowledging that students see and make sense of their world through their individual habitus. Finally, I look at what the students state is needed to ensure their success by using their suggestions for a student survival guide.

### **7.2 The Knowledges that Staff and Students Identified for Success**

In this section, I show that there are two sets of sanctioned knowledges. The first is staff-sanctioned capital which is privileged by the staff in the tertiary education relational structure. The second type is student-sanctioned capital defined as privileged by non-mature students who dominate the social environment at the University of Otago. When these are combined, in Table 2 (List of Knowledges that Staff and Student Identified for Success in the Social Work Programme), they represent the knowledges required by students of any age to be successful in the social work programme.

Table 2 - List of Knowledges that Staff and Student Identified for Success in the Social Work Programme

| <b>Staff-Sanctioned Capital <sup>58</sup>for Success in Tertiary Education</b>  | <b>Student-Sanctioned Capital <sup>59</sup>for Fitting In at University</b>   |
|---|---|
| Critical thinking<br>Self-reflection<br>Communication skills<br>Open to new ideas<br>Active learning<br>Utilisation of staff<br>Collaboration<br>Deal with personal challenges<br>People skills<br>Passion<br>Social work skills<br>Professionalism | Being friendly<br>Talk to others<br>Be yourself<br>Be confident and inclusive<br>Show respect to others<br>Make an effort with others<br>Have a sense of humour<br>Have similar interests<br>Be able to develop purposeful relationships<br>Have similar values |

### 7.3 The Profile of a Knowledgeable and Resourceful Student

The students who possess these staff and student-sanctioned knowledges combine people skills with a collaborative approach to be able to work well with others to achieve shared results. They bring a level of self-motivation and professionalism that enables them to take responsibility for their actions. Also, these students have an openness to new ideas, and have an ability to apply critical thought to these ideas such that they are able to understand the strengths and weaknesses in their application. They are able to grow and develop skills and resources that can be used in a range of situations, especially those that are personally challenging. These students are able to regularly take stock of the world around them, of themselves and their actions. They are then able to utilise the outcomes of these reflections to inform and guide their subsequent actions. Finally, they are adept at fitting in with those around them by employing a range of social skills that are based on respect for others. It is these types of students who will be successful in the social work programme.

The sanctioned knowledges identified in my research, and those that comprise the New Zealand led research model on student engagement (Leach & Zepke 2011; Zepke & Leach, 2010) are well aligned. Therefore, there is value in combining both sets of knowledges in a future student

<sup>58</sup> I used the following survey question to identify staff-sanctioned capital: *What are the skills important to being a successful student?*

<sup>59</sup> I used the following student survey question to identify student-sanctioned capital: *What do you see as important to do to fit in with your classmates?*

survival guide. However, what does differ is the type of agent that the two sets of knowledges presuppose. The student engagement agent responds best when they have an internal motivation to learn. They require an environment that allows them to fulfil their potential as a learner and as an active citizen in the wider world that they are a part of. They are an agent that enters into positive social interactions with their teachers and with their peers. In these interactions they are encouraged, supported and challenged to succeed. Finally, they are an agent who requires support from the wider tertiary institution and from their family and friends outside of the university.

In contrast, from my research theoretical perspective, students are social agents who achieve success when the knowledges they possess match with the knowledges privileged by the field of which they are a member of. The knowledges they bring are a result of structuring by their membership in other fields both past and present, including their upbringing. This acquisition of new knowledges comes about through membership in the current field, and through specific educational interventions. This particular type of agent engages in interactions with those around them that result in building up social capital that the students can then convert into success. This conversion is in accordance with the social logic of the field of which they are also members of. In the context of Bourdieu's logic of practice, success is the achievement of a position of status in the field through the successful application and conversion of privileged capital. In the social work programme, this position of status is the attainment of the BSW qualification and eventual employment in the social work industry.

## **7.4 The Student in a Challenging Environment**

There are two intertwining themes that arise from these profiles: The first is of resourceful students, who come with an existing collection of interrelated knowledges and have an expectation of adding more skills to their collection. The second theme is that the social work programme, and the education journey in general, can be very challenging and being a part of it will test students' utilisation of their resources.

While there can be no doubt that the learning journey can be hard for students, the key is to be able to deal with challenges as they arise, especially personal ones. For example, in the staff focus group, the exacting nature of the social work programme was viewed as a place where those issues thought to be previously resolved need to be re-addressed:

Whereas personal challenges that mature students bring are sometimes deeply entrenched, trauma histories for example . . . and even if they have resolved it, coming into our programme often means it comes to the surface again and they have to be able to be strong enough to have good coping strategies. (Staff Participant C)

Saliently, the importance of being able to deal with the impact of the programme on existing relationships was emphasised as one staff member in the focus group recounted what a former head of department would tell the new intakes, “when they came into the programme where we all sat down and we had this meeting and he said ‘there are marriages that are going to breakup during the course of your study’ and essentially this is what happened” (Staff Participant D). These challenges are echoed in Harker’s (2005) research of New Zealand mature students, and Baxter & Britton’s (2001) research of mature students in the UK who were both found to experience opposition to their study from their spouses, which in some cases lead to broken relationships.

This discussion on students in a challenging environment also emphasises that some skills are dependent upon one another, where for example, self-reflection and being able to deal with these personal challenges were considered by this staff member as being inextricably linked: “How can you talk about self-reflection and not deal with personal challenges? You can’t.” (Staff Participant F).

Another example is where good utilisation of staff by the students can alleviate some of the difficulties faced. It was felt by the staff that mature students are better at it than non-mature students (Staff Participant A). But significantly, staff believed that they had a responsibility to earn and develop relationships of trust so that students could better utilise them (Staff Participant F).

## **7.5 Some Knowledges are Required Prior to Enrolment**

Both staff and students agree that some knowledges need to be present prior to the programme, while others are developed during the programme. People skills were considered by the staff to be essential for students to come into the programme with, i.e. “I think they have to come with the people skills” (Staff Participant D). This idea of prerequisite knowledges is supported by this student response, where certain knowledges are viewed as being an outcome of life experience prior to the programme, while others are seen as being acquired during the course of the programme:

Social work skills, passion, personal challenges, communication, attitude, people skills – these are life knowledge accumulated through life. Critical Thinking, Self-Reflection, Open to New ideas, Collaboration . . . put this under Uni knowledge as things learnt along the way (while at Uni). (Student Participant R)

In this response, staff highlight passion as a knowledge that could be picked up during the programme, i.e. “[t]hey [young students] can acquire that [passion for social work] on the way through... some get it at fieldwork.” (Staff Participant J)

This is further emphasised in this student response on critical thinking:

Need to come in as a critical thinker – I just don’t know how you would go if you didn’t have that ability – you don’t learn by rote, you learn by engaging. Top 5 [self-reflection, passion for social work, critical thinking, open to new ideas, confident & inclusive attitude] are the ones you probably need to come into the programme with. (Student Participant K)

This was also further stated by staff:

Some of these, in a sense, you can’t teach, it’s like [if] they haven’t got basic things... then there is a limit to how much they are going to get out of their education, so for me some of that top layer [self-reflection, deal with personal challenges, people skills, critical thinking, openness, collaboration] is the critical determinant of whether they can take advantage of rest of what education has to offer. (Staff Participant C)

These observations brings together two views where the first is that some knowledges are not taught in the programme and the second being that the absence of some knowledges can limit the education experience – both of which go the heart of how the staff understand how their students learn, and how students themselves make sense of their own learning experiences.

## **7.6 The Missing Knowledge – The Ability to Learn**

So it is that both staff and students identify that some knowledges are required as a prerequisite to entry into the programme, others are learnt within the programme, and all knowledges are related to each other. As such, I conclude that the ability to monitor one’s learning is the knowledge that is fundamental to all knowledges identified by staff and students. From the perspective of Seifert and Sutton (2008) learning is positioned as a change in thinking. This can be through knowledge construction from individual experiences, which is a theory attributed to the work of Jean Piaget (Piaget, 2001). Alternatively, a change in thinking can

occur through the assistance of more knowledgeable others, which is a theory attributed to, among others, Vygotsky (1978).

The work of Piaget constructs a cognitive learner as one who makes sense of their world through a collection of pre-existing concepts or mental representations (Piaget, 2001; Seifert & Sutton, 2008). These schemas allow the learner to interpret and assimilate new knowledge such that the concepts become modified to accommodate this new knowledge. A form of cognitive equilibrium in the learner occurs when they can rely on their existing schema while being open to new information which will in turn modify the schema. For students in the social work programme, and specifically mature ones, an awareness of their schemata and cognitive equilibrium can help them to assess their own readiness for learning. If, for example, students are closed to new ideas and have limited knowledge of the ways they make sense of the world, they will find their experience in the social work programme considerably more difficult, especially since openness to new ideas, critical thinking and self-reflection all rely on cognitive equilibrium.

This, of course, suggests that students would be better placed to succeed if staff assist them in assessing and equipping themselves so that they are ready to learn. The role of staff in the learning journey of students is what Vygotsky (1998) emphasises in his theory on learning (see also Seifert & Sutton, 2008). Specifically, in their role as expert coach, staff work to deliver a curriculum where the students are gradually exposed to new experiences that match the current competency level of the student. This transfer of knowledge in steps, known as scaffolding, is based on bringing students to an eventual place where they can hold and apply the knowledge themselves, without relying on the assistance of staff. This involves staff being active monitors of the level of competency of a student, so that they can scaffold the knowledge appropriately to maximise learning. Moreover, as part of this type of learning there is the aim to encourage the students to develop their own ability to monitor their learning, which is termed as metacognition (Seifert & Sutton, 2008). It follows that metacognition is a knowledge that students should bring to the social work programme, because without it their learning experience will be compromised.

## **7.7 Mis-Matched Expectations on Learning can Jeopardise Success**

Therefore, what becomes of those students who discover they are lacking in sufficient learning capital as described above? Furthermore, how do staff work with those students? Students who become members of the social work programme field do so in accordance with their existing decision making framework which forms part of their habitus. In this way, they have

engaged in an assessment of their hopes, goals and competency levels where they have concluded that the programme is worth investing in. The decision to invest in the field as a member involves an acknowledgement that they can achieve success by gaining a Bachelor of Social Work undergraduate qualification. This self-selection and expectation of success suggests that these students believe that they already possess the capital of being ready to learn, and of being able to monitor their own learning. I also suggest that, based on staff feedback, they too hold an expectation that their students have sufficient stocks of this learning capital when they enter the programme.

Following Bourdieu (1990a) these beliefs of the possession of adequate learning capital comprise unspoken yet acknowledged agreements between staff and students, embodied into the logic of the field. The issue arises when one or both parties do not fulfil their side of the agreement, where students are lacking in learning capital, or staff make decisions that do not factor in an assessment of the current level of student learning capital. This mismatch between the expectations of members and the logic of the programme can compromise student success. Therefore, it is essential that these unspoken agreements are brought to the surface of awareness for all involved to maximise student success.

## **7.8 Some Knowledges are More Important than Others**

Next, I focus on the findings from the staff and student follow-up events where I asked attendees to rank the knowledges in order of importance. This is based on the premise that when students hold the same view of high ranking knowledges as staff, then student success will be maximised. In Table 3 (Summary of Ranked Staff-Sanctioned Knowledges) that follows, I summarise the ranking of the staff-sanctioned capital by staff, mature and non-mature students. This is where all respondents ranked critical thinking, self-reflection and communications skills as the most important. While all ranked active learning and utilisation of staff as the least important.

This means that for those students who already possess, or put focus on building up adequate levels of critical thinking, self-reflection and communications skills, their journey through the programme should be easier than those lacking in these skills. In contrast, the results show that staff value collaboration more so than students do. This difference in importance can lead to a mis-understanding of learning outcomes between staff and students.

Table 3 - Summary of Ranked Staff-Sanctioned Knowledges

| <b>Knowledge</b>              | <b>Consolidated Ranking<sup>60</sup></b>   |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Critical thinking             | • Staff and students ranked as most important  |
| Self-reflection               | • Staff and students ranked as most important  |
| Communication skills          | • Staff and students ranked as most important  |
| Open to new ideas             | • Staff and students ranked as moderately important  |
| Active learning               | • Staff and students ranked as least important   |
| Utilisation of staff          | • Staff and students ranked as least important   |
| Collaboration                 | • Mature and non-mature ranked as least important<br>• Staff ranked as most important                        |
| Deal with personal challenges | • Staff and mature students ranked as most important<br>• Non-Mature students ranked as moderately important |
| People skills                 | • Staff and non-mature students ranked as most important<br>• Mature students ranked as moderately important |
| Passion                       | • Mature and non-mature students ranked as most important<br>• Staff ranked as moderately important          |
| Social work skills            | • Non-Mature ranked as moderately important<br>• Staff and mature students ranked as least important         |
| Professionalism               | • Not included in the ranking  |

## 7.9 Staff Found Ranking Knowledges Difficult

When the exercise to rank the knowledges needed for success as a mature student in the programme took place, both in the staff focus group and the staff interview, the feedback was that they were all important, for example “they [the knowledges] are all really important – you couldn’t have one without the other” (Staff Participant B), and “I think it is really hard to prioritise – they [the knowledges] are all important” (Staff Participant E). Another observation the attendees made was that the development of the skills was a work in progress related to where they were in the programme “All of this [ranking the knowledges] is really dependent on what stage of their studies they are at, because if you are talking about... 200 level, very different to 300 level when they are ready to go on placement” (Staff Participant E), and “I think they all go in a continuum” (Staff Participant D).

## 7.10 Students Based Their Ranking on the Frequency of Use

By contrast, in follow-up sessions with the students, there was specific mention of collaboration, utilising staff and self-reflection. For collaboration, two students justified ranking it less important than the staff ranking by stating that students “don’t necessarily have

<sup>60</sup> The rankings were determined by the participants of the staff focus group, and the student focus group where each group were asked to rank the knowledges identified in the surveys based on the importance to success as a student in the social work programme.

to do it to be successful” (Student Participant Z), and that is it “not a big focus of the degree” (Student Participant W).

For utilisation of staff, which was a knowledge that both staff and students ranked least important, the feedback from students saw it as a skill used infrequently, and even considered irrelevant: “communication is a constantly practised knowledge, while utilising staff is on a needs only basis” (Student Participant G), and “[I] didn’t see it [utilising staff] as important or relevant to going out and doing social work” (Student Participant C). They saw it as a skill that only became of value as students spent longer in the programme i.e. “I didn’t figure out [that utilising staff was important] until 200/300; really helpful once I worked it out” (Student Participant Q).

The knowledge of self-reflection was ranked in the top half of importance by staff and students. One student’s response acknowledges it as a building block that the other knowledges are built upon: “so much of it [self-reflection] is in social work, and it is a building block for other skills... [self-reflection] is the first one [knowledge] that needs to be learnt” (Student Participant V).

## **7.11 Success Comes When Staff and Students Agree on Importance**

The key message here is that when the dominated in a field identify the same important capital as the dominant, then the dominated will achieve a level of success in accordance with the logic of the field. Where there is a disagreement on important capital, this suggests one of two situations, where the first is the most likely where the dominated will struggle in the field. The second, but less likely situation, is where the dominated’s ranking of capital is of sufficient weight that it challenges the position of the dominant and therefore the logic of the field. In this case, any challenge will be met by resistance. With this in mind, the message to deliver to students is that while all knowledges identified are important, some are of more importance than others. The implication for the staff in the programme is to ensure that the curriculum aligns with the knowledge ranking they gave. Therefore, that once aligned, students can prioritise which knowledges they target for learning over others where gaps exist.

## **7.12 Fitting In is Important Too**

However, staff-sanctioned capital is only one part of picture – therefore, my discussion continues with a focus on student-sanctioned capital. Here, the non-mature students describe this type of capital as essential to making progress in the programme. In the following response, the small size of programme, compared to other degree programmes, is seen as making fitting in and working together even more important: “because it is such a small group, you need to be able to work with each other” (Student Participant M). Moreover, the relationships made in the programme are seen as useful resources: “relationships are important as you can utilise your peers to help you with your work” (Student Participant C).

In contrast, there were two mature students who questioned the need to have similar interests to fit in being classified as a knowledge, with one stating “it is interesting that having similar interests is considered a skill – it is a strange thing to say” (Student Participant F). This was further elaborated by the same student, who observed that mature students tend to focus more on academic side of the programme and less on trying to fit in i.e. “mature [students] focus on value for money paid to study” (Student Participant F). In other words, this suggests that staff-sanctioned capital takes precedence over student-sanctioned capital when trying to be successful in the social work programme, which is echoed in the findings of Mallman & Lee (2014).

## **7.13 Mature Students Strive to Be Themselves**

As shown in Table 4 (Summary of Ranked Student-Sanctioned Knowledges), there is agreement between mature and non-mature students on the importance of showing respect. However, when considering the differences between the two groups of students, what stands out most is the expression by mature students to rank being yourself as important. This alludes to a university environment that privileges non-mature students, and therefore rewards those mature students who best embody non-mature student attributes. This embodiment can run contrary to the secured identity of a mature student, and therefore in the midst of this powerful structuring force to fit in, it can lead mature students to resist and therefore value the maintenance of their own identity.

This point is emphasised in a mature student response who describes the difficulty in the early stages of the programme of fitting in with the non-mature students. This is where the knowledge of being yourself is important in reconciling when there are issues with fitting in:

Being a mature student, it was hard in the beginning with all the young kids... so I did gel with the other mature students, but I've always been myself, now that I'm older I'm okay with being myself, where as a young teenager I didn't know myself so well, it's okay to be me, you can't be friends with everybody. (Student Participant L)

Table 4 - Summary of Ranked Student-Sanctioned Knowledges

| Mature Students Ranking of Student-Sanctioned Capital | Non-Mature Student Ranking of Student-Sanctioned Capital |
|---|--|
| Be friendly<br>Show respect<br>Be yourself            | Show respect<br>Be inclusive<br>Make an effort           |

In conclusion, for students, knowing how to fit in, is something learnt from past experiences rather than being taught specifically by staff in the social work programme. They acknowledge that it can take time to fit in, but the small size of classes can help in doing so. However, even with time, feedback suggests that some student groups fit well, while others simply do not. While fitting in is more important to some than others, there are levels or degrees of fitting in. This is where one level of fitting in as peers who can work together can make success in the programme easier. While another level of fitting in can lead to the development of significant friendships. In essence, student-sanctioned capital represents the basic people skills which are essential for success as social worker in the field.

### 7.14 Not Every Student Identified the Same Knowledges

In this section, I examine the aspects of habitus that contribute to the variation of knowledges identified by individual. However, I first want to acknowledge that, in the midst of all these aspects, various combinations affect how students make sense of the knowledges for success so I chose age as my primary means of research distinction. In other words, I evidenced themes that support this distinction, but I also identified themes that spanned the age gap, and in some circumstances rendered the age gap irrelevant to success.

I therefore cross referenced the questions from the online survey to focus on understanding the likely origins of students' embodied practices. In this way, I could attempt a correlation between the knowledges for success they identified, and their previous socialisation experiences. For example, I suggest that if students have grown up in a family where their parents and siblings have gone to university, then these students may have accumulated the

practices that result in a successful university experience for themselves. This is based on the assumption that the family habitus is the primary habitus in a person's life (Lingard, Sellar & Baroutsis, 2015). The next most significant habitus would be as a result of education through pedagogical socialisation (Lingard et al., 2015).

One factor to consider, is which type of exposure is of more value in the programme i.e. historical via family, or that which arises through current field membership? This may depend on whether the current field is resulting in the reproduction of the dominant values thus reinforcing inequality i.e. inhibiting success, or whether the current field is transformative and therefore equipping students such that the inequality is negated and success is more likely to be achieved (Mills & Gale, 2009). It is important to understand that the impact of the process of reproduction in a habitus on students does not guarantee the same outcome for all involved.

Therefore, I treat the socialisation that comes from membership in current fields as having a significant impact on the habitus of students. For example, membership in the social work programme itself would be structuring the student in the ways of tertiary success. Being in the social work sector as an employee or volunteer would be structuring the student in the ways of social work in general. Then, given the professional nature of the programme, there is value in understanding students' general experience as an employee. Finally, students' perceptions of themselves and their relationships are an important factor in achieving success.

With these thoughts in mind, I then set about analysing certain questions asked in the online survey so that the responses could be aligned to the following habitus: 1) Social Work Programme Habitus, 2) Tertiary Habitus, 3) General Employment Habitus, 4) Social Work Sector Habitus and, 5) Social Relationship and Journey Habitus. In the table that follows, I take the five identified habitus and align these with whether or not the students' exposure is current or historical. This would provide me with a basis for determining which aspect of which habitus could be best focussed upon to improve the likelihood of success in the social work programme.

Table 5 – Aspects of Student Habitus showing their Current and/or Historical nature

| <b>Habitus Name</b>         | <b>Survey Question</b>   | <b>Exposure of Students to Structuring Nature of the Habitus</b>                  |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Social Work Programme       | Full Time / Part Time Attendance                                     | Current   |
|                             | On-Campus or Distance  | Current   |
|                             | Gender of Student  | Current / Historical via the Family Habitus ;<br>Current via the Societal Habitus |
|                             | Ethnicity of Student   | Current / Historical via the Family Habitus ;<br>Current via the Societal Habitus |
|                             | Year of the Programme  | Current   |
| Tertiary Habitus            | Education Experience prior to Enrolment in the Social Work Programme | Historical via Education Habitus  |
|                             | Mother's historical attendance at University                         | Historical via the Family Habitus   |
|                             | Father's historical attendance at University                         | Historical via the Family Habitus   |
|                             | Sibling's historical attendance at University                        | Historical via the Family Habitus   |
| General Employment Habitus  | Student is employed Full-Time or Part-Time in any Industry           | Current   |
|                             | Mother's Career as a Manager or Professional                         | Historical via Family Habitus   |
|                             | Father's Career as a Manager or Professional                         | Historical via Family Habitus   |
|                             |  |   |
| Social Work Sector Habitus  | Student is employed Full-Time or Part-Time in the Social Work Sector | Current   |
|                             | Student is a Volunteer in the Social Work Sector                     | Current   |
|                             | Mother's Career is in the Caring Sector                              | Historical via Family Habitus   |
|                             | Father's Career is in the Caring Sector                              | Historical via Family Habitus   |
|                             |  |   |
| Social Relationship Habitus | Perception of Relationship with Staff                                | Current   |
|                             | Perception of Journey as a Social Worker in the Making               | Current   |
|                             | Perception of Journey as Student in the Programme                    | Current   |
|                             | Perception of Fitting In with Peers                                  | Current   |
|                             | Perception of Who the Student Socialises With                        | Current   |

To further my analysis, I then applied the calculation of the average number of knowledges identified per habitus aspect for BSW mature and non-mature students, and the pre-professional non-mature students. My emphasis on this calculation is based on the theory that those who are dominant in a field are better able to articulate and utilise their knowledge of the game to maintain their position. Moreover, that those who are dominated in the field do not have a clear understanding of the rules. I completed my analysis by identifying those aspects of habitus that scored lowest per question and therefore most likely to prevent, or at the very least, inhibit success. By focusing on these elements, I provide both staff and students with insight in the key areas of students' habitus that need to be considered.

### **7.15 Identifying Aspects of Difference that can Impact Student Success**

In Table 10 - Aspects of Habitus that Can Prevent or Inhibit Success (see Appendix 10.8) in the Appendix, the aspects that can prevent or inhibit success belong in one of three categories which define the action that can be taken to mitigate their impact. The first category represents aspects that are structuring the students today, and this means that they can be directly influenced by the efforts of staff and the students involved. For example, those non-mature students who are studying part-time, or are working while studying can be identified and provided additional levels of support to ensure their success.

The second category of habitus aspects that students have are those that come from structuring that has occurred in the past. As such, these aspects appear less able to be directly influenced by current action. However, the key is to understand how these aspects manifest themselves in the students today. Therefore, where the parents of students did not attend university themselves, this means the students are unlikely to bring with them to the social programme existing knowledges on how to be successful at university. When this aspect is combined with students whose parents have no experience being employed in a caring profession such as social work, teaching or nursing, this doubly disadvantages them in that they bring little or no knowledges to be successful as a social worker. With this information, staff and the students concerned can work to enhance their existing knowledge stocks, rather than be constrained by them.

The third category of habitus aspect concerns those constructs that sit within the wider societal field of power: gender, ethnicity and age. The analysis shows that students who identify as male, and students who identify as not being Pākehā (e.g. Māori, Samoan) are likely to experience difficulty with being successful in the social work programme. Further, that non-mature students, more so than their mature counterparts, are likely to be impacted. The aim,

however, is not to attempt to convert male students into female students, or non-Pākehā into Pākehā. Instead, it becomes the responsibility of staff and students to identify those aspects of gender, ethnicity and age that facilitate success in the programme, and to make this knowledge available to everyone.

## **7.16 Students Agreed with My Habitus Conclusions**

According to Bourdieu (1990a), a feel for the game appears as natural or instinctual and the rules of a game sit below the level of conscious awareness. Therefore, when a student is asked to define the knowledges needed for success it would be consistent with the theory that they would be unable to identify any of them, or at least not all of them. Therefore, in the student follow-up events, I asked the attendees what they thought about why students in general identified fewer knowledges than the staff did.

In one student response, they said that success was defined by the students themselves, and that each of the students hold different views on what this is, “comes back to what we think success is, and what we deem to be successful” (Student Participant H). Whereas in this next response, the student acknowledges that the knowledges need to be named by the staff in order for students to know what they are seeing, “I didn’t know how to name self-reflection as a knowledge until exposed to it in the course” (Student Participant Q) and “as you go along 300 and 400 level you learn more of the knowledges as they have been drummed into you by the staff” (Student Participant I). Another view was that some knowledges were so obvious, for example the knowledge of social work skills, that conscious naming of the knowledge was not required. In other words, just because it wasn’t mentioned by students doesn’t mean it was not important, “some things are so obvious that they weren’t consciously identified” (Student Participant W). An alternative to this is that, for some students, it is what they are struggling with that has their attention, and therefore if they know they are struggling with self-reflection this would be front of mind: “I wonder if this is because they only identified what they were struggling with – where for those knowledges they are confident in, they don’t think about them.” (Student Participant D).

I asked the students to reflect upon the structuring that had been acting upon them as members of various fields. The prevalent themes were learning from the current social work programme environment, general employment and social work volunteer experiences, their family environment, general life experience, feedback from staff, learning from not doing well, and being encouraged by the feeling that comes from doing well. All of which are consistent with my alignment of online survey questions with different habitus.

## 7.17 Navigating the Determinism Minefield

My conclusion is that the student body, and in particular the mature student, is diverse. My findings concur with previous research that found that the mature student cannot be treated as a homogenous cohort as they span multiple generations and life contexts including personal, family, work, study, relationship, financial, health and socio-economic situations to name but a few (Davey, 2001; Harker, 2005; James, 1995). Moreover, there are a range of experiences that mature students can have as a member of a university field as it exerts its structuring force on them. For example, Mallman and Lee (2014) speak of the anxiety that comes from mature students trying to find their place at university. While Baxter and Britton (2001) highlight that working class mature students struggle more so than their middle class peers. Furthermore, they speak to the increased difficulties that female mature students face compared to their male classmates. While most research agrees on the struggles mature students face, it is not all doom and gloom as mature students experience life changing growth as a result of attending university (Mercer & Saunders, 2004). A New Zealand study of mature student experience over 40 recorded a high level of satisfaction with their study experience (Davey, 2001).

Therefore, we are talking about a range of individuals who have a range of structuring experiences, from both past and present field memberships, which manifest themselves in unique ways within the social work programme. As such, the table I have constructed (see Appendix 10.8 for Table 10 - Aspects of Habitus that Can Prevent or Inhibit Success) requires caveats on its usage. Firstly, do not apply the table as a set of rules that guarantee expected outcomes, because:

Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable but not eternal. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 131)

Secondly, the table reflects aspects of what I call a set of collective societal agreements of truth or as Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1971; Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1991) calls them, *doxa* – those rules which set below the level of awareness of agents and appear as uncontested truths. These include aspects of gender, where females are considered better suited to social work, of ethnicity where Pākehā appear better suited to tertiary study, and class where those from a working class may struggle in a university setting which is considered more attuned to the dispositions of the middle class.

These doxa become embedded into the habitus because “there is a probability, inscribed in the social destiny associated with definite social conditions that experiences will confirm habitus, because most people are statistically bound to encounter circumstances that tend to agree with those that originally fashioned their habitus” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 131). In other words, while habitus is an open system of practice, there is some commonality of experience that people in similar life situations will encounter. As Berger (2000) explains:

People, who live similar lifestyles because of their common level of access to capital, develop a shared worldview as a result of common experiences and interactions. This habitus fosters a common representation of the world in a class-specific manner at a cognitive, taken for granted, level. (Berger, 2000, p. 99)

The challenge for the future is to design a research-led intervention for mature students that can accommodate, acknowledge and celebrate the complexity and diversity of habitus. On the other hand, there is always concern that decisions made using an assumption of shared habitus, such as class, will simply reinforce existing positions of inequality.

## **7.18 Making the Social Work Programme a Place that Maximises Success**

In this section I acknowledge that the students’ possession of the knowledges privileged by the social work programme and the wider field of power is but one half of the success equation. The other half involves maximising the conditions necessary for the conversion of the knowledges into symbolic status. With this in mind, I engaged the students in the focus group and those interviewed separately to identify what they thought would be of value. I did this by asking them to consider topics for a survival guide that future students in the programme could utilise.

In Table 6 (Student Success Guide – Suggested Table of Contents), the guide topics are dominated by the theme of better equipping its members, both staff and students, to better play the social work programme game. This includes helping its members to first understand the rules of the game, and then to learn the skills required to play the game. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on understanding and learning more about themselves which, although appears beyond the scope of the game, is actually key to playing the game.

Table 6 – Student Success Guide – Suggested Table of Contents

| Chapter  | Sections  |
|--|---|
| Teaching the students the rules of the game                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactively explore the relational structures in the programme with the students</li> </ul>  |
| Teaching the students the knowledges required to play the game | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social relations - Actively address social relations of students in the programme</li> <li>• Providing exemplars on writing techniques specific to the programme</li> <li>• Work with students on how to use media [social, television, radio, print] around them to enhance their learning</li> <li>• Identify topics that students would benefit from learning about prior to coming into the programme</li> <li>• Equipping students for self-care</li> <li>• Highlight differences and significance of being a student and being a social worker</li> <li>• Teach, practise and apply confliction resolution</li> <li>• Provide tangible examples of active learning, from First Year and upwards</li> <li>• Create a way to measure the level of tertiary experience a student has, and then a structured programme to address the gaps (which could leverage student learning centre resources) – mandatory</li> <li>• Provide examples / case studies of where communicating with staff is important</li> </ul> |
| Staff focussed training  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train and advise lecturers and tutors on creating environments for learning</li> <li>• Do team building at the beginning of each year, which will involve integrating new members</li> <li>• Use of staff to create uncomfortable opportunities for group interaction</li> </ul>   |
| Non-curriculum learning  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create structured opportunities for students to develop personally</li> <li>• Be yourself = knowing yourself = self-reflection</li> </ul>  |

These conditions which the students identified compare favourably with the student engagement model of Leach and Zepke (2011; Zepke & Leach, 2010). Specifically, there is agreement on the role of the students themselves, of staff in the programme and the university as a wider organisation to create environments conducive to learning. In addition, the student engagement model emphasises the role of non-university support, specifically from the family and friends of the students. In this way, the conditions of the environment that the students engage in outside of the social work programme can also be used to maximise their success. These conditions comprise family and friends who demonstrate an understanding of the students' situation and back this up with assistance such as the provision of childcare and giving the students space to study. The student identified knowledge of dealing with personal challenges alludes to the support of family or friends. This knowledge is so invaluable that it should be added as a condition for success in my research.

The conditions for conversion confirm that students are influenced through their membership of multiple fields. These include the social work programme, the wider university field as a learning institution and separately as a social field. I have also added the field which comprises family and friends. In each of these fields, the students have a dependence on those who hold a position of dominance over them to provide these conditions.

However, this does not absolve the students, and mature students in particular, from taking responsibility for equipping themselves. Harker (2005) speaks of a mature student in the New Zealand context who is determined and able to cope with the stress of multiple roles. Whereas, Kinman and Grant (2010) state that with the right amount of emotional and social competence, mature social work students can handle the stresses they encounter. These are called psychological resources by Ash (1999) which, she states, can contribute to the students' perception that they actually have lower levels of stress.

From the perspective of Bourdieu, this inner world of the students is described using the concept of habitus. This is where, for example, the attribute of tenacity, is manifested in students as a result of the structuring that has occurred in their life up until this point. What is of significance in this discussion is the positioning of students as active agents. My premise is that for students who do not possess the inner resource of tenacity it is the responsibility of the field to facilitate the identification of this situation, and then to allow students, staff and the wider institution to work together. However, this collaboration of the members is always within the rules of the game, and therefore can be limited.

In the midst of some tangible examples of how to maximise the conditions of the programme for success, what becomes clear is that a significant commitment by staff and the university is required over and above what occurs today. For staff, this is a challenge, as they are already under time and schedule constraints to deliver the programme's curriculum. For the university itself, the challenge is to create an environment that enables students to better invest in themselves by utilising existing university resources and creating new ones specific to the programme. Both of these challenges require the tertiary education field of power to be modified so that the conditions of the social work programme better maximise the success of the students.

## **7.19 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented the knowledges that staff and students identified as important to being successful in the social work programme. I explored how they made sense of these knowledges and I accounted for variations in their responses by exploring aspects of their individual habitus. Finally, I outlined how the students think the conditions of social work programme could be changed to maximise their success.

## Chapter Eight – Conclusion

### 8.1 Introduction

I have based this thesis on the premise that, in order to positively reframe the homogenous narrative of the struggling mature social work student in existing research it is first necessary to bring to their awareness the social logic of the field of which they are members. My own research therefore set out to catalogue the logic of the social work programme at the University of Otago over the 2014/2015 period. This period is significant because it is the first time in the history of the programme that the mature student is no longer the dominant cohort. Also, current enrolment trends show that, in the future, the value that mature students bring to the programme could be lost. In my research, I used the theoretical lens of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu at the macro, meso and micro levels to uncover this social logic, and in doing so, capture the diversity and distinctiveness of mature students. I focussed my effort by seeking to answer the following research questions:

1. What knowledges of the social work programme are required by a mature student to succeed?
2. How does a mature student understand and describe the knowledges they must master to succeed?
3. How does the perspective of the mature student compare to a) other students, b) staff in the social work programme?

As such, in this chapter I bring to a close my research journey with a discussion of my findings on facilitating the success of mature students. I then acknowledge the limitations of my study before considering the implications of my work from the perspectives of theory and policy. Finally, I discuss my recommendations for future research.

### 8.2 Findings

In order for the mature student to succeed in the social work programme, the knowledges they must possess are those that enable them to first bring the programme's social logic to their awareness, those that enable them to be equipped with the capital that the programme's logic privileges, the capital itself and, finally the wherewithal to utilise that information to maximise their potential for success. To this end, mature students will be able to convert their efforts into positions of status in both the eyes of the staff (academic success) and the non-mature students

(fitting in). My thesis has demonstrated that the method for coming to an awareness of the programme's logic is through the use of Bourdieu's conceptual toolbox. I have also argued that the process of being equipped with the privileged capital begins with the skill of learning, in particular metacognition. The actual capital privileged, as shown in Table 2 (List of Knowledges that Staff and Student Identified for Success in the Social Work Programme), comprises staff-sanctioned capital (critical thinking, self-reflection, etc), and student-sanctioned capital (being friendly, talk to others, etc). The knowledge of how to utilise this information, however, requires the collaboration between the mature student, the non-mature student, the staff and those in the field of power.

Together, these knowledges bring an understanding of the field of power and relational structures that the social work programme is defined by. This is where mature students see that the social work profession is a gendered industry (clients and workers), and yet they are members of a programme that values traits of both genders. This is where mature students understand that the programme is aligned to the social work profession through the diligent work of national and global professional associations. Moreover, that the profession and the programme are significantly shaped and constrained by the government through related economic social and tertiary policy. Enlightened mature students come to understand that the relational structures they take part in are power based and marginalising in nature. The mature students come to understand that they are in a relationship where their existing skills are being nurtured, and where they are being equipped with new skills.

I determined that mature students make sense of these knowledges through a social lens of understanding that is their habitus. This is also true for their non-mature peers and the staff on the programme. However, the habitus of mature students is a both a lens that enables them to see, and a process that acts upon them to shape and structure what they see. It is a social dynamic that acknowledges that mature students are defined by where they are at a particular point in time. Therefore, while mature students are members of the social work programme, and subject to its structuring effects, they are also members of other structuring social fields – both past and present. This social process is occurring unbeknownst to the mature students so, as they invest their energies in various social endeavours, their experience is taking place as they expect it to. In other words, they are seeing, experiencing, expecting and hoping within a set of underlying cognitive and embodied social structures infused by upbringing, class, ethnicity, culture, age, gender, and power.

It follows therefore that, when mature students become aware of the knowledges for success, and that when they utilise this awareness, this in turn leads to a change in the way they see and

interact. In other words, their habitus itself is changed from a structuring structure that reproduces and enables societal inequality to one that seeks freedom from these inequalities. However, as previously stated in this thesis, to use habitus as a thinking tool requires that the other thinking tools are used in equal measure. As such, the degree of freedom exercised by those who are marginalised but aware of this inequality depends also upon the actions of those in the field who are in a position of dominance. It is the dominant within the field, and those beyond in the field of power that employ strategies to preserve the logic of the field, and in turn their own positions of status.

My conclusion is that, for mature students to succeed in the social work programme, they require the application of the knowledges for success by the staff in the programme, together with co-ordination with those in power beyond the programme. This includes those from the tertiary institute, the social work profession and the government. This is, however, no small order given the evidence in my thesis which shows how over the last fifteen years, government policy has resulted in the gradual reduction of mature students in the programme. Nonetheless, my findings show that staff take a position as advocates for the mature students, working for and alongside them to minimise and manage the oppressive influence of the field of power, and the social logic operating within the programme itself. It is no coincidence that the action of the staff in seeking a socially just curriculum and assisting their students through the programme is akin to the role of the social worker who tirelessly represents their clients, seeking positive transformation. Where better therefore, for a student of social work to learn their trade than within an educational structure of inequality, where they are equipped with the macro, meso and micro level knowledges required for success, supported by staff who are role models for advocacy and empowerment.

### **8.3 Limitations**

It is important, before I consider the implications of my findings and look towards future research endeavours, to acknowledge that there were limitations in my research journey. Specifically, I encountered concerns with participant selection, applicability of case study findings, utilising Bourdieu's work as a method, and my role in the data collection process. These concerns did not significantly weaken my conclusions, but more resemble a series of lessons learnt, which I would seek to address in future research projects.

### 8.3.1 Applicability of Case Study Findings

There was a concern that the findings from my qualitative study where there was a small number of participants in single certain location meant that it would be difficult to generalise the outcomes to apply to other programmes at other locations (Bryman, 2012). However, Williams (2000) suggests that generalisations based on aspects of such findings could be made but these are to be considered very carefully in their application. This is one reason why I utilised enrolment profile data from all tertiary social work programmes approved by the SWRB so that I could understand the differences between the programmes.

### 8.3.2 Theory-Based Research Design and Application

At the outset of this research project, I discussed with my supervisors my objective of using the study as an opportunity to exercise my understanding of the work of Pierre Bourdieu. As such, my approach to the collection and analysis of data was directly informed by his ideas. While doing so provided me with a template for my research journey, I also became aware of the possibility of drawing conclusions consistent with his work because those were the conclusions I was looking for. For example, the conclusions I made about the influence of the habitus of the students were based on a small amount of data, which is in contrast to the substantial data collection and analysis that Bourdieu performed over his career.

### 8.3.3 Participant Selection

I was not able to recruit a representative sample of mature students from the pre-professional programme (first and second year levels) which meant that I could not compare their experience with their non-mature peers. In my ethics application I described how I was going to secure a list of all students and their email addresses from the social work programme. I planned to use the list to load into Survey Monkey to send out the online survey invitations. However, when the time came to get the list I discovered that this was not a practice that the University of Otago supported because they wanted to protect the students from unnecessary emails. As a consequence, I discussed this with my supervisors and set in motion a plan to recruit the students by engaging them in their semester opening lectures and workshops.

### 8.3.4 Criteria for Including Data

My decision to treat the interviews as an extension of the focus group was based on my initial assumption that the type of data collected was independent of the method of collection. However, while both techniques involved similar types of social practice, there were not the same. I experienced the interviews to be more personally affecting and when I reviewed the recorded sessions there was a set of rich contextual data outside the scope of my research questions e.g. fieldwork experiences. This reaffirmed to me that as a qualitative researcher I subject my data to a criteria of usefulness and relevance to my research project. This was also the case for focus groups as well. However, while the research questions framed my research scope, the data that I chose to put to one side was of no lessor value. In future research endeavours I would include specific commentary on the criteria of data that I chose to omit (Hamel, 1998).

### 8.3.5 The Student Focus Group

Upon reflection, the student focus group took the shape of a tutorial enactment given that it took place in a room at the library that resembled a classroom, albeit significantly smaller. Furthermore, my role of curious moderator that I experienced in the staff focus group required a shift to a more active facilitator role as the discussion took time to flow. I found myself (re)constructed into the role of having to stimulate discussion like a tutor, which is a role I had evidenced my undergraduate lecturers and tutors performing when faced with reticent students. While the data was equally as rich as the data I had secured from the staff focus group, I did become more aware of my active presence in the process. This has led me to conclude that, as a qualitative researcher, I have a significant role in shaping the data that I collect (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Hamel, 1998).

## 8.4 Theoretical Implications

In the existing research that I have focussed on, the main theme has been the confirmation that the mature student is less equipped, or more to the point, differently equipped, than their non-mature classmates. As such, their progress through a tertiary programme, such as the social work programme at the University of Otago, is typified by struggle. There have been suggestions made based on some authors' conclusions, to improve the skill composition of mature students, and to enhance the curriculum of the programmes to be more inclusive of the needs of mature students. However, there is an absence of discussion on a methodology that

the mature students can learn and apply that allows them to take stock of the social logic of a field. I contend my work has demonstrated that the thinking tools of Bourdieu are useful when trying to develop an understanding of a social space infused with unequal power relationships.

## **8.5 Policy Implications**

I have evidenced a number of typologies that authors have created and utilised to cater for the diversity of mature students. While there are identifiable common experiences that mature students encounter, such as those that arise from being in the same social class and/or gender, it becomes problematic to settle upon one definition that can be of value to policy makers. For example, how is it that the middle class single 29 year old male student who works part-time and studies full-time be classified as a mature student when the divorced working class female of 45 with two children enrolled full-time is also classified as a mature student? While the life circumstances are different, it is the fact that they are both older than 24 that denotes their classification. Therefore, while the title of mature student encompasses a range of situations, it renders invisible those contained within that classification – there is simply too much diversity.

I have provided Bourdieu's concept of habitus as a tool for making sense of this diversity. I have also derived an approach for staff and students to utilise (see chapter seven) to assist them in being able to take a self-reflexive stance on their skills and their experiences in the social work programme. What I recommend is an amendment be made to the social work programme, supported by the SWRB, ANZASW and the university itself. I seek an outcome where the skills necessary to reveal the social logic of a field, the skills necessary for learning, and the skills privileged by that field, are taught as part of the social work programme curriculum, year on year. Therefore, rather than positioning generic skill based courses in the realm of student services that are only available for optional attendance, create an equipping based approach that is a compulsory part of the programme. This is but one way of creating an inclusive programme habitus for mature, and all students.

As a start, I suggest that at the next departmental review of the social work programme, a study be made into the skills required and how the teaching of them can be incorporated in the current curriculum. I acknowledge that some of these skills and approaches do not have to be specific to the social work programme, and therefore it could be cost effective for the university to generate a suite of knowledges focussed workshop that programmes could incorporate as core requirements for all majors.

## **8.6 Recommendations for Future Research**

Throughout my thesis journey, I have been aware that the discovery of the social logic of the programme and its privileged capital is only one half of the picture of student success. What I therefore propose for a future research project is to take the methodology and findings of my thesis and design a social work education intervention that can be tested over the period of two years. Specifically, I envisage a research project where the curriculum of one social work core paper from each year is modified to include specific teaching of 1) Bourdieu's thinking tools, 2) the social logic of the programme, and 3) the means to equip students with elements of the programme's privileged capital deemed most important. These topics would be addressed monthly in a lecture format so as to avoid the main topic of the paper being compromised. Alongside this paper, I propose to recruit students of any age to attend a range of social work programme specific workshops on topics that complement the three above mentioned aspects, for example, workshops on self-reflection. These workshops would be delivered in a variety of ways to accommodate the needs of the students which could include internet based delivery and one-on-one sessions. Using a mixed methods approach, my focus would be on the quality of the social work education experience as described by the students and staff, and on the performance of the students. At the conclusion of the study, staff and students from the programme, together with representatives from the SWRB, ANZASW and the university would be invited to consider the results and decide upon future improvements to the curriculum content and delivery. It would be my hypothesis that this research intervention would result in an improvement in the overall experience and performance of students of all ages who were struggling.

## **8.7 Conclusion**

In this thesis I set out to determine the social logic of the social work programme at the University of Otago to create the foundation for a sociological revolution that will maximise the success of mature students. I believe that this work goes beyond the scope of mature students and is of value to all students in the programme. I also sought to demonstrate the value of a Bourdieu informed theoretical approach for making sense of power based relational structures. There is value, too, in the consideration of including his thinking tools in the curriculum of programme. In closing, I look forward to an opportunity to present these findings to staff and students, and to work together to develop the student success guide so that it can be used to facilitate the success of all students – mature and non-mature.

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# Appendices

## 10.1 Consent from Ethics Committee

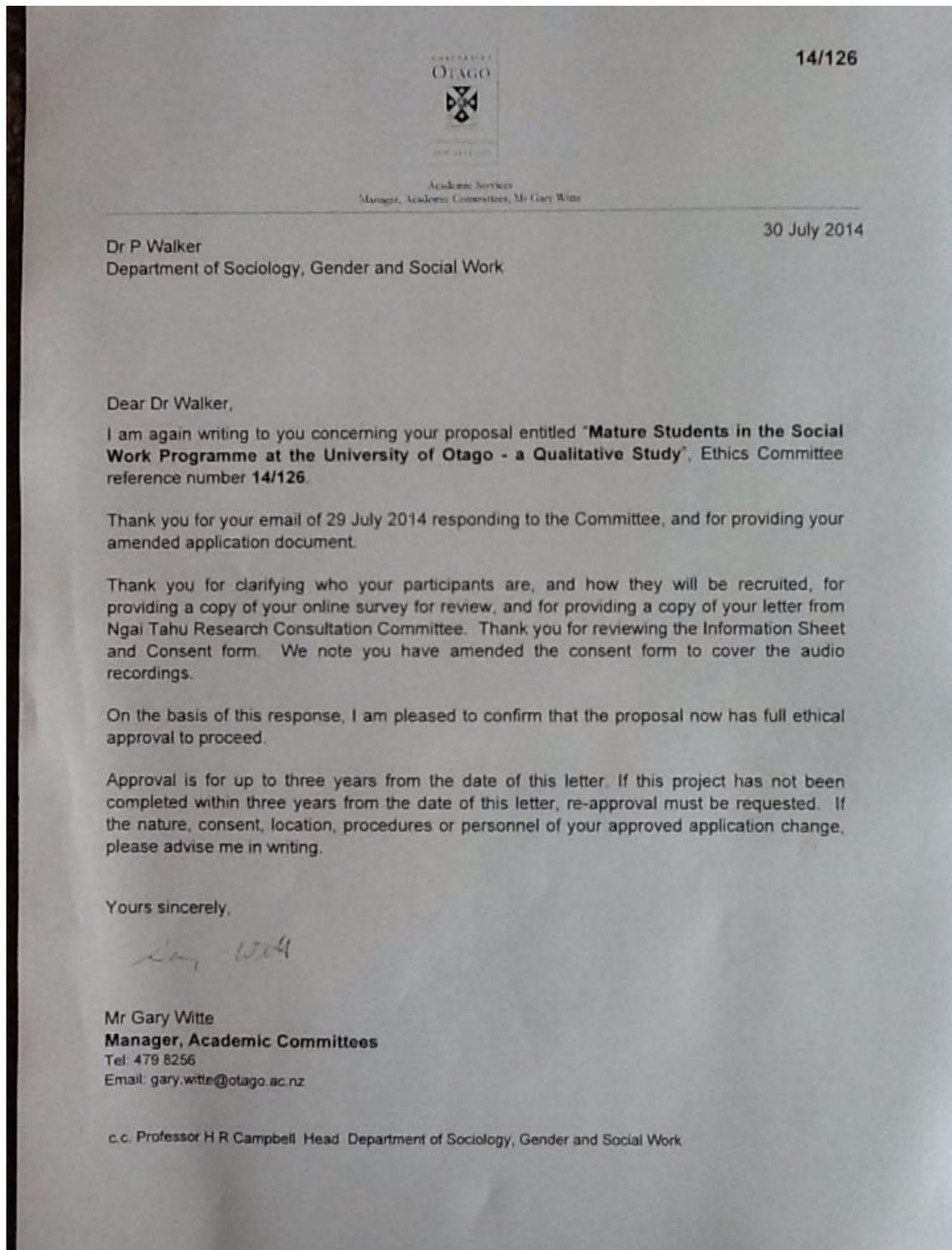


Figure 9 - Ethics Approval from the University of Otago

## 10.2 Consent from Social Work Programme

**Access to Departmental review documents – Sociology, Gender and Social Work, specifically focusing on Social Work departmental/programme review documents.**

Phillip Roxborough, Masters student, agrees in reviewing the above documents to investigate the following subjects only;

Division/departamental/programme policy and practice re mature students, degree changes, regulatory changes and policies (specifically ANZASW and SWRB and their impacts on the programme). No other material outside of these subjects will be ~~accessed~~ used for any purposes.

Documents will only be accessed and analysed on the departmental premises in consultation with Pamela Jemmett and Peter Walker.

The outcomes of any analysis will be reviewed and approved by Peter Walker prior to publication.

Phillip Roxborough *PA Roxborough*  
Date 8/9/14

Pamela Jemmett *Jemmett*  
Date 8/9/14

Peter Walker *P Walker*  
Date 8/9/14

Figure 10 - Consent to Access Department Review Documents

## 10.3 Staff Web Survey

### A. Information about this Survey

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information page carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you and we thank you for considering our request.

When you have finished reading this page, click on the NEXT button below and you will be asked to provide your consent to participate.

#### What is the Aim of the Project?

Today, little is known about the undergraduate mature students in the social work programme at the University of Otago and how their presence in the programme could affect the success of their younger colleagues (non-mature students). In this project mature students are defined as those aged 25 years or older at the time of their enrolment in the Social Work programme at the University of Otago. This research project is intended to close this knowledge gap and is being undertaken as part of the requirements for Phillip Roxborough's Masters in Human Services.

#### What Type of Participants are being sought?

We are seeking two types of participants for this research project;

- students currently enrolled in either the Social Work Pre-Professional Programme or the Bachelor of Social Work Programme, and
- staff in the Social Work Programme who have any level of involvement with the above mentioned students.

You have been invited to participate because you are a member of one of these groups.

#### What will Participants be Asked to Do?

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to:

Complete this confidential online survey which will take no longer than 30 minutes of your time. In addition, you will go into a draw to receive a \$30 JB Hi Fi Voucher.

At the end of this survey, you will be invited to attend a follow-up focus group event – one for students, and one for staff – where the results of the online survey will be presented and discussed, and a guide for mature students will be drafted. This session is expected to take no longer than 90 minutes of your time, and finger food and non-alcoholic refreshments will be provided.

If you cannot attend on-campus then there is an option for a follow-up interview via Skype or Phone. Also, if there are a high number of focus group participants then the survey responses will be used to randomly select a diverse range of participants to make the focus group sessions more manageable.

### **What Data or Information will be Collected and What Use will be Made of it?**

In the online survey we are first seeking to collect information about you that will assist us in classifying the responses such as age, full-time / part-time status, on-campus / distance student, gender, ethnicity and prior tertiary learning history. Then, we will ask questions related to what success as a student looks like. Finally, we will explore your perceptions on where you are in your own journey in the Social Work Programme.

The follow-up session (either On-Campus Focus Group or Interview via Skype or Phone) will be recorded using an audio device so that we can ensure your invaluable feedback is captured for subsequent analysis. As mentioned, at this session we will also work together to produce an electronic guide for the mature student and this guide will be saved for analysis.

The survey results and follow-up session transcripts collected will be securely stored in such a way that only the researchers will be able to gain access to them for the duration of the research project. At the conclusion of the research, this specific data will be destroyed, while the findings derived from this data will be kept for 5 years in a locked filing cabinet.

In this survey you will be given an option regarding your anonymity. Please be aware that should you wish we will make every attempt to preserve your anonymity. However, with your consent, there are some cases where it would be preferable to attribute contributions made to individual participants.

The focus groups / interviews will involve an open-questioning technique. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the focus group / interview develops. In the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.

The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand).

### **Can Participants Change their Mind and Withdraw from the Project?**

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

### **What if Participants have any Questions?**

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Phillip Roxborough or Dr Peter Walker

Department of Sociology, Gender & Social Work

University Phone Number: N/A University Phone Number: 03 479 7651

Email Address roxph698@student.otago.ac.nz Email Address peter.walker@otago.ac.nz

This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256 or email gary.witte@otago.ac.nz). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

## **B. Consent for Staff Participants**

I have read the Information Page concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. I can choose to maintain my anonymity in this survey;
4. Personal identifying information including audio recordings from follow-up sessions including focus groups and/or interviews will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any findings data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for at least five years;
5. This project involves focus groups / interviews using an open-questioning technique covering topics such as perceived skills and strategies for success as a student and social worker in the making, and the value that non-mature and mature students bring to the programme. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. In the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind;
6. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity should I request it;
7. As a participant in the online survey my name will go into a draw to receive a \$30 JB Hi Fi voucher.

### **C. Staff Specific Questions**

- 1. I accept the terms and conditions of this survey, and I wish to participate**
- 2. Are you a student or a staff member in the Social Work Programme at Otago University?**
- 3. What is your date of birth?**
- 4. Which gender do you identify with?**
- 5. What ethnicity do you identify with?**
- 6. What is the type of involvement you have with students in the Social Work Programme?**
- 7. How many years have you been a staff member in the Social Work Programme?**
- 8. Are you a registered social worker?**
- 9. How many years have you been in the social work profession?**
- 10. What sectors of the social work profession were you active in?**
- 11. In what capacity, if any, are you still active in the social work profession?**
- 12. How many years have you been teaching in the social work profession?**
- 13. What is your highest qualification?**
- 14. In what ways, if any, do you work with mature students differently to how you work with non-mature students?**

### **D. Student Success Questions**

- 15. Describe what success as a student of any age looks like in class?**
- 16. What are the skills important to being a successful student of any age in class?**
- 17. What advice would you give to a new student of any age entering the Social Work Programme on how they can be successful?**

**18. What value does a mature student (aged 25 or older) bring to the class?**

**19. What challenges does a mature student (aged 25 or older) bring to the class?**

**20. What value does a non-mature student (aged under 25) bring to the class?**

**21. What challenges does a non-mature student (aged under 25) bring to the class?**

**22. What suggestions do you have for improving the contribution of mature students (aged 25 or older) in class?**

**23. What suggestions do you have for improving the contribution of non-mature students (aged under 25) in class?**

### **E. End of Survey Questions**

**24. Do you wish to add your name to your survey response, or do you wish to remain anonymous?**

**25. Please add your name**

**26. Are there any other comments you wish to make in this survey that haven't been addressed by a specific question?**

**27. Do you wish to be invited to participate in the follow-up to this survey where the survey results will be presented and further discussion can take place?**

**28. What is your availability in Oct/Nov 2014 to attend a follow-up event?**

## **10.4 Student Web Survey**

### **A. Information about this Survey**

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information page carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you and we thank you for considering our request.

When you have finished reading this page, click on the NEXT button below and you will be asked to provide your consent to participate.

#### **What is the Aim of the Project?**

Today, little is known about the undergraduate students in the social work programme at the University of Otago and how their presence in the programme could affect the success of their colleagues. This research project is intended to close this knowledge gap and is being undertaken as part of the requirements for Phillip Roxborough's Masters in Human Services.

#### **What Type of Participants are being sought?**

We are seeking two types of participants for this research project;

- students currently enrolled in either the Social Work Pre-Professional Programme or the Bachelor of Social Work Programme, and
- staff in the Social Work Programme who have any level of involvement with the above mentioned students.

You have been invited to participate because you are a member of one of these groups.

#### **What will Participants be Asked to Do?**

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to:

Complete this confidential online survey which will take no longer than 30 minutes of your time. In addition, you will go into a draw to receive one of two \$30 JB Hi Fi Vouchers.

At the end of this survey, you will be invited to attend a follow-up focus group event – one for students, and one for staff – where the results of the online survey will be presented and discussed. This session is expected to take no longer than 90 minutes of your time, with finger food and non-alcoholic refreshments provided.

If you cannot attend on-campus then there is an option for a follow-up interview via Skype or Phone. Also, if there are a high number of focus group participants then the survey responses will be used to randomly select a diverse range of participants to make the focus group sessions more manageable.

#### **What Data or Information will be Collected and What Use will be Made of it?**

In the online survey we are first seeking to collect information about you that will assist us in classifying the responses such as age, full-time / part-time status, on-campus / distance student, gender, ethnicity and

prior tertiary learning history. Then, we will ask questions related to what success as a student looks like. Finally, we will explore your perceptions on where you are in your own journey in the Social Work Programme.

The follow-up session (either On-Campus Focus Group or Interview via Skype or Phone) will be recorded using an audio device so that we can ensure your invaluable feedback is captured for subsequent analysis.

The survey results and follow-up session transcripts collected will be securely stored in such a way that only the researchers will be able to gain access to them for the duration of the research project. At the conclusion of the research, this specific data will be destroyed, while the findings derived from this data will be kept for 5 years in a locked filing cabinet.

In this survey you will be given an option regarding your anonymity. Please be aware that should you wish we will make every attempt to preserve your anonymity. However, with your consent, there are some cases where it would be preferable to attribute contributions made to individual participants.

The focus groups / interviews will involve an open-questioning technique. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the focus group / interview develops. In the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.

The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand).

### **Can Participants Change their Mind and Withdraw from the Project?**

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

### **What if Participants have any Questions?**

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

Phillip Roxborough

or

Dr Peter Walker

Department of Sociology, Gender & Social Work

University Phone Number:- N/A

University Phone Number:- 03 479 7651

Email Address roxph698@student.otago.ac.nz

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This study has been approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479 8256 or email gary.witte@otago.ac.nz). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

## **B. Consent for Student Participants**

I have read the Information Page concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. I can choose to maintain my anonymity in this survey;
4. Personal identifying information including audio recordings from follow-up sessions including focus groups and/or interviews will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any findings data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for at least five years;
5. This project involves focus groups / interviews using an open-questioning technique covering topics such as perceived skills and strategies for success as a student and a social worker in the making. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. In the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind;
6. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity should I request it;
7. As a participant in the online survey my name will go into a draw to receive one of two \$30 JB Hi Fi vouchers.

## **C. Student Specific Questions**

- 1. I accept the terms and conditions of this survey, and I wish to participate**
- 2. What is your date of birth?**
- 3. Which gender do you identify with?**
- 4. What ethnicity do you identify with? (select all that apply)**
- 5. What is your enrolment type?**

6. Are you classified as a Distance Student?
7. Which social work programme are you currently enrolled in?
8. When did you first enrol in this social work programme
9. What Year in the Programme do you consider yourself to be in?
10. What education experiences did you have prior to enrolment in the programme?
11. Describe any social work volunteer experience you had prior to enrolment?
12. What is your employment status?
13. Did your mother/female guardian attend university?
14. What is your mother/female guardian's career occupation?
15. Did your father/male guardian attend university?
16. What is your father/male guardian's career occupation?
17. Did any of your brothers or sisters attend university?
18. What were your reasons for choosing the social work programme as your major?
19. In your journey to be a social worker, how successful do you currently feel?
20. As a student, how successful do you currently feel?
21. How would you rate how you currently fit in with your other classmates?
22. What do you see as important to do to fit in with your other classmates?
23. How likely are you to
  - sit next to a mature student in class / in a workshop
  - to ask questions of a mature student
  - to seek group work with a mature student
  - to hang out with a mature student if on campus
  - to socialise with a mature student outside university
24. Which students do you mostly hang with in class / in a workshop / in a group?
25. How would you rate your current learning relationship with the staff in the Social Work Programme?

#### **D. Student Success Questions**

26. Describe what success as a student looks like in class / workshop / group:
27. What are the skills important to being a successful student in class / workshop / group?
28. What advice would you give to a new student entering the Social Work programme on how they can be successful?
29. What do you think is the value of having mature students (aged 25 or older) in class?
30. What do you think is the value of having non-mature students (aged under 25) in class?

## **E. End of Survey Questions**

**31. Do you wish to add your name to your survey response, or do you wish to remain anonymous?**

**32. Please add your name**

**33. Are there any other comments you wish to make in this survey that haven't been addressed by a specific question?**

**34. Do you wish to be invited to participate in the follow-up to this survey where the survey results will be presented and further discussion can take place?**

## 10.5 Survey Questions aligned with Bourdieu's Thinking Tools

Table 7 - Survey Questions Aligned with Bourdieu's Thinking Tools

| Section        | Staff | Student | Question   | Relevance to theory and/or research project   |
|----------------|-------|---------|--|---|
| <b>Consent</b> | Yes   | Yes     | I accept the terms and conditions of this survey, and I wish to participate              | Informed consent & participation in research field – linked to ethics                                       |
| <b>Opening</b> | Yes   | N/A     | Are you a student or a staff member in the Social Work Programme at Otago University?    | High level agent classification   |
| <b>Opening</b> | Yes   | Yes     | What is your date of birth?  | Age as a classification parameter of habitus  |
| <b>Opening</b> | Yes   | Yes     | Which gender do you identify with?   | In the social work programme, the female gender is the dominant gender                                      |
| <b>Opening</b> | Yes   | Yes     | What ethnicity do you identify with?   | In the social work programme, Pākehā is the dominant ethnicity  |
| <b>Staff</b>   | Yes   | N/A     | What is the type of involvement you have with the students in the Social Work Programme? | Relationship with student agents ; indication of the position of the students in the staff-sanctioned field |

|              |     |     |   |   |
|--------------|-----|-----|---|---|
| <b>Staff</b> | Yes | N/A | How many years have you been a staff member in the Social Work Programme?     | University / Department Habitus – longer the duration the more likely they are structured by the programme    |
| <b>Staff</b> | Yes | N/A | Are you a registered social worker?   | Social Work Habitus – a foot in the social work field and a field in the University/Department Habitus        |
| <b>Staff</b> | Yes | N/A | How many years have you been in the social work profession?                   | Social Work Habitus – longer the duration the more likely they are structured by the social work profession   |
| <b>Staff</b> | Yes | N/A | What sectors of the social work profession were you active in?                | Which part of the social work field   |
| <b>Staff</b> | Yes | N/A | In what capacity, if any, are you still active in the social work profession? | Is the social work field still structuring and is the staff member an agent of another significant field      |
| <b>Staff</b> | Yes | N/A | How many years have you been teaching in the social work profession?          | The longer the duration the more likely they are structured by the education field                            |
| <b>Staff</b> | Yes | N/A | What is your highest qualification?   | Education as a mechanism of reproduction of dominant values of society and an indicator of privileged capital |

|                |     |     |  |  |
|----------------|-----|-----|--|--|
| <b>Staff</b>   | Yes | N/A | In what ways, if any, do you work with mature students differently to how you work with non-mature students? | To unearth staff practices dependent on age of the student   |
| <b>Student</b> | N/A | Yes | What is your enrolment type?   | Represents the type of exposure to the structuring field of the social work programme, and university itself |
| <b>Student</b> | N/A | Yes | Are you classified as a Distance Student?  | Represents the type of exposure to the structuring field of the social work programme, and university itself |
| <b>Student</b> | N/A | Yes | Which social work programme are you currently enrolled in?   | Which sub-field (100, 200, 300 or 400 level) of the social work programme field                              |
| <b>Student</b> | N/A | Yes | When did you first enrol in this social work programme?  | Length of time in the social work programme field – habitus  |
| <b>Student</b> | N/A | Yes | What year in the programme do you consider yourself to be in?  | Length of time in the social work programme field – habitus  |
| <b>Student</b> | N/A | Yes | What education experiences did you have prior to enrolment in the programme?                                 | To gauge the agent's feel for the education game   |
| <b>Student</b> | N/A | Yes | Describe any social work volunteer experience you had prior to enrolment                                     | To gauge the agent's membership of a social work habitus   |
| <b>Student</b> | N/A | Yes | What is your employment status?  | To gauge the agent's membership of a general employment habitus  |

|                   |     |     |  |  |
|-------------------|-----|-----|--|--|
| <b>Student</b>    | N/A | Yes | Did your mother/female guardian attend university?                                 | Habitus / feel for the education game  |
| <b>Student</b>    | N/A | Yes | What is your mother/female guardian's career occupation?                           | Indication of class and therefore indication of habitus  |
| <b>Student</b>    | N/A | Yes | Did your father/male guardian attend university?                                   | Habitus / feel for the education game  |
| <b>Student</b>    | N/A | Yes | What is your father/male guardian's career occupation?                             | Indication of class and therefore indication of habitus  |
| <b>Student</b>    | N/A | Yes | Did any of your brothers or sisters attend university?                             | Habitus / feel for the education game  |
| <b>Student</b>    | N/A | Yes | What were your major reasons for choosing the social work programme as your major? | Indication of interest in field membership (illusio of field) – does the programme deliver on reasons for membership |
| <b>Student</b>    | N/A | Yes | In your journey to be a social worker, how successful do you currently feel?       | Self-perception of the feel for the game – social work   |
| <b>Student</b>    | N/A | Yes | As a student, how successful do you currently feel?                                | Self-perception of the feel for the game – education   |
| <b>Fitting In</b> | N/A | Yes | How would you rate how you currently fit in with your other classmates?            | Sense of one's place in the young student-sanctioned field   |
| <b>Fitting In</b> | N/A | Yes | What do you see as important to do to fit in with your other classmates?           | Indicator of capital and Sense of one's place in the young student-sanctioned field                                  |

|                   |     |     |   |   |
|-------------------|-----|-----|---|---|
| <b>Fitting In</b> | N/A | Yes | How likely are to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sit next to a mature student</li> <li>• To ask questions of a mature student</li> <li>• To seek group work with a mature student</li> <li>• To hang out with a mature student if on campus</li> <li>• To socialise with a mature student outside of university</li> </ul> | Relationship between mature and non-mature agents in the young student-sanctioned field |
| <b>Fitting In</b> | N/A | Yes | Which students do you mostly hang with in class / in a workshop / in a group?   | Relationship between mature and non-mature agents in the young student-sanctioned field |
| <b>Fitting In</b> | N/A | Yes | How would you rate your current learning relationship with the staff in the Social Work Programme?  | Relationship with staff in the staff-sanctioned field                                   |
| <b>Success</b>    | Yes | Yes | Staff - Describe what success as a student of any age looks like in class?<br><br>Student – Describe what success as a student looks like in class / workshop / group?  | Definition of success by agents within the field, therefore a field specific definition |
| <b>Success</b>    | Yes | Yes | Staff - What are the skills important to being a successful student of any age in class?<br><br>Student – What are the skills important to being a successful student in class / workshop / class?  | Capital privileged by the field   |

|                   |     |     |   |   |
|-------------------|-----|-----|---|---|
| <b>Success</b>    | Yes | Yes | Staff - What advice would you give to a new student of any age entering the Social Work Programme on how they can be successful?<br><br>Student - What advice would you give to a new student entering the Social Work Programme on how they can be successful? | An attempt to unearth doxa operating in the social work programme field |
| <b>Mature</b>     | Yes | Yes | Staff - What value does a mature student (aged 25 or older) bring to the class?<br><br>Student – What do you think is the value of having mature students (aged 25 or older) in class?  | Sense of one's place and of others in the field                         |
| <b>Mature</b>     | Yes | N/A | What challenges does a mature student (aged 25 or older) bring to the class?  | Sense of one's place and of others in the field                         |
| <b>Non-Mature</b> | Yes | Yes | Staff - What value does a non-mature student (aged under 25) bring to the class?<br><br>Student – What do you think is the value of having non-mature students (aged under 25) in class?  | Sense of one's place and of others in the field                         |
| <b>Non-Mature</b> | Yes | N/A | What challenges does a non-mature student (aged under 25) bring to the class?   | Sense of one's place and of others in the field                         |

|                   |     |     |   |  |
|-------------------|-----|-----|---|--|
| <b>Mature</b>     | Yes | N/A | What suggestions do you have for improving the contribution of mature students (aged 25 or older) in class?   | Attempt to change position of agents or at least work out what is needed to change |
| <b>Non-Mature</b> | Yes | N/A | What suggestions do you have for improving the contribution of non-mature students (aged under 25) in class?  | Attempt to change position of agents or at least work out what is needed to change |
| <b>Anon</b>       | Yes | Yes | Do you wish to add your name to your survey response, or do you wish to remain anonymous?   | Survey Ethics  |
| <b>General</b>    | Yes | Yes | Are there any other comments you wish to make in this survey that haven't been addressed by a specific question?  | General Catch-All  |
| <b>Follow-Up</b>  | Yes | Yes | Do you wish to be invited to participate in the follow-up to this survey where the survey results will be presented and further discussion can take place?                | Set scene for focus group  |
| <b>Follow-Up</b>  | Yes | Yes | Staff - What is your availability in Oct/Nov 2014 to attend a follow-up event?<br><br>Student - What is your availability in Semester 1 2015 to attend a follow-up event? | Set scene for focus group  |

## 10.6 Male & Female Traits showing alignment of Traits with BSW Entry Preferred Traits

*Table 8 - Male & Female Traits showing alignment of Traits with BSW Third Year Entry Preferred Traits*

| <b>Male Traits</b> | <b>BSW Third Year Entry Preferred Traits</b> | <b>Female Traits</b> | <b>BSW Third Year Entry Preferred Traits</b>                |
|--------------------|--|----------------------|---|
| Adventurous        | Confidence                                   | Sentimental          | No match  |
| Dominant           | No match                                     | Submissive           | Able to submit to the social work process                   |
| Forceful           | Tenacious                                    | Superstitious        | No match  |
| Independent        | Aware of one's identity                      | Affectionate         | No match  |
| Strong             | Commitment to being a Social Worker          | Dreamy               | No match  |
| Aggressive         | No match                                     | Sensitive            | Open to self-reflection                                     |
| Autocratic         | No match                                     | Attractive           | Not appropriate   |
| Daring             | Taking risks for clients                     | Dependent            | Able to rely on others including supervision, and lecturers |
| Enterprising       | Creative                                     | Emotional            | Able to establish a helping relationship with empathy       |

|             |   |              |   |
|-------------|---|--------------|---|
| Robust      | Being an advocate                                   | Fearful      | Not appropriate                                     |
| Stern       | Being an advocate                                   | Soft Hearted | Open to Learning with a Client and with themselves  |
| Active      | Social justice and human rights                     | Weak         | No match  |
| Courageous  | Being an advocate                                   | Sexy         | No match  |
| Progressive | Open to discovery with a client and with themselves | Curious      | Open to discovery with a client and with themselves |
| Rude        | No match  | Gentle       | Emotional stability                                 |
| Severe      | No match  | Mild         | Able to work with other's differences               |
| Unemotional | Sound judgement                                     | Charming     | No match  |
| Wise        | Intellectual ability                                | Talkative    | Able to talk through issues with a client           |

## **10.7 SRWB and ANZASW – Privileged Social Work Competencies aligned with BSW Application Criteria**

*Table 9 - SRWB and ANZASW – Privileged Social Work Competencies aligned with BSW Application Criteria*

| <b>ANZASW Core Competency</b>   | <b>SWRB Core Competencies</b>  | <b>BSW Application Criteria</b>  |
|---|--|--|
| The social worker adheres to the Code of Ethics and the Objects of Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers.  | To practice within legal and ethical boundaries of the social work profession    | Ethical – sound judgement  |
| The social worker demonstrates a commitment to practicing social work with an understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Articles 1, 2, 3 and 4 and demonstrates competence to work with Māori.                     | To practice social work with Māori   | Work with Māori – An understanding of implications of cultural differences             |
| The social worker demonstrates competence to work with different ethnic and cultural groups in Aotearoa New Zealand.  | To practice social work with different ethnic and cultural groups in New Zealand | Work with other ethnicities – an understanding of implications of cultural differences |
| The social worker establishes an appropriate and purposeful working relationship with people and communities, taking into account individual differences and the social context of situations and environments. | To work respectfully and inclusively with diversity and difference in practice   | Inclusive and respectful – Concern for the disadvantaged                               |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| No ANZASW equivalent – included in PS 6  | To apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgements   | Critical thinking – an awareness of one’s own multiple social group memberships / identities   |
| The social worker collaborates with people to gain control over their environment and circumstances.   | To promote empowerment of people and communities to enable positive change   | Empowerment – ability to relate positively and confidently to others regardless of differences   |
| Social workers have and develop the applied knowledge, skills and theories required for effective social work practice                       | To understand and articulate social work theories, indigenous practice knowledge, other relevant theories, and social work practice methods and models | Theory based – Preparedness for study in a professional programme ; academic ability ; intellectual ability  |
| Social workers demonstrate the skills and knowledge required to communicate and work effectively with people, communities and organisations. | No SWRB equivalent – included in Core Competency 3 & 8   | People skills – social skills ; communication skills / ability to relate ; cooperation ; establish helping relationships ; ability to work as a member of a team |
| The social worker demonstrates commitment and contribution to social change and social development.  | To engage in practice which promotes social change   | Social change- commitment and motivation to social work  |
| The social worker has an awareness of and demonstrates commitment to social justice, human rights and human dignity.                         | To promote the principles of human rights and social and economic justice  | Social justice – A commitment to social justice and human rights   |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| Membership of the ANZASW is used to promote and support the SW profession with integrity   | Represents the social work profession with integrity and professionalism | Professional – reliability ; integrity |
| <u>BSW Competencies with No Direct Match to SWRB / ANZASW Core Competencies – but Consistent with the Social Work Profession:-</u> Dependability ; Fit and Proper Person ; Community / Cultural / Sporting Involvement ; Self Awareness ; Personal Insight ; Emotional Instability ; Creativity ; Recommendation of Others ; Flexibility ; Initiative ; Resilience ; Determination ; Demonstrating Tenacity and the Ability to Respond to the Unexpected ; Perseverance ; Stress Management ; Maturity ; Leadership ; Stamina ; Health |  |  |

## 10.8 Aspects of Habitus that Can Prevent or Inhibit Success

Table 10 - Aspects of Habitus that Can Prevent or Inhibit Success

| Habitus                       | Aspects that Prevent or Inhibit Success  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Social work programme habitus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-mature students who attend the programme in a part-time capacity</li> <li>• Any students identifying as male</li> <li>• Any students in the first year of the pre-professional programme</li> <li>• Mature students who identify as non-Pākehā including Māori or Samoan</li> </ul>   |
| Tertiary education habitus    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any students who have no prior tertiary education experience before enrolling in the social work programme</li> <li>• Any students whose fathers did not attend University</li> </ul>   |
| General employment habitus    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-mature students who work in any job while studying in the programme</li> <li>• Non-mature students whose mothers are not in a managerial and/or professional career</li> <li>• Any students whose fathers are not in a managerial and/or professional career</li> </ul>   |
| Social work sector habitus    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-mature students who work in the social work sector while studying in the programme</li> <li>• Non-mature students who are not involved in any social work volunteer work</li> <li>• Non-mature students whose mothers are not employed in a caring profession (teaching, social work, nurse)</li> <li>• Non-mature students in the pre-professional programme whose fathers are not employed in the caring profession (teaching, social work, nurse)</li> </ul> |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Social relationship and journey habitus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Non-mature students in the pre-professional programme who perceive their relationship with staff to be poor</li><li>• Any students who perceive their journey as a social worker as unsuccessful</li><li>• Non-mature students in the pre-professional programme who perceive their journey as a student as unsuccessful</li><li>• Any students who perceive that they do not fit in socially</li><li>• Any students who do not socialise with both mature and non-mature students</li></ul> |
|---|--|